



# *Theory Based as a qualitative path in the study of old age: a narrative review*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this narrative review is to know the contribution of Grounded Theory as a qualitative method in the study of old age.

A virtual search was carried out, in the English language databases Medline and academic Google, starting from 2007 to 2018, finding 40 original articles from 14 countries in specialized journals that carried the keywords of grounded theory and old age and

that were original articles. A bibliographic search, systematization of data, selection of articles was carried out, to then carry out the analysis and final evaluation.

The results indicate that Grounded Theory was used mostly by social disciplines such as: Nursing, Psychology and Sociology, in countries such as Spain, Sweden, Canada, Mexico and the United States, with women predominant as authors and co-authors. Grounded Theory was used as the only qualitative method in most articles; applying in-depth interviews as the only data collection technique. These results denote the advance of Grounded Theory as a qualitative research methodology, in the study of social problems, being very useful to delve into issues such as old age, allowing the capture of experiences, experiences and emotions, as expressed by the informant's keys.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the social sciences, the two paradigms which have led to research since its inception have been positivism and interpretive and it is the interpretative paradigm that qualitative research is inspired by a relationship between theory and open and interactive research; deliberately rejecting the formulation of theories before starting to work on the subject, as quantitative research does, on the grounds that it can inhibit the ability to understand the point of view of the subject studied. Therefore, the elaboration of theory and empirical research occur simultaneously (Corbetta, 2007).

The main objective of this article is to analyze scientific production using the Theory Based on the study of old age and to establish its significance as a methodology of analysis and qualitative research, since it generates inductive theory, based on the data coming from the field work Balcazar, Gurrola, & Moysel. (2002), refer that the main difference from other methodologies is the development of a theory based on what the interviewee says and how he says it.

As for the study of old age, through grounded theory, they can give us results to capture the different meanings, prejudices and beliefs in the study of this stage of life, to understand the social meaning and also the repercussions that old age has on the health of these people from a holistic view. Aponte (2015), makes the association of this stage of old age with retirement, considering this closely inter-related event, being reinforced by Arias (2013), considering that retirement is a stage in which older adults can be happy, having resources of social support, enjoy their sexuality and be satisfied with their lives.

In contrast to this statement, Parraguez (2006), refers that retired people are marginalized, and that even being integrated into a society they do not participate in it, receiving the benefits that are granted to them, but without directing or make decisions; considering them as citizens

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devoid of public utility, turning them away from the world, to hope that death will come for them.

The grounded theory is used in this research since it is a methodology based on the theoretical development from information collected and analyzed in a systematic way. Its main feature is the constant comparison method; it is an inductive analytical process in which there is an interaction between the information and the analysis of the data until it is reduced to the most representative concepts. Fraile (2007), affirms that this methodology allows flexibility and freedom when investigating; in this case, that it studies the contributions of the theory bases to the study of old age, allows to generate explanatory models of human behavior, as well as the patterns of behavior related to their experiences, feelings and emotions; distinguishing in this way similitudes and differences in terms of the components studied in this important stage in life and that every human being, aspires to enjoy a dignified and healthy old age.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

It is a bibliometric analysis, whose methodological design was descriptive, quantitative. We searched for scientific articles in Spanish and English, through Google scholar and the Medline database, selecting 40 original articles that applied the f-theory as a qualitative method in the study of old age. The systematization of the information was made through an Excel template, designing simple statistical tables; since the purpose was “to specify properties and characteristics of concepts, phenomena or facts in a given context” (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018, p. 108).

For the analysis of the data used the narrative review, strategy that facilitated the understanding in the application of the Theory Grounded in the study of the old age, since it describes with theoretical foundation and / or of context the inclusion of different types of information, considering different sources and enabling the learning by means of the definition and of concepts; considers the historical process and advances in the area; as well as the identification and selection of referential, methods and techniques to be used in future research Zillmer & Díaz. (2018).

The categories of analysis were: annual production, disciplinary area, countries of origin of the authors, sex, type of qualitative and technical method used, the social thoughts around old age and retirement, from which emerged the sub-categories of a) Negative thoughts ,b) Health care c) Gender and life cycle.

### 3. RESULTS

**Table 1.**

Research according to the disciplinary area that used Theory Based

<b>DISCIPLINARY AREA</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
Infirmary	14	35
Psychology	11	28
Sociology	6	15
Pedagogy	4	10
Public health	3	7
Physiotherapy	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: own authorship

As for the scientific distribution according to the disciplinary area, it is evident the frequency of articles produced mostly by disciplines belonging to the social sciences, which are the branches of science related to society and human behavior. It is distinguished from the natural sciences and the formal science because they address and deal with different aspects of social relations and the groups of people which make up society. Among them we have Nursing (35%), Psychology (28%) and Sociology (15%), adding these three disciplines a total of 78%.

