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Does sex influence perceived parental care and overprotection? A study from a Brazilian State sample

O sexo influencia o cuidado e a superproteção parental percebidos? Um estudo com uma amostra de um estado brasileiro

ABSTRACT

Parenting research is essential to better understand how caregivers affect their offsprings development. The parental behaviors of care and overprotection can be assessed by adult offsprings recollections of experiences during childhood and adolescence. It is suggested that both the parents and the offsprings sex influence the frequency and magnitude of perceived care and overprotection. The objective of the study was to verify the relationships of parental care and overprotection in the Brazilian context, while also accounting for the influence of caregivers and participants sex. 477 Brazilian adults participated in the study. The Parental Bonding Instrument was used to assess participants perceptions of parental care and overprotection. Spearman correlations and dependent and independent t-test analyses were conducted. Parental care and overprotection were inversely correlated. Mothers were viewed as presenting higher levels of both care and overprotection than fathers. Female participants reported higher paternal overprotection, while male individuals expressed experiencing more maternal care. The preliminary outcomes indicate that sex seems to be an important variable to be accounted for when verifying parents behavioral patterns. This research proposes to amplify the discussion about caregivers behaviors considering social contexts in Brazil.

Keywords: Maternal Behavior, Paternal Behavior, Sex

RESUMO

A condução de pesquisas sobre a parentalidade é essencial para a compreensão de como os pais afetam o desenvolvimento de seus filhos. Os comportamentos parentais de cuidado e superproteção podem ser mensurados através das memórias dos descendentes adultos de suas experiências da infância e adolescência. Sugere-se que o sexo dos pais e dos filhos influencia a frequência e a magnitude de cuidado e superproteção parental. O objetivo deste estudo foi verificar as relações entre o cuidado e a superproteção parental no Brasil, considerando a influência do sexo parental e dos participantes. A amostra foi composta por 477 adultos. O *Parental Bonding Instrument* foi usado para mensurar as percepções dos participantes sobre o cuidado e a superproteção parental. Foram conduzidas análises de correlação de Spearman e testes t dependentes e independentes. O cuidado e a superproteção parental foram inversamente correlacionados. As mães foram percebidas como apresentando maiores níveis de cuidado e superproteção. Participantes do sexo feminino relataram mais superproteção paterna, enquanto os homens reportaram mais cuidado materno. Os resultados preliminares indicam que o sexo parece ser uma importante variável ao verificar padrões comportamentais parentais. Esta pesquisa propõe ampliar a discussão sobre os comportamentos parentais ao considerar os aspectos sociais do Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Comportamento Materno, Comportamento Paterno, Sexo

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INTRODUCTION

The parental role is a unique experience in individuals' lives, as it can have positive impacts and lead to fulfilling feelings of happiness and pride. At the same time, parenting can also be described as an overwhelming and challenging task (Sanders & Turner, 2018). Over the last 75 years, parenting research has accentuated the essential function that caregivers have in child development while investigating the influences of parenting styles, practices, and behaviors and their consequences on offspring (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). In this context, attachment is considered an important aspect of the relationship between parental figures and their descendants (van Bakel & Haul, 2018).

Attachment theory indicates that emotional bond refers to any parental behavior that aims to create a dynamic interaction between caregivers and children to attenuate youngsters' signs of anxiety and vulnerability and to develop a secure base (Bowlby, 1969). When an attachment relationship is optimal and a secure attachment pattern has been established, parents are viewed as sources of comfort and safety while the offspring is exploring the world (van Bakel & Haul, 2018). Even though the construct of attachment has been widely analyzed when evaluating relationships between parents and children, parental contribution is often neglected (Parker, 1984).

According to Parker et al. (1979), attachment can be measured through the childhood and adolescence recollections of adult individuals of two parental behaviors: care, which represents affection, understanding, and warmth in opposition to rejection, and indifference; and overprotection, which is related to control, infantilization, intrusion and encouragement of dependency in contrast to the promotion of autonomy. To measure the two cited constructs, the authors created the Parental Bonding Instrument, which evaluates adults' perceptions and memories of parental care and overprotection. The dimensions of care and overprotection are believed to be inverted, as excessive protection seems to display negative aspects of parents' behavioral patterns (Parker, 1984). Recent empirical research has observed a negative correlation between care and overprotection for both fathers and mothers from different social and cultural backgrounds (e.g., Ge et al., 2023; Gong et al., 2022; Lyons et al., 2017; Tugnoli et al., 2022).

