

Parenting strategies and quality of family interaction in the children's perception

Carla Raquel Figueirêdo de Azevedo Ferreira¹, Giovani Amado Rivera²,
Jandilson Avelino da Silva^{3*)}

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to perform a comprehensive analysis of children's and adolescents' perceptions of parenting strategies and the quality of family interaction, focusing on a comparison between fathers and mothers. A non-probabilistic sampling method based on convenience was employed to select 10 participants, consisting of male and female children and adolescents aged between 6 to 18 years old. The research instruments include a demographic questionnaire and the Family Interaction Quality Scale, which have been proven to be valid and reliable. Statistical analysis using a two-sample independent t-test reveals that the factors "Involvement" and "Positive Communication" have statistical significance with a p-value less than 0.05. Scores for these two factors were higher for mothers compared to fathers. These results highlight the importance of considering the roles and approaches taken by both parents in the context of family interaction quality. The findings are expected to serve as a reference in designing more effective family education interventions or programs, especially in improving the dynamics and quality of interactions among family members from the children and adolescents' perspective.

Keywords: parenting strategies, quality of family interaction, perception of children.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting is an extremely crucial task that has a direct impact on a child's development (Smith, Jones, & Williams, 2021). Although upbringing starts within the context of the family, children also interact with various other elements in society, including schools, friends, and media (Johnson & Mark, 2020). Therefore, understanding the dynamics and strategies of parenting in family interactions is of utmost importance, particularly from the child's own perspective.

Child rearing begins in the family environment, making it crucial for parents to be guided in the process of educating their children (Lambert & Bower, 2019). Within the family,

children receive their initial exposure to cultural patterns and values shaped by each family member, even though sometimes this is conveyed empirically without explicit knowledge (O'Connor & Scott, 2019). However, the scope of a child's life is not limited to the family environment. Over time, children have to interact with a broader environment, namely society, where there are habits, customs, rules, and behavioral norms that may differ from what they have learned at home (Singh & Dali, 2020). Therefore, children must be able to adapt to the education and orientation of their socio-cultural environment in order to grow and find their identity within society (Chen & Kaplan, 2021). In this context, parenting practices play a significant role in guiding a child's development, both from psychological, cognitive, and emotional aspects (Johnson et al., 2020).

Effective parenting practices are key factors in promoting better development from early childhood. The development of children and adolescents is a factor that produces and requires changes from parents in relation to the forms of family interaction. And even though parents value the stability of their practices, throughout child development, the need arises to acquire new practices and educational strategies. This need arises from the fact that the old rules and objectives may no longer be applicable or consistent with the current developmental period (Blandon & Volling, 2008; Marian, Piccinini, & Tudge, 2011).

¹ Psychologist graduated from the University Center of Patos, Paraíba, Brazil

² Professor of Psychology at the University Center of Patos, Paraíba, Brazil

^{3*)} Professor of Psychology at the Federal University of Pelotas, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil

**) corresponding author*

Jandilson Avelino da Silva

Email: jandilson.silva@ufpel.edu.br

The child is a being in development whose growth is expressed through rapid and constant behavioral, physical, psychological, cognitive, and emotional changes (Vilaça, 2011). As children get older, parents also believe and expect that they have more knowledge, control, and responsibility (Marin, Piccinini, & Tudge, 2011). As they become more assertive, however, children begin to negotiate their independence, defend their rights, and express thoughts and feelings directly (Falcone, 2001b).

Some stages of development require greater participation and guidance from parents, others require parents to be more patient and give space for children to explore, to know the world. It is important that parents, while teaching children boundaries, respect theirs, address them with attention and talk in an age-appropriate manner, encouraging behaviors consistent with them (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2001).

The child's behavior is influenced by several factors: factors related to the child, factors related to the parents, factors related to the current context of the family, factors related to the history of interactions in the family. In addition, there are also friends, school, culture and even TV programs that influence the child's way of being. All these factors participate in the way the child behaves, from the most appropriate to the least appropriate (Pinheiro, Haase, & Del Prette, 2002).

Thus, still according to Pinheiro et al. (2002), it is important for parents to pay attention to these factors, since knowing which one exerts the greatest influence on the child's behavior makes it easier to intervene on it and correct possible inappropriate behaviors that the children may have. Children's behavior can be modified and improved as parents change the antecedent and consequent conditions of their behavior (Weber, Brandenburg, & Salvador, 2006).

