



UNIVERSIDADE D
COIMBRA

Maria Manuel Bastos Martins

**PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT:
THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PARENTAL ACCEPTANCE-
REJECTION AND THE IMPACT OF SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC
AND FAMILY VARIABLES**

**Master's thesis in Clinical and Health Psychology, sub-specialization in
Systemic and Family Psychotherapy, supervised by Professor Maria Madalena
de Carvalho, Ph.D., and presented at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational
Sciences of the University of Coimbra.**

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Abstract

Paternal involvement has proved to be fundamental in the context of family life and children's development, given the sociocultural changes and transformations in parenting that have taken place. The main purpose of this investigation is to evaluate the impact of sociodemographic and family variables on Paternal Involvement, considering the mediating role of Parental Acceptance-Rejection; the other objectives are related to the study of relationships between variables and comparisons between groups.

The empirical study included the participation of 544 subjects, from single-parent, adoptive and nuclear intact families. To achieve some of the goals, only fathers were studied ($n = 67$). Data were collected through the survey method, in an online format. The instruments that were studied were the Sociodemographic, Family and Complementary Data Questionnaire, the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Parent), and the Inventory of Father Involvement. Regarding statistical analyses, linear regression tests (single and multiple), Student's t-tests, and a simple mediation analysis (through PROCESS) were used. Among other results, we found that parental acceptance-rejection has an impact on paternal involvement: higher values in the total score and in the warmth/affection dimension contribute to less involvement. The results also revealed that family structure causes differences in parental acceptance-rejection.

The lack of literature that met the objectives of the present study was significant. Thus, despite its limitations, this study entails contributions for future investigations and interventions in this area.

Keywords: paternal involvement, parental acceptance-rejection, family structure, gender of the parent, father's age group

Resumo

O envolvimento paterno tem-se revelado fundamental no âmbito da vida familiar e desenvolvimento dos filhos, dadas as mudanças socioculturais e transformações na parentalidade que se têm verificado. O principal objetivo da presente investigação é avaliar o impacto de variáveis sociodemográficas e familiares no Envolvimento Paterno, tendo em conta o papel mediador da Aceitação-Rejeição Parental; os outros objetivos prendem-se com o estudo de relações entre variáveis e comparações entre grupos.

*O estudo empírico contou com a participação de 544 sujeitos, de famílias monoparentais, adotivas e nucleares intactas. Para a concretização de alguns objetivos, apenas foram alvo de estudo os pais homens ($n = 67$). Os dados foram recolhidos através do método de inquérito, em formato online. Os instrumentos alvo de estudo foram o Questionário Sociodemográfico, de Dados Familiares e Complementares, o Questionário de Aceitação-Rejeição Parental (Pais) e o Inventário de Envolvimento Paterno. No que diz respeito às análises estatísticas, foram usados os testes de regressão linear (simples e múltipla), testes *t* de Student e uma análise de mediação simples (através do PROCESS).*

Entre outros resultados, verificámos que a aceitação-rejeição parental tem impacto no envolvimento paterno: valores mais elevados no score total e na dimensão carinho/afeto contribuem para um menor envolvimento. Os resultados também revelaram que a estrutura familiar causa diferenças na aceitação-rejeição parental.

Foi significativa a escassez de literatura que fosse ao encontro dos objetivos do presente estudo. Assim, apesar das suas limitações, este estudo acarreta contribuições para futuras investigações e para intervenções neste âmbito.

Palavras-chave: envolvimento paterno, aceitação-rejeição parental, estrutura familiar, género do elemento do par parental, faixa etária do pai

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Introduction

Over the past few years, paternal involvement has been approached as a key source of overall family well-being and the positive development of children (Diniz et al., 2021). There is currently a “new ideal of fatherhood, in which men are more involved in their children’s lives” (Monteiro et al., 2017, p. 522). Paternal involvement and parental acceptance-rejection complement each other: involvement represents a key instrumental component of child care and affection/acceptance represents an important emotional component (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2016). So, according to Ruíz et al. (2019), paternal involvement promotes positive development in children, because the father’s presence is related to the way he behaves in his parental role, which in turn influences the children’s development.

Although paternal involvement is an increasingly studied concept and the impact of parental acceptance-rejection perceptions on children’s development has been investigated and verified, there is still little scientific literature dedicated to the study of variables that explain greater paternal involvement and that explain what motivates parents to have more child-accepting behaviors. In other words, the relationship between the two above-mentioned concepts and the development of children is well documented in the literature (e.g., Cabrera et al., 2000; Rohner, 1998; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Ruíz et al., 2019; Souza & Benetti, 2009; Venetian, 2000, 2003; Vieira et al., 2014), but some factors that can influence them, that is, what can contribute to a greater involvement of the father and more acceptance of the children, have not deserved due attention. Thus, in the literature review, there is a small number of scientific studies that focused on variables that influence paternal involvement and parental acceptance-rejection, for example, the father’s age group, the child’s age group, the educational level, the gender of the parent and the family structure, which are studied in the present investigation.

Briefly, this study will seek to respond to three specific goals: (1) investigate whether parental acceptance and rejection influence paternal involvement; (2) identify if there are differences in the perceptions of parental acceptance and rejection, in male and female individuals, and in two family structures; and (3) assess whether, in males, parental acceptance-rejection mediates the relationship between the father’s age group and paternal involvement.

Considering the literature, we can expect that parental acceptance and rejection will have an impact on paternal involvement, since, according to Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2014), paternal involvement should be considered as a multidimensional concept, incorporating qualitative factors, such as affection, love, and accepting attitudes and behaviors; therefore, it is expected that greater acceptance of fathers will lead to greater involvement in their children’s lives. Furthermore, some studies find that there are differences in parental acceptance-rejection between mothers and fathers (e.g., Bosch et al., 2016; Gamble et al., 2007; Tilano et al., 2009; Winsler et al., 2005). Other studies compare different family configurations with regard to parental acceptance and rejection, and the results are inconsistent (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2016; Halme et al., 2009; Hook & Chalasani, 2008).

However, Rohner (1986, as cited in Rohner et al., 2005) says that single fathers and mothers who are socially isolated, and especially if they are younger and have economic needs, seem to be exposed to a greater risk of depriving their children of love and affection. Thus, we can expect that individuals belonging to this family structure have more difficulties in expressing love and acceptance of their children, due to the family transformations they have gone through. Finally, some studies examining the impact of father's age on paternal involvement have had contradictory results (e.g., Castillo et al., 2013; Kwok & Li, 2015; Monteiro et al., 2010, 2017; Perry et al., 2012). No studies that assessed this relationship considering the mediating role of parental acceptance-rejection were found.

In short, we hope that this research will allow us to obtain a better understanding of the concepts of paternal involvement and parental acceptance and rejection and will contribute to the development of other studies in the future. Thus, we aim to acquire useful knowledge applicable to the practice of psychology, since the topics under study and the relationships between them are still barely explored.

I - Conceptual Framework

Sociocultural changes and transformations in fatherhood

The concept of fatherhood has undergone changes, motivated by various social movements, redefining itself in relation to traditional fatherhood, in which the father held the power and fulfilled the responsibility for family support (Isotton & Falcke, 2015). Since the '70s, with the rise of the industrial economic model and the feminist movement, with the questions about gender inequalities, with the advance of contraceptive methods and the insertion of women in the workforce, new expectations, beliefs, and attitudes about the roles of father and mother have emerged (Cabrera et al., 2000; Staudt & Wagner, 2008). According to Figueira (1986; as cited in Oliveira et al., 2008), there was a process of modernization of the family, guided by the ideal of an equalitarian family, instead of an hierarchical ideal, inherited from the patriarchal system. In this context, and with a progressive change in the way gender roles are perceived (women have rewarding careers and men are capable caregivers), the “new modern” is to share economic, domestic and parental responsibilities (Monteiro et al., 2017, p. 513). Therefore, currently, some fathers experience different models from the traditional one, exercising fatherhood with greater participation in domestic activities, in the care and education of their children, and building close and affectionate bonds with them and with their partners (Isotton & Falcke, 2015).

Regarding the comparison between traditional and modern paternity patterns, according to Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004, p. 3), fathers were viewed as “all-powerful patriarchs who wielded enormous power over their families”, were responsible for ensuring that their children grew up with an appropriate sense of values, and were the “breadwinner” and economic support of the family; in the mid-twentieth century, fathers were encouraged to participate, and, in the late 1970s, a concern for the caring father, who played an active role in their children’s lives, emerged. Sampaio (2020, p. 207) enriches this view, referring that in the past the father was a “distant character, facing outwards and away from the education of the children” – his role was that of “breadwinner, sometimes that of disciplinarian, when the mother, always dedicated to the home and children, asked for his help”. The end of the 20th century caused a “new father” to emerge (Sampaio, 2020, p. 10): in addition to providing economic support, he is concerned with “providing care and emotional support to the children”, in a logic of “sharing and cooperation with mothers” (increased paternal time in tasks and care and increased responsibility) – the “caregiving-father” was born (Sampaio, 2020, p. 34).

Specifically in Portugal, after April 1974, changes towards equality accelerated (Sampaio, 2020) and, although the traditional ‘male breadwinner and housewife’ dichotomy remains a Portuguese family pattern (Monteiro et al., 2017, p. 513), it is no longer viewed as the ideal, being often associated with low educational levels and lack of employment opportunities (Escobedo & Wall, 2015). What is perceived, however, is that the increasing insertion of women in the workforce does not seem to be accompanied in the same proportion by the insertion of men in the domestic sphere (Anderson & Hamilton, 2005; Pinheiro et al., 2009; Staudt & Wagner, 2008). Thus, when broadening the perspective on the phenomenon of fatherhood, it is essential to recognize that paternal participation in child care implies a continuous process of overcoming the exclusively maternal model (Campeol & Crepaldi, 2018), and that cultural and social circumstances shape the way men carry out their fatherhood (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004).

In summary, for Sampaio (2020, p. 9), if we consider how, for so long, a man taking care of his child was considered “unmasculine”, we can see how the reductive and hasty conceptions of parenting skills came to overshadow the full responsibility of men in children’s education.

Regarding the regulation of parental responsibilities, according to Cunico and Arpini (2014, p. 695), the “great maternal privilege with regard to the custody of children” is undeniable, which reflects the belief that the mother is naturally the best prepared to care for the children, attributing to the father a peripheral condition. Padilha (2008, as cited in Cunico & Arpini, 2014) adds that the possibility of a father obtaining custody of his children without having to prove that the mother is not competent to exert it is strange. For Sampaio (2020, p. 144), “men were defined by society and by the courts as incompetent to educate and even accompany their children and did not even dare to request joint custody”. However, and since men today define themselves as caregivers and demand equality regarding the care of their children, court decisions that advocate shared residence have increased, which means progress concerning children’s rights, who should not, in a certain way, lose contact with part of their family (Sampaio, 2020). It is also known that there is an increase in the use of parental leave by men (Sampaio, 2020). Some studies report that the fact that fathers take paternity leave has a positive impact on paternal involvement (Hosking et al., 2010; Knoester et al., 2019; Meil, 2013; Petts, 2018; Petts & Knoester, 2018) and that its longer duration seems, especially, to increase the involvement and responsibility of fathers who do not live with their children (Knoester et al., 2019).

