

PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT IN A GROUP OF FATHERS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to evaluate the degree of paternal involvement in Portuguese parents of children between 5 and 9 years old, exploring factors of interindividual variability (father's age, education, socioeconomic status and number of children), as well as the association between father involvement and a number of factors identified in the literature: parental satisfaction, parental stress and marital adjustment. The sample consists of 145 married fathers aged between 28 and 59 years ($M = 40.14$), most of them with a high and college degree of education and a middle socioeconomic status. Data collection was based on self-report assessment scales, along with a questionnaire for socio-demographic characterization. The main results point to a relatively high degree of paternal involvement, particularly in the dimensions *Care* and *Availability*, although in relative terms the father's reports indicate a higher percentage of time given to mothers as primary caregivers of children. There were no significant differences between the fathers depending on the individual variables studied. However, we found a moderate negative association between father involvement and parental stress, and also a moderate positive association between father involvement and dyadic adjustment, which is consistent with other studies in this area. The results support the multidimensional conceptualization of father involvement, suggesting different dimensions of paternal behavior in relation to the care and education of children. In addition, the study confirms the multi-determined nature of paternal involvement, suggesting that personal and relational factors may have an impact on how men perform paternity.

Key-words: Marital adjustment; multidimensionality; parental satisfaction; parental stress; paternal involvement.

ENVOLVIMENTO PATERNO NUM GRUPO DE PAIS DE CRIANÇAS DO 1º CICLO

RESUMO: O estudo pretendeu avaliar o grau de envolvimento paterno de pais Portugueses de crianças entre os 5 e os 9 anos de idade, explorando factores de variabilidade interindividual (idade do pai, educação, nível socioeconómico e número de filhos), bem como a associação entre envolvimento paterno e alguns factores identificados na literatura: satisfação parental, stress parental e ajustamento conjugal. A amostra é constituída por 145 pais casados, com idades entre os 28 e os 59 anos ($M=40,14$), a maioria dos quais com um nível de escolaridade secundário e superior e um nível socioeconómico médio. A recolha de dados foi realizada através da aplicação de questionários de auto-resposta, juntamente com um questionário para caracterização sócio-demográfica. Os principais resultados mostram um grau relativamente elevado de envolvimento paterno, sobretudo nas dimensões *Cuidados* e *Disponibilidade*, embora em termos relativos os pais atribuam às mães uma maior percentagem de tempo como principais figuras cuidadoras da criança. Não foram encontradas diferenças significativas entre os pais em função das variáveis individuais estudadas. Contudo, foi encontrada

uma associação negativa moderada entre o envolvimento paterno e o stress parental, bem como uma associação positiva igualmente moderada entre o envolvimento e o ajustamento diádico, o que vai ao encontro de outros estudos realizados nesta área. Estes resultados suportam a conceptualização multidimensional do envolvimento paterno, sugerindo diferentes dimensões de comportamento paterno face aos cuidados e educação das crianças. Adicionalmente, confirmam a natureza multideterminada do envolvimento, sugerindo que factores pessoais e relacionais podem ter impacto na forma como os homens desempenham a paternidade.

Palavras-chave: Ajustamento conjugal; envolvimento paterno; multidimensionalidade; satisfação parental; stress parental.

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The last 30 years have been marked by the emergence of a new ideal of fatherhood, characterized by increased participation in the care and education of children, where the affective and regulatory dimensions of paternal role appears alongside a more traditional dimension of instrumental and economic support of family functioning (Lamb, 1987, 1992; Schoppe-Sullivan, McBride, & Ho, 2004). This recent ideal of a "new father" is rooted in a series of changes both in terms of social practices as well as in representations and beliefs associated with the paternal role, which many areas of science have tried to analyze and understand in the light of broader changes occurring within the family (Marks & Palkowitz, 2004; Palkowitz, 2007; Seward & Richter). For example, the growing participation of women in the work force, with a consequent increase in families where both parents work outside the home, is perhaps one of the most revolutionary social changes of the 20th century with impact on family functioning, responsible for new perspectives about the role played by fathers and mothers in the care and education of children (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000).

