



FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND ADJUSTMENT IN SOUTHERN EUROPE: A CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON BETWEEN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

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BACKGROUND

- ❑ **Emerging adulthood** is a new developmental stage recently identified in industrialized countries, which encompasses the years from 18 to 29 (Arnett, 2014). The development and characteristics of this life stage are different from both adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2007, 2010).
- ❑ It is a critical time which there is a progressive **deferral of transition into adult roles**, such as living independently, entering the labor market, getting married and becoming a parent (Aassve, Arpino & Billari, 2013; Arnett, 2006; Oinonen, 2010).



- ❑ The delay in the adoption of adult roles **has affected most families' daily life** (Lefkowitz, 2005).
- ❑ The transition to adulthood has been prolonged and young people are **delaying moving out of their parents' homes** until well over the age of twenty. This in turn requires the establishment of a new balance in parent-child relationships (Fosco, Caruthers, & Dishion, 2012; Parra, Oliva & Reina, 2013).
- ❑ Moreover, this readjustment is influenced by the characteristics of the context (García-Mendoza, Sánchez-Queija & Parra, in press).
- ❑ Regarding sex differences within family context, women tend to view their parents as being a more important source of emotional support than men (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). By contrast, men tend to be less involved in the relationships with their parents (Marinho & Mena, 2012).



family

BACKGROUND

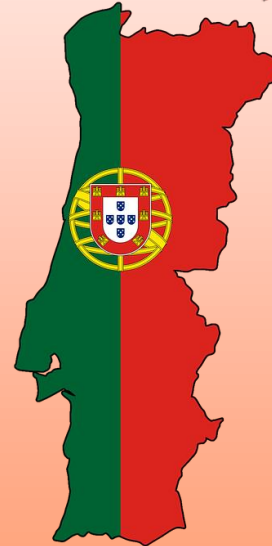
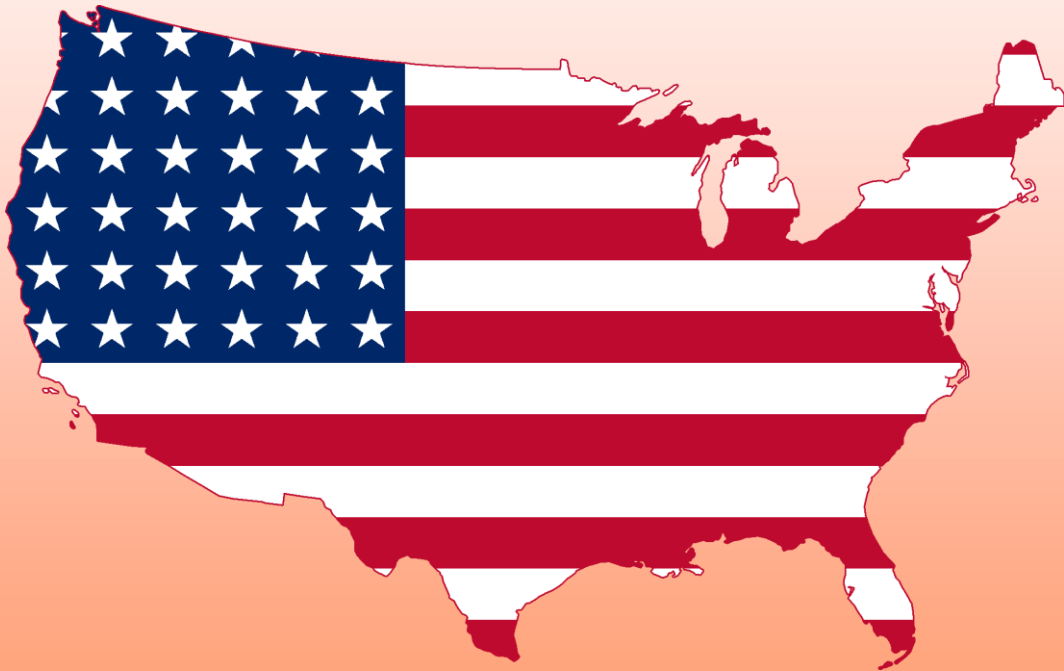
In Spain and Portugal:

- ❑ Emerging adults have a strong family system (Coimbra & Mendonça, 2013; García-Mendoza, Parra & Sánchez-Queija, 2017) which stimulates tight intergenerational family relationships (Oliveira, Mendonça, Coimbra & Fontaine, 2014) in both countries.
- ❑ There is a prolonged co-residence with parents in both countries. Specifically: almost eight out of every ten young people aged between 16 and 29 in Spain and between 15 and 29 in Portugal still live with their parents; in others words, 80.6% of the entire youth population in Spain (CJE, 2017) and 80.7% of the entire youth population in Portugal still live with their parents (Eurostat, 2016).
- ❑ Parents are the main source of economic support among emerging adults in both countries (Andrade, 2006; INJUVE, 2013).



BACKGROUND

- It is important to mention that, in Southern European countries such as Spain and Portugal, there is a lack of studies on family relationships during this stage. Most studies have been carried out in the United States.



AIMS



A cross-national study was carried out in Spain and Portugal with two aims:

1. To analyze the quality of family relationships during emerging adulthood in both countries. Special attention was paid to differences between women and men during the data analysis.
2. To study the link between family relationships and emerging adults' psychological well-being and distress.



METHOD (Participants)



PORTUGAL

- 492 university students from Portugal (Porto):
 - 279 women and 213 men
 - aged between 18 and 30 (*Mean: 20.29; SD: 2.13*)
 - participating in the Transição para a adultez e relações familiares em Portugal e ajustamento psicológico: investigação intercultural entre Espanha e Portugal research project.

This study was supported by an Erasmus + Internship grant and was approved by the relevant institutional ethics committee: “A Comissão de Ética (CE) da Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto”.





SPAIN







- 554 university students from Spain (Seville):
 - 282 women and 272 men
 - aged between 18 and 29 (*Mean: 20.20; SD: 2.10*)
 - participating in the Transition to Adulthood in Spain (TAE) research project.



This study was supported by a grant from the Spanish Ministry of the Economy and Competitiveness (EDU 2013-45687-R) and was approved by the Coordinating Committee for the Ethics of Biomedical Research in Andalusia.



METHOD (Scales)

1. **Socio-demographic variables:** Sex & Age

2. **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)** (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). “family subscale” ( $\alpha = .94$;  $\alpha = .90$). 4 items. Example item: I can talk about my problems with my family.

3. **Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS)**, College Student Version (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991; Robbins, 1994). 20 items divided into three subscales: parental involvement ( $\alpha = .74$;  $\alpha = .83$, e.g., My parent finds time to talk with me), parental warmth ( $\alpha = .85$;  $\alpha = .82$, e.g., My parent accepts me and likes me as I am) and parental autonomy support ( $\alpha = .84$;  $\alpha = .82$, e.g., My parent helps me to choose my own direction).

4. **Psychological control subscale of the Parenting Styles Scale** (Oliva, Parra, Sánchez-Queija, & López, 2007). 8 items. ( $\alpha = .87$;  $\alpha = .87$). Example item: My father/mother makes me feel guilty when I do not do what he/she wants.

5. **Behavioral control subscale** (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). 5 items. ( $\alpha = .79$;  $\alpha = .77$). Example item: My father/mother tries to control how I spend my money.

METHOD (Scales)

6. **Psychological Well-being Scales (PWBS)** (Ryff, Lee, Essex, & Schmutte, 1995). The PWBS comprises 6 subscales: self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth, which are grouped into a second-order factor: psychological well-being (🇵🇹 $\alpha = .89$; 🇪🇸 $\alpha = .87$). 29 items. Example item: When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.

7. **Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21)** (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The DASS-21 has 3 subscales: depression, anxiety and stress, which are grouped into a second-order factor: psychological distress (🇵🇹 $\alpha = .92$; 🇪🇸 $\alpha = .89$). 21 items. Example item: I felt sad and depressed.

