WHAT PARENTS SAY?
A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTION ON PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE ABOUT FAMILY CONFLICT AND COMMUNICATION DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

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1. INTRODUCTION

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

EMERGING ADULTHOOD:
new stage of development situated between adolescence and adulthood
-18 to 29 years old-
in Western, postindustrial societies
(Arnett, 2000, 2014).

o By definition, emerging adults are no longer adolescents but have not yet completely reached adulthood because of the delay in the assumption of adult roles (e.g., being a parent or mother, financial or housing independence) (Arnett, 2007).

o This period of life is characterized by feeling "in-between", instability and possibilities (Arnett, 2014).

o This stage is defined by the socio-cultural characteristics of the context in which it takes place (Arnett & Padilla-Walker, 2015; Zhong & Arnett, 2014).

1. INTRODUCTION

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FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

CONFLICT:

negative interactions (e.g., disagreements or disputes) between parents and children

(Laursen & Collins, 2009).

- Previous research has found a low-medium level of family conflict reported by emerging adults (Kumar & Mattanah, 2018) and their parents (Fang et al., 2021).

- Moreover, during this stage, there is a decrease in conflictual parent-child relationships perceived by both, parents (Whiteman et al., 2011) and offspring (Parra et al., 2015), compared with adolescents.

- Nevertheless, some topics usually still provoke conflict such as family issues (Yao et al., 2020), making decisions and accepting responsibility (Riesch et al., 2003; Renk et al., 2007), household rules, peer issues or school issues (Renk et al., 2007).

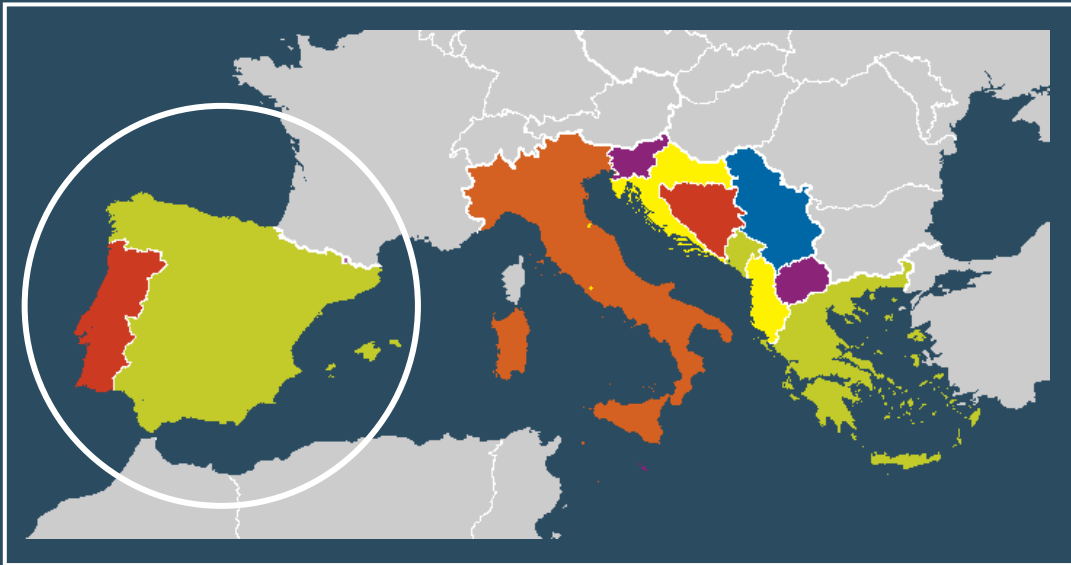# FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

COMMUNICATION:

verbal and nonverbal interaction between parents and children within a family system (Munz, 2015).

○ Some authors found a lower level of communication reported by emerging adult offspring in comparison with younger children (Parra et al., 2015).

○ However, other studies indicated an increase in general closeness, including communication, in parent-child relationships during this stage. Specifically, the conversational quality between parents and offspring emerging adults is marked by openness, comfort, affection (Morgan, 2008), and appreciation/respect for parents (Lefkowitz, 2005).