Therefore, no definition of “successful fatherhood” and no “ideal father’s role” can claim universal acceptance or empirical support; instead, fathers’ expectations about what they should do, what they actually do, and their effects on children must be seen in the context of family, community, culture, and current history (Cabrera et al., 2000, p. 133). Thus, fathering is “a dynamic and reciprocal process resulting from the interplay between an individual’s characteristics, such as personality, attitudes, behaviors, and social and ecological background, as well as aspects external to the family, such as work, support systems, community, and societal expectations, impacting the development of children over time” (Diniz et al., 2021, p. 78).

Paternal involvement

Over the past few years, paternal involvement has been approached as a key source of overall family well-being and the positive development of children. (Diniz et al., 2021). In the early years, most research on paternal involvement focused on quantitative aspects, often defined as the father's participation in childcare compared to the mother (i.e., sharing parental tasks and responsibilities) (Tremblay & Pierce, 2011) and investigated, deep down, the absence/presence of the father in the children's lives and the amount of time he spent with them (Monteiro et al., 2017). However, the exercise of fatherhood has changed and, in this context, the growing number of publications with an interest in the topic is a reflection of the greater visibility of the father's participation in the children's lives (Souza & Benetti, 2009). In that sense, more recently, several authors have highlighted the importance of perceiving the quality of paternal involvement to fully understand its impact on children's development: paternal involvement should be understood as a complex and multidimensional concept, including behaviors, emotions and cognitions (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999). So, according to Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004, p. 10), "the amount of time that fathers and children spend together is probably much less important than what they do with that time and how fathers, mothers, children, and other important people in their lives perceive and evaluate the father-child relationship". In short, current studies are converging in affirming the relevance of father participation for the healthy development of children (Cabrera et al., 2000; Souza & Benetti, 2009; Vieira et al., 2014). This visibility of fatherhood, in discussions about the contemporary family, opened space for the role traditionally assigned to the father, in the context of the home, to be problematized and made more flexible (Cúnico & Arpini, 2016). Even so, according to Sampaio (2020), compared to what we know about mothers, we still know little about fathers, as decades of predominance of interest in the role of the mother have left the father in a secondary role. This was also seen in the way fathers were assessed in the studies: when they were included, fatherhood was measured through derivations of motherhood assessments, although fathers were probably not involved in the same type of activities that characterize mother-child relationships (Cabrera et al., 2018).

According to Diniz et al. (2021, p. 78), father involvement is a "broad concept involving multiple dimensions, such as direct interactions with the child, responsibility for managing child-related tasks, and the monitoring of child activities and social interactions". In order to conceptualize the new fatherhood, Lamb et al. (1985, p. 884) defined three dimensions of paternal involvement: (1) "interaction", related to "the father's direct contact with his child, through caretaking and shared activities"; (2) "availability", which refers to "potential availability for interaction, by virtue of being present or accessible to the child, whether or not direct interaction is occurring"; and (3) "responsibility", which refers to "not the amount of time spent with or accessible to children, but to the role father takes in making sure that the child is taken care of, and arranging for resources to be available". Pleck (2010) developed a model, with the aim of reviewing

the conceptualization of the concept proposed by Lamb et al. (1985). This reconceptualization includes three main components: (1) positive engagement activities, (2) warmth and responsiveness, and (3) control. These three components mirror the way in which involvement is currently operationalized within the scope of research on fatherhood. In addition, Pleck (2010) proposes two auxiliary components, which allow clarifying two distinct aspects of “responsibility” (original component): (1) indirect care (activities performed for the child, but not involving interaction with the child) and (2) the responsibility for the process, which involves taking the initiative and monitoring what is needed, and not just “helping the wife” (Pleck, 2010, p. 66).

For a long time, fathers were characterized as highly involved when they had to economically provide for their children and less involved in their daily care, which allowed the conclusion that fathers did not spend enough time with their children to the point of emotionally affecting them (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). However, there is currently a “new ideal of fatherhood, in which men are more involved in their children’s lives” (Monteiro et al., 2017, p. 522) and because of that, they play a number of important roles: partners, caregivers, husbands, protectors, role models, moral guides, teachers and breadwinners/household heads (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). Sampaio (2020) also tells us that fathers are no longer just guardians of discipline and income providers for their children, but also become mothers’ companions, collaborators at home, stimulants for their children, and moral guides for the younger ones. With the reconfiguration of fatherhood, there seems to be emerging a man who, although does not always deny characteristics such as strictness/supremacy, manages to express sensitivity and affection (Badinter, 1993; as cited in Isotton & Falcke, 2015). Paternal involvement is also affected by multiple interacting systems, operating at different levels throughout the life course: Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) defined some determinants of paternal involvement, such as psychological factors (motivation for fatherhood, and skills and self-confidence to exercise it), individual characteristics of children (such as temperament and gender), social support (in marital relationships and with members of the extended family) and the influences of culture and community (e.g. socioeconomic opportunities and cultural ideologies). Sampaio (2020) adds that some factors can help fathers to become more involved: the socioeconomic situation and mental health of both parents, existing stress levels, negative life events, the quality of the parents’ relationship and the relationship with their own parents.

In line with this issue, several studies reflect on the impact of certain variables on paternal involvement. First, it is important to investigate whether individual characteristics, namely the age of the father and the age of the child(ren), have an impact on paternal involvement. Regarding the father’s age, some authors reported that a higher age seemed to have a beneficial influence on the father’s involvement (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013; Kwok et al., 2013), namely in caring for the child when he/she is suffering (Kulik & Sadeh, 2015). However, other studies have reported that younger parents would be more involved (Castillo et al., 2013; Perry et al., 2012), while older parents were less involved in playing (Monteiro et al., 2017; Monteiro et al., 2010), in indirect care (Monteiro et

al., 2010) and in teaching/discipline (Monteiro et al., 2017). It is crucial to pay attention to the timing of fatherhood in order to capture how aspects related to the father's age, such as energy, health or personal availability can be responsible for or contribute to his involvement (Parke, 2000).

The child(ren)'s age is also a relevant characteristic in the scope of this study, and is often associated with contradictory patterns of paternal involvement (Diniz et al., 2021). In the study of Halme et al. (2009), fathers were more involved with older preschool children, in the discipline/teaching component, and the study of Monteiro et al. (2017) revealed that as preschool-age children grow, fathers become less involved in activities of the same component. On the one hand, Lamb (1987) reports that fathers spend more time on caregiving tasks when their children are younger; in contrast, Bailey (1994) found that paternal involvement increases with the children's age (between 1 and 5 years old), in the area of care. Yet, Laflamme et al. (2002) state that, if basic care needs decrease with age, involvement in playing and outside of the home activities remains stable. So, according to Monteiro et al. (2010), the child's characteristics can affect the way parents interact with them, which can contribute to explaining the variability of paternal involvement in the family context. Even so, it appears that there are gaps in the literature at various levels: at the level of exploration of paternal involvement with younger children (before preschool age) and how this involvement evolves; how parental involvement can vary depending on the age of the child(ren); and how (in)direct forms of care can occur throughout early childhood (Diniz et al., 2021).

Secondly, Monteiro et al. (2017) connected the father's educational level, the number of working hours and parenting styles, having noticed that, for parents with a lower educational level, it seemed that having a democratic parenting style (characterized by emotional support, boundary setting and firm but responsive disciplinary strategies) would be associated with greater involvement in activities of "direct care" and "teaching/discipline" (p. 520). For parents with a high level of working hours (40h/week) a democratic style was associated with greater involvement in "teaching/discipline" and "playing activities" (p. 521).

With regard to the overlap between family and career, this seems to be quite evident, especially for women, as they spend more time planning and carrying out domestic activities (Monteiro et al., 2017). Polivanova (2018, p. 341) states that one of the factors that most produce stress for families and parents is the "constant double bind in which parents must choose between family and children, on the one hand, and career and work, on the other". Still regarding the educational level, some authors (Cabrera et al., 2011; Castillo et al., 2011; McBride et al., 2005) came to the conclusion that fathers with higher educational qualifications are more involved with their children in indirect interactions. Synthesizing, Adamsons and Pasley (2016) report that the father's age, educational level and income level affect fatherhood: older parents, with more educational qualifications and with more income tend to be more involved (Pleck, 1997).

Several studies analyze aspects related to socioeconomic status, and the results are inconsistent (Diniz et al., 2021). On the one hand, some investigations reveal that parents with a high income/socioeconomic level, and also with more educational qualifications, are more involved

in their children's lives (Castillo et al., 2013; Laughlin et al., 2009; Maroto-Navarro et al., 2013; Monteiro et al., 2017; Yeh et al., 2021), namely at the level of direct (Gomes & Alvarenga, 2016; Kato-Wallace et al., 2014; Kulik & Sadeh, 2015) and indirect care (Monteiro et al., 2010; Torres et al., 2014), but their involvement is reduced when it comes to playing (Monteiro et al., 2017; Murphy et al., 2017). On the other hand, some studies find that the fact that fathers have less income and less educational qualifications would be related to greater paternal involvement in care and playing (Izci & Jones, 2018; Kato-Wallace et al., 2014). Carlson and Magnuson (2011) also emphasize, in their study, the importance of high-quality interactions and relationships between children and fathers whose socioeconomic level is low. Finally, previous research suggests that paternal involvement in child care is shaped by fathers' perception of themselves in that role (importance of fatherhood in their identity and perception of self-efficacy) and by satisfaction with the marital relationship, as well as by attitudes and mother's beliefs about the father (Tremblay & Pierce, 2011): for the father to experience fatherhood in a more involved way, it is necessary that the mother also gives space so that the bond between father and child is strengthened (Sampaio, 2020). With regard to fathers' cognitive attitudes, it was found in some studies that greater father self-efficacy and positive beliefs about his role were related to greater involvement (Kwok et al., 2013; Kwok & Li, 2015; Perry et al., 2012), over time (Meteyer & Perry-Jenkins, 2010; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2014; Shorey et al., 2019; Tremblay & Pierce, 2011).

Hence, according to Diniz et al. (2021), since there are several components of fatherhood and social and family resources, it is possible to affirm that paternal involvement is influenced by psychosocial aspects, such as beliefs, socioeconomic/cultural context, interpersonal relationships and the characteristics of the children; but this concept also influences a multitude of domains, such as child development, the quality of marital relationships, and family well-being – it is crucial to examine paternal involvement through multiple lenses (Diniz et al., 2021).

Synthesizing, as stated by Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004, p. 5), multidimensional conceptions of father involvement have fostered “new theoretical models and empirical testing of the relations among measures of fathering, while raising questions about how and why dimensions of fathering vary across developmental and historical time and how they jointly contribute to the life trajectories of children and families”. Currently, a parental space that is defined by two, with greater involvement of the father, seems to be more evident (Sampaio, 2020) and, thus, adopting a broader conception of the father's functions within the family will allow a new look at fatherhood, breaking some taboos that caused the father to distance himself from affective involvement with his children (Cunico & Arpini, 2016).

It is important to understand what it means to be a parent in the 21st century (Cabrera et al., 2018).