Paternal Involvement

One of the key areas in research on fatherhood is *paternal involvement*, a concept defined both in terms of time spent interacting with the child, or in terms of the quality of that relationship (Adamsons, O'Brien, & Pasley, 2007; Featherstone, 2004), and is now increasingly advocated the need for more comprehensive and multidimensional conceptualizations. One of the most influential models is the one of Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1987), which distinguish between three distinct components of paternal involvement: direct interaction (time spent in care or interaction with the child), accessibility (time spent in activities with less intense degree of interaction, but which require the availability of the parent to the child), and responsibility (for the tasks essential to the welfare, care and safety of the child).

More recently, some researchers have proposed additional re-statements in order to further evaluate father's contribution in family dynamics. For example, Radin (1994) stresses the need to differentiate between *absolute involvement*, which considers only the father (e.g., number of hours that the father is alone with the child) and

relative involvement, resulting of the comparison between different caregivers (e.g., father involvement in relation to mother involvement).

Research suggests that, despite the current father become more involved with their children; this involvement is still much lower compared to the mothers. On the other hand, it also indicate that mothers and fathers engage in different types of interaction with children, with maternal interactions being dominated by the practical tasks of caring, while the tasks of socialization and leisure, more flexible in their routines and schedules, appear as the most salient component of fathers interactions with their children (Finley, Mira, & Schwartz, 2008; Lewis & Lamb, 2003; Monteiro, Veríssimo, Castro, & Oliveira, 2006; Monteiro, Veríssimo, Santos, & Vaughn, 2008). With respect to Portuguese population, Amâncio and Wall (2004) highlight the continuing differentiation of gender roles within the family, persisting a marked asymmetry in terms of domestic tasks, of which men are virtually absent, as well as the fusion of femininity with motherhood and family, even though Portugal presents an high rate of female participation in labor force. Taken together, these data show us that this has been a slow and modest process of change, despite what the speeches of public opinion frequently assume, and there are still many families in which mothers hold the largest share of childcare whereas fathers assume mainly the role of family "helpers".

Determinants of Fathering

Knowledge about fatherhood has developed the idea that paternal involvement is not only multidimensional, but also multi-determined, based on empirical evidence that there are a variety of factors with a potential effect, positive or negative, on how men participate in child care (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Roggman, 2007; Featherstone, 2004; Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006; NICHD, 2000; Rouyer, Frascarolo, Zaouche-Gaudron, & Lavanchy, 2007). In general, it is considered that father involvement is affected by multiple interacting systems that operate at different levels throughout the life cycle, including personal characteristics, characteristics of the child, factors of the social and relational context, as well as the institutional practices and public policies directed to parenthood (Adamsons et al., 2007; Bouchard, Lee, Asgary, & Pelletier, 2007; Henley & Pasley, 2005; NICHD, 2000; Palkovitz & Palm, 2009; Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, & Cabrera, 2006).

The importance of examining the determinants of paternal involvement stems from the view that fatherhood is less defined and culturally determined than motherhood, making the father role more sensitive to personal characteristics and to the influences of marital relationship, the children and social context (Cabrera et al., 2007; Parke, 2002; Rouyer et al., 2007).

Socio-demographical factors

Personal variables such as father's age, educational background, socioeconomic class and the number of children have been identified as factors of interindivi-

dual variability (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Mehall, Spinrad, Eisenberg, & Gaertner 2009; Wood & Repetti, 2004).

With respect to father's age, studies have reached contradictory results. Some empirical evidence shows that parents today spend more time with their children compared with parents of previous generations, with greater flexibility in the types of activities they engage with their children, encompassing the greater availability to perform household chores and direct care to children (Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). However, other studies have shown opposite results. For example, the study carried out by Lima (2008) in the Portuguese population found that older fathers were not only more accessible to children, but also interacted more with them. Meanwhile, research conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2000) found that paternal involvement in childcare tasks was greater when both fathers and mothers were younger, although older fathers and fathers with less traditional beliefs were more sensitive during play with children, suggesting that the study of the impact of age of father in his involvement with children must consider the various components of involvement.