RESULTS

In Spain and Portugal:

Results showed that emerging adults perceived high levels of:

- Family social support (Range 1-7)
- Parental involvement (Range 1-7)
- Parental autonomy support (Range 1-7)
- Parental warmth (Range 1-7)

Moreover, emerging adults perceived low levels of:

- Psychological control (Range 1-6)
- Behavioral control (Range 1-6)

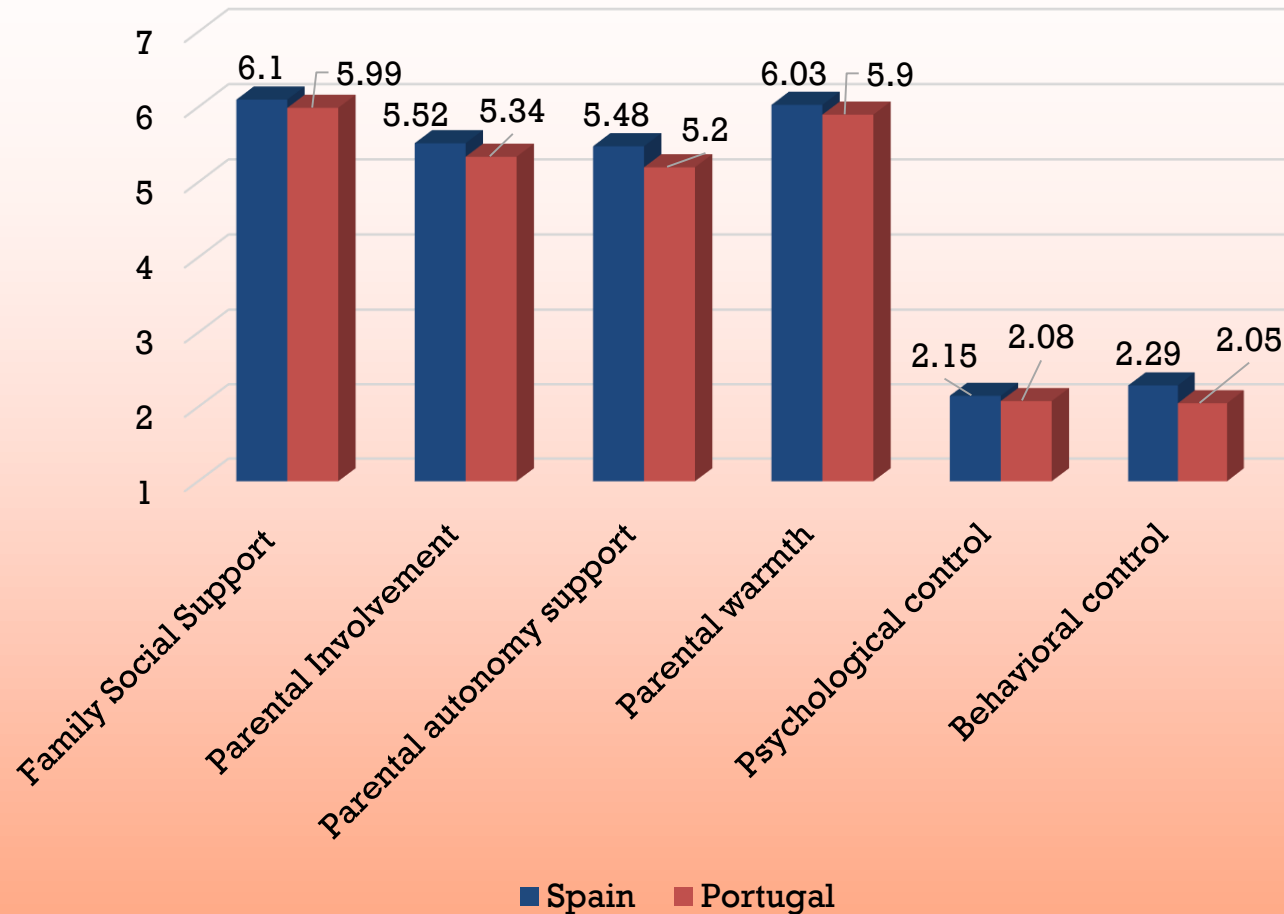


Figure 1. Means and range for family variables per Country



RESULTS

Table 1. Mean differences between Spain and Portugal in family variables

	Spain (n= 554)	Portugal (n= 492)	F	Cohen's d
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
Family social support	6.10 (1.26)	5.99 (1.30)	5.11	.05
Parental involvement	5.52 (1.17)	5.34 (1.05)	7.52	.15
Parental autonomy support	5.48 (1.05)	5.20 (1.08)	13.29***	.26
Parental warmth	6.03 (1.03)	5.90 (1.11)	4.93	.12
Psychological control	2.15 (1.09)	2.08 (1.01)	.42	.07
Behavioral control	2.29 (1.10)	2.05 (.99)	8.49***	.23

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Results showed that **there are many similarities** between the family relationships perceived by young people in Spain and Portugal.

However, results also showed that Spanish young people perceived more parent autonomy support and more behavioral control than their Portuguese counterparts (small effect size).

RESULTS

To examine possible differences between Spanish and Portuguese emerging adults we performed an analysis of variance (ANOVA) both for males and females.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of family variables in Women

	Spain (n= 554) M (SD)	Portugal (n= 492) M (SD)	F	Cohen's d
Family social support	6.21 (1.15)	6.03 (1.34)	2.54	.04
Parental involvement	5.63 (1.17)	5.50 (1.05)	2.62	.12
Parental autonomy support	5.52 (1.12)	5.29 (1.14)	6.85	.20
Parental warmth	6.11 (1.07)	6.02 (1.13)	2.24	.08
Psychological control	2.18 (1.17)	2.02 (1.06)	1.40	.14
Behavioral control	2.26 (1.15)	1.96 (.97)	8.08**	.28

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of family variables in Men

