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PARENTAL PRACTICES: IMPACT ON CHILD BEHAVIOR

Sofia Campos (a)*, Felismins Resende (b), Conceição Martins (c), Manuela Ferreira (d),
Cândida Alves (e), Carlos Albuquerque (f),
*Corresponding author

(a) Escola Superior de Saúde-Instituto Politécnico de Viseu-Portugal; sofiamargaridacampos@gmail.com

(b) Instituto Piaget de Viseu-Portugal; felisminaresende@hotmail.com

(c) Escola Superior de Saúde-Instituto Politécnico de Viseu-Portugal; mcamartinsp@gmail.com

(d) Escola Superior de Saúde-Instituto Politécnico de Viseu-Portugal; mmcferreira@gmail.com

(e) Universidade de Ceuma-Brasil; candida.alves@hotmail.com

(f) Escola Superior de Saúde-Instituto Politécnico de Viseu-Portugal; cmalbuquerque@gmail.com

Abstract

The family, as a promoting and facilitating nucleus of human development, performs two fundamental tasks: to assure the continuity of the human being and to enable the balance between growth and individualization and the socialization of each member. The present study is causal-comparative and the main objectives are to uncover parental reactions to positive child emotions and how parents react to the different emotional responses of their children comparing multiproblematic and non-multiproblematic families. The sample constituted 65 subjects; 32 of which belonged to families flagged by NCPAC (National Commission of Protection of Adolescents and Children), and 33 belonging to non-flagged families. The instruments used were a sociodemographic questionnaire, an emotional management questionnaire (QCEP-P- Melo, Moreira & Soares, 2004) and a questionnaire on parental practices (PPQ-Carolina Webster-Stratton 2005). The main results indicate that multiproblematic families have higher values in the "strict discipline for age"; "appropriate discipline"; "appropriate parenting"; "positive parenting"; "clear expectations" and "monitoring", whilst non-problematic families have higher values in terms of "rigid discipline" and "inconsistent discipline". The main conclusions point to a clear and significant lack of differentiation in the educational dimensions between non-problematic and problematic families and to the importance of parental strategies in positive and negative emotions of children.

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1. Introduction

In all societies, the family is considered as a central element in the child's socialization process. For better or for worse, it occupies a prominent place in our lives, continuing to present itself as the basic unit of society. It is in the families that we are born into and grow that we hope that will help us to develop in a healthy way and to be as prepared as possible to deal with the difficulties, obstacles and even the joys with which we are confronted along our journey of life. Families are expected to take care of their members internally, to protect them so that they develop in a healthy way and prepare them to deal with the world "out there", thus fulfilling a dual function, internal and external, allowing the their members to create a sense of belonging to the family while helping them to become autonomous (Relvas, 1996). But if we all expect families to fulfill their roles to prepare their children to be able to grow adaptively and deal effectively with others and with different life events, it is quite impossible as different families have to face and deal with very different challenges, with access to different resources and different forms of support. If all children have the right to grow up in a caring family, all families should also be able to access support to carry out their duties and to deal with the many challenges that increasingly threaten their integrity, and well being. Parental function in multiproblematic families has deteriorated, both at the level of attachment and at the level of socialization. It is often the mother figure who occupies a key position, to which often success in life is linked to the procreation of children, that ultimately leads to the overvalue and presence of high expectations as to what the role of mother should be, where criticism of mother-child interaction, is felt as a personal disqualification. This, often can withdraw the mother from its central position, which can create an oscillation between anger and depression and simultaneously accuse and defend the father. The participation of the male figure depends on the position that the mother assumes in the family system, being more relevant when the mother assumes a position of greater detachment. The informal support network is particularly important in the education of children, often being provided by members of the extended family and / or significant others. The power ends up dispersing itself within several figures who take the lead rotationally, not obeying a clear or congruent system of rules and principles. The nature of parental power thus becomes confused because, on the one hand, the hierarchy of power is compromised by the serious deterioration in its exercise and distribution; on the other hand, it is clear that parents fluctuate between authoritarian and absolute power, and periods of physical or psychological resignation in relation to their duties, which coincide with the delegation of parental duties to a child (parental child). Between parents and children, it is common to establish some dysfunctional alliances: the child is placed in a situation of division of loyalty, having to choose between one of the parents, being in an undesirable situation of power with respect to the father, with whom he/she allies (Alarcão, 2006, Ausloos 2003, Sousa, 2005). The combination of impaired parenting, where emotional attachment is neglected by instrumental use in parental bonding, and disharmony in conjugality, marked by conflict and frustration, often results in the sexual use of children. Like the erotic impulses, the aggressive impulses of the parents flow freely, leaving the children without the control of the protective functions, which results in physical maltreatment that often emerge on a background of neglect and lack of care (Alarcão, 2006; Sousa, 2005). In children, the unpredictability of parents' responses is reflected in failures in basic security and in the internalization of unrelated models of attachment (there are no implicit or explicit rules of conduct that can be