The educational background and socioeconomic status of fathers have been identified as major determinants of paternal behaviors and, for some authors, they are the more consistent factors predicting involvement, in terms of personal characteristics of parents (Arendell, 1996; Cabrera, Shannon et al., 2007). In general, studies suggest that parents with higher levels of education engage more often in child care and in tasks related to child's school (Davis & Perkins, 1996; Monteiro et al., 2006), are more accessible to the child during the week (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001), and present higher motivation to fatherhood, with greater awareness of the developmental needs of children (Cabrera, Shannon et al., 2007), when compared to parents with lower education levels. In turn, socioeconomic status has also shown to be related with both the paternal skills and the time spent on parenting tasks, observing Arendell (1996) that co-parenting models, where both parents share tasks and responsibilities in all the dimensions of family life and child care, tends to be more prevalent in families with middle or higher socioeconomic status.

Finally, the number of children is a demographic variable whose importance to parental involvement has been demonstrated by studies that correlate the size of the family to a decrease in the quality of parenting in general, and father involvement in particular (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Wood & Repetti, 2004). This may be due to the specificity of the family organization facing the increasing number of children, which leads fathers to feel more pressure to the role of economic provider, spending more hours in work than in family care. However, the recent study of Mehall, Spinrad, Eisenberg, and Gaertner (2009) reached contradictory results, suggesting that fathers tend to become more involved in parenting activities as the family increases, although this increase is mainly related to older children, at the expense of a lower time spent in interaction with young children, whose responsibility falls mainly on mothers.

Parental satisfaction

Defined as the perception of pleasure and gratification associated with the parenting role (Johnston & Mash, 1989; Mercer, 1986, cit. By Hudson, Campbell-Grosman, Fleck, Elek, & Shipman, 2003), this is still a understudied concept in the literature on parenting (Hudson, Elek, & Fleck, 2001; Bornstein, Hendricks, Hahn, Haynes, Painter, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2003), although the empirical evidence suggests that parental satisfaction is associated with higher feelings of self-efficacy and self confidence in the performance of parental roles and, consequently, a greater involvement in child care (Henley & Pasley, 2005; Hudson et al., 2001; Jacobs & Kelley, 2006). Thus, we can assume that fathers who feel more satisfied with fatherhood and have more confidence in their abilities tend to assume a major role in the relationship with the children, while they perceive their involvement as a source of personal satisfaction and gratification.

Parental stress

Parental stress can be understood as the result of a perceived discrepancy between the requirements related to parenting and the personal resources, in an ongoing effort to adapt to the needs of the developing child (Östberg, Hagekull, & Hagelin, 2007), whose cumulative impact over time can be quite significant for parental functioning and child adjustment (Östberg, 1998; Chang & Fine, 2007; Putnick, Bornstein, Collins, Hendricks, Painter, & Suwalsky, 2008). Studies reviewed by Huth-Bocks and Hughes (2008) show that parental stress is related to rigid and ineffective parental discipline techniques, such as criticism, greater physical discipline, higher use of orders and fewer educational behaviors. Other authors add further evidence of a lower responsiveness and affectiveness, and lower personal well-being of fathers and mothers who experience high levels of stress, particularly due to economic difficulties (Crnic, Gaze, & Hoffman, 2005; Guajardo, Snyder, & Petersen, 2009; Haskett, Ahern, Ward, & Allaire, 2006; McPherson, Lewis, Lynn, Haskett, & Behrend, 2009).

One of the adverse consequences associated with parental stress has been less parental involvement, particularly in terms of quality of interactions observed in both fathers and mothers (Crnic et al., 2005; Whiteside-Mansell et al., 2007), indicating that parents who experience higher levels of stress may have greater difficulties in adjustment and coping in the tasks associated with parenting, with a significant effect on the quality of parent-child relationships and on a positive involvement.

