edual editorial UNIVERSIDAD DE ALMERÍA

Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology ejrep

UNIVERSIDAD DE ALMERÍA

Ilustre Colegio Oficial de Psicología DE ANDALUCÍA ORIENTAL

Relationship of the family environment with social competence and behavioral problems in Early Childhood Education children

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Abstract

Introduction. Current family education has had to adapt to the different changes generated by the society of the 21st century. The main objective of this investigation is to determine the relationship between the family social environment and the involvement in joint family activities, with the social competence of children in the Early Childhood Education stage. Several investigations show that the scarce quality time dedicated by parents to their children, the poor involvement in their education, or the lack of knowledge about adequate parenting guidelines, could favor the early appearance of behavioral problems in children.

Method. A total of 560 parents and legal guardians of children from 3 to 6 years old from Early Childhood Education participated in the present study. They answered, through a virtual survey, to different aspects related to their personal and professional characteristics, to the functioning of their families and to their children's behavior. Correlational and single-factor variance analyses were used to evaluate the relationships between family characteristics and children's social competence.

Results. The results show that parenting styles characterized by dialogue, in which parents share time with their children to talk about school, their concerns, or participate jointly in leisure or eating activities, are related to a greater social competence in their children.

Discussion and conclusions. In line with previous investigations, an adequate family environment, with high cohesion, expressiveness, and time-sharing, is related to a greater social adjustment and lower levels of behavioral problems in childhood. This supports the importance of the family, as the first context of socialization, in the social and personal adjustment of its members.

Keywords: family; family environment; social competence; behavioral problems and grandparents.

Introduction

Anyone who observes society will discover that, in recent decades, it has experienced a series of changes in the social, personal, economic, educational and values spheres; changes in the progress of the 21st century generating the so-called globalization in several fields, especially in that of the family. This impact has been quite significant, finding modifications in its structure, and in the roles and functions that the family traditionally fulfilled. The family is the ultimate place where people learn about the world and social relations, establishing a system of personal values and an identity (Estévez, 2016). In this sense, the full child development is determined by the responsibility and influence that families exert on their children. Therefore, several psycho-sociological theories have highlighted the importance of the family in children's education. According to Pichardo (2000), each family, when guiding their expectations, they establish a system of values, assertions, instructions and rules that function as fundamental pieces, when developing their attitudes and actions, and which normalize the child's behavior when he/she adapts to the social environment that surrounds him/her. The correct education in the family means the parents' capacity to adequately carry out their care, defense, instruction, respect, empathy and attachment. In turn, as pointed out by different studies, as in that of Chang and Dodge (2003), the learning methods in childhood are affected by the family and by the people who surround children, and these stimulate their development and help them to attain habits that allow them to develop and interact in different contexts. In this line, an adequate family education ensures the correct child well-being, which is the basis of the mental balance of the future adults of the society, hence its important relationship with the social competence or the eventual behavioral problems that children might develop (Barudy and Dantagnan 2005).

The behavioral problems of children (impulsivity, anxiety, attention problems, aggressiveness, etc.) generate uneasiness within families (Cantero-García and Alonso-Tapia, 2017), altering their appropriate family environment. Children's behavioral problems can be understood as anti-social, disruptive, rebellious and problematic actions, which lead to a deterioration of daily life at home, at school, and that adults are not able to manage in the immediate environment (Yu, Ziviani, Baxter, and Haynes, 2012). Behavior becomes unsafe when it implies harm to oneself or to others and an inadequate relationship with the social environment (Cava, 2016).

Hence the great importance of developing and improving social competence in the early childhood, where family and early attachment figures are essential. Furthermore, the mutual influence between attachment and social risk situations is fundamental, being especially important that parents help their children to process their own and others' emotional states in an affective and cognitive manner (Marrone, 2014). In Early Childhood Education, the stage on which this study focuses, children learn new behaviors that are decisive for later periods. Therefore, the novel events of this stage encourage children to develop skills that they have not yet mastered and that they must put into practice when faced with the separation from their parents (Monjas, 2000).

Taking into account the influence of these previous aspects, derived from the well-being and quality in the family, we arrive to the central concept of this investigation: the family environment. According to the study carried out by Lila and Gracia (2004), the family environment acquires an essential perspective in the conduct of parents with their children in various aspects of daily life. The importance of an appropriate family environment has been the subject of study of numerous investigations that emphasize it as the effective or detrimental well-being state that arises from the interaction between its members, such as the limits, benefits, behaviors, rules, etc. (Alonso-Tapia, Simón and Asensio, 2013).