internalized). They learn essentially that behavioral bans are associated with the mother's or other person's power, or emotional (usually suffering) disposition in the position of power. Thus, they need the parents to organize their interpersonal transactions, which hinders their true autonomization and untroubled exploration of the environment. The existence of several potentially parental figures does not mean having parents, most times this factor, coupled with the high vulnerability of the environment, stimulates in children and young people feelings of fear, abandonment, defensive behaviors and premature emotional self-sufficiency. The lack of norms in parent-child interactions (socialization structures) is associated with the lack of instructions on the way children behave in the future (ignorance of cultural norms), and it is a source of conflicts with the environment. At the level of adolescents and young adults, it causes disruptions that lead to the passage to the act and incompetence in the integration in the external systems. The most common pathology is of the socio-psychopathic type, linked with problems of school adaptation, delinquency, drug addiction and alcoholism (Alarcão, 2006; Sousa, 2005). However, there are also positive aspects in parenting in multiproblem families. There is the recognition that parents love their children, although they are incompetent in the execution of tasks; a situation that comes from their own reference models, which were also unstable and insecure. In these, there are reserves of loyalty and dependence, which hold together the various elements (Sousa et al, 2007; Sousa, 2005). The affective lability that characterizes these families and the intensity of the disharmony and the conflict that they experience allow us to create less monolithic experiences and fissures through which some protective and transforming mechanisms of the inadequacies of the parental function are developed (eg the mother who is angry with the father, in the face of his aggressiveness toward his children) (Alarcão, 2006, Sousa, 2005). It is therefore particularly important that professionals working with multiproblem families not neglect family functioning as a whole, since it could be the gateway to change that allows the family to promote its development as an ecosystem, as well as the individual development of those who comprise it.

From the perspective of Kotchick and Forehand (2002), parental practices are also shaped by multiple factors, but the social context in which the family is inserted is the one that holds the greatest importance. The social context includes ethnic and cultural aspects, socio-economic status and the community and neighborhood environment. The authors argue that parental practices vary according to contextual elements and that they influence parental beliefs and behavior.

As described, the multiple determinants of parenting encompass the characteristics of the child, the parents, the social context and the inclusion of a new domain of the social context, the role of the neighborhood and the community in general, in the way parents play their parental role. Belsky and Jaffee (2006) also discussed the influence of hereditary factors, that is, parents' influence on the child due to shared genes. Several studies prove the individual differences in parenting through genetic influences (Belsky, Harrington, Caspi, Moffitt (2006) having proven the correlation between development, contextual factors and parenting, the impact of genetic sharing can also play a role.

2. Research Question

This study will attempt to identify the perceptions parents have about their behavior toward the emotions and behaviors of their children.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to understand the perception of multiproblematic families and non-multiproblematic families about their parental skills and the solutions they perceive to be effective in achieving their goals; the quality of affection and the parent-child relationship; the quality of family communication; of parental supervision; of recourse to punishment and the use of positive discipline strategies.

4. Research Methods

A descriptive-correlational design was used. The sample consists of two groups; a group belonging to families considered non-multiproblematic, and the group belonging to families considered multiproblematic. The sample comprised 65 participants; 32 belonging to the group considered multiproblematic and 33 to the non-multiproblematic group.

Applications for authorization to collect data were made at the Commission for the Protection of Children and Youth (CPCJ) of Cinfães in Portugal. Once the authorizations were granted, the institution was contacted in order to operationalize the investigation and ensure compliance with ethical standards.

Taking into account that this investigation involves the collection of data from unlabeled families, this data collection was done at random and for convenience. With the necessary authorizations and after ensuring compliance with all ethical standards, namely with regard to the clarification of all questions related to the objectives of research, voluntary participation and confidentiality of the data obtained, only then was the information collected. At the time of the collection of each instrument, it was verified that the participation of each family was acknowledged with thanks for the availability.

The research protocol used in the present study comprised a Sociodemographic Questionnaire, aimed to characterize the sample, taking into account the variables: gender, age, marital status, educational qualifications, employment status, with differentiation of the families indicated by CPCJ from those not signaled by whom they live.

