

Maternal Educational Practices: Difficulties in Early and Middle Childhood

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Abstract: The family is the system that most influences a child's development throughout different phases. The perceptions of parents about skills, abilities, and characteristics of each developmental stage influence the way they will behave with their children. Objectives: To identify the main difficulties found by mothers in the education/upbringing of children in early childhood (3-6 years) and middle childhood (6-12 years). Method: Participants were 120 mothers (two groups of 60 mothers for each age range), mostly married, ranging in age from 30.4 to 36.5 years, who completed a self-administered questionnaire containing essay and multiple-choice questions about data on characterization of the sample and maternal difficulties in dealing with their children according to the child's stage of development. Participants completed the questionnaires at home or in schools. Results: More than 75% of mothers live with their child's father, and more than 78% of these fathers help in child-rearing activities. Mothers spent an average of more than 4 hours a day with their children. Major difficulties of mothers of children in early childhood: putting toys away (63.3%), obedience to maternal commands (46.7%), sleeping on schedule (43.3%), eating an adequate diet (40%). Major difficulties of mothers of children in middle childhood: eating an adequate diet (43.3%), sleeping on schedule (41.7%), putting toys away (38.3%), and obedience to maternal commands (36.7%). Conclusion: The data show an increasing difficulty by mothers in getting children to do their homework and to learn school content as the child's age advances. Common difficulties are centered on the establishment of a routine and obedience.

Keywords: Children from 3-6, children from 6-12, difficulties in education, educational practices.

INTRODUCTION

The family is the first social environment of the child and, therefore, it is also the agent who is responsible for the education of the child as a baby [1-3]. Therefore, the family has a key role in all domains of child development, being considered the system that most influences this development [4].

Considering the role of the family, it is important to emphasize that the domestic environment and its components may interfere with the development of children in many ways. O'Connor, Heron, Golding, Beveridge and Glover [5], for instance, found that even during the prenatal period maternal anxiety was related to the appearance of emotional and behavioral problems in children up to 4 years old. Another study found a significant relationship between the TV series watched by the families (part of a program developed as one of the steps of parental intervention and "Triple P" family support) and the reduction of children's disruptive behavior in relation to a control group [6]. These studies illustrate some of the home environment components as well as the different ways in which they are presented in different family structures, affecting

child development. The first analyzed study, for instance, shows negative consequences of a component, while the second presents positive consequences of the same component.

Thus, according to Biasoli-Alves [1], once aware of the role they play in their children's education, parents are increasingly concerned with questions related to how they are acting with children and whether they are properly preparing them for life's challenges. Regarding this parental concern, the author also mentions that currently, parents have faced contradictions between the way they were raised and the present reality, having to reconsider previous values. Therefore, it becomes crucial that parents know and understand the typical characteristics and peculiarities of each phase of human development, as they should know how to deal with "expected" difficulties as they arise.

For instance, in a longitudinal study, Lam, Hiscock and Wake [7] found that sleep problems are common in preschoolers, and can be somewhat associated with behavior problems in children and maternal depression scores, although these families maintain a good family functioning. The study shows that sleep problems can be expected in this age group without necessarily depending on family practices, since it is a common characteristic of this developmental stage. This reinforces the argument that it is important for families

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to be instructed about what can be expected for each developmental stage, in order to better cope with possible difficulties.

Difficulties faced by families due to external factors may also influence the mental health of mothers and children. Accordingly, Whitaker, Philips, and Orzol [8] found an increased percentage of major depressive episodes and generalized anxiety disorder in mothers with increased food insecurity (risk of failing to supply adequate nutrition to the family). Among these mothers, increased food insecurity was also related to increased behavior problems in children. Therefore, external factors were correlated to reduced maternal (higher percentage of major depressive episodes and generalized anxiety disorder) and child mental health (higher incidence of behavioral problems).

Another difficulty not expected by families is the presence of developmental delays. Children with developmental delays had higher scores of behavior problems, which contributed to a worsening in parenting stress, which, in turn, contributed to a worsening in child behavior problems [9]. Mothers from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background whose children had some kind of intellectual disability were more likely to develop an unhealthy family functioning [10]. Parental cognitions about the locus of external control, parental dissatisfaction, and child behavioral difficulties also correlated with higher levels of parenting stress [11].