Besides, according to Parke and Buriel (2006), children's well-being is directly influenced by the relationships between their parents and by the family dynamics. The quality of the relationship between parents affects the social-emotional development of children, influencing their ability to self-manage emotions and their coping skills. Because of this, close-knit families that seek to give importance to activities related to culture, feelings and intellectual development help to create emotional behaviors in their children, thus making them more intelligent, forging in the family the most relevant context where emotions are developed. Recent investigations try to analyze the impact that this bond can have on the family life and on the emotional and social environment (Ford, Heinen and Langkamer, 2007; Gonzalo, 2016; Honeycutt, Sheldon, Pence, and Hatcher, 2016). Therefore, the interaction between parents and children is considered the basis upon which social development is built (Laible and Thompson, 2007). In this vein, according to Echeburúa (1993), the social stimulation provided by the parents harmonizes directly with the children's level of social functioning. Even the way in which parents interact verbally with their children about aspects of their daily lives, through guidelines and open-ended questions, helps children to practice their communi-

cation, promoting their social development (Vygotsky 1978, Gallagher 1993, Lee, Kinzie and Whittaker, 2012). However, when these communication interactions with the children do not take place and the parents face daily family difficulties, the behavior of the children is affected, and in turn the psychological well-being of the parents in the family itself (Luengo, 2014; Pérez, Menéndez and Hidalgo, 2014) generating ignorance, uncertainty, parental stress, etc.

As mentioned above, it is evident that the role played by parents is essential in human activities in all societies (Balabarca, 2018), and due to social changes of different kinds, there are many families that need help to establish the first socialization of their children. Consequently, parents' working hours may have a negative relation with the amount of time they spend with their children. Several studies have argued that parents who have more stressful jobs tend to spend more hours at work and are less involved in their children's education (Nock and Kingston, 1988). At the same time, in a family, leisure time is considered a privileged space to educate and socialize, as it also strengthens the bonds of affection and help to create a family lifestyle. In short, family leisure time is an opportunity to foster and strengthen the family relationships and a healthy leisure style in each of its members (Liédana, Jiménez, Gargallo, and Estévez, 2013), but it cannot be ignored that less time offered to the family leads to a series of shortcomings that affect the children's progress, requiring the intervention of other family members to carry out several roles (Jiménez and Roquero, 2016).

Nowadays, in addition to the family, other interaction figures such as older siblings, aunts and uncles, grandparents, caregivers, external institutions, teachers, etc., acquire an important value, deriving to them part of the functions that the parents used to perform by themselves, without forgetting that the role of these people is to take care of the children, affecting their nutritional, health, psychological and physical patterns, mainly in their early ages (Moreno, 2015). Several aspects of recent demographic changes highlight the likely importance of grandparents in the contemporary family life as a relevant feature of the family in modern times. "In this sense, grandparents play a fundamental role in transmitting the family legacy through stories that allow for a more solid construction of the child's family identity, while uncles and aunts tend to fulfill more instrumental functions, such as helping to deal with conflicts with parents or friends, or to overcome school difficulties" (Estévez, 2016, p.48). In this line, Cava and Musitu (2000) in their investigation stated that the importance of the grandparents as socializing axes that offer support to families is unquestionable. At the same

time, there is currently a great deal of support from external institutions for the education of children due to the multiplicity of changes faced by today's society.

Objectives and hypothesis

The objectives posed in this study for its subsequent analysis are the following: 1) to study the influence of the family environment on the social competence and behavioral problems of children in Early Childhood Education; 2) to investigate the effect of the time that families spend interacting with their children in different daily activities.

As initial hypothesis, it is expected that, with the existence of an appropriate family environment, children will improve their social and affective development in the Early Childhood Education stage. At the same time, that the quality time dedicated to children and the emerging role of grandparents, uncles, aunts, institutions, etc., will have an effect on the social competence and/or behavior of children, fulfilling the secondary hypothesis.

Method

Participants

In this investigation, a total of 560 parents and legal guardians of children from 3 to 6 years old (M_{age} = 3.14 years old, SD_{age} = 0.80) from Early Childhood Education stage, participated, of which 305 answered to the proposed survey completely and 255 only to part of the questionnaires. Therefore, in each of the instruments considered, only the questionnaires that were answered in their entirety were considered valid. For this reason, depending on the variables, the number of participants may vary.

The children came from different schools and public, private and subsidized educational centers located in different parts of Spain. The description of the participating parents/legal guardians is shown in Table 1, which is composed of the data gathered from a questionnaire with 28 items, created with the purpose of collecting different aspects related with the participants' personal, professional and family structure characteristics.