○ Empirical results suggest that communication between emerging adults and their parents tends to include themes such as romantic relationships (Morgan et al., 2010) or sexuality (Pariera & Brody, 2018).

1. INTRODUCTION

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SOUTH EUROPEAN FAMILY CONTEXT

- ○ Family conflict and communication patterns and themes differ in function of socio-cultural context:

- ▪ Most studies focused on these family processes during this life stage were implemented in the United States and Northern Europe.

- ▪ Southern European countries, such as Spain and Portugal, may present quite different patterns, considering some of its specific features such as close family ties and late offspring emancipation, generally around 30 years old, to marry or to live with a romantic partner (Alesina & Giuliano, 2013).

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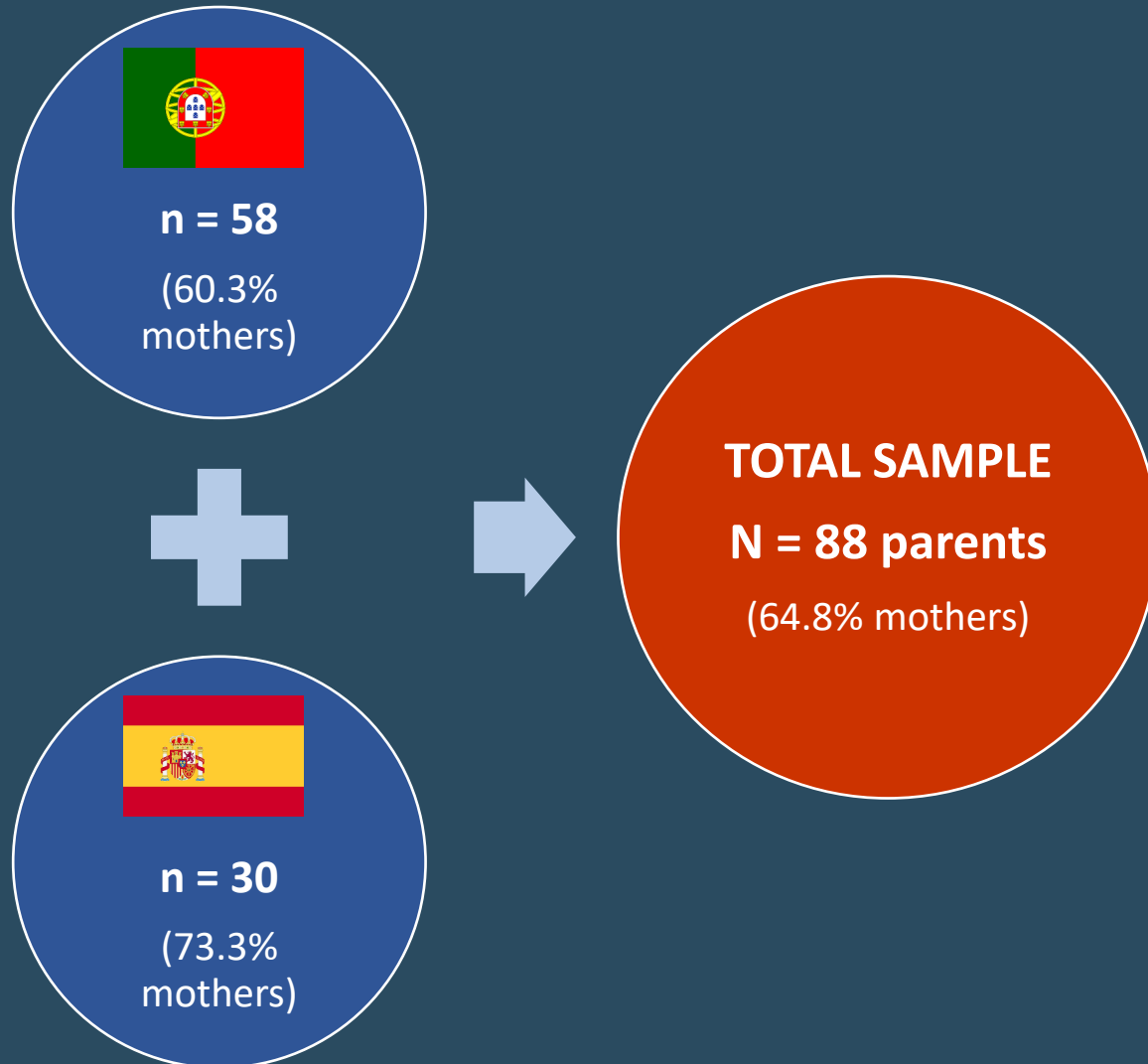Bienestar psicológico y digitalización: el gran reto de la Psicología hoy

