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Fathers' Involvement in the lives of preschool-aged children in the northern and interior region of Portugal

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BACKGROUND

The role of fathers is widely accepted in the education and promotion of child development (Featherstone, 2004), although fathers' involvement is frequently omitted in the research field (Day & Lamb, 2004; Lamb, 2010; Parke, 2000, 2002; Pleck, 2010). Therefore, there is still a long way to go in research of new contours of this involvement and its implications, both for children and parents.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to characterize fathers' involvement with their preschool-age children.

METHOD

Sample

A total of 435 (87%) fathers of children, ages between 3 and 6, attending kindergarten at the city of Bragança, in the northern and inner region of Portugal, agreed to participate in this study.

Instruments

An adapted version of the Portuguese Parental Involvement Scale (Simões, Leal & Maroco, 2010a) was used with 14 items organized into the domains of care, recreational activities and discipline, with a consistency, measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, respectively of 0.80, 0.70 and 0.43. The internal consistency of the scale was 0.81.

Procedure

After the initial contact with all kindergartens, the instrument was delivered, in a closed envelop, via childhood to educators, to be completed by fathers. The return of inquiries from parents, followed the reverse route.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fathers' ages ranged from 20 to 62 years, and most of them were married (81.6%), with 12 or more years of education (70.34%) and employed (87.8%). Most parents had one (45.10%) or two children (46.40%). Also, 50.80% children were males and 49.20% females. The majority of children were 4 years old (32.90%), followed by 5 (29.90%), 3 (22.50%) and 6 (14.70%).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

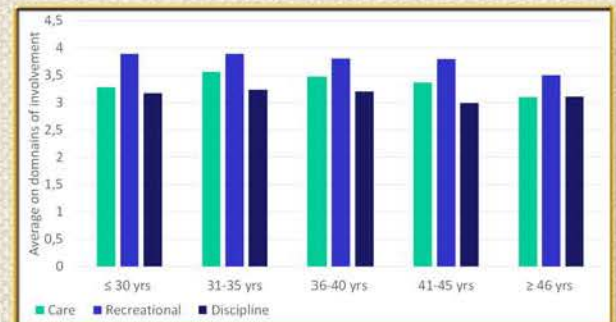


Figure 2. Age and fathers' involvement in the domains of care, recreational activities and discipline.

Fathers' involvement didn't differ according to marital and employment status. Nevertheless, fathers' age predicted, respectively, involvement in care and discipline (Fig. 2). Data confirmed "generational niches", raising the possibility of intergenerational changes. Indeed, while some studies found no differences accordingly to father's age (Simões et al., 2010b), others have opposite results (Lima, 2005; Monteiro, 2010).

Fathers with one children (compared with those with more than two) were more involved in recreational activities. Besides, those who had female children were more often involved in activities such as reading and story telling.

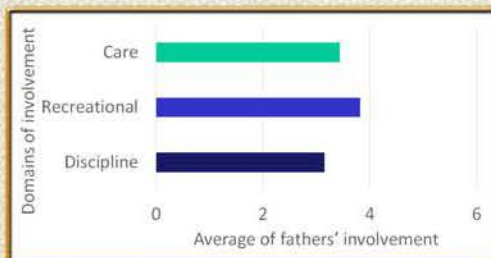


Figure 1. Fathers' involvement in the domains of care, recreational activities and discipline

Most participants spent few time with their children, although they were highly involved in recreational activities, followed by care and discipline (Fig. 1). This probably occurred because the dyad usually interacted on a more flexible schedule, consistent with previous studies (Cia et al., 2009; Pimenta et al., 2010).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- The time fathers spend with their children were not equivalent to less paternal involvement.
- Fathers' involvement was particularly significant for recreational activities.
- Subtle changes become already evident in younger parents.
- Despite the stereotypical view of fathers' involvement, being a parent of a daughter was more associated with frequent literacy practices than for fathers with sons.
- Future studies should deepen these realities for a more in-depth understanding of fathers' involvement and its implications for child development.

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