	Spain (n= 554) M (SD)	Portugal (n= 492) M (SD)	F	Cohen's d
Family social support	5.99 (1.35)	5.94 (1.25)	3.04	.04
Parental involvement	5.40 (1.16)	5.14 (1.03)	4.92	.24
Parental autonomy support	5.43 (.98)	5.09 (.99)	6.50***	.35
Parental warmth	5.94 (.99)	5.74 (1.05)	2.71	.20
Psychological control	2.11 (.99)	2.15 (.95)	.74	-.04
Behavioral control	2.33 (1.04)	2.17 (1.00)	1.45	.16

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$



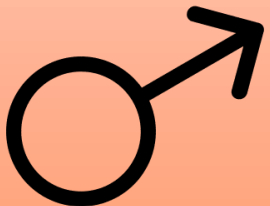
RESULTS

Again, the main result is **that there are many similarities** between the family relationships perceived by women in Spain and Portugal and by men in Spain and Portugal.

Only 2 significant differences were observed between the two countries:



Young Spanish women perceived more behavioral control by their parents than young Portuguese women.



Young Spanish men perceived more parental autonomy support from their parents than young Portuguese men.



Similarly, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine possible differences between women and men in Portugal.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of family variables in Portugal

	Total (N= 492)	Women (n= 279)	Men (n= 213)	F	Cohen's d
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)		
Family social support	5.99 (1.30)	6.03 (1.34)	5.94 (1.25)	.48	.07
Parental involvement	5.34 (1.05)	5.50 (1.05)	5.14 (1.03)	14.46***	.35
Parental autonomy support	5.20 (1.08)	5.29 (1.14)	5.09 (.99)	4.36*	.19
Parental warmth	5.90 (1.11)	6.02 (1.13)	5.74 (1.05)	7.56**	.26
Psychological control	2.08 (1.01)	2.02 (1.06)	2.15 (.95)	2.08	-.13
Behavioral control	2.05 (.99)	1.96 (.97)	2.17 (1.01)	5.47*	-.21

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$



Results showed that in Portugal:

- Women perceived more parental involvement, autonomy support and warmth than men.
- Men perceived more behavioral control than women.

Next, another analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine possible differences between women and men in Spain.