4.1 Guidance Questionnaire for Emotion Management - Parents (QCEP-P- Melo, Moreira & Soares, 2004). The QCEP-P is a new questionnaire, which is intended to evaluate the parents' reaction to the expression of positive emotions of the child. It consists of five vignettes that present parents with a hypothetical situation in which the child expresses a positive emotion (eg, "It's the weekend and he's been out for a walk.") He wakes up early, gets his things together quickly, he gets ready ahead of time and is always asking him when he will leave, how much time is left, and bombarding him to leave"), some in situations that may interfere with the interests of the parents in that (ie, "It's a weekend.") Your child is humming around and starts trying to mess with you, tickling you, or wanting to tell you sweet things that have happened to him. You have to finish a job and you feel like he's messing you up. What do you do?"). Parents are asked to rate how often they respond to the child according to five different styles of response on a seven-point Likert scale.

The repressive / inhibitory responses reflect parental behaviors of minimization, mockery or punishment before an expression of a positive emotion demonstrated by the child. Disturbed / indifferent

responses reflect disruption or discomfort of parents on positive emotions of the child that can be translated into parental attempts to ignore or not respond to the child. On the other hand, the instrumental / external guiding responses reflect parental attempts to deal with the child's emotion in an instrumental way, using external resources as rewards or material compensations, not enabling them to deal autonomously and adaptively with their emotions. Empathic / permissive responses do not offer any kind of guidance, nor do they set limits, reflecting empathic but permissive behavior. Finally, enabling instructional responses leads to recognizing the child's emotions, guiding them and guide the process of regulating their emotions, seeking to enable them to develop adaptive responses (being led towards solutions that are oriented to emotions). Each of the five vignettes presented corresponds to a distinct emotion, a total of twenty-five items. The emotions contemplated are love / tenderness, pride, positive enthusiasm / expectation, joy and interest / curiosity.

4.2 The Parental Practices (PPQ)- The Parenting Clinic (PP-2005) was developed by Caroline Webster-Stratton, of the University of Washington's Parenting Clinic (PP). According to the author, this questionnaire was adapted from the Oregon Social Learning Center's (OSLC) questionnaire and reviewed for children. "The Incredible Years" Parenting Questionnaire also known as LIFT can be administered as an interview or as a completed questionnaire by the mother or the father. The original is based on a sample of 318 mothers with children between 4 and 5 years of age, but was used with parents of children between 3 and 8 years of age, with similar results. This questionnaire consists of 7 scales, Rigid Discipline, Rigid Discipline for Age, Inconsistent Discipline, Appropriate Discipline, Positive Parenting, Clear Expectations, and Monitoring.

Most of the items were quoted on a 7-point scale, although there were items with scales of 5 and 8 points. Thus, and according to the author's indication, all items were converted into a 7-point scale so that all items had scales of the same value. Thus, items with 5-point scales are recoded as follows: (1 = 1), (2 = 2), (3 = 4), (4 = 6) and (5 = 7).

Finally, all items marked in the original with (R) were recoded and their values were inverted (from 1 to 5 the values were quoted from 5 to 1, from 1 to 7 the values were quoted from 7 to 1); namely items 4a, 4b, 5b, 9a, 9b, 9e, 9f, 10a, 10b, 10c, 12, 13, 15b, 15c.

The first study was used with a Portuguese sample of 362 children aged 3 to 6 years (the first Portuguese version to be used).

4.3 The following hypotheses were put forward:

1) There is an association between gender and parents' perception of their intervention practices in the behavioral process of the child;

2) There is an association between age and parents' perception of their intervention practices in the behavioral process of the child;

3) There is an association between the marital status and the parents' perception of their intervention practices in the behavioral process of the child;

4) There is an association between the academic qualifications and the parents' perception of their intervention practices in the behavioral process of the child;

5) There is an association between the labor situation and the parents' perception of their intervention practices in the behavioral process of the child;

6) There is an association between the household and parents' perception of their intervention practices in the behavioral process of the child; and

7) There is an association between parents' reactions and their perception about intervention practices in the behavioral process of the child.

5. Findings

In relation to respondents' reactions on the positive emotions of the children, statistical data shows that parents who belong to **Problematic families (Pprob)** present average values higher than the level of the emotions of love ($M = 3.60$) and pride ($M = 3.60$); ($M = 3.93$), joy ($M = 3.69$), and interest ($M = 3.49$). We also found that the emotions that obtained the best average values (or reactions more frequently) in the Pprob are enthusiasm, love and pride, while in the **Non-problematic families (Pnprob)** are enthusiasm, joy and interest. We find that it is men, those who present higher averages in the dimensions of rigid discipline and positive parenting: although the strict discipline for the age, the inconsistent discipline, the appropriate discipline, the clear expectations and the monitoring are the women (mothers) who present higher values.