**Table 2.**

Distribution of articles with grounded theory, according to the country of origin

<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
Spain, USA, Sweden, Canada, Mexico	18	45
South America	17	43
Cuba, Hong Kong, Iran Malaysia,	5	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Own authorship

Spain, Sweden, Canada, Mexico and the USA, belonging to Europe and North America, boast the largest scientific production with 45%. Secondly, we have South America with 43%; it is followed by Cuba, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Iran with one item each, for a total of 12%.



**Table 3.**

Audit of articles with grounded theory.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
Woman	23	57
Woman and Man	13	33
Man	4	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Own authorship

These results shown that the topic of old age and grounded theory has greater interest in the female sex with 57 %; and with 33 % were performed by men and women as authors and only 10% was performed by men.

**Table 4.**

The theory based on the capture of social thoughts around old age.

<b>Social thinking</b>	<b>%</b>
Frail Old Age- Venerable Old Age- Old- Older Adult-Aging -Fourth Age- Retirement	45
Family- Autonomy- Stereotypes	35
Adaptation - Quality of Life- Routine	25
Perceived changes- not to follow rutines - subjective well-being- Dependence	30
Chronic pain- Death - Isolation- Widowhood- Finitude	20
Care- Physical activity- Health promotion- Sense of humor- Mental health - Health systems- Gerogogy	20
Sexuality- Menopause- Gender	10

Source: Own authorship

The results identify negative thoughts towards old age, with statements that the elderly are fragile, lead a life alone that tends to isolation, un be dependent without autonomy Doblás & Conde (2013), refers that it usually does not go unnoticed in sociological analyses the role played by older people, who are abandoning attitudes and behaviors deeply rooted, reflected in their lifestyles, in their way of thinking and acting; in the relationship of life alone, to the claim of autonomy as people ,with the right to manage their destiny and the determination of their way of life.

**Table 5.**

The grounded theory and the synergy with other methods of investigation.

Research methods	%
Grounded Theory	82.5
Grounded Theory - Symbolic Interactionism-	2.5
Grounded Theory - Action-Research -	2.5
Grounded Theory - Hermeneutic Method-	5
Grounded Theory - Nursing Models -	2.5
Grounded Theory - Phenomenology -	2.5
Grounded Theory - Descriptive Quantitative	2.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Own authorship

Most of the articles reviewed (82.5%). they used the Basic Theory as the only method for the study of old age. Therefore, the theory based as a qualitative method opens a space in the analysis of health problems from a social and cultural perspective, thus providing unique methodologies that allow to know the context where phenomena arise, to develop theoretical proposals to explain them (Amezcuca & Gálvez, 2002).

**Table 6.**

Research techniques in articles with Grounded theory

Types of Techniques	%
In-depth interview	35
Semi-structured interview	28
In-depth interview -Photoecitation- Theoretical coding – Likert - Participant observation	14
Semi-structured interview - Focus groups - Observation	8
Structured and unstructured interviews- Participant observation	5
Systematic review	5
Secondary data analysis - Focus groups- Biographical interviews	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Own authorship

These results are dominated by in-depth interviews (35%) and semi-structured interviews (28%), with the main characteristic being used as the only technique in the study of old age.

The diversity of qualitative techniques studied in the social sciences leads us to reflect on the way in which empirical research is carried out, with the aim of elucidating which of the different research designs is most appropriate and in which situations. Reflection on research techniques is an abstract reworking of practical and concrete research. Ander-Egg (2011), refers that, regarding the operational aspects in the use of the techniques, the main issue is to have sufficient criteria and experience to choose the most appropriate techniques according to the nature of the phenomenon to be studied, the research objectives, the human resources available, and the degree of training of those who must perform the field work.

#### **4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

In the application of the fundamental theory in the study of old age, the highest scientific production was in the years 2015 and 2016, for 50% of the total, being (45%) from Spain, Sweden, Canada, Mexico and USA. The majority of articles produced were by disciplines belonging to the social sciences such as: Nursing, Psychology and Sociology, with a predominance of women as authors and co-authors.