The combination of the two cited parental behaviors generates four parental style possibilities: affectionless control (low care and high overprotection); neglectful parenting (low care and low overprotection); affectionate constraint (high care and high overprotection); and optimal bonding (high care and low overprotection; Parker, 1984). The optimal bonding style seems to be associated with a higher propensity to develop positive intimate relationships during adulthood and higher levels of self-esteem (Schmoeger et al., 2018). Meanwhile, both the affectionless control and the neglectful parenting styles are related to negative outcomes regarding descendants' mental health and development across the life span (Gomes et al., 2023;

Mannarini et al., 2018; Rikhye et al., 2008; Siqueira-Campos et al., 2021). Finally, the affectionate constraint parenting style does not appear to cause significant positive or negative impacts on youngsters' development (Parker, 1984).

When assessing individuals' recollections about their parents' behaviors, it is important to consider the variable of sex. Mothers and fathers may diverge in the levels of care and overprotection that they express towards their descendants. The offspring might also perceive and judge their female and male parental figures' behaviors differently. The literature proposes that higher levels of both care and overprotection are usually attributed to mothers than to male caregivers (Ngai et al., 2018; Parker et al., 1979).

Two recent studies aimed to verify whether there were any differences in parental behaviors according to the primary caretakers' sex. Both the research conducted with a sample of pregnant Japanese women and the one with a population of middle-aged British individuals reported that maternal care and overprotection were deemed by participants as higher than paternal behaviors (Fukui et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2018). Sex effects were also observed in a sample of American adults who had suffered from childhood maltreatment when they were younger, as independent t-tests showed that female caretakers were viewed as expressing more care and overprotection than their male counterparts (Rikhye et al., 2008). One possible explanation for these outcomes is that maternal behaviors tend to be more influential in societies where mothers are deemed responsible for most childcare tasks (Ngai et al., 2018) as is observed in Brazil (Benatti et al., 2020).

Besides the potential impact of caretakers' sex on the endorsement of parental behaviors, mothers and fathers might also act differently, or be perceived as doing so, towards their daughters and sons. Parental care is usually described as stable regardless of the offspring's sex (Parker et al., 1979). However, daughters tend to perceive their male parental figures as more overprotective than sons, which may be influenced by social and cultural norms (Pereira & Oliva, 2023; Seganfredo et al., 2009; Teodoro et al., 2010). This pattern of outcomes has been evidenced through the conduction of independent sample t-tests with British (Lyons et al., 2017), Italian (Tani et al., 2018), and Brazilian (Teodoro et al., 2010) adults. Still, more studies are needed to verify whether this tendency is confirmed when a new sample of Brazilian adults is used.

Even though the subject of parental behaviors has already been approached in Brazil (e.g., Coelho et al., 2014; Hauck et al., 2005; Pereira & Oliva, 2023; Seganfredo et al., 2009; Siqueira-Campos et al., 2021; Teodoro et al., 2010), a proposal of research more focused on parental care and overprotection and the influence of sex is still necessary to better understand the patterns of Brazilian caregivers' behaviors and their adult offspring's perceptions. The main objective of the current study is to establish how offspring and parental figures' sex impact the endorsement of care and overprotection. The verification of

the frequency of parenting styles in the Brazilian context is also aimed. It is hypothesized that parental care is inversely related to parental overprotection and that the optimal parenting style is the bonding style with the most occurrences. It is also expected that mothers are rated as having expressed more care and overprotection than fathers during participants' childhood and adolescence. Finally, while daughters are predicted to perceive their fathers as more overprotective than their male counterparts, no differences between female and male respondents' perceptions of parental care are anticipated.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The present study's sample was formed of 477 adult Brazilian individuals, whose ages varied from 18 to 59 years old ($M=31.28$, $SD=11.34$). The inclusion criteria stipulated that the participants must have been exposed to close contact with both their biological father and mother as they grew up, especially when they were undergoing the developmental stages of childhood and adolescence. Most respondents were women (66.2%), from the State of Rio de Janeiro (72.1%), and had an undergraduate degree (55.8%).

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected online, as participants received invitations to be a part of the research through their emails and social media messages. A snowball sampling technique was selected, which led to the obtainment of a convenience sample. Individuals filled out an online questionnaire created on the Google Forms platform. It is estimated that it took participants 30 minutes to complete the form.