Dyadic adjustment

Among the various contextual factors that influence paternal involvement, the marital relationship is what has been assessed more consistently by many studies, suggesting that the affective quality of the marital relationship is positively correlated with the affective quality of father-child relation (Adamsons et al., 2007; Bonney, Kelley, & Levant, 1999; Bradford & Hawkins, 2006; Jacobs & Kelley, 2006; Lewis & Lamb, 2003; NICHD, 2000; Rouyer et al., 2007).

In agreement with the model of Belsky (1984), we can assume that when one spouse shows the other that he loves him and appreciates in general, these positive feelings, while not directly related to parenthood, affect parenting and may be understood as indirect forms of social support, with a significant impact on paternal behaviors. Rather, the dissatisfaction associated with the marital relationship can lead to the withdrawal of man from family life and from involvement with children (Mehall et al., 2009).

Several studies confirm this association between the quality of marital relationship and paternal involvement, both in the quality of parent-child interactions, and in terms of frequency of involvement in childcare (Bonney et al., 1999; Bradford & Hawkins, 2006; Lee & Doherty, 2007; NICHD, 2000), since the very early stages of child development (Elek, Hudson, & Bouffard, 2003; Mehall et al., 2009). In addition, Cummings and O'Reilly (1997) report in their review of the literature that on harmonious marriages, as opposed to discordant marriages and with higher levels of conflict, mothers and fathers tend to play similar roles, shared and reciprocal, suggesting that the co-parenting model may be more common in marriages described as harmonious in terms of relationship quality and satisfaction.

Aiming to contribute to an increased knowledge about fatherhood in Portugal, this study pretended to assess the perceptions of paternal involvement in a sample of Portuguese fathers of school-age children (elementary school), exploring the impact of some socio-demographic variables as factors of interindividual variability (age of the father, educational background, socioeconomic status and number of children). At the same time, we sought to assess how different levels of parental satisfaction, parental stress and marital adjustment may be associated with different levels of involvement in fathers, based on a multidetermined conceptualization of father involvement.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consists of 145 Portuguese fathers residents in the district of Lisbon, aged between 28 and 59 years ($M=40.14$; $DP=5.391$), with a greater preponderance of parents between 39 and 49 years of age (50.4%). All subjects have at least one children aged between 5 and 9 years.

In terms of educational background, most participants have a college (41.4%) or high school degree (35.9%), with only 15.2% of fathers with less than 12 years of schooling and 7.6% with a bachelor's degree. With regard to employment status, the overwhelming majority of parent have a professional activity (91%), with a very low percentage of unemployed (2.8%) and retired (0.7%, corresponding to 1 participant). 5.5% of parents did not provide any indication as to their employment status.

According to the categorization of Simões (1994) for the classification of socioeconomic status (SES), based on the crossing analysis of education and employment situation, we observed that 53.8% of the parents has a middle SES, 31% has a high SES, with the remaining 15.2% presenting a low SES.

All participants are married or living with a partner, with the nuclear family consisting of father, mother and child(s). In respect to the size of the family, 24.8% of fathers have only 1 child, 57.9% have 2 children, and the remaining 0.7% has 3 or more children. Of the parents who have more than one child, 7.6% reported having at least one child from a previous relationship.

Table 1
Socio-demographical characterization of the sample

<i>Characteristics (N=145)</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Age		
[28-38]	63	43.4
[39-49]	73	50.4
[50-60]	9	6.2
Area of Residence		
Cascais	113	77.9
Oeiras	22	15.2
Lisboa	2	1.4
Sintra	2	1.4
Mafra	1	0.7
Didn't respond	5	3.4
Educational Background		
Less than 12 years	22	15.2
High School	52	35.9
Bachelor Degree	11	7.6
University (College Degree or Higher)	60	41.4
Employment Status		
Employed	132	91
Unemployed	4	2.8
Retired	1	0.7
Didn't respond	8	5.5
Socioeconomic Status		
Low	22	15.2
Middle	78	53.8
High	45	31
Number of Children		
1 child	36	24.8
2 children	84	57.9
3 or more children	1	0.7
Children of Previous Relation		
Yes	11	7.6
No	134	92.4

Procedures

The collection of the sample was conducted in four educational institutions – elementary schools – public and private, after initial contacts with the directions of each school and a subsequent authorization for the study. The delivery and collection of questionnaires to the parents, along with a detailed description of the investigation, was done by the teachers of each room. In total, 635 questionnaires were delivered and only 318 were returned, of which only 145 were considered valid, according to the inclusion criteria to the study: Portuguese fathers with at least 18 years, married or living with the mother of their children, with at least one child aged between 5 and 9 years.