➢ **AIMS:**

The main aim of this study was to qualitatively describe family conflict and communication during emerging adulthood, from the perspective of parents, mothers and fathers, from two southern European countries, Spain and Portugal.
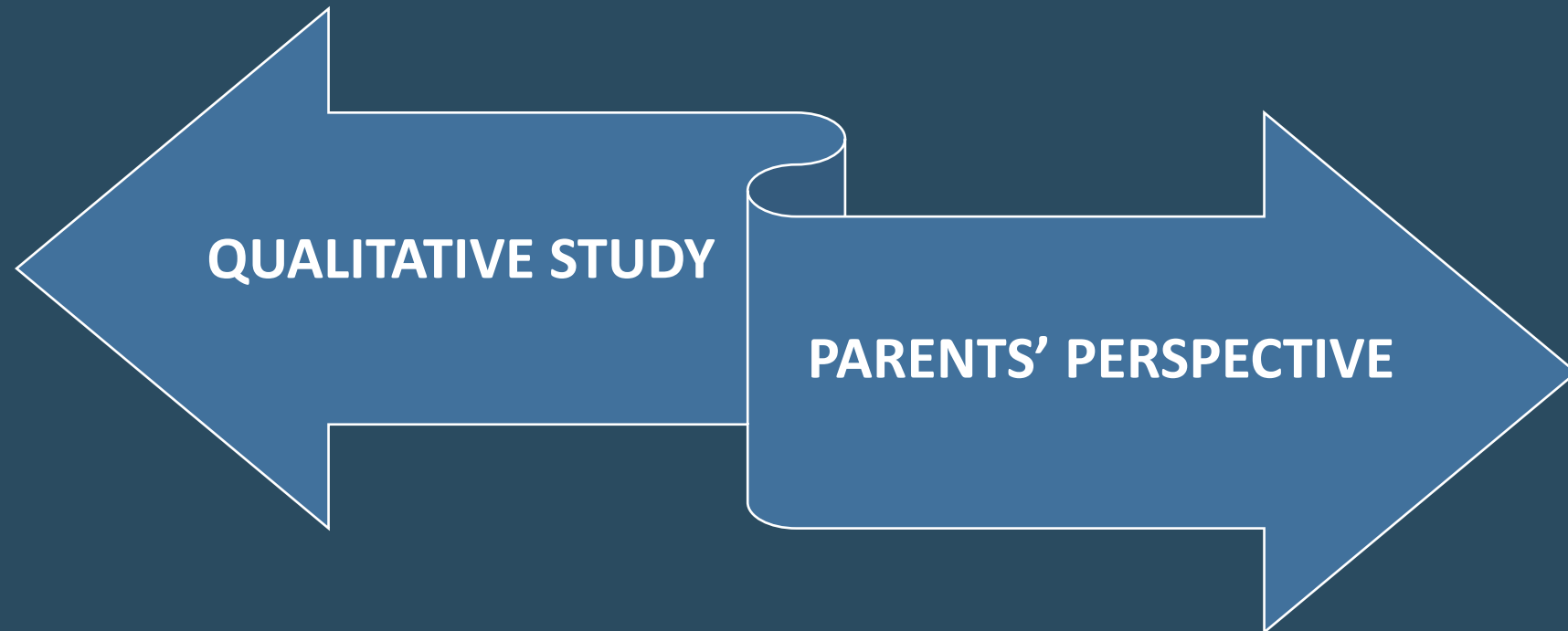
QUALITATIVE STUDY

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

2. METHOD

This study is part of a transcultural project between Spain and Portugal called *"Transição para a adultez e relações familiares em Portugal e ajustamento psicológico: Investigação intercultural entre Espanha e Portugal".*