Considering that in the present work we analyze some common problems reported by mothers of children in early and middle childhood, and that parents should be aware of the peculiarities of each developmental stage, it is important to describe some characteristics of these age ranges.

Papalia and Feldman [12] reported that early childhood corresponds to the period from 3-6 years, in which there is increased strength and refinement of simple and complex motor skills. The child's behavior is predominantly egocentric, and cognitive maturity still contains illogical ideas about the world. The creativity and imagination expressed in play become more elaborate. Independence and self-control increase, and the family remains as the center of the child's life. One characteristic of this phase concerning parents refers to the child's diet. It is common in this period that children present food neophobia; however, parents often worry that their child is not eating properly, and end by using inappropriate feeding strategies [13]. Another problem refers to the gastroesophageal reflux disease, which is

significantly related to feeding problems and oral disorders [14].

From the historical-cultural perspective, Facci [15], revisits the developmental process. The author points out that children in the preschool period (similar to the classification of early childhood) are primarily engaged in the world of games or play, and it is through play that the child develops awareness of the objective world, of social relationships, and social functions, even if he or she does not actually perform them. Still in this period, an important developmental milestone stands out, which is the entry of the child into school. In a case study, Fonsaca and Araújo [16], observed that some activities, such as the observation of similarities and differences between objects, for instance, can already be stimulated in early childhood, in order to increase the skill of arranging and classifying objects, which is an activity of greater cognitive advance.

Still regarding early childhood, Santos and Cabonera [17], point out that for Rousseau, the educator in this phase must respect the child's world, and should not be too prescriptive in the selection of educational content. Thus, the educator should not try to pass on his adult ideals, but be a mediator between the child and nature, which, in this moment of life, involves the body's strengthening and refinement of senses for the development of morality and autonomy in the following phases. These examples show how the particularity of this phase will influence the child's degree of control and understanding over the world, so parents that do not respect the child's cognitive scope, may be subjected to difficulties and frustrations.

Middle childhood, in turn, is the age range from 6-12 years [12] and, during this stage, physical growth and egocentricity decrease as memory and language skills increase. The self-image develops, affecting their self-esteem, and friends become essential. The circle of relationships expands, and children go to the next phase in which the main activity is studying. In this moment, children start having duties and tasks, adding a greater "responsibility," thus changing their relationship with the adult (either teacher or family) [15]. Furthermore, the study is the beginning of the internalization of scientific and social knowledge, when conscience and theoretic thinking emerge, as well as the capacity for mental reflection, analysis, and planning.

Concerning the middle childhood, Zattoni [18], highlights the importance of self-esteem, stressing the main role of parents in the process of acquiring it, as

they send messages directly or indirectly to the children. Thus, it is important that parents are aware of this fact in order to deal with the specific difficulties of this phase.

Thus, it appears that the perception of parents about skills, abilities, and characteristics of a particular phase will influence the way they will behave toward their children. Considering these perceptions, Almeida and Cunha [19] found that the common social representation of the child is play, innocence, and dependence. These associations should be regarded with caution by parents as not to overestimate or underestimate the ability of children and their own. These stereotypes and educational practices that are transmitted from one generation to another [20] will outline educational practices and parental styles, such as positive monitoring and moral behavior, for instance. These, in turn, can predict problems of behavior and social competence [21] and be related to antisocial and transgressive behavior, as well as physical abuse [22].

