

Semi-structured interviews with elderly males, Kenya 1997

Guidelines

The Substance

The main aims of the semi-structured interviews with elderly males are to understand how changes in social, economic and epidemiological conditions have changed the position of the elderly in this area.

The topics to cover in the long interviews are:

1 Life history

- schooling
- where worked?
- who married? How did you meet them? If not an arranged marriage, reaction of parents?
- what did you want to do? If he didn't actually do what he wanted, why not? What stopped him? Colonial government? Money? Family? (POSSIBLE: Do you think it will be/is easier for your children to achieve their goals?)

2 Transference of property across generations

BY PROPERTY I MEAN LAND OR LIVESTOCK. BUT IS THERE ANY OTHER OBJECT THAT WOULD BE CLASSED AS PROPERTY AND WHICH HAS SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL VALUE?

- how old were you when you were given property? What was it (land etc...)?

- who made the decision to give it to you? Your father? All the clan elders? Was mother involved?

- what were the circumstances surrounding the timing of the transition? Had you just married so needed some of your own? Was father incapacitated? Sick? Too busy to manage these things? Trying to stop you from going to the city by “bribing” him with property? (WHAT I’M TRYING TO GET AT HERE IS WHETHER, TRADITIONALLY, THERE WERE PRESCRIBED TIMES IN THE LIFE-CYCLE FOR THE TRANSFERENCE OF PROPERTY ACROSS GENERATIONS, OR WHETHER IT WAS PRETTY MUCH A DECISION THAT COULD BE MADE INDEPENDENTLY WITHIN EACH FAMILY).

- how is that different now? Have you given some of your property to your children? If so, what? (I THINK THEY ARE LIKELY TO GIVE LESS TO THEIR CHILDREN THAN THEY GOT BECAUSE (A) THERE IS LESS LAND AVAILABLE; AND (B) MORTALITY HAS GONE DOWN SINCE THEY WERE CHILDREN, SO THERE THEY HAVE MORE SURVIVING CHILDREN THAN THEIR PARENTS DID.)

- do you think it will be a problem for your children to leave enough to their own children when the time comes for them to transfer property? If it isn’t enough, what do you think will happen? (WE’RE HEADING TOWARDS THE BENEFITS OF FAMILY PLANNING HERE, BUT THIS IS ABOUT AS FAR AS I WANT YOU TO GO WITH IT. ie. DON’T SUGGEST THAT “SMALLER FAMILIES” MAY BE ONE WAY TO HELP WITH THIS PROBLEM. IF THE GUY SAYS THAT THEN FOLLOW-UP, BUT I WANT HIM TO VOLUNTEER IT.)

3 Causes of intergenerational conflict

THIS MAY BE TRICKY. WHAT I'M TRYING TO GET AT IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE RAPID SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES IN THE LAST 30-40 YEARS HAVE FREED TODAY'S YOUNGER GENERATIONS FROM THE TRADITIONAL STRUCTURE OF FAMILY AUTHORITY. YOU'LL HAVE TO THINK OF HOW TO BEST APPROACH THIS.

- What do you think are the main things that cause problems between people of your age, and people who are younger? MY INSTINCT IS THAT ITS BETTER TO START BY TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE IN GENERAL, BUT THEN WORK UP TO ANY PARTICULAR PROBLEMS HE'S HAD WITH HIS OWN CHILDREN.

4 Definitions and characterizations of 'old'

IS BEING OLD DEFINED BY WHAT A PERSON DOES (eg. SOCIAL FUNCTIONS) OR BY LIFECYCLE CHARACTERISTICS eg. (THE FACT THAT THEY HAVE GRANDCHILDREN, OR NO LONGER WORK FOR MONEY, OR PASSED THROUGH CERTAIN CEREMONIES)? AGAIN, I'M INTERESTED IN FINDING OUT HOW THIS HAS CHANGED SINCE THESE GUYS WERE YOUNG.

-what made somebody "old" when you were a kid? Behaviors? Functions (both in the family and in social life)? Special religious roles? How did all these differ by gender?

- changes in definitions and perceived characteristics ie. Ask the same questions but refer to now.

- do you think that people are more likely to live to old age now than was the case when you were young?

ACCORDING TO DEMOGRAPHIC DATA, PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO LIVE TO THE OLDER AGES THESE DAYS. BUT I WONDER IF THESE GUYS RECOGNIZE THAT FACT. THEY MIGHT WELL THINK THAT THERE IS MORE OLD-AGE MORTALITY IN THE SAME WAY THAT MOST OF OUR RESPONDENTS (WRONGLY) THINK THAT THERE IS MORE CHILD MORTALITY.

5 Other topics

As we discussed before, if the content of the conversations becomes too predictable, especially regarding life-history, fan out a little. Other things that I'm interested in are:

- politics (local, national, faith in the system ethnic identity) does he think that the young Luo are becoming just like everybody else? If so, why? If not, what distinguishes them?
- religion (relations between churches)
- the impact of AIDS (how is it changing local customs?) EG. YOU TOLD ME THAT IT IS CHANGING THE TIMING OF FIRSTBORN SONS MOVING OUT OF FATHERS' COMPOUND. I'D LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS, AND ABOUT OTHER SIMILAR EFFECTS.
- farming techniques and crops - what and how did you farm when you were young? How is that different from now? If there are any changes, what do you think of them, good? bad? no opinion?