The Project 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" (Ref.ª 2017/10-02c and Ref.ª 2017/10-02c).
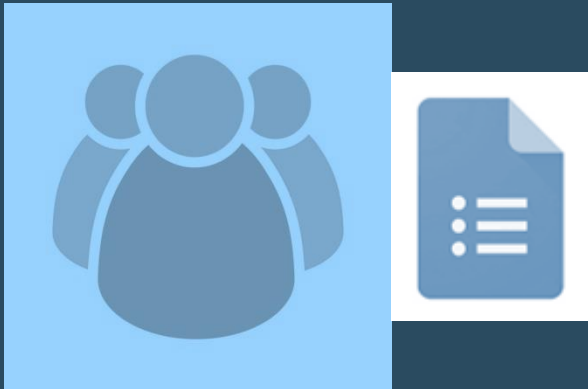
➢ **PARTICIPANTS:**

n = 58
(60.3% mothers)

+

n = 30
(73.3% mothers)

TOTAL SAMPLE
N = 88 parents
(64.8% mothers)

- The total sample was comprised of 88 parents (64.8% mothers) of emerging adults who studied at two universities from Southern Europe and who formed part of the transnational project between Spain and Portugal.

- Data was collected from April 2022 to November 2022.

> **PROCEDURE OF DATA COLLECTION AND INSTRUMENT :**

- All participants signed an informed consent form and anonymously and voluntarily answered online to a qualitative open-ended questions in Spanish or in Portuguese languages (~10min).

- The survey included a close-ended question about the parents' gender. Then, parents were asked about their relations with their offspring in terms of conflict and communication by four open-ended questions:

(1) Could you think about the last conflict situation with your son/daughter?, Why did it happen?
(1b) This type of parent-child conflict situations happen often?, Why?
(2) Could you think about the last good communication situation with your son/daughter?, What was the topic?
(2b) This type of situations of good parent-child communication happen often?, Why?.

2. METHOD

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➢ **CODING OF THEMES AND ANALYSES:**

Interviews were analyzed by the first and the third authors of the study.

This involved a line-by-line analysis of each interview in order to identify parents responses on the various topics of family conflict and communication. These topics were then grouped, categorized, and agreed between judges.

Finally, this categorization was presented to the whole research team who decided on the definitive system of coding.

3. RESULTS

Questions: (1b) This type of parent-child conflict situations happen often?, why?
(2b) This type of situations of good parent-child communication happen often?, why?.

Table 1. Numeric content analysis for family situations frequency

	Family conflict		Family communication	
	Portugal	Spain	Portugal	Spain
Parents' responses				
Yes	4	7	45	23
No	14	14	1	0
Sometimes	10	3	6	3
Less than before	5	3	-	-
N/A	1	0	-	-
Total	34	27	52	26