It is well established by the literature the role of the family and the environment that surrounds it, as well as the various factors associated with the development of children and a healthy family dynamics. These issues inspired the research conducted in the present study. Given the physical, cognitive, and social changes, and the developmental tasks of each stage of development to which parents must adapt to educate their children presented above, this research aimed to investigate the difficulties perceived by mothers of children in early and middle childhood regarding the education of their offspring.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

In the present study, participants were 120 mothers of children in early (3-6 years) and middle childhood (6-12 years), attending public and private schools in a municipality in the countryside of the state of Paraná, Brazil. Thus, two groups were formed: 60 mothers of 3-6-year-olds (early childhood) and 60 mothers of 6-12-year-olds (middle childhood). The mean age of mothers of children in early childhood was 30.4 (SD=5.14) years; 63.3% were married; 16.7%, single; 1.7%, widowers; 3.3%, divorced; and 15% lived in stable union with their partners. Among mothers of children in middle childhood, their mean age was 36.55 (SD=5.96) years, 71.7% were married, 8.3% were single, 5% were widowers, 1.7% were divorced, and 13.3% lived in a stable union.

Instruments

A self-administered questionnaire was applied with 18 questions (APPENDIX A). The questionnaire contained a header with instructions on how to complete it and was developed by the researchers according to the research objectives.

The items investigated addressed data on characterization of the sample; e.g., occupation and civil status, and questions related to the family, such as the following: amount of children, age and sex of each of them, time spent with children and at work daily, whether the mother lives with the child's father or if the current partner (being the father of the child or not) helps in the child's education. The other questions were related to the specific objectives of the research focusing on maternal difficulties in dealing with the child. Response options included homework, diet, fights, learning school content, friendships, educational strategies, children's behavior in different social environments, behavior that mothers wanted to change in their children, difficulties for such changes, and additional comments.

Procedures

Initially, consent was obtained from the school to conduct data collection. After the authorization, researchers attended the parents' meeting on a previously scheduled date. The researchers introduced themselves, explained the research objectives and the instructions to complete the questionnaire. Mothers were delivered the terms of free and informed consent along with the questionnaire. They were empowered to respond immediately or at home. For those who chose to respond at home, they were asked to return their forms within a week to the coordinating school. A week after the delivery of questionnaires to mothers, the researchers returned to the schools and collected the completed forms.

Questionnaires that had most of the questions completed and a signed Informed Consent were considered valid. At the end of the study, general results were reported to the school, which was in charge of publicizing them to mothers and the whole school community. The ethical procedures involved in this research are in accordance with the ethical guidelines for human research, and the study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Assis Gurgacz Faculty.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were performed; comparison between responses of mothers of preschoolers and mothers of school-age children were made through Student's *t* and chi-square tests using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The open questions were analyzed by creating categories of responses by similarity of content.

Statistical analysis was conducted to verify possible differences between the responses of mothers of children attending public schools compared to mothers of children attending private schools, according to the developmental period, using bivariate analysis and the chi-square test, but there were no significant differences ($X^2 > 0.800$; $ps > 0.05$). Likewise, for questions involving means, such as time spent at work and time spent with children, we applied the *t* test for independent samples, and no statistically significant differences were found when comparing public and private schools ($ts > 0.154$; $ps > 0.05$). Based on these results, the sample started to be evaluated as a single group in terms of the type of school, keeping the separation according to the child's age.

For each age group, the following data were investigated: the number and age of children, the average time the mother spent with them, the amount of hours worked by the mother per day, if the mother lived with the child's father and if her partner helped in the education of the child. Mothers whose children were in early childhood, had on average 1.78 (SD=0.84) children and their mean age was 3.5 (SD=1.06) years. The responses of mothers indicated that they spent on average 4.43 (SD=1.37) hours with children, and 7.88 (SD=4.38) hours at work; 75% of

them lived with the child's father, and 78.3% received assistance from her partner in the education of their offspring.

On average, mothers of children in middle childhood had 1.95 (SD=0.83) children and their ages were 8.78 (SD=2.02) years on average. These mothers spent a mean of 4.88 (SD=1.35) hours with their children and 7.57 (SD=1.56) hours at work; 78.3% of mothers lived with the child's father, and 86.7% received help from partners.

There was no difference between the two age groups regarding the time spent with the child ($t = -1.81$, $p = 0.073$) or the time spent at work ($t = 0.524$, $p = 0.602$). Mothers of the two age groups showed similar patterns of response as to cohabiting with the father of the child ($X^2 = 1.61$, $p = 0.45$) and having the assistance of a partner ($X^2 = 1.81$, $p = 0.404$).