Parental Acceptance and Rejection and Paternal Involvement

Parenting implies a series of essential responsibilities towards children, such as ensuring that their economic and material needs are met, guiding and instructing, exercising authority, promoting affective exchanges, and sharing everyday experiences (Thompson & Laible, 1999, as cited in Grzybowski & Wagner, 2010). Still, parents can exercise parenting in different ways, having different thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors towards their children. The Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory – IPARTheory (originally called Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory, by Rohner et al., in 2005) – is an evidence-based theory of socialization and lifespan development that attempts to predict and explain major causes, consequences, and other correlates, related to parental acceptance and rejection (Rohner, 1980, 2004). This theory is based on the assumption that, throughout evolution, humans developed the emotional, biological and lasting need to obtain positive responses from the most important people to them (Rohner et al., 2005). Together, parental rejection and acceptance form the *warmth dimension* of parenting, which concerns the quality of the affectionate bond between parents and their children, and the physical and verbal behaviors parents use to express their feelings (Rohner et al., 2005). All humans can be placed on this *continuum*: a pole is marked by parental acceptance, characterized by the existence of affection, care, comfort, concern, interest, support and love, which can be manifested physically (hugging, kissing, cuddling, comforting), verbally (praising, congratulating, and saying nice things to or about the child) or symbolically, for example through culturally specific gestures (Rohner et al., 2012). At the other pole is parental rejection, marked by the absence or significant removal of the aforementioned feelings and affective behaviors and by the presence of a variety of physically and psychologically harmful behaviors and emotions (Rohner et al., 2005).

In addition to the expression of coldness/non-affection, parental rejection can be experienced through three other expressions: hostility and aggressiveness, indifference and neglect, and undifferentiated rejection (Rohner et al., 2005). Aggression is “any behavior where there is the intention of hurting someone, something, or oneself (physically or emotionally)” (Rohner et al., 2012, p. 2); parents are physically aggressive when they hit, push or throw things at their children, or verbally, when they are sarcastic, mock, scream and make humiliating and disparaging statements about or directed at their children (Rohner et al., 2012), and may also resort to “hurtful, nonverbal symbolic gestures toward their children” (Rohner et al., 2012, p. 2). Negligence concerns not only the parents’ failure to provide for their children’s material/physical needs, but also the inability to adequately meet their social and emotional needs (Rohner et al., 2012). Undifferentiated rejection refers to “individuals’ beliefs that their parents do not really care about them or love them, even though there might not be clear behavioral indicators that the parents are neglecting, unaffectionate, or aggressive toward them” (Rohner et al., 2012, p. 2).

Linking paternal involvement and parental acceptance, more specifically the warmth dimension, it is clear that these two variables complement each other: involvement represents a key instrumental component of child care and affection represents an important emotional component (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2016). The concept of “nurturant fathering” (Schwartz & Finley, 2005, p. 208), which represents the extent to which children perceive their fathers as being emotionally available, loving, and caring, is closely related to Rohner’s work on parental acceptance and father love (Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Evidence supports the conclusion that paternal love is as strongly implicated as maternal love in the development of behavioral and psychological problems, as well as in the health and well-being of children (Rohner, 1998; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Veneziano, 2000, 2003). Thus, paternal involvement promotes positive development in children, since the father’s presence is related to how he behaves in this parental role, which in turn influences the development of the children (Ruíz et al., 2019). According to Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory and Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1983), the time fathers spend with their children creates a context of interpersonal relationships in which feelings of love and affection tend to emerge, which will contribute to the quality of the father-son relationship. The children’s perception of paternal acceptance tends to further increase the child’s psychological adjustment; the opposite is true if it is parental rejection that emerges from this interpersonal context – the perception of rejection can cause a psychological maladjustment and the painful feelings associated with this perception tend to induce in children, and even in adults, a negative overview of the world, life, interpersonal relationships and the nature of human existence (Ruíz et al., 2019). Also in the study of Veneziano and Rohner (1998) – whose objective was to understand whether the relationship between paternal involvement and the psychological adjustment of young people was reduced or eliminated when controlling the children’s perception of the father’s acceptance-rejection – the results showed that, in the sub-sample of Caucasian Americans, love and acceptance that young people feel from their fathers significantly mediates how they experience their father’s involvement.

In short, it is crucial to recognize that paternal involvement should be considered as a multidimensional concept, incorporating qualitative factors, such as affection, love, and acceptance attitudes and behaviors, in order to understand, in a more comprehensive way, its impact on children’s development (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2014).

Rohner et al. (2005, p. 317) state that it is essential to understand that parental rejection occurs in a “complex ecological (familial, community, and sociocultural) context”. Therefore, it is essential to understand why parents in certain societies are affectionate, while parents in other societies tend to reject their children: to understand this phenomenon, it is important not only to investigate factors that facilitate or are responsible for these social differences, but also what causes individual variations, in the exercise of parenting, within the same society (Rohner et al., 2005).

The Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory intends to predict major psychological, environmental, and maintenance systems conditions under which parents are likely to accept or

reject their children (Rohner, 1980). In that regard, some investigations seek to understand the importance of sociodemographic and family variables in Parental Acceptance and Rejection. First, some studies report that mothers and fathers tend to engage in different amounts and types of interactions (Craig, 2006; Yeung et al., 2001) and seem to have different parenting styles (McKinney & Renk, 2008; Putnick et al., 2012); despite the differences, they can also contribute to their children's prosocial behaviors in a similar way (e.g., Janssens & Dekovic, 1997).

Literature is scarce regarding the existence of differences between the way fathers and mothers perceive their expressions of parental acceptance-rejection. Nevertheless, some studies examine the perception that children have of their parents' expressions of acceptance and rejection: in the interactions with them, children tend to assess mothers as having a greater degree of affection, control and discipline strategies when compared to fathers. With regard to hostile and rejection behavior, mothers and fathers are perceived as being approximately equal (Rodríguez et al., 2009). In contrast, other researchers claim that mothers get the highest criticism-rejection score (Bosch et al., 2016), while others reached similar conclusions but for fathers (Tilano et al., 2009). Many American studies show that mothers have more accepting attitudes than fathers (Armentrout & Burger, 1972; Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Gamble et al., 2007; Tacón & Caldera, 2001; Winsler et al., 2005); non-Western studies support the consistency of this difference (e.g., Shek, 1998), but others don't (Chen et al., 2000; Russell & Russell, 1989). Dwairy (2010) reported that, in nine cultural groups, fathers were perceived by their children as having more rejecting and less accepting behaviors, compared to mothers. Lastly, some authors (Pinquart, 2016, 2017; Rodríguez et al., 2016) report that the best predictor of mental health disorders is not so much the gender of the parents, but the relationship between them and their children.

Regarding the influence of parental age, some authors (Garrison et al., 1997) suggest that postponing parenthood results in a preponderance of advantages for the parents and probably for the children. Finley (1998), in his study, found that men who were fathers when they were between 30 and 39 years old were perceived by their children as having significantly more accepting behaviors and as having fewer negative characteristics (aggression, hostility, neglect, indifference, and rejection) when compared to younger (16 to 29 years) and older fathers (40 to 55 years) – both younger and older had the same level of perceived acceptance-rejection. Thus, according to this author, adults who postpone parenthood until their 30s are perceived by their children as being more accepting, having fewer attitudes of parental rejection. It seems that there is a gap in the scientific literature, regarding the study of the influence of parents' age on their perceptions of their own parental acceptance-rejection behaviors, i.e., if their age has an impact on the way they treat their children and on their relationship with them.

Additionally to the variables we have already discussed, some studies make it clear that fathers and mothers behave differently and tend to assume different roles, parenting styles, and interactions, depending on the sex and age of their children (Borke et al., 2007; Dubeau et al., 2013). Rohner et al. (2005, p. 317-318) add that “personal characteristics of children, such as their

temperament and behavioral dispositions, shape to a significant extent the form and quality of parents' behavior toward them". Perceived parental rejection tends to have a more robust effect on daughters compared to sons and on younger children (boys and girls) compared to older children (Ramírez-Uclés et al., 2018). Thus, parental rejection seems to have a smaller impact on the psychological adjustment of adolescents, compared to the impact on younger children; they may be more vulnerable to maternal rejection due to the fact that (a) they spend a lot of time with their mothers, (b) mothers' involvement is more significant in the first years of life, and (c) younger children have limited access to alternative support figures (for example, peers) (Ramírez-Uclés et al., 2018). Unlike mothers, fathers seem to spend approximately the same amount of time with their children, regardless of age, and their level of involvement in their children's lives appears to be similar at all stages of development (Collins & Russell, 1991; Phares et al., 2009). In addition, as children grow, they also notice a decrease in parental affection, involvement and support (Rodríguez et al., 2009; Shek, 2000; Spera, 2005). According to Rodríguez et al. (2009), younger children perceive greater involvement and supervision by the two parents, and older children perceive a greater degree of hostility and neglect in parental behavior, especially in the case of mothers. For Laursen et al. (1998), during adolescence, fathers and mothers exhibit more rejection and hostility behaviors and are more permissive with their children.

Finally, regarding socioeconomic status, some studies report that stress associated with economic problems makes parents, in this context, more likely to exhibit more severe, abusive, inconsistent and negligent parenting styles compared to middle and high-class parents, which has negative effects on children's mental health. (Conger et al., 2010; Hoff et al., 2002).

In conclusion, perceived parental acceptance-rejection is itself a powerful and universal predictor of psychological and behavioral adjustment. As stated by Rohner et al. (2005), a cross-cultural scientific understanding of antecedents, consequences and other correlations related to acceptance-rejection could lead to the possibility of formulating viable and fair programs, policies, and interventions for each culture, which would affect families and children.

Parenting, Fatherhood and Parental Acceptance-Rejection in different family structures

Defining the family has been a challenge for anyone who deals with this topic, since, undeniably, family configurations that challenge traditional models and encourage the construction of different forms of relationship have emerged (Cunico & Arpini, 2016). Alarcão (2000, p. 202) conceptualizes the "new forms of family" as being "a diversified set of family configurations

distinct from the traditional nuclear family and the three-generation family”. Therefore, it is clear that the understanding of what the family is, is no longer necessarily linked to the concept of a nuclear family (composed of a mother, father and children) (Oliveira et al., 2008) and that marriage is no longer an indissoluble pact (Campeol & Crepaldi, 2018), which is reflected in the multiplicity of socially recognized family arrangements: it is possible to find families that follow traditional models, couples who share childcare and family organization, women and men who alone assume the financial support of the family, reconstituted families, couples without children, homosexual couples, couples with adopted children, among others (Oliveira et al., 2008). According to Sampaio (2020, p. 209-210), these various configurations, also in the way of being a father, “increase the need to value the role of new fathers and not remain stuck in the roles that the first half of the last century so much proclaimed”. In this sense, although the concept of family, and the roles of fathers in it, has been expanded, little is known about the (re)definitions of parenting and paternal roles in other family structures (Campeol & Crepaldi, 2018). Regarding parental acceptance and rejection, it is important to understand if the way parents treat their children varies according to different family configurations.