Measures

Socio-demographic characteristics

The key socio-demographical variables were gathered by a questionnaire devised by the authors of the study, in which parents were asked about their age, nationality, area of residence, educational background, employment status, marital status, number of children and existence of children from previous relationships.

Paternal involvement

The involvement of the fathers of our sample was assessed by the *Paternal Involvement Scale* (Simões, Leal, & Maroco, in press), developed in the present investigation. This is a Likert-type questionnaire with 19 items coded on a 5-point response scale, whose purpose is to understand the frequency of certain situations and behaviors related to daily family functioning and to assess the frequency with which fathers perform various tasks of care and education of children (e.g., How often do you bath and dress your child?; *How often do you help your child in his personal problems?*). The scale allows a total score by the sum of all Likert-type items – overall degree of paternal involvement – with higher scores corresponding to a higher perception of involvement, as well as the analysis of four different subscales or dimensions of paternal involvement: a) Care; b) Availability; c) Presence and d) Discipline. Simultaneously, the scale also permits to measure the relative involvement of fathers by the addition of a last item comparing the percentage of time that different figures spend as the primary caregiver of the child (*What percentage of time your child is in the care of the following persons: You ___; Your spouse ___; Other relatives ___; Professor ___.*)

The study of factorial validity and reliability of the scale was realized in the present investigation, registering a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.85 for the total scale, 0.75 for *Care* subscale, 0.86 for *Availability* subscale and 0.65 for both *Presence* and *Discipline* subscales.

Parental satisfaction

For father satisfaction with parenthood we used the *Parent Satisfaction Scale of Halverson & Duke* (1991), adapted to Portuguese by Martins and Leal (2005, published in Leal & Maroco, 2009). This is a 20-item Likert-type questionnaire coded on a 7-point response scale, which allows to measure levels of satisfaction associated with parenting according to 3 sub-scales: a) Pleasures of parenthood, b) Burdens of parenthood, and c) Importance of parenting. Statements are presented about the satisfaction and importance attached to parenthood, asking subjects to position themselves according to their degree of agreement or disagreement to each statement. A higher overall result indicates higher degree of parental satisfaction.

Parental stress

Father stress regarding parenting was assessed using the *Parental Stress Scale* of Berry & Jones (1995), adapted to Portuguese by Mixão, Leal, and Maroco (2005, published in Leal & Maroco, 2009). It is a 17-items Likert-type questionnaire with scores from 1 to 5, which measure the degree of stress experienced by parents according to 4 subscales: a) Parental concerns, b) Parental satisfaction, c) Lack of control, and d) Fears and anxieties. It addresses aspects related to the proximity to the child, satisfaction in their role as parents, positive and negative emotions related to parenting, and the difficulties associated with the parental role. Participants are asked to respond to each item according to their degree of agreement or disagreement, based on their personal parental experience. Higher results indicate higher levels of parental stress.

Dyadic adjustment

Marital relationship was assessed using the *Dyadic Adjustment Scale* of Spanier (1976), adapted to Portuguese by Gomez and Leal (2004, published in Gomez & Leal, 2008). Likert-type questionnaire with 30 items in a 5-point response scale and 2 dichotomous items (yes/no), which aims to assess the perceived quality of the marital relationship through 4 sub-scales: a) Consensus, b) Satisfaction, c) Expression of affection, and d) Cohesion. The questions focuses various aspects of marital functioning and satisfaction associated with it, asking subjects to respond to each item according to their agreement or disagreement, or according to the frequency with which certain situations of married life occur. Higher scores reflect a more positive perception of the quality of the relationship.