Table 1. *Characteristics of the participating sample of parents/legal guardians*

Characteristics		**N**	**%**
Age of participants (N_{valid} = 473)	Under 25 years old	5	1.1%
	Between 26-35 years old	99	20.9%
	Between 36-40 years old	202	42.7%
	Between 41-50 years old	160	33.8%
	Over 50 years old	7	1.5%
Relationship with the child (N_{valid} = 473)	Fathers	111	23.5%
	Mothers	360	76.1%
	Legal guardians	2	0.4%
Total number of children (N_{valid} = 472)	1 child	132	28%
	2 children	276	58.5%
	3 children	58	12.3%
	4 children	3	0.6%
	5 children	2	0.4%
	More than 5 children	1	0.2%
Children not only Early Childhood Education (N_{valid} = 488)	Between 0-3 years old	183	37.5%
	Between 3-6 years old	284	58.2%
	Between 6-10 years old	144	29.5%
	Over 10 years old	38	7.8%
Civil status of participants (N_{valid} = 456)	Unmarried	19	4.2%
	Separated	6	1.3%
	Divorced	5	1.1%
	Married	395	86.6%
	Widowed	1	0.2%
	Cohabiting as a couple	30	6.6%
Mother's education (N_{valid} = 472)	Without studies	1	0.2%
	Primary Education	10	2.1%
	Secondary Education/Baccalaureate	35	7.4%
	Vocational Training	70	14.8%
	University Undergraduate Degree (Diploma/Bachelor Degree)	267	56.6%
	University Postgraduate Degree (Master's and/or Doctorate)	85	18%
	Not applicable	4	0.8%
Father's studies (N_{valid} = 472)	Without studies	3	0.6%
	Primary Education	22	4.7%
	Secondary Education/Baccalaureate	66	14%
	Vocational Training	68	14.4%
	University Undergraduate Degree (Diploma/Bachelor Degree)	224	47.5%
	University Postgraduate Degree (Master's and/or Doctorate)	81	17.2%
	Not applicable	8	1.7%
Socioeconomic status (N_{valid} = 470)	Less than 1000 €/month	16	3.4%
	Between 1001 €-2000 €/month	123	26.2%
	Between 2001 €-3000 €/month	169	36%
	Between 3001 €-4000 €/month	111	23.6%
	More than 4001 €/month	51	10.9%
	Less than 1000 €/month	16	3.4%

Instruments

Family Environment Scale (FES): the Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos and Trickett, 2000), standardized for the Spanish population, was administered to parents or legal guardians. This scale is composed of 90 items, separated into 10 subscales that define the main dimensions of family social environment: *Relationships, Development and Stability*. When presented with a series of statements in relation to their family, participants had to answer *T* if the statement was *True* and *F* if they considered the statement as *False*. The specific subscales that provided relevant information to the study were chosen: the Relationship Dimension assesses the communication and the degree of conflict within the family: *Cohesion, Expressiveness and Conflict*; the Development Dimension assesses the relevance of personal development within the family that may or may not be fostered by living together: *Autonomy*; the Stability Dimension provides information on the structural and organizational level of the family and also on the control exercised by the different members among themselves: *Control*. According to the authors of the scale, the internal consistency of the different subscales is acceptable, with values ranging between .67 and .78 (Moos and Moos, 1986, Moos and Moos, 1990). For this study, the internal consistency indexes were between .62 and .67.

Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC), adapted to Spanish by González, et al. (2004). These scales use different types of information about the behavior and personality of children based on the information provided by the parents/legal guardians, in an adaptive and clinical manner according to their dimensions. In this investigation, the assessment has been carried out based on the BASC *in its version for Parents*, in order to evaluate the multiple dimensions in which parents/legal guardians are an essential source of information, considering the behavior of children aged 3 to 6 years old according to observation at home. The *Adaptability, Social Skills, Aggressiveness, Anxiety, Depression, Hyperactivity,* and *Attention Problems* scales were used in the present investigation. The response assessment is made taking into account the child's behavior at home during the last six months, answering on a scale between: *Never* (when the child has never shown the specified behavior or the adult has not observed it), *Sometimes, Frequently, Almost always* (when the child almost always shows the specified behavior or the adult has so observed it). The internal consistency indexes for the present study were considered acceptable, ranging from .62 to .87.

Procedure

First, we made the initial contact with the educational centers administrations involved, in order to explain the purpose of the study and its characteristics. Once the acceptance of the centers was obtained, the educational centers administrations sent an e-mail to the parents/legal guardians from their family databases, informing them through an attached link that redirected them to the web platform where the survey *LimeSurvey* was conducted, which is managed by the University of Granada. Before accessing the questionnaire, participants were asked for their informed consent to participate in the study, which they had to sign in order to start the questionnaire. The questionnaire was hosted on this platform so that it could be easily answered in different phases (with auto-saving); in case the parents and/or legal guardians needed to do so. The parents/legal guardians accessed the questionnaire if their children met the age characteristics requested (Early Childhood Education) and if they met the estimated response time established, which was also informed in the same e-mail. Then, 10 days after the first mailing, a reminder and a thank you for the collaboration were sent. The information obtained was completely anonymous and confidential, so we asked for the most sincere response possible. Once the deadline had expired and most of the questionnaires were received, the data were transmitted from the *LimeSurvey* virtual platform to the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) program in its version 25 for Windows for their analysis.