Among the closed questions, one of them addressed items related to the difficulty of mothers in dealing with their children. There were several options, in which mothers could mark more than one alternative. Table 1 presents the responses to these options.

When comparing the difficulties of mothers of children in early childhood and mothers of children in middle childhood, the latter presented more difficulty in getting their children to do homework ($X^2 = 5.21$, $p = 0.02$). In contrast, mothers of children in early childhood emphasized the problems of bedwetting ($X^2 = 7.21$, $p = 0.007$) and putting toys away ($X^2 = 7$, $p = 0.006$).

When the child does something wrong, the behavior of mothers of children in early childhood was similar to that of mothers of middle childhood ($X^2 = 3.57$; $p = 0.467$),

Table 1: Comparison of Frequencies of Maternal Difficulties (with n in Brackets)

	Early childhood (n=60)	Middle childhood (n=60)
Homework	11.7% (n=7)	28.3% (n=17)*
Adequate diet	40.0% (n=24)	43.3% (n=26)
Fights at school	8.3% (n=5)	5% (n=3)
Learning school content	6.7% (n=4)	13.3% (n=8)
Obedying the mother	46.7% (n=28)	36.7% (n=22)
Sleeping on schedule	43.3% (n=26)	41.7% (n=25)
Bathing	18.3% (n=11)	11.7% (n=7)
Putting toys away	63.3% (n=38)	38.3% (n=23)*
Verbalizing feelings without crying	25% (n=15)	18.3% (n=11)
Bedwetting	21.7% (n=13)	5% (n=3)*

with the majority (85% and 75%, respectively) telling the children that they behaved badly. The mothers also reported yelling (8.3% of mothers of early childhood and 16.7% of mothers of middle childhood) and punishing by spanking or grounding (1.7% and 3.3%, respectively); only 1.7% of mothers of school-age children reported pretending they do not see the wrong behavior of the child.

Regarding the homework, there was a heterogeneity in the responses of mothers of children in early childhood compared to mothers of children in middle childhood ($X^2 = 34.7$, $p < 0.001$): 13.3% of mothers of preschoolers marked the option "does it as soon as I ask him to," 11.7% indicated the alternative "takes a long time to start doing it/or complains," 33.3%; "does it willingly," 5% "always does it without me having to ask," and 21.7% "only does it when I am next to him." The remaining mothers reported that their children do not receive homework assignments. Regarding the mothers of school-age children, 23.3% marked the alternative "does it as soon as I ask him to"; 21.7%, "takes a long time to start doing it/or complains"; 10%, "does it willingly"; 35%, "always does it without me having to ask," and 8.3% "only does it when I am next to him." These results indicate greater autonomy of children in middle childhood to perform the task as soon as the mother tells him to or without the mother having to remind him. However, at this age, children tend to complain more often compared to children in early childhood.

With regard to children's help with household tasks, there is a greater contribution of children in middle childhood ($X^2 = 13.07$, $p = 0.001$); 91.7% of mothers of children in middle childhood and 65% of mothers of children in early childhood reported that the children help with household chores when needed.

The next topics were discussed in open questions. Responses were quantified according to the themes assigned. Regarding the behavior of children in early childhood when the family is together, 25% of mothers reported that their children want to be the center of attention, 10% responded that they play with their parents/brothers/uncles, 11.6% responded that they make a mess/behave badly, 3.3% indicated that the child speaks a lot, 15% reported that their children are cheerful/happy, 30% responded that they behave well/are educated, and 10% reported that their child enjoys being together with the family.

In relation to mothers of children in middle childhood, 50% declared that the child's behavior is

good, very good, or excellent, 25% reported that their child wants to draw attention, and 8.3% perceive the child as happy when reunited with the family. Isolated responses indicated: introversion, wanting to stick their oar in the conversation and agitate the family, and also that the child does not like the assembled family, is communicative, or behaves normally.

In relation to the greatest difficulty in the education/upbringing of the child, the mothers of children in early childhood responded the following: 26.6% mentioned the education; 28.3%, setting limits and making the child obey by rules; 16.6%, the short time available; 6.6%, fights between siblings; 6.6%, lack of patience in the education; 5%, financial; 5%, the lack of the male figure. Isolated responses mentioned the intervention of others in education, independence and responsibility of children, and stubbornness.