In terms of age, parents between the ages of 15 and 30 present higher average order values in terms of appropriate discipline, positive parenting and clear expectations; those between 31-40 years of age present higher values only in the monitoring dimension. The older parents (41-49 years) are connoted with rigid discipline, rigid discipline for age and inconsistent discipline. Despite this analysis, we found significant statistical differences ($p < 0.05$) only in the inconsistent discipline dimension ($p = 0.047$) and positive parenting ($p = 0.006$). The individuals with higher educational levels practiced more rigid discipline, more clear expectations and more monitoring, when compared with those who have lower qualifications. The remaining dimensions are more practiced by parents with lower qualifications. The averaged values of the means show that unemployed parents frequently practiced an inconsistent discipline while employed parents opted for a more frequent parenting style at the level of strict age-related discipline and monitoring. Only the second, third, fifth and seventh hypotheses were accepted in part. Age is associated with parental practices, inconsistent discipline is a parental style practiced essentially by the "unaccompanied" parents when compared to those followed up. Unemployed Parents more often practice an inconsistent discipline and when more often is a greater response, so is the parenting style exercised and in the case of negatives the opposite happens, that is, the increase of a response decreases parental practice.

6. Conclusion

With reference to the terms from the questionnaires used to gather the data, we can conclude that the paternal figure gives more emphasis to "rigid discipline" and "positive parenting" while the maternal figure values more "rigid discipline for age", "inconsistent discipline", "appropriate discipline", "expectations clear, "and" monotorization". Thus, the paternal figure contributes to more assertive

dimensions of education while the maternal figure contributes to more disparate dimensions of education. We conclude that gender is independent of parental perception of intervention practices in the behavioral process of the child. With regard to intervention practices in the behavioral process of the child in relation to the parents' age, we can verify that the younger parents, especially those up to the age of 40, tend to have a more positive educational strategy, valuing dimensions such as “appropriate discipline”, “positive parenting” and “clear expectations”, while parents over 41 years of age present a less positive educational strategy, emphasizing aspects such as “strict discipline”, “strict discipline for age” and “inconsistent discipline”. We believe that these results are the consequence of the different visions of parents about life, that is, a more pessimistic or optimistic view. As Schmidt, Staudt & Wagner (2016) contend, discipline can be considered positive (for example, praise when the child behaves well or withholding praise when the child misbehaves) or negative (eg, beating or threatening the child for misbehaviour). Parental attitudes and practices influence child behavior and development, both in the acquisition of prosocial skills and in the emergence of psychosocial adjustment difficulties (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). With regard to emotions, the results indicate higher average values for problematic families in love and pride, while in non-problematic families the upper average values point to enthusiasm, joy and interest. Here we are faced with significant differences regarding the emotions transmitted among parents and children in problematic families, which value love and pride in preparing their children to become better adults (with more love to give). However, such children are deprived of emotions such as interest, joy, and enthusiasm unlike children in non-multiproblematic families as they are provided with emotions that, we believe, are more appropriate in today's society. Analyzing all the results obtained in the study, we can see that the educational process of a child is more complex than it may seem. If we verify the data obtained according to the different families studied, these indicate different concerns with educational dimensions. However, we cannot verify that the dimensions identified in the non-multiproblematic families are the most appropriate and vice versa. In this case, we propose that a combination of these dimensions would constitute the ideal educational strategy.

Regarding the evaluations reported by the parents, negative responses were positively associated with social skills in the child. Instrumental / external responses correlated positively with social skills. Regarding the results obtained from the negative responses, low means were reported in both groups, yet more frequently in the non-multiproblematic families. The instrumental / external orienting responses were more emphasized in the multiproblematic families and the enabling instructor responses presented equal results. This result may be justified by the sample size where the non-distinction of results between problematic families and non-problematic families may be due to the reduced size of the sample, but it is also important not to forget the importance of individual differences, since any social behavior related to emotion is influenced by the child's individual characteristics (temperament), by the parental characteristics, by the characteristics of the child's culture in which the family operates and by the very context in which the behavior occurs. It is probable that this sample of parents has different representations of what each specific emotion arouses in itself, in function of its experience, and that this variable has had more influence in the way they evaluated their reactions to their children's emotional expressions.

In summary, this research has highlighted the relevance of parental strategies to positive and negative emotions in children, emphasizing closer relationships of parental reactions to some specific negative emotions with some dimensions of temperamental emotionality and the symptoms of child externalization and internalization. The relationship between the behavior of parental emotional socialization and the child's ability to regulate effort was also demonstrated.

This study provides important data for the follow-up of these children in a school context, to prevent academic failure and disruptive behavior, to promote emotional and behavioral self-regulation abilities, and to assist the Child and Youth Protection Commissions to empower positive parenting.

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