RESULTS

The analysis of the results sought to: 1) compare the degree of paternal involvement found in the groups of fathers, according to the socio-demographical variables identified (age, educational background, socioeconomic status and number of

children), and 2) explore the correlation between paternal involvement and parental satisfaction, parental stress and dyadic adjustment, in order to determine the existence of an association between the variables.

The descriptive and inferential analyses of data were performed using the *Statistical Package for Social Sciences – SPSS, 17.0*. At the descriptive level, we determined the frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations for the variables characterizing the sample. In terms of inferential analysis, after checking all the preconditions for application of parametric methods (normal distribution and homogeneity of variance), we performed analysis of variance to compare more than two means (one-way ANOVA), using *Welch's* correction in situations where the groups did not meet the preconditions for application. *Tukey post-hoc* test was applied when a statistically significant difference between groups was found, in order to discriminate group. Finally, to assess the association between paternal involvement and parental satisfaction, parental stress and dyadic adjustment, we used the bivariate correlation test (*Pearson* coefficient).

Paternal Involvement

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores for the *Paternal Involvement Scale* are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Means, standard deviation and minimum and maximum values of Paternal Involvement Scale

<i>Paternal Involvement Scale (N=145)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Total	3.51 (0.44)	1	5
Care	3.46 (0.54)	1	5
Availability	4.30 (0.68)	1	5
Presence	2.75 (0.84)	1	5
Discipline	3.05 (0.53)	1	5

We observed a degree of paternal involvement above the average range, suggesting that parents in our sample perceive themselves as figures involved in the care and education of children. Regarding the subscales, the *Availability* dimension was the one with the highest value, pointing to high levels of father accessibility in everyday life of the child. The *Care* dimension also presents relatively high values, suggesting that fathers perceive themselves as figures relatively involved in the care and education of children – *feeding them, getting them to sleep and helping them in their personal problems* are tasks that the fathers of our sample tend to perform frequently, over other caregiving tasks such as *bathing* and *dressing* the child, less performed in our sample.

The average score obtained in the *Discipline* subscale demonstrates that this dimension is not a particularly prominent component of father roles in our sample – scale results point to the occasional nature of *punishment* and *setting of limits*, and to share with the mothers of the *decisions* related to discipline. Finally, the *Presence* subscale is the one with the lowest result, showing that, although parents in our sample perceive themselves as quite available to children, they are not as physically present in certain periods of child’s routines during the week (e.g., *lunch time*, *homecoming from school*), which could mainly be due to their professional schedules.

In terms of relative involvement, Table 3 permits us to understand that fathers attribute to mothers the highest percentage of time as the primary caregiver of the child (36.02%), followed by the teachers (31.21%) and only then by themselves (27.48%).

Table 3
Percentage of time assigned to each caregiver (means and standard deviation)

	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Other relative</i>	<i>Teachers</i>
<i>M</i>	27.48	36.02	5.27	31.21
<i>DP</i>	11.41	13.02	7.09	17.78

Thus, although the general results presented above indicate high levels of paternal involvement in the study sample, the analysis of involvement in relative terms suggests a greater responsibility of mothers in the care of children, according to father’s reports.

Socio-demographic factors

In terms of socio-demographic variables, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) found no differences statistically significant between the fathers based on age, education and socioeconomic status (see Tables 4 to 6). Thus, in our sample these variables don’t appear as factors of interindividual variability in terms of paternal involvement.

Table 4
Paternal involvement in relation to age of fathers (Means, standard deviation and F ANOVA)

Paternal Involvement Scale	[28-38] (n=63)	[39-49] (n=73)	[50-60] (n=9)	ANOVA	
	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	F	<i>p</i>
Total	66.15 (8.46)	66.48 (8.73)	70.00 (5.31)	0.82	.441
Care	20.60 (3.56)	20.93 (3.06)	21.00 (2.73)	0.18	.828
Availability	25.58 (4.21)	25.76 (4.13)	27.33 (3.08)	0.70	.494
Presence	10.79 (3.54)	10.94 (3.26)	13.00 (2.54)	1.72	.181
Discipline	9.17 (1.51)	9.20 (1.65)	8.66 (1.73)	0.45	.633