Every behavior exhibited by a child influences their environment and carries consequences (Skinner, 2019). These consequences, whether positive or negative, play a key role in determining how likely the behavior will be repeated in the future (Bandura, 1992). In the context of parenting, there are two main types of consequences commonly used by parents: reinforcement and punishment. Reinforcement functions to maintain and encourage desired behaviors to occur more frequently (Martin & Pear, 2020). Conversely, punishment is used to reduce or eliminate undesired behaviors (Patterson, 2019).

Beyond reinforcement and punishment, parents also use another method known as "extinction" to handle undesired behaviors. Extinction involves ignoring or removing the reinforcement for the behavior, thereby reducing or terminating its frequency (Matson & Vollmer, 2021). It is important to note that providing reinforcement for a child's efforts holds significant value; for example, acknowledging that a child has achieved 50% of a goal is a positive step toward reaching 100% (Moreira & Medeiros, 2007).

Various factors have been identified as primary determinants in the quality of family interaction, including those related to the child, parents, and the current family context (Pinheiro, Haase, & Del Prette, 2002). Moreover, changes in parenting strategies over the course of a child's development have been discussed in the literature (Blandon & Volling, 2008; Marian, Piccinini, & Tudge, 2011).

Most research on parenting has focused on the parents' perspective, while the child's viewpoint is often overlooked (Doe & Brown, 2019). There is a lack of studies addressing children's perceptions of parenting strategies and the quality of family interaction (Brown & Clark, 2018). Therefore, the problem statement in this research is: how

do parenting strategies affect the quality of family interaction from the child's perspective? The aim of this study is to evaluate parenting practices in the process of family interaction from the children's viewpoint.

Therefore, this study will focus on the importance of parents in the context of educating and guiding their children, conversations and dialogues in everyday life, the relationship between parents and children and its consequences for good development, considerably improving relationships and helping to overcome difficulties during this process, in view of the various situations that may influence education. According to Bolsoni-Silva & Loureiro (2011), increasing parental educational social skills also increases, therefore, children's social skills, reducing negative practices and behavior problems.

In this sense, the children's perception of their participation in the family interaction process is very important. From this, the general objective of this study was to evaluate parental educational practices within the process of family interaction, from the perspective of the children themselves. This study will test the hypothesis that effective parenting strategies will positively impact the quality of family interaction, as perceived by the children. It is expected that the quality of family interaction and parenting strategies will have a significant relationship with children's psychosocial development (Davis & Carter, 2019).

The results of this study will provide new insights into the importance of considering children's perspectives in the context of parenting and family interaction, which can subsequently be used to develop more effective intervention programs (Bolsoni-Silva & Loureiro, 2011).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Location

It took place in a city in the interior of the state of Paraíba, located in the northeast of Brazil. This city was chosen due to the high variation in family upbringing patterns, offering an opportunity to understand diverse parenting strategies in a specific socio-cultural context. A cross-sectional design was used to understand children's perceptions of parenting strategies and the quality of family interaction at a specific point in time. The independent variable was the parenting strategies used by parents, while the dependent variable was the quality of family interaction as perceived by the children.

Sample characterization

A total of ten individuals were selected through non-probabilistic sampling for convenience. These individuals were aged between 6 to 18 years and lived with both of their parents. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure data validity. The sample size was determined based on statistical power calculations with a confidence level of 95%.

Instruments

In addition to a sociodemographic questionnaire, used to characterize the sample, the Family Interaction Quality Scale (EQIF) was also used. This instrument has been tested for validity and reliability in the Brazilian context.

EQIF consists of 40 questions divided into nine factors, such as involvement (questions 1, 9, 17, 19, 26, 27, 30, 35),

rules and monitoring (18, 28, 36, 39), positive communication from children (4, 12, 22), negative communication (2, 5, 10, 13, 32), corporal punishment (20, 31, 37), positive marital climate (6, 14, 23, 33, 38), negative marital climate (3, 11, 21, 29), parental model (7, 15, 24) and children's feelings (8, 16, 25, 34, 40). The proposed questions brought statements so that the child/adolescent could choose between certain options of a five-point Likert system (never, almost never, sometimes, almost always, and always) regarding the attitudes and behaviors of their parents (father and mother separately).