A percentage of 16.6 of mothers of school-age children reported no difficulties with their child's behavior; 23.2% reported the problem of disobedience and difficulties with setting limits; 8.3%, difficulties at school; 6.6%, lack of support from the father of the child; 5%, sibling relationship problems, including fights and jealousy; 5% mentioned difficulties to educate properly. Isolated responses included: lack of time to be with their child, inability to give what the child asks, inability to say no to the child, interference from grandparents, disrespectfulness, stubbornness, untidiness, and difficulties in helping their children become more independent.

Regarding the desire to change children's behavior and the difficulties and strategies used, 70% of mothers of 3-6-year-olds said there are behaviors they believe necessary to be changed regarding acting, toys, nervousness, disrespectfulness, diet, fights, stubbornness, temper, among others; 46.6% of mothers reported difficulties in helping children change their behavior; 53.3% said they have tried to make changes using the following methods: punishment, talking, prohibiting the child to do something he or she likes, scolding, spanking, trying to correct them, changing the way they interact with the child, and taking them to professionals such as psychologists and speech therapists; 6.6% of mothers reported that nothing worked.

Regarding the answers of mothers of 6-12-year-olds on the desire to change children's behavior and the difficulties and strategies employed, 65% of mothers said they wanted to change something in their child: 53.3 % reported having difficulties in helping children

change their behavior, 55% said they had tried to make some changes, such as talking, asking, scolding, changing the way they interact, taking them to a psychologist, and encouraging them to go to school, reading, and participating in activities that activate reasoning.

Concerning the child's behavior at school, 68.3% of mothers of preschoolers responded that their children behave well/very well, 15% of mothers said they behave normally (when compared to other children of the same age); 3.3% of mothers reported that the child is shy, 8.4% that they are agitated; 5% answered that the child is inattentive. Isolated responses involved the difficulty in performing tasks and stubbornness. As for children in middle childhood, 80% of mothers reported that the child behaves well, 5% reported that the child talks a lot, and others said that the child behaves "more or less".

DISCUSSION

According to the results of this survey most participants live with the child's father and receive help in the education of children. The amount of time mothers spent with children, as well as the hours devoted to work is approximately the same regardless of the child's age range. This piece of information seems to corroborate the findings of the recent literature, which reveals that the roles of the father and the mother are becoming similar in regards to childrearing and in the time devoted to work, as both contribute to the provision of material goods [23, 24]. This fact is positive, since a good marital relationship fosters the sharing of housework and childrearing practices, providing a sense of security in children [25].

The data illustrate a growing difficulty by mothers in getting children to do their homework, learn academic content, and help with household chores as the child's age advances. According to Bailey, Silver, Brabham, and Ross [26], the parent-child interaction while doing homework assignments is a positive aspect for the child's development. The authors also mention that this practice increases parental commitment as well as the child's skills in making inferences about the responses of lessons. Another study that involved the participation in an intervention program in social skills and school success found that parental involvement in the child's tasks showed positive effects on academic performance of children [27]. Only 21.7% of mothers of 3-6-year-olds and 10% of mothers of 6-12-year-olds marked the alternative "only does it when I am next to him" in relation to homework, which indicates greater

autonomy of children and little maternal participation as children's ages advance.

Issues concerning unhealthy habits and disobeying maternal commands were indicated as problems in the two stages of development. In relation to food, a qualitative study on the perceptions of mothers about the children's diet [13] discusses how mothers are often unaware that some difficulties are common and end up using inappropriate strategies. The survey results indicated that the use of occasional negative interventions continues even after the eating behavior has changed, possibly due to the distress suffered by mothers concerned with their child's diet. Thus, it is possible that mothers of the two age groups are experiencing similar troubles and have highlighted this difficulty in the questionnaires.