- Parents reported that, during emerging adulthood, conflict situations with their offspring do not happen anymore or occur less frequently compared with previous years. According to mothers and fathers, there is also a good communication with their offspring and they talk to each other frequently.
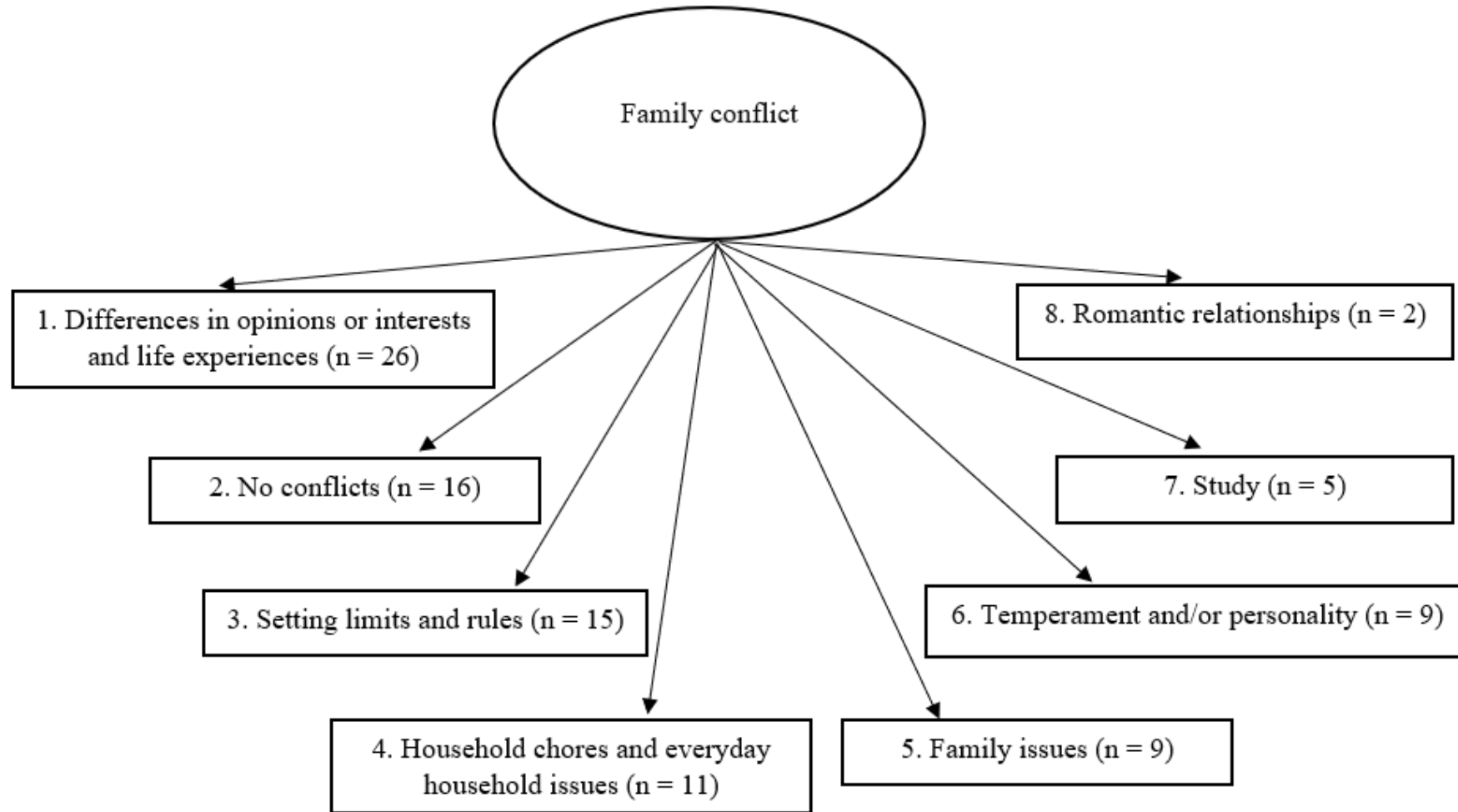
Figure 1. Thematic map for family conflict