Data analysis

To carry out the analysis, we carried out descriptive studies to analyze the characteristics of the participant population, in each of the study variables (arithmetic mean and standard deviation). Then, taking into account the distribution analyzed by means of the Kolmogorov Smirnov test, we performed Pearson's correlation coefficient in order to explore the relationship between the family social environment variables considered and the scores obtained in social competence and behavioral problems. Finally, we performed various ANOVAs with the purpose of analyzing the differences in social competence and behavioral problems depending on: 1) the daily frequency spent talking about school (less than 15 minutes, between 15-30 minutes, more than 30 minutes); 2) the daily frequency spent talking about emotions (Never, Sometimes, Occasionally, Always); the daily time involved with the children in leisure and free time activities (less than 1 hour, between 1-2 hours, more than 2 hours); and the weekly frequency of the child's stay with grandparents, aunts, uncles, caregivers or external institutions (less than 1 time, between 1-2 times, more than 2 times). For the *post hoc* multiple

comparisons, based on homogeneity of variances (Levene's test), we used the Bonferroni or Tamhane tests. Finally, the effect size was calculated using the partial eta squared test.

Results

First, we analyzed the descriptive statistics of the variables of the study, the means and standard deviations of family social environment variables and the social competence and behavioral problems variables, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Means and standard deviations of family environment, behavioral problems and social competence variables*

FES AND BASC_P	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Family environment			
COH	373	8.12	1.26
EXPRE	374	6.38	1.26
CONFL	373	2.63	1.16
AUTO	374	4.58	1.29
CONTR	374	4.31	1.40
Social competence			
ADAP	309	24.15	4.17
SK	308	30.41	6.39
Behavioral problems			
AGGR	309	6.46	3.68
ANX	283	6.69	2.81
DEPRE	309	8.31	3.92
HYPERAC	309	17.81	6.69
ATT.PROB	309	6.75	3.18

Note: FES (Family Environment Scale) = Assessment of the family social environment for parents. Relationship Dimension assessment (COH = Cohesion, EXPRE = Expressiveness, CONFL= Conflict), Development Dimension (AUTO = Autonomy) and Stability Dimension (CONTR = Control). BASC_P (Behavior Assessment System for Children) = Children and teenagers' behavior assessment system for parents. Childhood Stage. Assessment of Adaptive Scales (ADAP = Adaptability and SK = Social Skills) and Non-Adaptive Scales (AGGR = Aggressiveness, ANX = Anxiety, DEPRE = Depression, HYPERAC = Hyperactivity and ATT.PROB = Attention Problems).

Then, to determine the relationship between the family social environment variables and the variables of social competence and behavioral problems of the children, we performed a Pearson correlation, of which the results are shown in Table 3. In it, a significant and positive correlation can be observed between the family environment variables (cohesion, expressiveness) and the social competence variables examined (adaptability, social skills). On the contrary, the correlation is significant and negative in attention problems, hyperactivity, depression and aggressiveness with family cohesion; and in attention problems, hyperactivity, anxiety and aggressiveness, with family expressiveness. Finally, no significant correlations

were observed between the autonomy and control variables belonging to family environment with any of the social competence and behavioral problems variables considered.

Table 3. *Pearson's correlation coefficient between family social environment variables and social competence and behavioral problems variables*

FES AND BASC_P	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
COH	1											
EXPRE	.34**	1										
CONFL	-.38**	-.11*	1									
AUTO	.03	.12*	-.07	1								
CONTR	.10	-.11*	.09	-.17**	1							
ADAP	.21**	.17**	-.25**	.03	-.02	1						
SK	.27**	.13*	-.25**	.05	.03	.69**	1					
AGGR	-.31**	-.18**	.39**	.03	.02	-.35**	-.24**	1				
ANX	-.11	-.12*	.16**	.02	.09	-.14*	.03	.50**	1			
DEPRE	-.24**	-.10	.29**	.08	-.03	-.31**	.14*	.63**	.53**	1		
HYPERAC	-.22**	-.12*	.32**	-.02	-.02	-.22**	-.12*	.62**	.47**	.46**	1	
ATT.PROB	-.29**	-.14*	.26**	-.01	-.03	-.38**	-.33**	.50**	.38**	.48**	.58**	1

Note: FES (Family Environment Scale) = Assessment of the family social environment for parents. Relationship Dimension assessment (1 COH = Cohesion, 2 EXPRE = Expressiveness, 3 CONFL = Conflict), Development Dimension (4 AUTO = Autonomy) and Stability Dimension (5 CONTR = Control). BASC_P (Behavior Assessment System for Children) = Children and teenagers' behavior assessment system for parents. Childhood Stage. Assessment of Adaptive Scales (6 ADAP = Adaptability and 7 SK = Social Skills) and Non-Adaptive Scales (8 AGGR = Aggressiveness, 9 ANX = Anxiety, 10 DEPRE = Depression, 11 HYPERAC = Hyperactivity and 12 ATT.PROB = Attention Problems. (CONTR = Control). *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine the relationship between the variables of social competence and behavioral problems of the children in Early Childhood Education and the time spent with their families. Table 4 shows the data according to the minutes per day that families spend at home talking about school, divided into three groups (less than 15 minutes, between 15 and 30 minutes and more than 30 minutes). It can be seen that there are significant differences in the two social competence variables considered and in the attention problems variable. When multiple comparisons were made for the variables that were significant, differences were observed between those families who talked at home about school for less than 15 minutes and those who talked for more than 30 minutes ($p = .001$). Likewise, there are differences between more than 30 minutes and between 15 and 30 minutes ($p = .006$). However, no differences were observed between the levels of less than 15 minutes and between 15 and 30 minutes ($p = .162$). On the other hand, in the comparisons