Regarding intact nuclear families, these represent the most traditional configuration, characterized by the father and the mother, who have biological and/or legal ties with all the children of the family (Fallesen & Gähler, 2020). Although for Alarcão (2000, p. 202), more than twenty years ago, this configuration had “the days numbered”, and it is realized that the current understanding of the family is not necessarily linked to the concept of a nuclear family (Oliveira et al., 2008), it turns out that, in the study of Scaglia et al. (2018), this configuration is still valued and described as correct and desired, unlike other forms of family, which are seen as threatening. Furthermore, it was found that the nuclear family seems to correspond to the ideal configuration for individuals whose family has another configuration, but this idea is not always experienced by those who are part of an intact nuclear family (Scaglia et al., 2018). With regard to parental acceptance, in traditional families, the elements of the parental dyad can manifest different levels of affection: for example, two very affectionate parents can share parental qualities that end up reinforcing the positive interactions between each one and their children (Chung et al., 2020); however, in the face of incongruous levels of affection between the two parents, the most affectionate element can mitigate the effects of the other element, who is not so loving (Chung et al., 2020); on the other hand, it is also possible that this last element can weaken the contributions of the element that manifests more affection, undermining his capacity to have beneficial behaviors for the child (Martin et al., 2010). Although the evidence is limited, Chung et al. (2020) conclude that the development of children is optimized in a context in which there are high levels of affection, both on the part of mothers and fathers.

Single-parent families are families “where the parents’ generation is only represented by a single element” (Alarcão, 2000, p. 212) that can be found in the condition of single, separated, divorced, or widowed. According to Sampaio (2020), many parents experience parenting alone,

either because they were pushed away by their partner from close contact with their children, or because they became distant, or because a crisis in the couple precipitated the break-up and divorce. In any case, all members of the family system have to adjust to an increase in complexity in the performance of developmental tasks (Grzybowski & Wagner, 2010). According to Alarcão (2000), this family structure faces specific difficulties at three levels: (1) the conjugal subsystem is lost or not constituted, with reduced emotional support and feeling of individuality and belonging; (2) regarding the parental subsystem, there is the difficulty or even impossibility of sharing tasks and resorting to the complementarity of roles in the educational task; and (3) the identification problem, i.e., the child of the same sex as the absent parent may have more difficulties in building their identity, due to the lack of an identification model. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of single parent families has been an important factor in modifying the feeling of shame and stigmatization that these children feel sometimes (Alarcão, 2000).

Some research has focused on identifying correlations and predictors of fathers' behavior (e.g., Lamb & Lewis, 2010). However, studies focus predominantly on fathers from intact nuclear families (e.g., Beaton & Doherty, 2007), especially those who have recently become parents (e.g., Knoester et al., 2007), or in divorced fathers who do not have custody of their children (e.g., Amato & Dorius, 2010). The study of Finzi-Dottan and Cohen (2016) aimed to assess whether the fact that fathers are (1) married, (2) divorced and have exclusive custody of their children or (3) divorced and not have custody, had an impact on their involvement and affection with their children: the results showed that being a divorced father who has custody of the children is associated with greater involvement and more affectionate behaviors, compared to the other two conditions. Hilton et al. (2001) found that single fathers had better resources than single mothers, more positive parenting behaviors than married fathers, and sought more support from friends than married fathers. In the context of single fatherhood, Hook and Chalasani (2008) confronted different family configurations and revealed that fathers in these families: (a) spend more time caring for their children than fathers in intact nuclear families, and less time than mothers in post-divorce and intact families; (b) spend more time playing with their children than married mothers and fathers, and also more time doing housework – which they do in a flexible and shared way with their children, according to Isotton and Falcke (2015) – but spend less time on social activities compared to married fathers; (c) and work less full-time outside the home (76%) and mothers work more (56%), compared to intact families (90% and 43%, respectively). Halme et al. (2009) found that divorced fathers and also fathers from non-traditional families enjoyed more interaction with their children, when compared to fathers in traditional families. Regarding single fathers/mothers and their acceptance-rejection behaviors, Rohner (1986, as cited in Rohner et al., 2005) tells us that those (most often mothers) who find themselves socially isolated, without emotional or social support, and especially if they are younger and economically deprived, seem to be at greater risk of depriving their children of love and affection. Note that, in spite of that, poverty by itself is not necessarily associated with increased rejection: it is the association of poverty with other social and emotional

conditions that put children at greater risk (Rohner et al., 2005). In the study of Schwartz and Finley (2005), in all ethnic groups evaluated, participants from families whose parents were divorced reported less nurturing and affectionate paternity than parents from intact nuclear families, which is in line with previous investigations (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Lastly, Miranda et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between the adolescents' perspective of maternal and paternal acceptance-rejection and the adolescents' poor adjustment, and concluded, among other aspects, that mothers were perceived as rejecting less than fathers and that the family structure (intact vs. non-intact) moderated the relationship between parental acceptance-rejection and symptoms of anxiety and depression in adolescents; moreover, belonging to a non-intact family amplified the effects of rejection and interparental inconsistency. On the other hand, some authors suggest that perceptions of mother-child relationships are similar between intact nuclear families and post-divorce single parent families (Brenner & Hyde, 2006; Schwartz & Finley, 2009).

In conclusion, it is essential to spread the knowledge that parenting is an indissoluble bond, regardless of family configuration (Ziviani et al., 2012). There is still little information on how parenting is manifested in different cultural contexts and in different family structures, which has important implications in the way mothers and fathers exercise parenting (Cabrera et al., 2018). It is crucial to investigate how these different family configurations influence parenting, fatherhood, and parental acceptance-rejection behaviors.

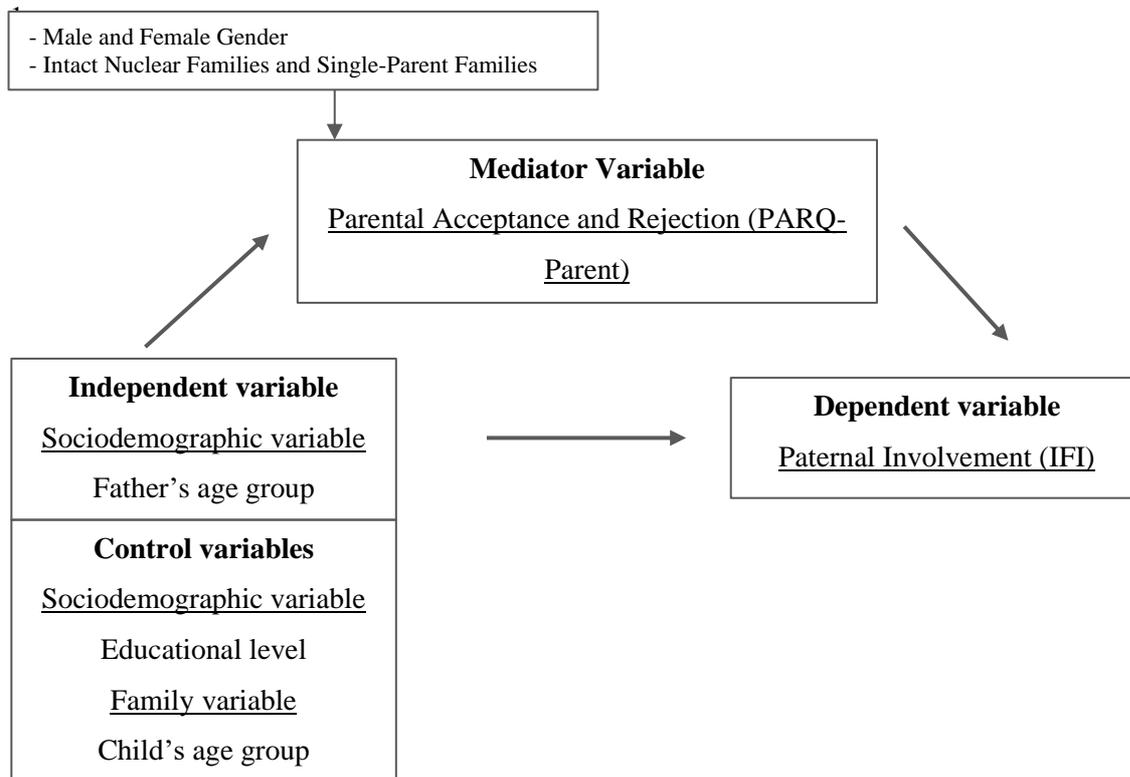
II - Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of sociodemographic and family variables on Paternal Involvement, considering the mediating role of Parental Acceptance-Rejection. The specific objectives are related to the study of relationships between variables and comparisons between groups, regarding the concepts of Paternal Involvement and Parental Acceptance-Rejection. Based on the conceptual map represented in Figure 1, the specific objectives of this study are:

- (1) Finding out if Parental Acceptance and Rejection (total score) and its respective dimensions – *warmth/affection*, *hostility/aggression*, *indifference/neglect*, and *undifferentiated rejection* – influence Paternal Involvement, in male individuals.
- (2) Identifying whether there are differences in the perceptions of Parental Acceptance and Rejection, regarding the instrument’s total score and its dimensions – *warmth/affection*, *hostility/aggression*, *indifference/neglect*, and *undifferentiated rejection* –, in male and female individuals, and in two family structures – intact nuclear family and single-parent family.
- (3) Assessing whether, in male individuals, Parental Acceptance and Rejection mediates the relationship between the sociodemographic variable *father’s age group*, considering the control variables *level of education* and *child’s age group*, and Paternal Involvement.

Figure 1

Conceptual map of the variables under study and the hypothesized simple mediation model



Paternal Involvement: The mediating role of Parental Acceptance-Rejection and the impact of sociodemographic and family variables

III - Methodology

Sample characterization

The sample of this study was collected at two different times: first, in the period between March and May 2020, 432 participants responded to the survey (79.4% of the total sample); this year, from February to March, a sample of 112 people (20.6% of the total sample) was collected. Thus, the study had a total of 544 participants residing in Portugal: 67 males and 477 females.