Puertas (2017), states that scientific and technological research has been carried out by and for men. For centuries social and cultural conditions have separated women from these scientific fields because they are considered “men’s things”, and only the most tenacious and those who, because of their family environment, were close to science, did their research, which in the vast majority of cases has remained hidden or used by their male environment. In this regard, Gómez (1993), refers that society, through the paradigms of masculinity and femininity, channels differently the motivation of men and women with regard to the selection between behavioral alternatives that have variable implications for one’s own health and that of others.

According to UNESCO (2020), 45% of researchers in Latin America are women, a figure that far exceeds the global rate of 28%. Research in the field of science and technology has also increased and the development and implementation of policies and regulations in universities and research centers with the aim of preventing gender-based discrimination and violence has been launched.

In this review, the majority of the authors used the Grounded Theory as the only method for the study of old age and a minority associated it with Hermeneutics, Symbolic Interactionism, Research – Action, Nursing Models and Phenomenology. Likewise, the in-depth and semi-structured interviews were used as the only technique.

According to Vivar, Arantzamendi, López, & Gordo (2010) consider that the grounded theory is classified as a methodology of analysis and research, which begins without a theory or hypothesis a priori, for which reason, the theory is emerging through the systematic

analysis of the empirical data collected. In the face of an initial theoretical basis, it must show methodological rigor in the analysis of the data. In this regard, Glaser, and Strauss, (2017), refer that the grounded theory allows to better understand the nature of human behavior through the generation of theories on psychosocial phenomena, By associating it with the study on old age, its importance is justified by using this methodology with the aim of contributing to the development of a theoretical framework in this specific area, therefore the application of this theory is relevant to develop, from the data collected, substantive theories about the study of old age.

Flick (2013), refers that qualitative research is inherently multi-methodological and the use of different methods, coupled with triangulation reflects the intention of the researcher to ensure the understanding of the phenomenon under study, trying to reach the objective reality of the theory supported by the data. They are situations in which you want to know what people really think about a specific situation, what their experiences, perceptions, feelings and emotions are.

These data provide alternatives to the researcher to have a deeper knowledge of a particular situation, which will allow to solve a problem in the words of the informants, instead of considering the perspective of the researcher. Thus, qualitative research is an art, in which the researcher does not discover, but builds knowledge (Balcázar, Gurrola, & Moysel, 2002).

As for the application of the theory based on the study of old age, the authors identify negative thoughts towards old age, such as: a fragile old person; not continue with the same routine, dependence, d chronic smell, death isolation, widowhood and finitudes

They also identify the need for cares, physical activity, health promotion, mood, mental avalanche, health systems and attention to sexuality and menopause in their lifestyles, in their way of thinking and acting; but they also identify Gerogogy, as a teaching-learning method, which takes importance as a process to promote development in old age; oriented to the development of skills and not to the compensation of the deficit.

Restrepo & Málaga (2001), highlights the low interest that traditionally has the health of women during their old age and therefore, the urgency of increasing the sensitivity of the health sector and society to respond to the specific needs of this risk group, which needs more attention in their reproductive health. Fos (2018), refers for our society, the end of reproduction ends with old age; consequently, menopause represents a negative image, it is irreversible, there comes a time when all fears come true

Aponte (2015), affirms that the aging of old people, becomes relevant and it is a social, cultural and health challenge, because it is necessary to deep in the meanings, prejudices and

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beliefs, regarding what it is to be old, to understand the social meaning of old age and the repercussions that this has on the health of a person from a holistic point of view. Likewise Basso et al (2014), identify the need to incorporate adequate parameters of sexuality education within the context of health promotion, the adequacy of nutritional interventions, to promote the health of older adults, without losing gender perspectives; for example, menopause should be the object of special attention, through the formation of multidisciplinary groups that study the characteristics of climacteric in women from different physical and socio cultural environments; also, the mental health of women is an area in which public health has given little relevance

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The articles that applied the Grounded Theory, mostly belong to the disciplines such as: Nursing, Psychology and Sociology.

The largest scientific production was identified in Spain, Sweden, Canada, Mexico and the United States, with women predominating as authors and co-authors.

Most authors decided to use grounded theory as the only qualitative method; and in the other cases it was with another qualitative method such as: Symbolic interactionism, action-research, hermeneutics and phenomenology. Most applied the interview in depth and semi-structured as the only data collection technique.

It is concluded that the grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology, very useful to deepen in social issues such as old age, allowing the capture of experiences, experiences and emotions, as expressed by the key informants, therefore, it contributes to the development of theory by its rigor as a qualitative design; being fundamental to understand in depth the meaning of old age and the determinants of health, associated with this important stage in the life of a person, such as the moment of their birth.

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