made between the three levels in the social skills variable, significant differences were observed between all the levels considered: between less than 15 minutes daily and between 15 and 30 minutes daily (p = .001), between less than 15 minutes daily and more than 30 minutes daily (p < .001) and, in turn, between 15 and 30 minutes daily and more than 30 minutes daily (p = .015). Finally, significant differences were observed in the attention problems variable, between families who dedicate less than 15 minutes per day and more than 30 minutes per day to their children (p = .041). However, no differences were observed between less than 15 minutes and between 15 and 30 minutes daily (p = 1.00) or between more than 30 minutes daily and between 15 and 30 minutes daily (p = .131). To sum up, multiple comparisons show that families who spend more time talking to their children about school have a higher mean in adaptability and social skills, while families who spend less time talking to their children have a higher mean in behavioral problems. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the effect sizes of all the variables are very small.

Table 4. *ANOVA based on the minutes per day dedicated to talk about school within the family*

	Daily frequency	N	*M*	*SD*	df	F	p	Eta^2
ADAPT	<15 min	75	2.09	0.40				
	15-30 min	174	2.19	0.37	306	9.17	.000	.057
	>30 min	60	2.36	0.33				
SK	<15 min	74	1.95	0.54				
	15-30 min	174	2.20	0.41	305	15.86	.000	.094
	>30 min	60	2.36	0.36				
AGGR	<15 min	75	0.56	0.31				
	15-30 min	174	0.47	0.26	306	2.60	.076	.017
	>30 min	60	0.50	0.31				
ANX	<15 min	70	0.74	0.38				
	15-30 min	156	0.73	0.29	280	0.85	.430	.006
	>30 min	57	0.79	0.28				
DEPRE	<15 min	75	0.66	0.32				
	15-30 min	174	0.61	0.28	306	2.14	.120	.014
	>30 min	60	0.70	0.33				
HYPERAC	<15 min	75	1.12	0.47				
	15-30 min	174	1.11	0.38	306	0.04	.958	.001
	>30 min	60	1.12	0.48				
ATT.PROB	<15 min	75	0.91	0.42				
	15-30 min	174	0.85	0.38	306	3.24	.040	.021
	>30 min	60	0.74	0.40				

Note: BASC_P (Behavior Assessment System for Children) = Children and teenagers' behavior assessment system for parents. Childhood Stage. Assessment of Adaptive Scales (ADAP = Adaptability and SK = Social Skills) and Non-Adaptive Scales (AGGR = Aggressiveness, ANX = Anxiety, DEPRE = Depression, HYPERAC = Hyperactivity and ATT.PROB = Attention Problems).

Table 5 shows the ANOVA data on social competence and behavioral problems in terms of the daily time spent by families talking about the emotions felt by their children, differentiated in three levels (never/sometimes; occasionally; always). Significant differences were observed in the two social competence variables considered, with no significant differences in any of the behavioral problems variables. When multiple comparisons were made in adaptability, significant differences were observed between those families that talk about emotions with their children between never/sometimes and always (p = .001). Likewise, there are differences between occasionally and always (p = .028). However, these differences are not observed between the levels never/sometimes and occasionally (p = .126). On the other hand, in the comparisons made between the three levels in the social skills variable, significant differences were observed between never/sometimes and occasionally (p = .009), never/sometimes and always (p = .001) and occasionally and always (p = .004). These comparisons reflect that families who do not spend time to talk with their children about emotions, and those who always or occasionally do so, have a higher mean in social competence in general, while the behavioral problems of the children are not affected.