NOTE: A significance level of $\alpha = .05$ was considered for statistical decision based on the p-value

Table 5

Paternal involvement in relation to educational background of fathers (Means, standard deviation and F ANOVA)

Paternal Involvement Scale	Less than 12 years (n=22)	High School (n=52)	Bachelor Degree (n=11)	College Degree or Higher (n=60)	ANOVA	
	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	F	<i>p</i>
Total	64.81 (10.84)	67.67 (7.85)	68.63 (6.85)	66.30 (8.24)	0.74*	.481
Care	20.09 (3.50)	20.98 (3.42)	21.27 (3.13)	20.80 (3.07)	0.47	.702
Availability	24.90 (5.48)	26.78 (3.40)	25.45 (3.53)	25.30 (4.11)	1.69	.171
Presence	11.09 (3.68)	10.73 (2.95)	12.36 (3.10)	10.96 (3.64)	0.71	.546
Discipline	8.72 (1.83)	9.17 (1.58)	9.54 (1.36)	9.23 (1.56)	0.79	.500

NOTE: A significance level of $\alpha = .05$ was considered for statistical decision based on the p-value

* Welch correction

Statistically significant differences were found only with relation to the number of children in the *Discipline* subscale [$F(2,142) = 4.46, p < .05$], as presented in Table 6, particularly among fathers with one child and fathers with two children (Tukey's test $p = .010$). This suggests that fathers with 2 children tend to exercise more frequently the tasks related to the discipline and setting limits for the child's behavior toward the group of parents with one child.

Table 6

Paternal involvement in relation to the number of children (Means, standard deviation and F ANOVA)

Paternal Involvement Scale	1 child (n=36)	2 child (n=84)	3 or more children (n=25)	ANOVA	
	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	F	<i>p</i>
Total	65.75 (8.31)	66.80 (8.83)	67.96 (7.36)	0.50	.603
Care	20.80 (3.00)	20.89 (3.48)	20.44 (2.87)	0.18	.832
Availability	26.19 (4.41)	25.39 (4.23)	26.52 (3.08)	0.96	.385
Presence	10.22 (2.54)	11.07 (3.61)	11.92 (3.43)	2.43*	.149
Discipline	8.52 (1.64)	9.45 (1.49)	9.08 (1.65)	4.46	.013

NOTE: A significance level of $\alpha = .05$ was considered for statistical decision based on the p-value

* Welch correction

Parental satisfaction, parental stress and dyadic adjustment

With regard to the personal and relational factors identified, the fathers of our sample showed high levels of parental satisfaction, along with low levels of parental stress, even though they presented some concerns about the personal resources necessary for the performance of a good parental role (eg, time, energy, competence). In terms of marital adjustment, it was found that parents perceive the quality of their relationship as very satisfactory, showing very high results (see Table 8).

Table 7

Means, standard deviation and minimum and maximum values for Parent Satisfaction Scale (PSS), Parental Stress Scale (PStS) and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)

<i>Instruments (N=145)</i>	<i>M (DP)</i>	<i>Minimum – Maximum</i>
PSS	121.80	20 – 140
Total	(10.78)	
PStS	31.35	17 – 85
Total	(6.49)	
DAS	118.30	0 – 151
Total	(13.22)	

Finally, the correlational study aiming to explore the association between paternal involvement and each of these factors showed a statistically significant negative association between father involvement and parental stress, even with a moderate magnitude [$r(142) = -.242, p < .05$], suggesting that higher levels of parental stress are associated with lower paternal involvement. Between father involvement and dyadic adjustment was found a statistically significant positive association [$r(142) = .345, p < .05$], indicating that higher levels of marital adjustment are associated with greater involvement of fathers.