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FAMILY CONFLICT (PARENTS' RESPONSES EXAMPLES)	
1. Differences in opinions or interests and life experiences	Porque temos opiniões e pontos de vista diferentes [Because we have different views and opinions] (Portuguese mother)
2. No conflicts	No los tengo [I don't have them] (Spanish mother)
3. Setting limits and rules	Se produjo por dormir fuera de casa y no avisar [It was caused because of sleeping away from home and not giving notice] (Spanish mother)
4. Household chores and everyday household issues	Conflitos triviais, sem grandes consequências, sobre arrumação do quarto, organização de tarefas, esse tipo de coisa [Trivial conflicts, without major consequences, about tidying up the room, organizing chores, this type of things] (Portuguese father)
5. Family issues	Disputas de espaço entre minha filha e minha mulher atual, que não é mãe da minha filha [Disputes between my daughter and my current wife, who is not my daughter's mother] (Portuguese father)
6. Temperament and/or personality	Por capricho de ella, por ser muy cerrada en si misma [On a whim, because she is too closed in on herself] (Spanish mother)
7. Study	No quería seguir estudiando [He/She didn't want to continue studying] (Spanish mother)
8. Romantic relationships	Relacionou-se com um colega que se apaixonou por ela e ela não sentia o mesmo por ele. A minha filha sentiu que eu o apoiava - erradamente - e entramos em conflito que se resolveu facilmente com diálogo [About a colleague who fell in love with her and she didn't feel the same. My daughter felt that I supported him - wrongly - and we got into a conflict that was easily resolved with dialogue] (Portuguese mother)
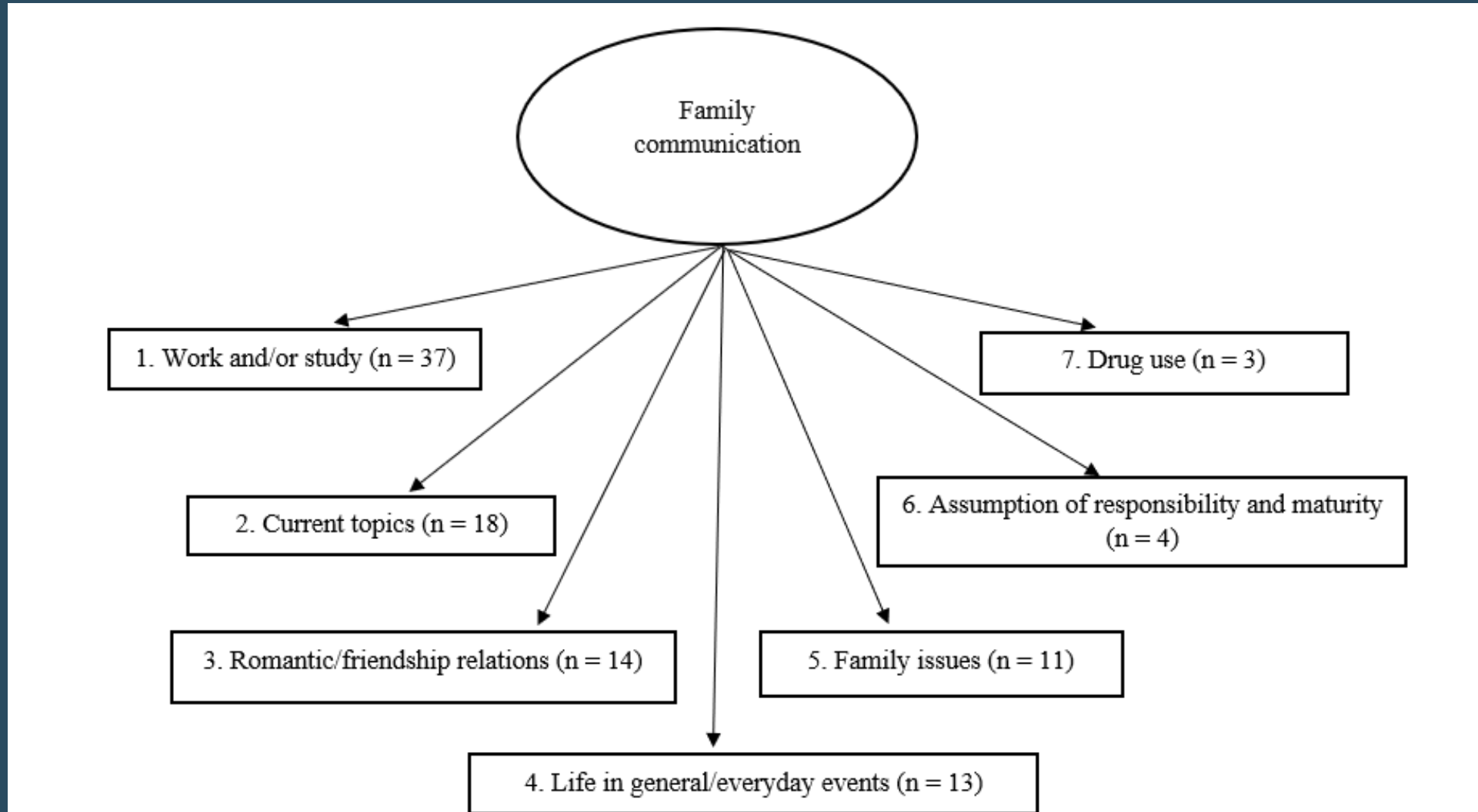
Figure 2. Thematic map for family communication