Table 5. *ANOVA based on the daily time spent by families to talk about emotions with their children*

	Daily frequency	N	*M*	*SD*	df	F	p	Eta^2
ADAPT	Never/Sometimes	38	1.99	0.45				
	Occasionally	87	2.14	0.36	306	9.99	.000	.06
	Always	184	2.20	0.35				
SK	Never/Sometimes	38	1.84	0.58				
	Occasionally	86	2.09	0.44	305	17.80	.000	.11
	Always	184	2.28	0.39				
AGGR	Never/Sometimes	38	0.52	0.31				
	Occasionally	87	0.53	0.29	306	1.04	.356	.01
	Always	184	0.48	0.28				
ANX	Never/Sometimes	37	0.69	0.27				
	Occasionally	80	0.71	0.29	280	1.74	.178	.01
	Always	166	0.77	0.33				
DEPRE	Never/Sometimes	38	0.67	0.27				
	Occasionally	87	0.66	0.29	306	0.50	.607	.01
	Always	184	0.63	0.31				
HYPERAC	Never/Sometimes	38	1.08	0.46				
	Occasionally	87	1.14	0.38	306	0.29	.752	.01
	Always	184	1.11	0.43				
ATT.PROB	Never/Sometimes	38	0.96	0.44				
	Occasionally	87	0.88	0.39	306	2.88	.058	.02
	Always	184	0.80	0.39				

Note: BASC_P (Behavior Assessment System for Children) = Children and teenagers' behavior assessment system for parents. Childhood Stage. Assessment of Adaptive Scales (ADAP = Adaptability and SK = Social Skills) and Non-Adaptive Scales (AGGR = Aggressiveness, ANX = Anxiety, DEPRE = Depression, HYPERAC = Hyperactivity and ATT.PROB = Attention Problems).

Table 6 shows the ANOVA data on social competence and behavioral problems according to the time per day that the family spends with their child in leisure and free time activities: playing, going to the park, going for a walk, etc., differentiated into three levels (less than 1 hour per day, between 1 and 2 hours, and more than 2 hours per day). The results show significant differences in the two social competence variables and in the depression variable. When multiple comparisons were made in adaptability, significant differences were observed between the frequency of time spent daily by the families in leisure and free time activities with their children, less than 1 h/day and more than 2 h/day (p = .001). However, no differences were observed between less than 1 h/day and between 1 h/day and 2 h/day (p = .070) and neither between more than 2 h/day and between 1 h/day and 2 h/day (p = .147). On the other hand, with regard to the social skills variable, significant differences were observed between less than 1 h/day and between 1 h/day and 2 h/day (p = .024).

Likewise, there are differences between less than 1 h/day and more than 2 h/day (p = .001). On the contrary, no differences were observed between the levels of more than 2 h/day and between 1 h/day and 2 h/day (p = .080). Finally, in the multiple comparisons of the depression variable, there are significant differences between 1 h/day and 2 h/day and more than 2 h/day (p = .029). However, there are no differences between less than 1 h/day and 1 h/day and 2 h/day (p = 1.00) and also between less than 1 h/day and more than 2 h/day (p = .133). In summary, the results show that families who spend more or less time daily doing leisure and free time activities with their children, taking into account the extreme frequencies proposed, have a higher mean in social competence in general. On the other hand, the behavioral problems of the children are not affected, except the depression, with lower scores in these two groups. The effect sizes are between η^2 = .05 and η^2 = .03 for the variables that were found to be significant.

Table 6. *ANOVA based on the daily time spent by families with their children in leisure and free time activities*

	Daily frequency	N	*M*	*SD*	df	F	p	Eta^2
ADAPT	Less than 1 h	36	2.02	0.39				
	Between 1-2 h	141	2.18	0.38	306	6.61	.002	.04
	More than 2 h	132	2.27	0.36				
SK	Less than 1 h	36	1.92	0.51				
	Between 1-2 h	140	2.15	0.43	305	8.78	.000	.05
	More than 2 h	132	2.27	0.44				
AGGR	Less than 1 h	36	0.57	0.31				
	Between 1-2 h	141	0.52	0.29	306	2.88	.058	.02
	More than 2 h	132	0.46	0.27				
ANX	Less than 1 h	34	0.76	0.32				
	Between 1-2 h	130	0.77	0.34	280	1.37	.255	.01
	More than 2 h	119	0.71	0.28				
DEPRE	Less than 1 h	36	0.70	0.30				
	Between 1-2 h	141	0.68	0.30	306	4.14	.017	.03
	More than 2 h	132	0.58	0.30				
HYPERAC	Less than 1 h	36	1.19	0.41				
	Between 1-2 h	141	1.13	0.41	306	1.27	.282	.01
	More than 2 h	132	1.07	0.43				
ATT.PROB	Less than 1 h	36	0.92	0.40				
	Between 1-2 h	141	0.88	0.39	306	2.74	.066	.02
	More than 2 h	132	0.79	0.39				

Note: BASC_P (Behavior Assessment System for Children) = Children and teenagers' behavior assessment system for parents. Childhood Stage. Assessment of Adaptive Scales (ADAP = Adaptability and SK = Social Skills) and Non-Adaptive Scales (AGGR = Aggressiveness, ANX = Anxiety, DEPRE = Depression, HYPERAC = Hyperactivity and ATT.PROB = Attention Problems).