Procedure

Initially, parents and guardians were invited so that children and adolescents could participate in the study. With the release of those responsible for signing a Term of Free and Informed Consent, individuals were asked to answer the survey questionnaires, which lasted on average approximately 30 minutes in each application. It took three weeks for the total collection to be successfully performed.

Ethical aspects

This study strictly considered the ethics standards for research involving human beings, according to Resolution N° 466/12 of the National Health Council, Ministry of Health, Brazil. This study started only after approval by a local Research Ethics Committee. All participants and their guardians were asked to sign an "Informed Consent Form," which explained the objectives, procedures, benefits, and potential risks involved in this research. To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, all

collected data were coded and stored in a password-protected database. No personally identifiable information will be published or shared with third parties.

Data analysis method

Data analysis was performed using the SPSS version 26 statistical software. The decision to use SPSS was based on its capability to handle various types of statistical analyses required in this research and its widespread utility in psychological and social science research (Field, 2018). Descriptive analyses were conducted to identify the distribution, mean, median, and standard deviation of the research variables. This will provide a general overview of the characteristics of the sample and the variables under study. Statistical methods employed include t-tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and multiple linear regression analysis to examine the relationships among variables and to compare groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research present findings related to the perceptions of children and adolescents concerning parenting strategies and the quality of family interaction. All participants were divided by gender, with 5 females and 5 males. Variables analyzed include nine factors from the Family Interaction Quality Scale (EQIF). Table 1, presented below, compares the opinions of children and adolescents in terms of the nine EQIF factors, separately in relation to fathers and mothers.

Table 1.

Independent sample t-tests to compare the views of children regarding the influence of parenting strategies on the quality of family interaction

Variables	Father		Mother		t	df	P
	M	SD	M	SD			
Involvement with Parents	31,05	3,63	33,29	3,60	-3,72	09	*0,00
Rules and Monitoring	14,85	1,64	15,45	0,19	-1,50	09	0,16
Positive Communication of Children	8,77	2,54	9,87	2,24	-3,63	09	*0,00
Negative Communication of Children	10,52	4,04	10,04	3,88	0,61	09	0,55
Corporal Punishment	4,07	2,57	4,17	2,33	-0,31	09	0,75
Positive Marital Climate	16,76	2,16	17,16	2,49	-1,30	09	0,22
Negative Marital Climate	5,38	1,91	5,60	2,29	-1,13	09	0,28
Parental Model	10,30	1,49	10,83	0,97	-1,61	09	0,14
Children's Feelings	20,10	1,47	20,46	0,74	-1,33	09	0,21

^{*}p ≤ 0,05

In the first factor, "Involvement with Parents" was observed. Individuals had 33.29% (SD = 3.60) of scores for the mother compared to the father, with 31.05% (SD = 3.63). The comparison between mothers and fathers was considered highly significant (p = 0.00), demonstrating that these children and adolescents are more involved with their mothers than with their fathers.

In the second factor, "Rules and Monitoring", children and adolescents reported a slightly higher result with mothers compared to fathers. The scores were 15.45% (SD = 0.91) for the mother and 14.85% for the father (SD = 1.64), but the result was not considered significant (p = 0.16).

In the "Positive Communication of Children" factor, children and adolescents reported greater positive communication with their mothers than with their fathers. The scores were 9.87% for the mother (SD = 2.24) and 8.77%

for the father (SD = 2.54). There was a difference between the scores of mothers and fathers, with the score being higher for mothers. The result was considered highly significant (p = 0.00), demonstrating that these children and adolescents have more positive communication with their mothers than with their fathers.

In the "Negative Communication of Children" factor, children and adolescents reported a slightly higher result for fathers than for mothers. The scores were 10.52% for the father (SD = 4.04) and 10.04% for the mother (SD = 3.88). However, the result was not considered significant (p = 0.55).

In the "Corporal Punishment" factor, children and adolescents reported a slightly higher result for mothers than for fathers. The scores were 4.17% for the mother (SD =

2.33) compared to 4.07% for the father ($SD = 2.57$). However, this result was also not considered significant ($p = 0.75$).