ETHICAL PROCEDURES

The current research was conducted after the approval of the project from the Brazilian Ethics in Research Committee (protocol number 38885420.1.0000.5282; approval number 4.541.589). The participation of individuals was registered through the signature of an Informed Consent Form.

INSTRUMENTS

Initially, respondents filled out a sociodemographic form whose objective was to characterize the analyzed sample. Therefore, they answered six questions asking them to state their sex, age, educational level (ranging from incomplete middle school to having an undergraduate degree), marital status (e.g., single, married, divorced, separated, living together, and widow) and the city and state of Brazil where they were currently living.

The Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker et al., 1979), in its translated and adapted form to the Brazilian population (Hauck et al., 2005), was utilized to measure the perceived parental behaviors of care and overprotection. The objective

of the scale is to address adults' memories of the established bonding between parents and their offspring as the latter grew up. Accordingly, participants had to answer to the instrument twice, as to present their perceptions of their mothers' and fathers' behaviors separately. A Likert-type scale of four points is used to generate the total score and the separate score for the two subscales for each parental figure, which are named: maternal care (12 items; $\alpha=0.91$), maternal overprotection (13 items; $\alpha=0.87$), paternal care (12 items; $\alpha=0.91$), and paternal overprotection (13 items; $\alpha=0.85$).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The two subscales that compose the Parental Bonding Instrument were used together to establish the frequency of the four possible parental styles. According to Parker (1984), the mean cut-off care score is equal to 27.0 for mothers and 24.0 for fathers. For the overprotection behaviors, the mean cut-off score is 13.5 for mothers and 12.5 for fathers. The primary caregivers were assigned to one of four quadrants, based on participants' perceptions of their parental figures: optimal bonding, neglectful parenting, affectionate constraint, and affectionless control.

Correlation analyses were conducted to verify whether there were significant relationships between the four variables representing perceived parental behaviors (e.g., maternal care, maternal overprotection, paternal care, and paternal overprotection). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were performed to attest to the normality of the sample's distribution. However, the cited variables were found to have a non-normal distribution. Therefore, the Spearman correlation method was considered preferable to be used in the present study.

Paired-sample t-tests were executed to investigate differences in how the offspring perceive their mothers' and fathers' behaviors of care and overprotection. Although paired analyses are most often used in studies with a longitudinal design, they can also be applied to research that involves natural pairs, such as married couples, twins, and parents (Argyrous, 1997). Possible differences in the perceived parental behaviors related to participants' sex were examined through the conduction of independent samples t-tests. Bootstrapping procedures (1000 resampling; 95% IC BCa) were used to correct deviations in the normality distribution of variables (Field, 2020). The principle of variance homogeneity was evaluated through Levene's test (Dancey & Reidy, 2019).

The sample size was calculated a priori to prevent erroneous conclusions. The G Power software was used and input parameters were set as two-tailed, alpha error probability of 0.05, Cohen's d effect size of 0.50, and 95% power for each analysis to be conducted (Lakens, 2022). The total sample size needed for the correlation test was equal to 138 individuals, while 210 participants would be necessary (105 for each group evaluated) for the independent t-test and 54 people for the dependent t-test to be completed.

RESULTS

The parental styles were assessed through the combination of care and overprotection behaviors scores for each primary caregiver. The more frequent parental style for mothers was the affectionate constraint (30.2%), whereas most fathers were perceived as having an affectionless control parenting style (33.8%; see Table 1).

Spearman correlation analyses showed significant associations between maternal and paternal care ($\rho = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$, 10.9% of shared variance) and between maternal and paternal overprotection ($\rho = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$, 13.0% of shared variance). Negative significant relationships were found between the variables of maternal care and maternal overprotection ($\rho = -0.38$, $p < 0.001$, 14.4% of shared variance) and paternal care and paternal overprotection ($\rho = -0.24$, $p < 0.001$, 5.8% of shared variance), as can be examined in Table 2.

The results of the paired-sample *t*-tests showed that participants regarded their mothers ($M = 24.66$, $SD = 9.28$) as providing more care than their fathers ($M = 19.71$, $SD = 9.98$; $t(469) = 9.57$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.44$). Likewise, individuals in this study attributed higher overprotection levels to their mothers ($M = 16.30$, $SD = 9.16$) in comparison to their fathers ($M = 13.10$, $SD = 9.35$; $t(469) = 6.65$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.31$), as shown in Table 3.