Concerning the difficulty of getting children to obey, many factors may be related. Clark [28] reports that both good and bad behavior are shaped by the rewards that children receive. Many parents unwittingly reinforce bad behaviors and fail to reinforce good ones. Strategies that involve rewarding good behavior, mild punishment or reprimands for misbehavior, and establishing consistent rules contribute to the quality of family relationships. Thus, it is possible that mothers are developing strategies that undermine this relationship and that they may not understand the stages of development of their children, contributing to the disobedience.

When comparing the difficulties in both age groups, two main difficulties of mothers of 3-6-year-olds stand out: one related to themselves, involving the lack of time and patience to educate, and another involving the establishment of limits. The issue of limits was also the main difficulty reported by mothers of 6-12-year-olds. The lack of time and patience to raise children may be the product of sociocultural changes related to the role of women. Weber, Santos, Becker and Santos [29] discuss the changes that led to opportunities for the inclusion of women in the labor market and how working generates feelings of guilt in a sample of mothers. In this research it was observed that mothers of all age groups spent more hours at work than with their children, a fact that may have influenced the reports of lack of time and patience. The difficulty with setting limits can be related to what has been discussed by Clark [28]. Parental inconsistency in establishing and reinforcing rules tends to generate relationship difficulties, where children start not to understand the limits imposed by parents.

With regard to the behavior of the child at family gatherings, it was verified that the attention-seeking behavior appears strongly in both early and middle childhood. In general, both age groups behave well at family gatherings.

These findings seem consistent with the literature [15, 30] regarding the stages of development. In early childhood there is still a strong egocentric character, which can be evidenced by disobedience and attention-seeking behavior at family gatherings according to mother's reports. Also, as the authors pointed out, at this age the children's play has a special function of expressing creativity and imagination, also being the means by which the child develops awareness of the objective world, of social relationships, and social functions. The need to play is evidenced in the difficulty mothers have in trying to get children to put their toys away, for instance, or in the moments they have to "accomplish their tasks".

Regarding homework, there is a higher percentage of answers from mothers of school-age children in comparison to mothers of preschoolers. As previously mentioned, middle childhood is the stage in which the study and the entry into school have greater impact on children [15, 31], which may explain the increased difficulty with homework in this age range.

Concerning educational practices and parental styles, in general, most mothers have support from partners and uses positive strategies, telling the child what he or she did wrong immediately after the event. The percentages of mothers who yell at their children or use physical punishment were low. As seen previously [21, 22], such attitudes contribute to a healthier parent/child relationship, less harmful to their social development.

In accordance with the research objectives, we investigated the main difficulties reported by these mothers: results showed maternal difficulties in three major areas: establishment of a routine, responsibility, and limits. Despite spending about 4 hours a day with their children, this amount of time did not seem to be aligned with the child's needs. It was found that as the child becomes older, mothers tend to stop supervising homework. Consequently, mothers reported that their children do not perform schoolwork and that they have learning difficulties. Mothers also reported problems regarding the lack of participation in household tasks, unhealthy eating habits, and putting toys away.

In this sense, preventive intervention programs could be implemented in schools in order to raise

awareness about the importance of establishing and maintaining a routine whose tasks involving responsibilities designated to children are systematically followed by parents. Weber [32] points out that the rules should be clear, specific, and well planned, and that the performance of tasks must be supervised. According to Soares, Souza, and Marinho [33] supervising implies to guide the child throughout the task, as well as verifying if he or she is meeting schedules. Neufeld and Maehara [34], in turn, emphasize the need to provide parents with tools to identify their behaviors and thoughts regarding their child's difficulties, because they tend to misinterpret responses, hindering a more proactive and productive interaction. Therefore, the psychologist must be a facilitator of the parent-child interaction, promoting the participation of parents in school affairs through verbal encouragement, direct reinforcement, and monitoring of activities.

It is also important to remember that each family is unique, with its own particularities, assimilating differently what occurs in its sociocultural environment, as demonstrated by the diverse facts mentioned in the isolated reports. Thus, we must simultaneously understand the characteristics of each developmental phase and respect the characteristics of each family, in order to conciliate both practices.