Finally, social competence and behavioral problems were analyzed with the weekly frequency that children spend with their grandparents, aunts, uncles and/or other institutions. Table 7 presents the results of the ANOVA. Frequency has been divided into three levels: less than 1 time per week; between 1 and 2 times per week; and more than 2 times per week. The results show the existence of significant differences between the three levels of frequency in depression, with an effect size of $\eta^2 = .04$. Multiple comparisons showed significant differences between less than 1 time/week and 1-2 times/week ($p = .004$). However, there are no differences between less than 1 time/week and more than 2 times/week ($p = 1.00$), nor between 1-2 times/week and more than 2 times/week ($p = .062$). Children who spend less than one or between one and two times per week with their grandparents, relatives or other institutions have a higher mean in depression, with differences in favor of the variable analyzed.

Table 7. *ANOVA based on the weekly frequency of children stays with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, caregivers, external institutions, etc.*

	Weekly frequency	N	*M*	*SD*	df	F	p	Eta^2
ADAPT	Less than 1 time	143	2.21	0.37				
	1-2 times	83	2.18	0.40	292	0.75	.475	.01
	More than 2 times	69	2.15	0.39				
SK	Less than 1 time	142	2.19	0.46				
	1-2 times	83	2.19	0.45	291	0.89	.410	.01
	More than 2 times	69	2.10	0.47				
AGGR	Less than 1 time	143	0.49	0.27				
	1-2 times	83	0.54	0.32	292	1.03	.358	.01
	More than 2 times	69	0.48	0.25				
ANX	Less than 1 time	131	0.80	0.29				
	1-2 times	74	0.69	0.34	266	3.03	.050	.02
	More than 2 times	64	0.73	0.32				
DEPRE	Less than 1 time	143	0.60	0.28				
	1-2 times	83	0.74	0.33	292	5.59	.004	.04
	More than 2 times	69	0.62	0.28				
HYPERAC	Less than 1 time	143	1.09	0.43				
	1-2 times	83	1.18	0.41	292	1.14	.322	.01
	More than 2 times	69	1.12	0.39				
ATT.PROB	Less than 1 time	143	0.83	0.36				
	1-2 times	83	0.88	0.43	292	0.62	.541	.01
	More than 2 times	69	0.88	0.42				

Note: BASC_P (Behavior Assessment System for Children) = Children and teenagers' behavior assessment system for parents. Childhood Stage. Assessment of Adaptive Scales (ADAP = Adaptability and SK = Social Skills) and Non-Adaptive Scales (AGGR = Aggressiveness, ANX = Anxiety, DEPRE = Depression, HYPERAC = Hyperactivity and ATT.PROB = Attention Problems).

Discussion and conclusions

This investigation was based on the idea that the family fosters the integral development of their children, which is necessary to establish a solid foundation for the creation of people who can adapt adequately to life (Bartholomeu, Montiel, Fiamenghi, and Machado, 2016). In relation to the above, Suárez and Vélez (2018, p.176) argue: "in the same way it fulfills functions like their preparation for social roles, impulse control, values, development of sources of meaning such as, for example, the selection of personal development goals, this socialization is what allows children to become proactive members of society".

Taking into account the results obtained in the study, the initial hypothesis on the influence that the family environment exerts on the social competence and behavioral problems of children in Early Childhood Education is confirmed. As established in the scientific literature, in recent decades the family itself and the family social environment have been extensively studied due to their effect on the behavior and development of children (García-Núñez,

2005; Tur-Porcar, Mestre, Samper, and Malonda, 2012). The results show that the children of the participating families obtain higher scores in social skills when there is a greater cohesion and expressiveness. In addition, the children who obtain higher scores in social skills are those from families with lower levels of family conflict. The results of the present study are in line with those of García-Núñez (2005), who found a correlation between social skills and family environment. At the same time, the same author argues that, a good family environment facilitates the interrelations between members, fulfilling the functions of communication, cohesion, etc. In relation to the behavioral problems analyzed in the investigation, the scores of the participants' children are lower when the scores obtained in family conflicts are also lower, coinciding with several studies referring to the interaction of these variables (Cumming and Davies, 1999; Neighbors, Forenhand and Bau, 1997). On the other hand, according to the data, the autonomy and control exercised by parents in the family is not related to the social competence or the behavioral problems of children. In contrast to this data, the literature on parental styles supports the importance of control in order to prevent behavioral problems in children and teenagers (Steinberg and Silk, 2002). Although, there are many authors who question this importance, but perhaps the data obtained is due to the fact that this investigation was carried out on children in the Early Childhood Education stage.