3. RESULTS

FAMILY COMMUNICATION (PARENTS' RESPONSES EXAMPLES)	
1. Work and/or study	Traçar os objetivos que pretende com o curso académico [Outline the goals he/she wants from the academic course] (Portuguese father)
2. Current topics	Sobre cine y literature [About cinema and literature] (Spanish father)
3. Romantic/friendship relations	La época en la que tuvo su primera relación amorosa [The time when she had her first love] (Spanish mother)
4. Life in general/everyday events	Assuntos do cotidiano. Amamos contar uns aos outros [Everyday matters. We love to tell each other] (Portuguese father)
5. Family issues	Hablamos de un miembro de la familia [We talked about a family member] (Spanish mother)
6. Assumption of responsibility and maturity	Autonomia. Sair da tutela dos pais [Autonomy. Leaving the parental custody] (Portuguese mother)
7. Drug use	Hablamos sobre las adicciones [We talked about addictions] (Spanish mother)

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- The findings indicate that **parent perceived a low rate of conflict** in the relationships with their offspring:

  1) Low frequency of conflict reported by parents
  2) The second more frequent response (family conflict themes) was that they do not have conflicts with their offspring

Furthermore…

- **The most frequent topics of conflict** with emerging adult offspring concerned *differences in opinions or interests and life experiences* and *setting limits and rules*. Moreover, other frequent topics are household chores and everyday household issues, family issues and temperament and/or personality.

Previous work

Already found medium or low levels of conflict in the parent-child relationships during emerging adulthood (e.g., Fang et al., 2021).

A possible explanation...

- During emerging adulthood, parent-child relationships become more symmetrical than before (Arnett, 2018). In this sense, parents do not see their children as adolescents although they do not still view them as fully grown-up people (Nelson et al., 2007). Therefore, during these years maybe they give more freedom to their children and interfere to a lesser degree in issues that they believe are no longer their business. As a consequence, the number of conflicts between them would be reduced.

- Parents also indicate that the topic labeled *differences in opinions or interests and life experiences* is the topic that stimulate most conflict with their children, precisely, the one regarding different generational perspectives in beliefs, attitudes, and values between parents and children.

Moreover

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

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The majority of Spanish and Portuguese emerging adults are residentially dependent on their parents (e.g, Eurostat, 2023)

- Taking this into account, it is not a surprise that some of the most frequent topics of discrepancies with their emerging adults children mentioned by parents are regarding issues of cohabitation that only happen because of the residence in the family home (e. g., *setting limits and rules* or *household chores and everyday household issues).*

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- The findings also revealed **a high rate of communication and a wide range of topics conversations perceived by parents** in the relationships with their emerging adult offspring.
- Specifically, parents revealed that *work and/or study* and *current topics* such as arts and lazer occupations and plans are the most frequent topics in the conversations with their children following by *romantic/friendship relations*, *life in general/everyday events*, *family issues* and less frequently *assumption of responsibility and maturity* and *drug use*.

The high level and quality communication that parent noted in their relationships with their offspring (high frequency conversations, diverse topics conversations) is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Morgan, 2008).

Moreover

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Family role in Spain and Portugal is characterized by strong family bonds and greater family closeness and family support comparing with other socio-cultural context (Parra et al., 2019).

In this context…

- It is unusual for parents to talk to their children about a wide variety of topics (e.g., work or studies, literature or film, what is going on in their daily lives, romantic and friendship relations) and even about other traditionally taboo issues (e. g., drug use).
- So, the fact that family relations find a new equilibrium and become more symmetrical during emerging adulthood is reflected not only in the low conflict rate between parents and children, but also in the high level and quality communication between them and their mothers and fathers, at least according to the latter. These results point that, certainly, it is seems that a new pattern of interaction appears and helps to forge a more equal relationship between two adults generations.

The present study is groundbreaking because it analyses **family relationships during emerging adulthood from the parents' perspective**. Research focused on parent's perspective has been globally understudied and even less in Southern Europe.

These findings offer a starting point for gaining insight about how parents understand the relationships with their children during this stage and helps to obtain a more complete picture of parent-child relationships during emerging adulthood in Spain and Portugal.

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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