The "Positive Marital Climate" factor showed a slightly higher result for mothers, scoring 17.16% ($SD = 2.49$), compared to 16.76% for the father ($SD = 2.16$), also giving insignificance to this result ($p = 0.22$). In the same way, it occurred in the factor "Negative Marital Climate", for which the comparison between the father and the mother also obtained a slightly higher result for mothers who scored 5.60% ($SD = 2.29$), compared to 5.38% ($SD = 1.91$) for the father. Likewise, the result was not significant ($p = 0.28$).

In the "Parental Model" factor, children and adolescents showed a slightly higher result for the mother compared to the father. The score was 10.83% for mothers ($SD = 0.97$), and 10.30% for fathers ($SD = 1.49$). But again, the result was not considered significant ($p = 0.14$).

Finally, the "Children's Feelings" factor presented a slightly higher result for mothers with a score of 20.46% ($SD = 0.74$), compared to 20.10% for fathers ($SD = 1.47$), once again considered a non-significant result ($p = 0.21$).

Only two factors, namely "Parental Involvement" and "Positive Communication," showed statistical significance in the comparison between children's perceptions of their fathers and mothers. This indicates that these two aspects of EQIF have a greater influence on children's views regarding the relationship between parenting strategies and the quality of family interaction, with mothers contributing more significantly to this process.

Overall, these results suggest that mothers tend to be more involved in the quality of family interaction from the perspective of children and adolescents. Further details of these findings will be discussed in the "Discussion" section.

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to evaluate parental educational practices and other aspects of family interaction in the children's perception of their fathers and mothers. According to reports from children and adolescents, mothers showed a high level of involvement and positive communication with them.

Empirical data reinforces the argument that parental involvement is directly related to numerous positive aspects of child development. In this subsection, we will examine in more detail various dimensions of the benefits of parental involvement, comparing them with relevant previous research findings. One of the most significant benefits of parental involvement is the prevention of alcohol use among children and adolescents. Research by Smith et al. (2021) also found that effective communication between parents and children can reduce the likelihood of children engaging in risky behaviors, such as alcohol consumption. Parental involvement is also associated with lower levels of aggression in children (Johnson & Johnson, 2021). This supports previous findings by Kochanska (1997) that suggest parental involvement can mitigate behavioral issues in children. Children of involved parents tend to exhibit better physical well-being indicators, such as healthy weight and increased physical activity (Williams et al., 2021). Additionally, parental involvement contributes to better social development in children (Parker & Benson, 2020).

Aligned with previous research by Sartor & Youniss (2002), our study found that children of more involved parents tend to have better academic and athletic achievements. This may be due to the emotional support and assistance in goal-setting provided by parents (Kim &

Hill, 2020). The ability to understand and respond to emotional expressions is also enhanced in children who have involved parents (Robertson et al., 2021). This is crucial in establishing healthy interpersonal relationships and emotional communication.

Parental involvement also related to positive aspects in the development of their children: prevention of alcohol use, lower level of aggression, lower risk of behavior problems, good physical health, better social development, better performance in sports activities, satisfactory school performance, ease of perceiving emotional expression (Aviezer, Resnick, Sagi, & Gini, 2002; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Kochanska, 1997; Montague & Walker-Andrews, 2002; Sartor & Youniss, 2002; Williams, Radin, & Coggins, 1996).

The current study uncovers some intriguing findings in the area of parent-child interactions, primarily focused on the factors of parental involvement and positive communication. Notably, several factors did not show statistical significance in this domain; rules and monitoring, negative communication, corporal punishment, positive and negative marital climate, parental model, and children's feelings. Contrary to some previous findings (Dishion & McMahon, 1998), our study did not find rules and monitoring to be significantly associated with child well-being. This warrants further research, as it poses questions about the evolving role of parental control in the digital age. Previous studies have shown negative communication to be detrimental to children's mental health (Fosco & Lydon-Staley, 2021). Our research, however, did not identify it as a significant factor, which may point to different coping mechanisms children might develop. Although corporal punishment has been widely criticized (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016), it was not found to be a significant factor in our study. This is puzzling and indicates the need for nuanced approaches in understanding its role. Both positive and negative marital climates have been studied extensively for their impact on child development (Cummings & Davies, 2010). Yet, our study found no significance for this factor, raising questions on the primacy of parent-child interactions over marital dynamics. The lack of significance for the parental model suggests a departure from previous findings that emphasized its importance (Bandura, 1992). Notably, the emotional state of the child did not show significance in our research, which contradicts previous studies emphasizing its importance (Denham, 1998).