Independent samples *t*-Student tests were conducted to evaluate whether there were any differences in perceived parental behaviors' indexes according to participants' sex (see Table 4). The outcomes pointed out that men reported statistically higher levels of perceived maternal care ($M = 27.20$, $SD = 7.25$) than women ($M = 23.32$, $SD = 9.94$; $t(418.04) = 4.85$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.43$). Women described higher indexes of perceived paternal overprotection ($M = 14.02$, $SD = 9.70$) than men ($M = 11.33$, $SD = 8.40$; $t(365.65) = -3.14$, $p = 0.002$, $d = 0.29$).

Table 1. Frequencies of the parental styles in the current study's sample.

	Optimal Bonding	Neglectful Parenting	Affectionate Constraint	Affectionless Control
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Maternal	114 (23.9%)	95 (19.9%)	144 (30.2%)	124 (26.0%)
Paternal	126 (26.4%)	128 (26.8%)	62 (13.0%)	161 (33.8%)

Spearman correlations for the perceived parental behaviors' variables.
Note: * $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Spearman correlations for the perceived parental behaviors' variables.

Variable	Maternal Care	Maternal Overprotection	Paternal Care	Paternal Overprotection
Maternal Care	-			
Maternal Overprotection	-0.38*	-		
Paternal Care	0.33*	-0.22*	-	
Paternal Overprotection	-0.21*	0.36*	-0.24*	-

Note: * $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Paired-sample *t*-tests to evaluate differences in the maternal and paternal behaviors of care and overprotection.

Variable	Maternal		Paternal		<i>t</i> (469)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Care	24.66	9.28	19.71	9.98	9.57	0.001	0.44
Overprotection	16.30	9.16	13.10	9.35	6.65	0.001	0.31

Table 4. Independent samples *t*-Student tests regarding differences in perceived parental behaviors between male and female participants.

	Male		Female		<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Maternal Care	27.20	7.25	23.32	9.94	4.85	418.04	0.001	3.88
Maternal Overprotection	15.73	7.84	16.51	9.82	-0.95	391.16	0.34	-0.79
Paternal Care	18.78	9.26	20.12	10.33	-1.44	354.67	0.15	-1.34
Paternal Overprotection	11.33	8.40	14.02	9.70	-3.14	365.65	0.002	-2.69

DISCUSSION

The current research aimed to verify how parental behaviors are perceived by Brazilian adults. In the present sample, the most frequent maternal parenting style was the affectionate constraint one. The mothers were not only perceived as establishing a relationship of care with their offspring but as also being overprotective. This outcome aligns with a Brazilian study with a sample of pregnant teenagers (Coelho et al., 2014). According to Parker (1984), this parenting style does not seem to be associated with the prevalence of psychiatric disorders, as the combination of high levels of overprotection and care does not indicate an attempt of parental figures to be controlling. The maternal affectionate constraint parental style did not have statistical differences regarding the levels of anxiety, depression, self-efficacy, and suicide ideation of offspring when compared to the optimal bonding style in a Brazilian study with undergraduate medical students (Siqueira-Campos et al., 2021). Mothers of the present study may not be considered by their adult descendants as being intrusive and restrictive, but as using this behavior pattern to express preoccupation and emotional warmth (Coelho et al., 2014; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007).

Most participants of the current study perceived their fathers as expressing low care and high overprotection, as it is characterized by the affectionless control parental style. This combination of parental behaviors has been associated with elevated relative risks for many psychological disorders and mental health conditions (Parker, 1979), such as depression (Mannarini et al., 2018), binge eating (Amianto et al., 2020), schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder (Gomes et al., 2023). A Brazilian study pointed out that the offspring of fathers with an affectionless control style tended to suffer more from depression symptoms and suicide ideation than the descendants of fathers with an optimal bonding style (Siqueira-Campos et al., 2021). The ambivalent behavior of affectionless control fathers may lead to difficulties in emotional regulation, problematic interpersonal relationships, and the development of traumas (Gomes et al., 2023; Siqueira-Campos et al., 2021).