Regarding the total sample and the respective sociodemographic data, the minimum age of the respondents – father or mother – was 22 years old and the maximum 59, with the average age being 38.82 years old (SD = 6,493) and the dominant age group was from 36 to 40 years old (31.6%). When filling out the questionnaire, the respondents with a degree were predominant (37.7%), most of the participants were employed (90.1%) and more than half were married (57.7%). The sociodemographic data of the total sample are shown in more detail in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of Sociodemographic characteristics of the Total sample

Variables	n	%
Gender		
Male	67	12.3
Female	477	87.7
Age group		
22-35	154	28.3
36-40	172	31.6
41-45	142	26.1
46-59	76	14.0
Literary qualifications		
Primary school (4th grade)	2	0.4
Elementary school (6th grade)	7	1.3
Middle school (9th grade)	54	9.9

High school (12th grade)	193	35.5
Degree	205	37.7
Master's degree	60	11.0
Ph.D.	9	1.7
Other	14	2.6
Professional situation		
Student	5	0.9
Unemployed	49	9.0
Employed	490	90.1
Marital status		
Single	49	9.0
Civil Union	116	21.3
Married	314	57.7
Separated	18	3.3
Divorced	47	8.6

Note. $N = 544$

Regarding the sub-sample “Fathers” ($n = 67$), crucial to this study, it was found that the minimum age was 26 years old, the maximum 59, and that the average age was 41.37 years old ($SD = 6,360$). The age group from 41 to 45 years old was predominant (28.4%). A greater number of male respondents finished high school (12th grade) (34.3%), are employed (95.5%) and married (67.2%) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of Sociodemographic characteristics of the “Fathers” sub-sample

Variables	n	%
Age group		
26-35	13	19.4
36-40	17	25.4
41-45	19	28.4
46-59	18	26.9

Literary qualifications

Elementary school (6th grade)	3	4.5
Middle school (9th grade)	9	13.4
High school (12th grade)	23	34.3
Degree	19	28.4
Master's degree	10	14.9
Ph.D.	2	3.0
Other	1	1.5

Professional situation

Student	1	1.5
Unemployed	2	3.0
Employed	64	95.5

Marital status

Not married	6	9.0
Civil Union	8	11.9
Married	45	67.2
Separated	3	4.5
Divorced	5	7.5

Note. N= 67

Regarding complementary and family data of the total sample, it was found that most participants belonged to an intact nuclear family (75.9%) and 22.8% were part of a single-parent family. Regarding the number of children, which ranges between 1 and 5, the highest percentage points to 2 children (46%), and the child's age group (in relation to which the participant answers the questionnaire) that was dominant was 9 to 12 years old (30.5%). The socioeconomic level most frequently reported was the medium level (49.1%). More information can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of Family and Complementary Data of the Total sample

Variables	n	%
Family structure		
Intact Nuclear Family	413	75.9

Single-parent family	124	22.8
Adoptive family	7	1.3
Number of children		
1	211	38.8
2	250	46.0
3	66	12.1
4	15	2.8
5	2	0.4
Child's age group		
0-4	140	25.7
5-8	134	24.6
9-12	166	30.5
13-16	104	19.1
Socioeconomic Level		
Low	73	13.4
Medium low	157	28.9
Average	267	49.1
Medium high	42	7.7
High	3	0.6
Missing	2	0.4

Note. $N = 544$

Regarding the “Fathers” sub-sample, the majority belong to an intact nuclear family (73.1%) and almost half of the male individuals who participated in this study have 2 children (47.8%); the most reported child’s age group was from 9 to 12 years old (31.3%). Equally to the total sample, the most recorded socioeconomic level was the medium (55.2%). It was also found that most of the fathers took paternity leave (71.6%) after the birth of their child(ren) (see Table 4).

Table 4*Descriptive statistics of Family and Complementary Data of the “Fathers” sub-sample*

Variables	n	%
Family structure		
Intact Nuclear Family	49	73.1
Single-parent family	14	20.9
Adoptive family	4	6.0
Number of children		
1	25	37.3
2	32	47.8
3	9	13.4
4	1	1.5
Child’s age group		
0-4	18	26.9
5-8	16	23.9
9-12	21	31.3
13-16	12	17.9
Socioeconomic Level		
Low	7	10.4
Medium low	16	23.9
Average	37	55.2
Medium high	5	7.5
High	1	1.5
Missing	1	1.5
Paternity Leave		
Yes	48	71.6
No	17	25.4
Missing	2	3.0

Note. N= 67

Used measures

The present study is part of a broader research project called “Novas Paternidades: Estudo Transcultural de Percepções sobre Parentalidade, Conjugalidade e Família”. The questionnaires were administrated online, through the Limesurvey platform, and included several instruments: the Sociodemographic, Family and Complementary Data Questionnaire; the Coparenting Questionnaire (CQ); the Perception Scale of Parenting Communication – Parents Version (COMPA); the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) – short form; the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) – short form; and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). However, considering the goals of the present investigation, only the Sociodemographic, Family and Complementary Data Questionnaire, the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire – short form (PARQ-SF), and the Inventory of Father Involvement – short form (IFI-SF), were studied.

Sociodemographic, Family and Complementary Data Questionnaire

The Sociodemographic, Family and Complementary Data Questionnaire is the first instrument of the survey and aims to characterize the sample of the study. Initially, information is collected about the respondent, namely the gender, age, country and place of residence, literary qualifications, professional status (including current profession and profession that he/she held for the longest time) and marital status. Secondly, the same questions are asked, but in relation to the other element of the parental dyad, that is, the spouse/partner or father/mother of the participant’s child; in addition, it is asked how long the respondent has lived with his/her spouse/partner, if he/she is currently in a marital relationship. Then, some family and complementary data, crucial in the context of this study, are collected: the family structure, the number of children, the number of people and characterization of the household and its monthly income and respective socioeconomic level (from the participant’s perspective). Other than that, it is also questioned whether the respondent’s current marital relationship is the first one or not (not applicable to those who do not have a marital relationship) and whether one or more children are the result of the current relationship. Finally, questions are asked regarding the use of parental leave (both for mothers and fathers) and the participant is asked to indicate the age of the child in relation to which they will respond to the survey (always reporting to it, throughout the entire questionnaire).

Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire – Parent (PARQ-Parent, short form; Carvalho et al., 2020)

The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ) is a self-response instrument created by Rohner (Rohner, 2005), which aims to measure the perceptions of individuals regarding parental acceptance or rejection. The PARQ exists in long/standard form, consisting of 60 items, and in short form, consisting of 24 items. There are three versions of this instrument (Rohner, 2005): PARQ-Adults – assesses the adult’s perceptions about how their father or mother treated

them, when they were between seven and twelve years old –, PARQ-Children – asks children about how they feel their father or mother treats them in the present –, and PARQ-Parent – parents are asked to assess how they treat their children in the current moment. This study uses the short version of the PARQ-Parent, measured for the Portuguese population by Madalena de Carvalho, Maria Luiza Castilho and Alda Portugal, in 2020. The items in this questionnaire are answered using a 4-point Likert scale, which varies between “almost never true” (1) and “almost always true” (4) (Rohner, 2005).

All versions of PARQ include four subscales (Rohner, 2005): *warmth/affection* (8 items, in the short version) – parents who are accepting of their children play with them, enjoy being with them and are affectionate and loving, demonstrating their love through words and actions, and, on the other hand, parents who reject their children are cold and unsympathetic and seem to dislike them; *hostility/aggression* (6 items), which includes behaviors of impatience, irritability, disapproval and/or ridicule of children – parents treat them rudely and abruptly, hit them and/or speak in a harsh and derogatory voice tone; *indifference/neglect* (6 items), which is manifested when parents ignore their children’s requests for help, attention and comfort and fail to meet other important needs for their well-being and happiness, being characterized as cold, distant and carefree; and, finally, *undifferentiated rejection* (4 items), characterized by rejection behaviors, despite the fact that its expression is not clearly aggressive, negligent or non-affectionate. Thus, Parental Acceptance-Rejection is a bipolar dimension, with Acceptance at one end of the *continuum* and Rejection at the other (Rohner, 2005). All subscales are coded towards Rejection, so the higher the score on any subscale and the total result, the higher the perception of coldness/lack of affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, undifferentiated rejection and rejection in general; on the other hand, lower values reveal greater Acceptance (Fernandes et al., 2015). Note that the total result, in the short form, must be between 24 and 96. In conclusion, these parental behaviors can be studied individually or collectively, as they tend to be significantly correlated, and therefore the researchers find that the sum of the four expressions provides more robust evidence with respect to behavioral and developmental outcomes (Rohner et al., 2005).

With regard to internal consistency levels, the authors of the original version reported Cronbach’s alpha values high enough for the questionnaire to be reliable (Rohner, 2005): in the dimensions and total scale the value of .7 is always exceeded, which is the value often recommended as the criterion for minimally acceptable/modest reliability estimates for multi-item measures used in an investigation (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Pallant, 2005; DeVellis, 2017); some values exceed .8. Note that the reported values are values relative to the aggregation of the three versions of the PARQ and to all ethnic and sociocultural groups in the world, which means that this questionnaire is reliable to be used in comparative multiethnic and intercultural studies (Rohner, 2005). In the present study, the highest Cronbach’s alpha value is .74 in the *warmth/affection* subscale, the lowest is .42 in the *undifferentiated rejection* dimension and the alpha of the total scale was .66 (see Table 5). According to Pallant (2005), it is common to find low

alpha values in scales or subscales with less than ten items, which seems to have occurred in the *undifferentiated rejection* subscale.

Table 5

Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire

Subscale	Present study	Original study (Rohner, 2005)
Warmth/affection	.74	.9
Hostility/aggression	.69	.87
Indifference/neglect	.64	.78
Undifferentiated rejection	.42	.78
Parental Acceptance-Rejection (total scale)	.66	.86

Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI, short form; Barrocas et al., 2017)

The Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) is a self-response instrument, created by Hawkins, Bradford, Palkovitz, Christiansen, Day and Call, in 2002 (Hawkins et al., 2002), and the Portuguese version, used in this study, was measured by Barrocas, Santos and Paixão, in 2011. This inventory aims to assess the cognitive, affective and behavioral components of direct and indirect paternal involvement (Barrocas et al., 2017). The short version used in this study has 26 items (the long form has 35 items) and the answers are given on a 7-point Likert scale, which varies between “very poor” (0) and “excellent” (6); it is also possible for participants to answer “not applicable” (NA).

In this instrument, nine dimensions of positive aspects of paternal involvement are measured (Barrocas et al., 2017), which can be seen as indicators of a single and global construct of paternal involvement (Hawkins et al., 2002): *discipline and teaching responsibility* (3 items), *school encouragement* (3 items), *mother support* (3 items), *providing* (2 items), *time and talking together* (3 items), *praise and affection* (3 items), *developing talents and future concerns* (3 items), *reading and homework support* (3 items), and *attentiveness* (3 items). The total IFI score is the result of the scores obtained on each of the aforementioned scales and, since all items are formulated positively, higher scores indicate higher outcomes with respect to the quality of fatherhood, as perceived by the responding father (Barrocas et al., 2017).

The original version of the Inventory of Father Involvement (short form) demonstrated an adequate level of internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .94 for the total score and coefficients between .69 and .87 for the nine subscales (Hawkins et al., 2002). In the study with the Portuguese population (Barrocas et al., 2017), the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale

is .93, which reveals high reliability, since, ideally, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be greater than .7 (Pallant, 2005). In the present study, the total scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .9, which, according to DeVellis (2017), represents a very good internal consistency.

Table 6

Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the Inventory of Father Involvement

	Present study	Original study (Hawkins et al., 2002)
Father Involvement (total scale)	.9	.94

Investigation Procedures

The data were collected since the beginning of February until the end of March of the present year, additionally to the data collected last year. Due to the current pandemic situation, all data were collected online, through a survey built on the Limesurvey platform (except for some paper questionnaires, which were administered last year). Prior to the application of the survey itself (displayed in the instruments section) an Informed Consent was presented to each participant, in which the broader research project was contextualized, the main purpose of the present study was explained and the inclusion criteria were described: in order to participate in the study, subjects had to (1) be fathers or mothers, (2) be at least 20 years old, (3) have children aged between 0 and 16 years old and (4) belong to a single-parent, adoptive or intact nuclear family. The Informed Consent clarified that only one of the members of the parental dyad could respond to the protocol and that, if the participant had more than one child, he or she should answer the statements only in relation to one of them, that is, always referring to the same child throughout the questionnaire. Then, the voluntary nature of the participation and the confidential nature of the responses were clarified. Finally, if the participant considered himself/herself informed about the purposes of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate in it, allowing the use of his data for research purposes, he ticked the corresponding option.