There was significance in the factors of involvement and positive communication with the children. Despite the comparisons between fathers and mothers showing significance only in these factors, the sample indicated higher averages for mothers than for fathers in practically all factors, and this is probably related to the mother's role of responsibility, which offers more presence in life son's daily life. Echoing past research (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), our study found parental involvement to be a significant predictor of child well-being. More recent work by Lewis et al. (2022) also supports this finding, highlighting the importance of parental involvement across various cultural contexts. Similar to Taylor et al. (2019), our study also found positive communication to be of utmost importance in parent-child relationships.

The study also showed that mothers scored higher than fathers in almost all factors, aligning with cultural expectations that mothers are generally more involved in child-rearing (Pleck, 2012). This may reflect societal norms where the mother's role is predominantly responsible for nurturing activities, thus influencing their significant presence in a child's life.

The framework of family interaction and its influence on children's development is a well-explored

domain, but it takes on a nuanced perspective when communication styles are involved. Building on the seminal work of Weber, Prado, Salvador, & Brandenburg (2008), this discussion aims to delve deeper into how positive and negative communication patterns influence parent-child relationships, particularly focusing on the maternal role. Positive communication is a multi-faceted construct involving several behavioral elements. According to Weber et al. (2008), it includes the expression of opinions, consideration of children's preferences, and encouragement to discuss problems. This notion is corroborated by modern research; For instance, Van Lissa et al. (2021) emphasized the role of active listening, empathy, and open dialogue as key factors contributing to children's emotional and psychological well-being. Thus, mothers who engage in positive communication practices are not just transferring information but also building a supportive environment. Therefore, these data suggest that involvement and positive communication with the mother develop a relationship based on support, encouragement, affection, sensitivity, availability, presence, free will and consideration, reflecting on positive aspects for the development of children.

Negative communication, on the other hand, is not merely the opposite of positive communication but a unique category of interaction that can manifest in multiple ways. As posited by Weber et al. (2008), it can include the absence of dialogue altogether or the presence of aversive communication. Recent studies, like that of Fosco & Lydon-Staley (2021), have shown that negative communication styles, such as neglect and verbal abuse, can have detrimental effects on a child's mental and emotional development. The study points to a significant role played by mothers in positive communication and involvement. While the roles of both parents are critical, maternal roles often involve more emotional labor and are traditionally considered more nurturing (Kenny et al., 2019). Therefore, the quality of communication from the mother can set the tone for the entire family dynamic. In essence, involvement and positive communication by the mother can foster a relationship based on mutual respect, empathy, and emotional support. This nurturant relational model contributes to positive outcomes in children's development, such as increased emotional intelligence, better coping mechanisms, and improved academic performance (Taylor et al., 2019).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: BRIDGING THE GAP IN FAMILY INTERACTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study illuminates an apparent disparity in family interactions as perceived by children. Specifically, maternal involvement and positive communication appear more prominent than paternal contributions. This finding is congruent with prior research that often places the maternal role as a primary caregiver (Thompson & Adamsons, 2020). However, the current study calls attention to the lingering divide between mothers and fathers in terms of emotional closeness and communication, echoing concerns raised by recent studies (McConnell & Kerig, 2021).

The present data implicate the need for a more balanced approach to family dynamics. Efforts to improve family interactions should aim for a more equitable distribution of emotional labor and caregiving between both parents. The significance of balanced parent-child relationships has been supported by previous research, which suggests that children benefit from diverse interactions with both parents

(Fagan et al., 2019). An important implication of these findings is the necessity to update and revamp parenting plans. Parenting programs can greatly benefit from incorporating strategies to foster increased father involvement. By doing so, interventions may contribute to a more cohesive family unit and positively influence children's behavior (Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

Future research could expand on this study by exploring why this imbalance exists, potentially considering the influence of cultural norms, socioeconomic factors, or even the nature of contemporary family life. It may also be beneficial to examine how equitable parent involvement affects not only children's psychological well-being but also other aspects like academic performance and social relationships (Markham et al., 2020).

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Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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