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of family variables in Spain



	Total (N= 554) M (SD)	Women (n= 282) M (SD)	Men (n= 272) M (SD)	F	Cohen's d
Family social support	6.10 (1.26)	6.21 (1.15)	5.99 (1.35)	4.51*	.18
Parental involvement	5.52 (1.17)	5.63 (1.17)	5.40 (1.16)	5.35*	.20
Parental autonomy support	5.48 (1.05)	5.52 (1.12)	5.43 (.98)	.89	.09
Parental warmth	6.03 (1.03)	6.11 (1.07)	5.94 (.99)	3.86*	.17
Psychological control	2.15 (1.08)	2.18 (1.17)	2.11 (.99)	.70	.06
Behavioral control	2.29 (1.10)	2.26 (1.15)	2.33 (1.04)	.60	.06

Results showed that in Spain:

- Women perceived more family social support, parental involvement and parental warmth than men.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

RESULTS

The most relevant finding was that **greater differences were observed in family relationships in accordance with sex than in accordance with country of origin.**





RESULTS



Finally, our second aim was to study the link between family relationships and emerging adults' psychological well-being and distress.





Thus, in the following slide we present the correlations between family variables, psychological well-being and psychological distress, giving the data for Portugal and Spain separately.

Table 6. Correlations between family variables, psychological distress and psychological well-being

	Psychological Distress		Psychological Well-being	
				
Family social support	-.30***	-.28***	.32***	.42***
Parental involvement	-.24***	-.17***	.28***	.33***
Parental autonomy support	-.27***	-.26***	.34***	.44***
Parental warmth	-.27***	-.24***	.36***	.46***
Psychological control	.29***	.27***	-.25***	-.30***
Behavioral control	.15***	.18***	-.19***	-.18***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 7. Correlations between family variables, psychological distress and psychological well-being

	Psychological Distress			Psychological Well-being		
			Z'			Z'
Family social support	-.30***	-.28***	-.35	.32***	.42***	-1.87*
Parental involvement	-.24***	-.17***	-1.18	.28***	.33***	-.88
Parental autonomy support	-.27***	-.26***	-.17	.34***	.44***	-1.90*
Parental warmth	-.27***	-.24***	-.52	.36***	.46***	-1.94*
Psychological control	.29***	.27***	.35	-.25***	-.30***	.87
Behavioral control	.15***	.18***	-.50	-.19***	-.18***	-.17

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

CONCLUSIONS

Results showed that:

- In general, **family relationships were very similar in Spain and Portugal**. Emerging adults perceived **positive family relationships** in both countries.
- Emerging adults from both countries who perceived better family relationships were also found to have a higher level of psychological well-being and a lower level of psychological distress. This finding coincides with those reported by other studies carried out in Southern Europe, in which higher levels of warmth, affection, closeness and support in relationships with parents were associated with higher levels of well-being (Inguglia et al., 2014).



CONCLUSIONS

- Although emerging adults perceived their relationships with their parents in a fairly similar way in both countries, some small differences between them were observed.
- Interesting sex differences were found in both countries.
- The most relevant finding was that **greater differences were observed in family relationships in accordance with sex than in accordance with country of origin.** This is not surprising given that the study compares two fairly similar cultures.



FINALLY & FUTURE RESEARCH...

➤ All in all, it seems that in both countries:

- Family is indeed a relevant source of support during emerging adulthood.
- Positive family relationships may be a protective factor for emerging adults' adjustment.

➤ Although this study offers an initial overview of family relationships during emerging adulthood in Southern European countries:

- It is essential to explore the cultural factors that frame this stage in more depth, in contexts different from that of the United States. In Southern European countries, the importance of studying family relationships mainly lies in the fact that the majority of young people spend these years under the family roof.
- It would be interesting to further explore the sex differences observed (moderations, mediations, etc.).



FINALLY...

Although emerging adulthood is a relatively recent period of life, it is a rapidly growing area of research (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005) that enables a more comprehensive understanding of family relationships during this stage.



“Families through the lens of diversity”



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THANK YOU!

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