There is need for additional studies that further investigate the maternal difficulties identified in the present research as well as the strategies that are used against these difficulties. For instance, we investigated the amount of time spent with children daily, but we did not investigate the quality of this interaction, or the activities performed together. Paternal support in the education/upbringing of children was analyzed, but the quality and scale of such support were not investigated. It would also be important to verify aspects of the mother-child relationship, to assess the mother as a caregiver, and to investigate broader family issues. Finally, further research should also comprise the socioeconomic variable, verifying differences in maternal difficulties among the different social classes.

Although the analyzed mothers seemed to be coping well with the difficulties they are experiencing, their feelings and knowledge about what they should expect from children were not fully investigated. For future studies, we recommend that these aspects be further investigated, so that mothers can be better guided and supported if necessary. Given the limitations of a cross-sectional design, it would be

interesting to monitor these mothers and their children in a longitudinal study as well, so that differences could be evaluated in the results.

CONCLUSION

The upbringing and education of children requires patience and the development of certain skills. It is natural that some difficulties arise in this process and, therefore, it is important to know what to expect from each stage of development. In early and middle childhood the main difficulties reported were regarding food, obedience, sleeping on schedule, and putting away toys. Such difficulties are related to the development of a routine with clear rules of household functioning. It would be expected that children in these developmental stages would have greater verbal skills, learning to express themselves without crying, which was not found in this study.

Appropriate educational practices and adequate parental styles may contribute to a healthy childhood, preventing risk behaviors [21-23]. Therefore, parents should be encouraged to adopt these practices and to understand the developmental stages in which their child is at a given moment, contributing, thus, to his or her personal success.

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Instructions

You are receiving a questionnaire with objective and essay questions; this questionnaire should be answered based on your child's behavior (3-6 years, mothers of early childhood; and 6-12 years, middle childhood). In essay questions, you should write freely what you think.

There are no right or wrong answers, so you should answer what you really think and what really happens in your home:

1. How old are you? () years.
2. How many children do you have? ()
3. What is the age and sex of each of them?
4. How much time, on average, do you spend with your son/daughter per day? (This includes moments such as bathing, feeding, plays, and does not include when the child is sleeping or when you are not interacting - that is, playing or

talking directly to him or her). () 1 hour () 2 hours () 3 hours () 4 hours () 5 hours () 6 hours or more

5. What is your occupation (job)? _____
6. How many hours per day do you spend at work? () hours
7. What is your marital status?
() Married () Single () Widower () Stable Union
8. Do you live with your child's father?
() Yes () No
9. Does your partner (in case you have one) help in the education of children? () Yes () No
10. Overall, do you think that you have difficulties with your child in any of the areas below? Check the topic(s) that correspond(s) to your difficulties. You can select more than one option:

() Doing homework assignments.
() Sleeping on schedule.
() Bathing.
() Eating a healthy diet.
() Fights at school.
() Bedwetting.
() Learning school content.
() Putting toys away.
() Obeying maternal commands.
() Verbalizing needs and feeling without crying.
11. When your child does something wrong, what to you do? Tick the box that contains the statement that you think best corresponds to your attitude. You can choose only one option here.
 - a) I intervene immediately, telling him/her what he/she is doing wrong.
 - b) I don't say anything. I just spank him/her.
 - c) Saying anything doesn't make any difference, children don't understand.
 - d) I pretend I didn't see.

- e) I yell at him/her, and he/she stops.
- f) I yell at him/her, and once it doesn't work, I spank him/her.
12. Check the box for what occurs most often. When your son/daughter has to do the homework, he or she:
- a) Does it as soon as I tell him.
- b) Takes a long time to start doing it/or complains.
- c) Does it willingly.
- d) Always does it without me having to ask.
- e) Only does it when I am next to him/her.
13. Does your child help with housework when needed? () Yes () No
14. How does your child behave at school?
15. How does your child behave when the family is reunited?
16. What is your main difficulty regarding your child's education/upbringing?
17. Does your child have any behavior that you would like to change? If so, what? Do you have any difficulty helping him/her change? Have you ever tried to make any changes in this regard? What changes?
18. Do you have any other difficulty that is not mentioned in the previous questions? If so, what?

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