The correlation analyses' outcomes suggest that parental care is negatively associated with parental overprotection. This pattern of results agrees with the international literature (e.g., Forresi et al., 2023; Ge et al., 2023; Gong et al., 2022; Khalid et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2017; Parker et al., 1979; Rikhye et al., 2008; Stearns & McKinney, 2020; Sultan et al., 2019; Tani et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2018) and with the current study's hypothesis. It is suggested that offspring's perception of parental care during childhood and adolescence is associated with increased resilience and the development of emotional regulation skills and that opposite results are displayed when regarding parental overprotection (Sameshima et al., 2020; Tani et al., 2018). The parental care and overprotection dimensions do not seem to be independent as lack of care tends to be related to overprotection in many different cultures (Parker et al., 1979).

Although parental care and overprotection are often described as being negatively correlated, the optimal bonding parenting style was not endorsed by many of the current study's participants' recollections about their primary caregivers. According to the definition of the parental overprotection construct, it involves excessive control and contact, intrusion, infantilization, and the obstruction of the descendants' independent behaviors (Parker et al., 1979). However, research conducted in Brazil (Teodoro et al., 2010) found a positive relationship between maternal care and overprotection, which points out the complexity of the variable. Parental care is believed to be universal and evolutionarily based, while parental overprotection is influenced by cultural conventions and social norms (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Pereira & Oliva, 2023; Smetana & Rote, 2019). More research is needed to understand the relationship between parental behaviors and to verify whether the parental style frequency outcomes are due to differential approaches regarding the overprotection construct. It is plausible that parental overprotection may not be perceived as a negative behavior in Brazil. Another explanation for the current study's outcomes is that Brazilian parents may have a lower tendency to adopt an optimal bonding parenting style.

The results of the paired sample t-tests indicated that mothers were perceived as being more overprotective and focusing more on care than fathers. The international literature aligns with such outcomes (e.g., Fukui et al., 2022; Ge et al., 2022; Ngai et al., 2018; Parker et al., 1979; Rikhye et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2018). It is proposed that mothers tend to present warmer and more optimal parenting styles (Ngai et al., 2018). In this context, even higher levels of overprotection may be interpreted as a way for female parental figures to express warmth (Xu et al., 2018). It is suggested that the behaviors of fathers and mothers may lead to differential effects and impacts on their offspring's development, although both paternal and maternal care seem to be important for socio-emotional development (Ong et al., 2018).

A recent study conducted in Brazil attested that mothers were perceived as having the main responsibility for taking care, controlling, and disciplining their children (Benatti et al., 2020). Even though there have been many changes in the configuration of family settings and in the amount of time that male parental figures spend with their descendants, fathers are still more likely to indulge in playing activities as a way of expressing affection (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019). Female caregivers might be considered as being more controlling and responsive than fathers because of their greater involvement in raising the offspring (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019; Yaffe, 2020). Thus, the traditional role of primary caregivers associated with mothers may have influenced the current study's results.

Differences regarding the perceived parental behaviors according to participants' sex showed significantly higher levels of paternal overprotection for women than for male individuals. Such a pattern of outcome is per international literature (e.g., Avci & Sak, 2018; Eun et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2017; Tani et al., 2018) and with a Brazilian study (Teodoro et al., 2010).

Fathers may tend to act more overprotectively towards their daughters because of cultural processes and the differential social expectations that are imposed on male and female offspring (Tani et al., 2018; Teodoro et al., 2010). In patriarchal cultural contexts like Brazil, women are often more controlled and protected by their male parental figures (Carvalho & Melo, 2019; Patias et al., 2018). Strict and overprotective paternal behaviors may have negative consequences under certain premises or situations, but they can also be positive in others (Eun et al., 2018), as fathers may try to guarantee their daughters' safety against potential dangers. The relationships between parental behaviors and offspring's development are affected by the societal and cultural background to which the family belongs (Scaglia et al., 2018). More studies about this result pattern are needed to analyze if Brazilian male caregivers are influenced by patriarchal beliefs that lead to greater control of their female offspring.

In the present study, male participants rated their mothers as expressing significantly more care than the reported by female respondents, contrary to the proposed hypothesis. Although this type of outcome has been described in an American study with individuals who had suffered from maltreatment during childhood (Rikhye et al., 2008) and in a Chinese article with a sample of mental health students (Ge et al., 2022), there is research that points out to higher indexes of maternal care towards their daughters (Qu et al., 2020). The international literature also indicates that there do not seem to be noted differences in the evaluation of parental care and responsiveness by male and female offspring (e.g., Ngai et al., 2018; Parker et al., 1979).