In addition, and in line with the expectations, the second hypothesis on the effect of the time spent by families interacting with their children in different daily activities and its relationship with their social competence and behavioral problems was also confirmed. The results of the study show that children from families who spend more time with their children, talking about school, obtain higher scores in the ability to adapt to social situations and greater skills to establish relationships with others, while obtaining lower scores in attention problems than those from families who spend less time with them. However, the effect sizes of the differences found between the different levels were very small. Despite the small size of the effect, it is worth mentioning that differences were found between the most extreme levels of time spent, but in many cases, they were not found between the intermediate levels proposed. In relation to this result, it confirms what some studies report: parents who are more concerned about their children's academic development, spend more time with them, especially carrying out activities related to their own achievements, are more involved because they are more aware of the needs of child development through positive parental involvement (Bailey, 1993, Blair, Wenk and Hardesty, 1994 and Marsiglio, 1991) and show a higher level of commitment. However, although there is evidence linking the way parents communicate verbally

with their children in relation to their cognitive skills and school performance, there are few studies on this subject (Mermelshtine, 2017).

On the other hand, it was found that children from families who spend more time with them, talking about their emotions and feelings, have higher scores in social competence than those who spend less time with them, although the effect sizes between the groups were very small. In this vein, parents can intervene directly or indirectly in the development of the emotional competencies of their children, establishing a relevant component in this process (Márquez and Gaeta, 2017), confirming the need for adequate emotional education and paying special attention to the first years of the child's life in the family context, helping him/her to achieve emotional regulation and promoting the development of responses that are better suited to the surrounding environment. It should be noted that there is no relationship with behavioral problems, so it can be drawn that children from families that dedicate time to talk about emotional education do not obtain better scores in these problems. This result is not supported by the literature reviewed, since investigators link externalizing behavioral problems to aspects such as poor family communication (Villar, Luengo, Gómez and Romero, 2003). Even to the point where inappropriate behaviors at school and within the family lead to the concern of parents, who need to know the factors that enhance social competence and the prevention of inappropriate behaviors in the early years of life (Hemmeter, Snyder, Fox and Algina, 2016), making the emotional dialogue evident at this stage.

In addition, it was observed that children from families that spend more time with them in leisure and free time activities, obtain higher scores in social competence, supported by several empirical lines that argue that shared family time, including leisure time, brings benefits to those who share it, like the well-being of the children, among others (Maynard and Harding, 2010; Offer, 2014). On the other hand, lower scores were obtained in depression, compared to those families who dedicate less time to their children, being the intervals of the daily time dedicated quite remarkable. In contrast to this result, in a study carried out in Singapore, Ahmad and Skitmore (2003) found that approximately 40 % of the participants with children in Early Childhood Education normally do not pay attention to the children's activities, blaming the lack of time for their inability to do so. Precisely, in this study, as it was mentioned before, the time that parents dedicate to practice leisure activities with their children is ample, but it may not be enough to improve behavioral problems such as attention problems, anxiety and hyperactivity. On the other hand, it was enough if we take into account

the scores in depression and, in a residual way, in aggressiveness. Therefore, the results in this section are partly in line with the literature reviewed, where it is found that family leisure has been identified as one of the main protective factors against the development of risk behaviors (Barnes Barne, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, and Dintcheff, 2007) and it is also reflected that those children who share more time with their parents have a lower probability of developing behavioral problems that could be harmful to their environment.

Finally, perhaps as a consequence of the need to somehow reconcile work and family, figures such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, caregivers, or external institutions currently dedicate time to these family needs, generating a series of effects in children related to some of the behavioral problems, as was expected at first, but no effects were produced with social competence, contrary to what was expected. In this sense, it is observed that children from families that stay with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, caregivers, institutions, etc., several days a week have lower scores in anxiety and depression than those who do not. The results are corroborated by a review of several studies, most of them focused on the influence of the time spent by grandparents with their grandchildren (Creighton, Park and Teruel, 2009), and/or on the influence that grandparents have on the education and development of the grandchildren (Jaeger, 2012; Chiang and Park, 2015).

Limitations and prospectives

Although the data obtained in this investigation are interesting and the number of participants was remarkable, a series of limitations should be pointed out, like the length of the questionnaire and its online transmission, which to a certain extent could have increased the percentage of questionnaires with unfinished responses. On the other hand, it should be taken into account that there is certain subjectivity on the part of parents when giving their opinion about their children in the Early Childhood Education stage, and therefore, there is a tendency to overestimate the behavior of children, which could lead to inaccuracy in some of the survey responses. It is understood that parents/legal guardians have a true knowledge of their children's raising, but sometimes there is a greater external validity in dealing with the data from the children themselves than from the parental source (Roa and del Barrio, 2002).

In turn, among other variables not considered, there was no representation of the participants by socioeconomic level, which would have allowed us to establish other interesting differences between parents. Likewise, it is worth mentioning as a future prospective, the in-

tervention with families, since family programs have also shown positive effects in the prevention of behavioral problems (Romero and Robles, 2011).

To conclude, several studies in this line have shown that parent training programs are a conclusive tool in the modification of children's behavior in early childhood (Dadds, Maujean and Fraser, 2003; Díaz-García and Díaz-Sibaja, 2005) helping them to manage their emotions correctly.

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Received: 02-12-2020
Accepted: 04-05-2021