DISCUSSION

Our sample presented a relatively high degree of paternal involvement, indicating that fathers perceive themselves as highly available and participative figures in the care and education of children. The results in the *Care* dimension suggest that parents often engage in some tasks of direct care, including feeding and putting the children to bed, with a smaller participation in the tasks of bathing and dressing the child. Some tasks associated with the social development and education of the child are also invested by fathers, including helping children in their personal problems. Fathers also perceive themselves as highly available figures, despite its smaller presence at certain moments of the child's routines, mainly because of their difficulty in reconciling work and school schedules.

In general, the results achieved by our sample on the Paternal Involvement Scale suggest that we are far from a representation of paternity guided by the instrumental, disciplinary and economic functions, more typical of a traditional image of father. Specifically, these results are closer to the ideal of the "new father", more willing to engage in various aspects of children's lives than their predecessors (e.g., physical care, emotional support, regulation of behavior, interaction), and confirms the trend described in the literature about the greater involvement of father in family life, with a further dilution of the effects of gender in the type of tasks that parents perform in relation to their children (Cabrera et al., 2000; Deutsch, 2001).

However, at the level of the relative involvement, there are still differences between fathers and mothers in the responsibility for the child, in terms of the amount of time that each is the primary caregiver. This confirms the trend described in other studies showing that, although fathers are becoming more involved with their children in absolute terms, this involvement is still lower than the involvement of mothers, especially in the area of responsibility for the child (Monteiro et al., 2010; Davis & Perkins, 1996; Jacobs & Kelley, 2006).

At the level of the individual and socio-demographic characteristics assessed, it was found that fathers did not differ depending on age, education and socioeconomic status, only observing interindividual variation between fathers with a child and fathers with two children in the *Discipline* subscale. These results suggest that fathers with two children tend to perform more often tasks such as setting limits and punishment, when compared to parents with only one child, which may be due to the need for additional resources in terms of care and supervision that accompany the existence of a second child in the family.

However, the inexistence of interindividual variation in the other variables caused us some surprise, especially when we consider the trends described in the literature, leading us to some considerations about the instrument and the sample dimension. First, the Paternal Involvement Scale was developed in this investigation, which forces us to consider its discriminative capacity. In this sense, the items comprising the scale may have revealed a weak discriminative power of the subjects, suggesting the need for further studies in order to confirm this hypothesis and lead to a refinement of the instrument. Secondly, although the total sample of fathers presents a reasonable size, the creation of smaller subgroups according to the socio-demographic factors studied led to a significant heterogeneity in the size of the sub-samples. This imbalance between groups may have impaired the evaluation of differences between fathers, considering once again useful to repeat the administration of the scale with a more rigorous control of the size and characteristics of the sample, to ensure an equal or almost equal number of subjects in each group.

The final goal of our study was to explore possible associations between the degree of father involvement and some personal and relational factors. At this level, the results point to the relative independence between paternal involvement and parental satisfaction, suggesting that the satisfaction associated with parenthood does not seem to be a strong determinant of involvement in the care and education of children.

The negative association found between paternal involvement and parental stress is consistent with the results found in other international studies (Crcic et al. 2005; Guajardo, Snyder, & Petersen, 2009; Whiteside-Mansell et al., 2007), inferring that these fathers do not present significant difficulties in terms of the problems and personal demands associated with parenthood. Although they presented some concerns about the personal resources required to perform a good father role (particularly in terms of the available time and the energy and skills required), these seem to express the “normal” concerns of parents aware of the importance of their role in children's lives.

The positive association between paternal involvement and marital adjustment also confirms the trend observed in most studies in this area, reporting that the affective quality of the marital relationship is a strong determinant of father involvement in child care (Adamsons et al., 2007; Bradford & Hawkins, 2006; Jacobs & Kelley, 2006; Lewis & Lamb, 2003; NICHD, 2000; Rouyer et al., 2007). The notion that paternal behaviors are highly sensitive to the influence of relational factors is consistent with the findings in our sample, showing that aspects such as the consensus between the spouses, the satisfaction with the relationship, the expression of affection and marital cohesion may have impact on how fathers will exercise their paternity, by the emotional support they provide and that can contribute significantly to a greater closeness and participation in family life and in the relationship with the child.

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