In this study, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling selection process was adopted, using the snowball method (Marocco, 2007). To obtain the largest possible number of participants who met the inclusion criteria, some of the subjects that make up the sample were contacted through formal and informal networks. Mothers, fathers, intact nuclear families, and single-parent families were included in the sample. Since there was no significant number of adoptive families ($n = 7$),

these were not studied when family structures were compared regarding Parental Acceptance-Rejection (Objective 3); therefore, in achieving this objective, single-parent families (n = 122) and intact nuclear families (n = 410) were compared. Nevertheless, we decided to keep respondents from adoptive families in the study, as they also provided contributions with their responses to the instruments used.

Statistical Procedures

After collecting the data, the computer program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), version 25 for Windows, was used to carry out descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Previously, it was necessary to adapt last year's database to the purposes of the present study, excluding the instruments that were not worked on, and then aggregating all the responses of the participants from both years. Some respondents were excluded from the sample, for example due to the fact that they did not respond to the instruments that were worked on, that they did not reside in Portugal, or that they filled in the surveys improperly.

First, the descriptive statistics and frequencies analyses of the sociodemographic, family, and complementary characteristics of the sample were studied: the goal was to describe the sample under study. Then, the internal consistency of each instrument was analyzed in order to guarantee their reliability, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Also, with regard to the instruments, the descriptive statistics of each of them were analyzed – mean values and standard deviations of each subscale and of the total scale – in order to briefly describe their results.

Subsequently, inferential studies were carried out in order to respond to each goal proposed in this investigation. Since the total sample is composed of 544 participants and the sub-sample of fathers has 67 individuals, we chose to use parametric tests, since, according to the Central Limit Theorem, a sample higher than 30 subjects is sufficient to assume the normality of the distribution (Marôco, 2007).

In order to investigate whether, in male individuals, the Parental Acceptance and Rejection (total score) and its dimensions – *warmth/affection*, *hostility/aggression*, *indifference/neglect* and *undifferentiated rejection* – influence the Paternal Involvement (goal 1), a simple linear regression between the total result of the PARQ and the total of the IFI was carried out, and a multiple linear regression between the dimensions of the PARQ and the total of the IFI was performed. It was necessary to test the assumption of the absence of multicollinearity (through the VIF: Variance Inflation Factor) and test the normality of the residuals; no assumption was violated.

Then, to achieve the 2nd goal (identifying whether there are differences in the perceptions of Parental Acceptance and Rejection, regarding the instrument's total score and its dimensions –

warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, and undifferentiated rejection –, in male and female individuals, and in two family structures – intact nuclear family and single-parent family), two Student's t-tests were applied; the assumption of homogeneity of variances was checked by performing the Levene Test.

Finally, in order to respond to goal 3 (assessing whether, in male individuals, Parental Acceptance and Rejection mediates the relationship between the sociodemographic variable *father's age group*, considering the control variables of *educational level* and *child's age group*, and Paternal Involvement), a mediation model was carried out, through the PROCESS tool (model 4), developed by Hayes (2012), in SPSS. In the simple mediation model, it is hypothesized that an antecedent variable X will influence a consequent variable Y, through an intervening/mediator variable M (Hayes, 2018). The independent variable chosen for the model was the *father's age group* and, additionally, the covariates *educational level* and *child's age group* were used. These covariates (or control variables) make it possible to “statistically account for shared associations between variables in the causal system caused by other sources” (Hayes, 2012, p. 21). Through the bootstrapping method, a resampling process, it is possible to obtain 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects (Hayes, 2012); 5000 bootstrap samples were used. The indirect effects are statistically significant – that is, there is a mediating effect – when the value of 0 is not found between the minimum and maximum limits of these confidence intervals. In running a mediation model, three linear regressions are underlying: (1) the direct relationship between the independent variable and the mediator; (2) the direct relationship between the independent and the dependent variable, controlled by the mediator; and (3) the direct relationship between the independent and the dependent variable, without control by the mediator. The assumptions of the absence of multicollinearity (through the VIF) and the normality of the residuals were tested – no assumption was violated. Note that, initially, the *socioeconomic level* variable was expected to be part of the model, as a covariate; however, its p-value was very high, which penalized the model's results, so it was decided to remove this variable.

IV - Results

Descriptive statistics of the instruments

Descriptive statistics obtained in the different subscales and in the total of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire are shown in Table 7. To score the PARQ, including the processing of missing data, we followed the test manual of the instrument's original author (Rohner, 2005); the subscales are obtained by summing the items¹. It was found that the *warmth/affection* dimension had the highest score (M=9.22), and that the *undifferentiated rejection* dimension had the lowest (M=4.85). The average of the total score was 31.10, with the minimum score being 24 and the maximum 78 (in this instrument, the results can vary between a minimum of 24 and a maximum of 96).

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire

Dimension	Mean	Standard deviation
Warmth/affection	9.22	2,364
Hostility/aggression	8.83	2,693
Indifference/neglect	8.19	2,425
Undifferentiated rejection	4.85	1,325
Total	31.10	6504

Note. N = 539

Descriptive statistics of fathers' responses in the Inventory of Father Involvement are shown in Table 8. The subscale and total scores were obtained by calculating the average of the items (Hawkins et al., 2002). It was found that the highest values relate to the *providing* (M=5.79), *school encouragement* (M=5.71) and *praise and affection* (M=5.70) subscales and the lowest relate

¹ Since the "warmth/affection" scale is coded in the direction of acceptance – and all other subscales are keyed in the direction of rejection –, the sum of items of this subscale was subtracted from 40, so that this dimension is scored in the direction of rejection.

to the *reading and homework support* (M =4.89), *mother support* (M=5.13) and *discipline and teaching of responsibility* (M=5.33) subscales.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of the Inventory of Father Involvement

Dimension	Mean	Standard deviation
Discipline and teaching responsibility	5.33	.699
School encouragement	5.71	.459
Mother support	5.13	1,020
Providing	5.79	.527
Time and talking together	5.38	.675
Praise and affection	5.70	.512
Developing talents and future concerns	5.55	.606
Reading and homework support	4.89	.731
Attentiveness	5.38	.668
Total	5.42	.437

Note. N = 61

Inferential study

(1) Finding out if Parental Acceptance and Rejection (total score) and its respective dimensions – warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, and undifferentiated rejection – influence Paternal Involvement, in male individuals.

A simple linear regression test was performed with the purpose of predicting the Paternal Involvement based on the Parental Acceptance-Rejection (total score). The model explains 36.2% of the variance in the dependent variable and is statistically significant ($F(1,54) = 30.69$; $p < .001$, $R^2 = .362$). Given that the value of the β is negative, when high values are found in the total PARQ score (keyed in the direction of rejection), there is a tendency for less paternal involvement.

Subsequently, through a multiple linear regression test, we sought to predict the Paternal Involvement based on the dimensions of *warmth/affection*, *hostility/aggression*, *indifference/neglect*, and *undifferentiated rejection* of the PARQ. It was found that the global model explains 47.2% of the variability of Paternal Involvement and is statistically significant ($F(4.51) = 11.40$; $p < .001$, $R^2 = .472$). Analyzing the data in Table 9, it appears that the independent variable *warmth/affection* ($\beta = -.089$, $p = .00$) is a significant predictor of paternal involvement, and the negative β value indicates that this dimension contributes to a decrease in paternal involvement. Thus, the fact that parents score more in the *warmth/affection* dimension – which is directed towards parental rejection – has a negative impact on paternal involvement.

Table 9

Regression Coefficients: dependent variable – Paternal Involvement

Model 1	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient	t	p
	B	Standard error	Beta		
Constant	6736	.239		28,192	.00
Total PARQ	-.041	.007	-.602	-5,539	.00
Model 2					
Constant	6,508	.236		27,611	.00
Warmth/affection	-.089	.022	-.542	-4.007	.00
Hostility/aggression	.028	.031	.120	.924	.36
Indifference/neglect	-.040	.023	-.231	-1,701	.095
Undifferentiated rejection	-.026	.044	-.076	-.582	.56

(2) Identifying whether there are differences in the perceptions of Parental Acceptance and Rejection, regarding the instrument’s total score and its dimensions – *warmth/affection*, *hostility/aggression*, *indifference/neglect*, and *undifferentiated rejection* –, in male and female individuals, and in two family structures – intact nuclear family and single-parent family.

To respond to the 2nd goal, two Student’s t-tests for independent samples were performed. First, it was tested whether there were differences between male and female respondents, regarding

the dimensions of parental acceptance-rejection. The results of this statistical analysis are shown in Table 10. It was concluded that there are no significant differences between the values reported by fathers (warmth/affection: $M = 9.71$, $SD = 3.11$, $t(69) = 1.34$, $p = .18$); hostility/aggression: $M = 8.52$, $SD = 2.19$, $t(88) = -1.18$, $p = .24$); indifference/neglect: ($M = 8.56$, $SD = 2.55$, $t(537) = 1.28$, $p = .20$); undifferentiated rejection: ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.26$, $t(537) = .26$, $p = .8$); total score: $M = 31.68$, $SD = 7.31$, $t(537) = .75$, $p = .46$) and those reported by mothers (warmth/affection: $M = 9.16$, $SD = 2.25$, $t(69) = 1.34$, $p = .18$; hostility/aggression: $M = 8.87$, $SD = 2.75$, $t(88) = -1.18$, $p = .24$; indifference/neglect: $M = 8.15$, $SD = 2.41$, $t(537) = 1.28$, $p = .20$; undifferentiated rejection: $M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.34$, $t(537) = .26$, $p = .8$; total score: $M = 31.02$, $SD = 6.40$, $t(537) = .75$, $p = .46$).

Therefore, and since all significance levels are above .05, it appears that, in this study, the variable *gender of the parent* does not contribute to differences concerning parental acceptance-rejection.

Table 10

T-test for independent samples: independent variable – Gender of the parent

				Levene's Test		T-test for equality of means	
Dimension	Gender	M	SD	F	p	t	p (2-tailed)
Warmth/affection	Male (n = 62)	9.71	3.11	6.02	.01	1.34	.18
	Female (n = 477)	9.16	2.25				
Hostility/aggression	Male (n = 62)	8.52	2.19	6.56	.01	-1.18	.24
	Female (n = 477)	8.87	2.75				
Indifference/neglect	Male (n = 62)	8.56	2.55	.46	.5	1.28	.20
	Female (n = 477)	8.15	2.41				
Undifferentiated rejection	Male (n = 62)	4.89	1.26	.21	.64	.26	.8
	Female (n = 477)	4.84	1.34				
Total PARQ	Male (n = 62)	31.68	7.31	.01	.94	.75	.46

Female (n = 477)	31.02	6.40		
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Note. N = 539

Then, we sought to understand if there were differences between the participants who were part of an intact nuclear family and those who belonged to a single-parent family, regarding their perceptions of parental acceptance-rejection. The results are displayed in Table 11. It was found that there are statistically significant differences in the *indifference/neglect* dimension ($t(159) = -3.34, p = .00$), being that respondents from single-parent families had higher scores ($M = 8.98, SD = 3.04$), compared to respondents from intact nuclear families ($M = 7.99, SD = 2.17$). The results also revealed statistically significant differences with regard to the total PARQ score ($t(162) = -2.27, p = .02$), verifying once again that participants from single-parent families had higher values ($M = 32.52, SD = 8.08$) than participants from intact nuclear families ($M = 30.73, SD = 5.94$). It is crucial to remind that in this instrument, having higher values means being more rejecting.