It is argued that maternal care may be more important and influential for the socio-emotional development of boys than of girls (Etzion-Carasso & Oppenheim, 2000; Lyons et al., 2017). While girls are commonly considered to be more mature and disciplined, boys are raised to be more autonomous and self-reliant (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007). Since girls are often viewed as expressing more thinking and learning competencies, mothers may perceive them as not requiring as much attention and closeness as their male counterparts (Zhan et al., 2023). Consequently, male offspring may have higher needs for care from their mothers.

A study conducted in Israel with a sample of female caregivers and their preschool-aged children found that mother-son dyads tended to show more open communication towards each other than the mother-daughter dyads (Etzion-Carasso & Oppenheim, 2000). According to the authors, parents who have open communicational approaches with their children can contribute to the creation of a calm and affective environment, in which the offspring feels secure, even during stressful situations. Therefore, it seems that the definition of open communication is similar to the construct of care, as it is characterized by Parker et al. (1979). Additional research is needed to verify whether men and boys really benefit from more care from their mothers than women and girls do.

Another possibility for the present research's outcome is that the way daughters perceive their mothers may have led to differential levels of observed maternal care when compared to the sons' perceptions. While the mother-and-daughter dyad bond is important for the development of girls, many conflicts and difficulties may occur between them (Wills & Zhang, 2021). A recent Brazilian study reported that mothers presented similar educational and care strategies for boys and girls, although girls had presented more internalizing behavioral problems (e.g., anxiety and depression) than boys (Maia & Soares, 2018). It is suggested that mothers display more negative educational practices and anxiety when the child who exhibits behavioral problems is a girl than when it is a boy (Maia & Soares, 2018; Song et al., 2022). The combination of conflicts with parents experienced during adolescence and behavioral difficulties may negatively affect parenting, leading mothers and/or fathers to become more overprotective and express lower levels of care (Forresi et al., 2023).

The mother-daughter relationship can also be examined by the amount of connectedness sensed by the dyad, that is, the amount of openness to communicate their feelings, share opinions, and express care by having regular physical contact, verbally addressing the closeness of the relationship, or other culturally relevant behavioral expressions of care (Ko & Mei, 2018). The difference between maternal care according to the descendants' sex found in the current study may be derived from the attribution of lower care scores from women because of relationship conflicts and not enough perceived connectedness. Since research about the theme is limited (Maia & Soares, 2018) and there is no agreement about the influence of descendants' sex on maternal care, more studies are required on this subject.

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the current study was to verify how adult offspring view their parents' behaviors of care and overprotection that were often expressed during childhood and adolescence. Many of the outcomes obtained aligned with the proposed hypothesis, such as the negative association between parental care and parental overprotection, the prevalence of higher scores of care and overprotection for mothers in comparison to fathers, and female participants' reports of higher perceived paternal overprotection than male subjects. However, maternal care was unexpectedly considered to be higher for male respondents. Although there is research about this theme conducted in the Brazilian context (e.g., Coelho et al., 2014; Siqueira-Campos et al., 2021; Teodoro et al., 2010), other studies are still necessary to better understand how parental figures display behaviors of care and overprotection and the influences of parents and offspring's sex in this matter, specifically when considering the cultural and social norms that exist in Brazil.

One of the most important limitations of this research is associated with the participant sample since most respondents

were from the State of Rio de Janeiro. Considering that Brazil is composed of many different cultural backgrounds, habits, and beliefs, the present study's results may not be representative of the parental behaviors expressed across the country. It is recommended that future research use samples of participants from diverse states and different familiar contexts and configurations.

Another limitation refers to the use of only one scale to measure parental behaviors, which is characterized as a self-report instrument. Social desirability bias may have affected the pattern of results obtained. As the Parental Bonding Instrument is based on the retrospective memory of adult individuals about situations that occurred during childhood and adolescence, it is not possible to guarantee that participants' answers were accurate and unbiased representations of reality (dos Reis Soares et al., 2020).

Even though there were limitations to be pointed out, the biggest contribution of this study was to have focused on the variables of parental care and overprotection and sex's influence majorly from one Brazilian State sample. Therefore, it has helped increase and deepen the knowledge about the theme in national literature.

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