In the remaining dimensions, the significance levels obtained are higher than .05, which means that, in the present study, the family structure variable contributes to significant differences in the *indifference/neglect* dimension and in the total score of the PARQ.

Table 11

T-test for independent samples: independent variable – Family structure

Dimension	Family structure	M	SD	Levene's Test		T-test for equality of means	
				F	p	t	p (2-tailed)
Warmth/affection	Intact Nuclear Family (n = 410)	9.22	2.35	.22	.64	-.28	.78
	Single-parent family (n = 122)	9.29	2.46				
Hostility/aggression	Intact Nuclear Family (n = 410)	8.70	2.55	7.85	.01	-1.95	.053
	Single-parent family (n = 122)	9.31	3.14				

Indifference/neglect	Intact Nuclear Family (n = 410)	7.99	2.17	24.33	.00	-3.34	.00
	Single-parent family (n = 122)	8.98	3.04				
Undifferentiated rejection	Intact Nuclear Family (n = 410)	4.82	1.32	.01	.92	-.94	.35
	Single-parent family (n = 122)	4.95	1.37				
Total PARQ	Intact Nuclear Family (n = 410)	30.73	5.94	9.56	.00	-2.27	.02
	Single-parent family (n = 122)	32.52	8.08				

Note. N = 532

(3) Assessing whether, in male individuals, Parental Acceptance and Rejection mediates the relationship between the sociodemographic variable *father's age group*, considering the control variables of *educational level* and *child's age group*, and Paternal Involvement.

Finally, we attempted to understand whether the relationship between the *father's age group* (independent variable) and paternal involvement (dependent variable) is mediated by parental acceptance-rejection (mediator variable). Additionally to the independent variable, two covariates were included in the model: *educational level* and *child's age group*. In this model, reference classes were chosen within each variable: the interpretation of the results is performed by comparing them in relation to these same classes. More detailed information about the variables under study is found in Table 12.

Table 12

Variables that are part of the mediation model: independent variable and covariates

Independent variable
Father's age group X1* ≤ 35

Paternal Involvement: The mediating role of Parental Acceptance-Rejection and the impact of sociodemographic and family variables

X2	36-40
X3	41-45
X4	≥46
Covariates	
Educational level	
E1	Primary, elementary, or middle school
E2	High school (12th grade)
E3	Degree
E4*	Master's degree or Ph.D.
Child's age group	
A1	0-4
A2	5-8
A3	9-12
A4*	13-16

*Reference classes.

In order to be able to ascertain whether there is a mediating effect – indirect effects – it is necessary to explore the direct effects.

First, we investigated the direct relationship between the independent variable and covariates – *father's age group*, *educational level*, and *child's age group* –, and the mediator variable – PARQ (Model 1 in Table 13). The global model explained 36.8% of the variability and was significant ($p < .05$), therefore, the *father's age group*, *educational level* and the *child's age group* have a significant impact on the PARQ (total). Analyzing the model variables, it is important to highlight the classes X4 ($B = -4.93$, $p = .02$), E1 ($B = 6.79$, $p = .014$), E2 ($B = 5.65$, $p = .014$), E3 ($B = 7.11$, $p = .003$) and A2 ($B = -5.81$, $p = .021$), which influenced parental acceptance-rejection and were significantly different from the respective reference classes.

Secondly, we tried to understand the relationship between the independent variable and covariates, and the dependent variable, controlling for the mediator variable (Model 2 in Table 13). The model explained 38.8% of the variability and was significant ($p < .05$). However, only the total PARQ variable was significant ($B = -.05$, $p < .001$): a higher total score in the PARQ points to more rejection and, according to this model, to less paternal involvement, due to fact that the value of B is negative.

The direct relationship between the independent variable and covariates, and the dependent variable (without control by the mediator variable) (Model 3 in Table 13) was not significant ($R^2 = 9.2\%$, $p > .05$): the sociodemographic variables *father's age group* and *educational level*, and the family variable *child's age group* do not directly impact the paternal involvement.

Finally, the indirect effect between the *father's age group* and paternal involvement, through parental acceptance-rejection, was analyzed (Table 12). The indirect effect is not

significant for age groups X2 (B = .121, SE = .15, 95% CI]-.114, .455]) and X3 (B = .032, SE = .12, 95% CI]-.228, .268]), compared to X1. However, it was found that the father's age group X4 (≥ 46) impacts paternal involvement, when mediated by the total PARQ: the mediator effect was significant for this age group, when compared to X1 (≤ 35), since the value 0 is present in the confidence intervals produced by bootstrapping (B = .232, SE = .11, 95% CI].046, .497]).

Table 13

Simple mediation model results obtained through PROCESS

	B	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Model 1						
Outcome: Total PARQ						
Constant	30.91	2.86	10.80	.000	25,148	36,670
X2	-2.59	2.51	-1.03	.309	-7,653	2,478
X3	-.68	2.15	-.32	.754	-5,014	3,656
X4	-4.93	2.05	-2.41	.020	-9,054	-.812
E1	6.79	2.66	2.56	.014	1,444	12,144
E2	5.65	2.20	2.57	.014	1,217	10,082
E3	7.11	2.26	3.14	.003	2,555	11,659
A1	2.45	2.55	.96	.342	-2,687	7,592
A2	-5.81	2.44	-2.38	.021	-10,726	-.900
A3	.69	2.18	.31	.755	-3,707	5,078
Model 2						
Outcome: Total IFI						
Constant	7.01	.37	18.97	.000	6,262	7,751
X2	-.09	.17	-.54	.594	-.442	.256
X3	.04	.15	.26	.796	-.258	.334
X4	-.14	.15	-.93	.356	-.437	.160
Total PARQ	-.05	.01	-4.62	.000	-.067	-.027
E1	.08	.19	.44	.666	-.306	.475

E2	.11	.16	.70	.488	-.211	.436
E3	.08	.17	.46	.647	-.264	.421
A1	-.08	.18	-.44	.660	-.432	.276
A2	-.20	.18	-1.15	.257	-.558	.153
A3	-.04	.15	-.30	.768	-.344	.256

Model 3

Outcome: Total IFI

Constant	5.56	.23	23.66	.000	5,084	6,029
X2	.03	.21	.14	.891	-.387	.444
X3	.07	.18	.40	.694	-.286	.426
X4	.09	.17	.56	.582	-.245	.432
E1	-.23	.22	-1.08	.288	-.674	.205
E2	-.15	.18	-.84	.402	-.517	.211
E3	-.26	.19	-1.37	.176	-.629	.119
A1	-.19	.21	-.92	.362	-.615	.229
A2	.07	.20	.35	.727	-.333	.474
A3	-.08	.18	-.43	.672	-.437	.284

**Indirect effects of father's
age group on paternal
involvement via parental
acceptance-rejection**

X2	.121	.15			-.114	.455
X3	.032	.12			-.228	.268
X4	.232	.11			.046	.497

V - Discussion

Paternal Involvement and the role of fathers in their families and their children's lives have been areas of growing interest in Psychology. According to the literature, fathers were often evaluated indirectly, that is, through the mothers' perspective. Furthermore, paternal involvement used to be assessed in a non-holistic way, namely at a quantitative rather than a qualitative level, i.e., more often the time fathers spent with their children was analyzed, rather than what they did with them during that time.

To try to overcome this gap and "give a voice" to fathers, the main purpose of this empirical study was to assess the impact of sociodemographic and family variables on Paternal Involvement, considering the mediating role of Parental Acceptance-Rejection. The remaining goals of this investigation were related to the study of relationships between variables and comparisons between groups, regarding the concepts of Paternal Involvement and Parental Acceptance-Rejection.

It is now important to compare the results obtained through statistical analyses, with the scientific literature consulted within the scope of this study: the discussion of the results will allow us to understand if these were in line with other existing studies – those that were found and that are mentioned in the literature review – or if they will allow the elaboration of new hypotheses and comprehensive readings about the themes under study. It should be noted that the generalization of the conclusions of this investigation to the general population must be carried out with caution, due to the fact that this study's nature is exploratory.

As mentioned above, the exercise of fatherhood has changed and, in this context, the growing number of publications with an interest in the subject is a reflection of the greater visibility of the father's participation in his children's lives (Souza & Benetti, 2009). Thus, over the last few years, paternal involvement has been approached as a key source of the well-being of the family, in general, and of the positive development of the children (Diniz et al., 2021). In addition, the concept of parental acceptance-rejection was studied: acceptance and rejection together form the *warmth dimension* of parenting, which concerns the quality of the affectional bond between parents and their children, and the physical and verbal behaviors that parents use to express their feelings (Rohner et al., 2005). In most of the articles that were found, parental acceptance-rejection behaviors and paternal involvement influence on children's development was investigated. In the present study, we sought to understand which variables (sociodemographic and family) influence and have an impact on parental acceptance-rejection and paternal involvement, and also to find out if there is a relationship between both concepts. Considering what was possible to find, we realized that there is little scientific literature in this area.

Thus, the first goal was to investigate whether parental acceptance-rejection and its dimensions influence paternal involvement (in male individuals). The results indicated that the total result of the PARQ and the *warmth/affection* dimension negatively affect paternal involvement, i.e., more manifestations of rejection in general and at the level of affection lead to less involvement

on the part of the father. It is also important to mention the *indifference/neglect* dimension, which was significant at 10% ($p = .095$), so it could potentially affect paternal involvement. These results were expected since, according to Ruíz et al. (2019), the father's presence is related to how he behaves in this parental role (which in turn influences the children's development). Thus, paternal involvement should be considered as a multidimensional concept, incorporating qualitative factors such as affection, love, and accepting attitudes and behaviors (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2014).

Then, we sought to understand if there were differences in the perceptions of parental acceptance-rejection, considering the gender of the parent and the family structure. Regarding the impact of the *gender of the parent* on parental acceptance-rejection behaviors, previous studies have presented inconsistent findings. Some authors support the idea that mothers show more acceptance when compared to fathers (Armentrout & Burger, 1972; Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Gamble et al., 2007; Shek, 1998; Tacón & Caldera, 2001; Winsler et al., 2005), while others conclude otherwise (Chen et al., 2000; Russell & Russell, 1989). In the present investigation, the variable *gender of the parent* did not significantly influence the perceptions of parental acceptance-rejection, that is, there seems to be no differences between mothers and fathers with regard to their manifestations of acceptance and rejection, directed towards their children. Thus, one should try to understand which other variables might influence this concept. For example, some authors report that the best predictor of mental health disorders in children is not so much the gender of the parents, but the relationship between them and their children (Pinquart, 2016, 2017; Rodríguez et al., 2016). It should be noted that, in fact, the literature focuses mostly on the relationship between children's perceptions about their parents' acceptance-rejection, and the mental health or developmental problems that may arise in children. This matter, associated with the lack of literature focused on parents' perceptions of their own parental acceptance-rejection behaviors, may justify the fact that the gender of the parent does not affect parental acceptance-rejection expressions in this study.

Regarding the influence of family structure, it was found in the present study that individuals from single-parent families had a significantly higher score than the score obtained by individuals in intact nuclear families, concerning the total score of the PARQ and the *indifference/neglect* dimension. This means that parents (fathers and mothers) belonging to single-parent families present more expressions of rejection in general, and of indifference and neglect of their children in particular, when compared to parents of intact nuclear families. It is also important to pay attention to the significance value of the *hostility/aggression* dimension ($p = .053$): although this dimension is not significant at 5%, it is at the limit, so it is crucial to evaluate more carefully and more deepened if hostility and aggression behaviors, manifested by the parents, are different in the two types of family mentioned above. These results seem to corroborate the conclusions of Rohner (1986, as cited in Rohner et al., 2005): single fathers and mothers who find themselves socially isolated, without emotional or social support, and especially if they are younger and economically deprived, seem to be at greater risk of depriving their children of love and affection. Specifically in relation to fathers, in the study of Schwartz and Finley (2005), participants from

families whose parents were divorced reported less nurturing and affectionate paternity, compared to fathers from intact nuclear families, which is in line with previous investigations (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). In fact, it is important to understand why single-parent families have these weaknesses, as found in our study. According to Alarcão (2000), this family structure faces specific difficulties at three levels: (1) the conjugal subsystem is lost or not constituted, with reduced emotional support and feeling of individuality and belonging; (2) there is the difficulty or even impossibility of sharing tasks and resorting to the complementarity of roles in the educational task; and (3) the identification problem, i.e., the child of the same sex as the absent parent may have more difficulties in building their identity. Thus, these difficulties seem to complexify the exercise of parental functions and, consequently, enhance the manifestation of more behaviors and attitudes of rejection, negligence and, possibly, hostility, directed at the children. On the other hand, the results of the present investigation contrast with the conclusions of other studies: some authors suggest that the perceptions of mother-child relationships are similar between intact nuclear families and post-divorce single-parent families (Brenner & Hyde, 2006; Schwartz & Finley, 2009), and in the study of Halme et al. (2009), divorced fathers and also fathers from non-traditional families enjoyed more interaction with their children when compared to fathers in traditional families. It is crucial to emphasize, once again, that there were few, or even non-existent, investigations (found) that analyzed the perceptions of parents about their own parental acceptance-rejection behaviors – which was one of the main goals in the present study; instead, these studies evaluated the children's perceptions.

Finally, through a mediation model, we sought to test direct and indirect effects between sociodemographic and family variables and paternal involvement, through parental acceptance-rejection. It should be noted that no mediation studies were found with the same variables in the present investigation.

First, for the covariates that were included in the model – *educational level* and *child's age group* – the aforementioned mediating effect was not tested; nevertheless, it was possible to obtain some conclusions regarding the direct relationships between these variables, parental acceptance-rejection, and paternal involvement. The three *educational levels* – primary, elementary, or middle school; high school; and degree – were significantly different from their reference class – master's degree and Ph.D. – and had a significant and positive impact on parental acceptance-rejection, being good predictors of it. No studies were found that investigated the impact of the educational level on parental acceptance-rejection, so this conclusion seems to bring something new. Regarding the *child's age group*, only the age group from 5 to 8 years old has a significant and negative impact on parental acceptance-rejection, which indicates that in this age group, parents seem to be less rejecting, compared to the age group's reference class. Some authors report that, as children grow, they notice a decrease in parental affection, involvement and support (Rodríguez et al., 2009; Shek, 2000; Spera, 2005). This information was not obtained in the present study.

Regarding the direct effect of these covariates on paternal involvement, contrary to expectations, it was found that the variables *educational level* and *child's age group* have no impact on paternal involvement. These conclusions contrast with some studies: for example, Cabrera et al. (2011), Castillo et al. (2011) and McBride et al. (2005) found that more educated fathers are more involved with their children in indirect interactions. Regarding the age of the children, Lamb (1987) reports that fathers spend more time on caregiving tasks when their children are younger; however, Bailey (1994) found that paternal involvement in care increases with the children's age (between 1 and 5 years old).

Concerning the indirect effects, we found that parental acceptance-rejection only mediates the relationship between the *father's age group* ≥ 46 years old and paternal involvement, while in the other age groups (35-40 and 41-45) this mediating effect did not occur. No studies were found that met this objective, however, some of them sought to understand the impact of the father's age on parental acceptance-rejection and paternal involvement. Regarding the impact of the father's age on parental acceptance-rejection, according to the study of Finley (1998), it seems that adults who postpone parenthood until their 30s are perceived by their children as being more accepting and having less parental rejection attitudes, compared to younger parents. This information is supported by Garrison et al. (1997), who suggest that the postponement of parenthood entails a preponderance of benefits for parents and probably for children. Regarding the direct influence of the father's age on paternal involvement, some authors reported that a higher age seems to have a beneficial influence on the father's involvement (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013; Kwok et al., 2013). On the other hand, other investigations reported that younger parents would be more involved (Castillo et al., 2013; Perry et al., 2012), while older parents were less involved, so much in playing (Monteiro et al., 2017; Monteiro et al., 2010), as in indirect care (Monteiro et al., 2010) and in teaching/discipline (Monteiro et al., 2017). However, in the present investigation, the father's age was not a major factor in predicting paternal involvement. Even so, the age group of older fathers (≥ 46 years), even though not having a direct impact on paternal involvement, influences it positively and indirectly (mediating effect), through the variable parental acceptance-rejection (mediator).

Limitations, implications of this study and suggestions for future studies

The present study, although having interesting conclusions, has some limitations. First, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all surveys (regarding the current school year) were completed online, so there was no opportunity, for example, to distribute paper questionnaires in places that allowed

greater access to the population that was studied. In addition to this difficult access to participants, the fact that the questionnaire was filled out online meant that many of them did not complete the questionnaires or did not answer correctly, making its use in the study unfeasible. However, the fact that an online platform was used has also brought some advantages, namely the fact that filling out becomes more practical and that the questionnaires can reach various parts of the country, without the need for physical dislocation. Secondly, although the sample of fathers is significant, the fact that there were many variables under study in the linear regression for a few number of participants, created some limitations in the assumptions necessary for the use in this test; for that reason, the interpretation of the results must be done carefully. Thus, to overcome this weakness, a larger sample would be recommended. Another limitation concerns the fact that not enough fathers and mothers from adoptive families have been found, nor men from single-parent families. Thus, it was not possible to integrate adoptive families in the comparison between family structures when it comes to parental acceptance-rejection and, above all, differences in paternal involvement taking into account the three family structures (nuclear intact, single-parent and adoptive) were not studied, which was one of the main goals at an early stage of the research.

Regarding the implications of this study, it is essential to be aware of the importance of fathers in their children's lives, in marital relationships (when applicable) and in family life. Furthermore, it is important to understand how certain variables and life events have an impact not only on the involvement of fathers, but also on their expressions of acceptance or rejection of their children.

In the present study, the contributions that stand out are: (1) the impact of the family structure on parental acceptance-rejection, with single-parent families showing more rejection of their children; (2) greater involvement of the father, through parental acceptance-rejection, when he is older (≥ 46 years old); and (3) the fact that more rejection behaviors in general and neglect/indifference in particular have a negative impact on paternal involvement. Thus, the practical implications of this study are: (1) interventions or programs for single-parent families, taking into account some difficulties associated with this family structure; a variable that can be significant in this context is the way in which parental responsibilities are regulated; (2) investment in interventions with fathers (especially younger) and with families, in places like maternity hospitals or health centers, in order to enhance their involvement since their partner's pregnancy, emphasizing their importance in family life and in the lives of their children, and immediately promoting the establishment of bonds with them. Furthermore, (3) it is important, in these programs, to encourage the practice of positive parenting, so that the pillars of parent-child relationships are love and acceptance, which will impact the fathers' involvement and the development of their children. It should be noted that, in Portugal, this year, the General Health Administration (*Direção Geral da Saúde*) launched a project to promote more involved and caring fatherhood: the proposal contains a set of guidelines so that services focus on men, not only as companions for women, but as "subjects in reproductive health care" (Agência Lusa, 2021).

Therefore, in Portugal and in practice, there is already a greater concern with issues related to the role of the father, allowing for a “new look at men” (Agência Lusa, 2021).

Finally, in terms of future studies, it would be important to try to address the weaknesses of this study and the scarcity of scientific literature. In this way, other strategies could be adopted to recruit fathers from single-parent and from adoptive families, in order to be able to study the paternal involvement in these family structures. Furthermore, it is also important to investigate what influences the fathers’ involvement, in order to intervene in this regard. At the level of parental acceptance-rejection, given the literature we found, we realized that the relationship between the children’s perception of their parents’ acceptance and rejection behaviors and the children’s mental health and development was studied. Thus, it is crucial to investigate what helps parents to show greater acceptance of their children, i.e., which variables have an impact on the exercise of more affectionate and invested parenting and fatherhood. If it is possible to reach some conclusions about this, it is likely that, through interventions focused on these variables, parents are more accepting, consequently influencing their children’s development positively.

VI - Conclusion

The main purpose of the present investigation was to obtain a better understanding of the impact of sociodemographic and family variables on paternal involvement, taking into account parental acceptance-rejection as a mediator variable of this relation. In addition, we sought to understand whether the perceptions of parental acceptance-rejection influence paternal involvement and whether there are differences between fathers and mothers, and between intact nuclear families and single-parent families, concerning parental acceptance-rejection.

Overall, the results showed us that the fact that fathers reject their children more in general and are behaviorally and emotionally colder – that is, show less warmth/affection –, has a direct impact on paternal involvement: they are less involved in their children's lives, in general. Additionally, it was found that parental acceptance-rejection mediates the relationship between the father's age group and his involvement, for older fathers. It was also verified that the variable educational level and one of the child's age groups have a significant direct impact on parental acceptance-rejection. Regarding the comparisons between groups, if on the one hand it was concluded that there are no differences between mothers and fathers in the way they perceive their expressions of parental acceptance-rejection, on the other hand, it was found that fathers from single-parent families exhibit more rejection behaviors in general and indifference/neglect in particular, towards their children.

Given the results obtained, we consider that the goals of this investigation were fulfilled. Nevertheless, we must continue to investigate which sociodemographic and family variables, or even which life events and contexts, contribute to a more involved, nurturing and accepting parenting and fatherhood. With research in this area, we hope to achieve new comprehensive readings of what motivates parents to show more acceptance of their children, treating them with affection and taking an interest in them, and of what leads to greater involvement in all areas of their lives. Then again, the relationship between paternal involvement and acceptance behaviors of children, and their development, is well documented in the literature. Thus, it is considered that the present study brings some contributions to the understanding of these topics and constitutes a good starting point for future research and for better clinical practice.

At a time when the challenges imposed on families are increasing, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its underlying changes, it is urgent to study family relationships, parenting and fatherhood, looking for factors that can influence them. So, proceeding with studies in this area is fundamental and it is up to researchers and, in this context, clinical and mental health professionals, to understand why certain parents exercise parenting as they do, what can help them to be more involved, and how do they influence their children. To conclude, and although this was not a goal of this study, it remains a reflection: will the way we were treated by our parents influence our development and our identity and, above all, will it influence the way we exercise parenting? It is

increasingly essential that we intervene to promote a more positive parenting, based on acceptance, affection, and involvement, so that children grow up happy and well-adapted, and become equally well-adjusted adults, who take care of their children as they were cared for – with love and acceptance.

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Attachments
