

Family perception of homework as a function of the responsible agent

Percepción familiar de las tareas escolares en función del agente responsable

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Abstract

The controversies caused by the subject of homework, both in the family and in educational centres, place it as one of the focuses of interest for educational research. It focuses on the diversity of support agents to which the student can turn, an aspect that has been scarcely dealt with, and considering that they can influence the homework completion process. Objective: To determine the perception of benefits, emotional exhaustion caused, the child's competences and the organisation of homework according to the family or non-family member who is the support agent. Method: A non-experimental, correlational, quantitative-cross-sectional research study was carried out with the aim of analysing this condition. For this purpose, the questionnaire "Coping with homework in the family" was applied to a total of 1787 families of infant (15.1%), primary (48.7%) and secondary (36.2%) school students. Results: The results revealed that the

person who mainly accompanies, in the completion of homework, is the mother and that, based on the different support figures (fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters or external professional), significant differences are established in relation to the organisation with homework, the perception of the benefits of homework, the competences that students have to cope with homework and the emotional wear and tear that it can produce in the family. Conclusions: The need to educate families so that they see homework as a positive task for the child's learning and as a possibility of bringing the family closer together to strengthen ties instead of causing estrangement is evident.

Keywords: family, homework, parent-child relationship, parent-school relationship, family accompaniment.

Resumen

Las controversias que ocasiona el tema de los deberes escolares, tanto en la familia como en los centros educativos, lo sitúan como uno de los focos de interés para la investigación educativa. Poniendo la mirada sobre la diversidad de agentes de apoyo a los que el estudiante puede recurrir, aspecto escasamente tratado, y considerando que éstos pueden influir en los procesos de realización de las tareas. Objetivo: Determinar la existencia de diferencias significativas en la percepción familiar de los beneficios, el desgaste emocional ocasionado, las competencias del hijo/a y la organización de los deberes escolares en función de la persona (familiar o no familiar) que se encarga del seguimiento y acompañamiento de las tareas escolares de los menores escolarizados. Método: Se llevó a cabo una investigación de metodología no experimental, correlacional de corte cuantitativo-transversal, con el objetivo de analizar esta condición. Para ello se aplicó el cuestionario "El afrontamiento de las tareas escolares en la familia" a un total de 1787 familias de estudiantes de educación infantil (15,1%), primaria (48,7%) y secundaria (36,2%). Resultados: Estos revelaron que la persona que acompaña principalmente, en la realización de las tareas, es la madre y que, en base a las distintas figuras de apoyo (padres, madres, hermanos y hermanas o profesional externo), se establecen diferencias significativas en relación con la organización con las tareas, a la percepción de los beneficios que tienen los deberes escolares, a las competencias que tienen los estudiantes para hacer frente a las tareas y el desgaste emocional que pueden producir en la familia. Conclusiones: Se pone de manifiesto la necesidad de educar a las familias para que estos aprecien las tareas escolares como una tarea positiva para el aprendizaje del menor y una posibilidad de acercamiento familiar en la que estrechar lazos en lugar de ocasionar distanciamiento.

Palabras clave: familia, tareas escolares, relación padres e hijos, relación padres-escuela, acompañamiento familiar.

Introduction

There are different ways of naming it, with “academic tasks” being the most commonly used in the scientific context and “homework” or “school-work” the most common in educational praxis. Conceptually, it is understood as the additional or supplementary homework assigned to students to be developed outside of class that must be guided and controlled by the curriculum (Pérez et al., 2020). Building on other studies, Valiente-Barroso et al. (2020) conceive of homework as “instructional strategies temporarily outside of teacher mediation that students carry out without direct teacher support and attention” (p.152). For Valle et al. (2021), it is not the place, but the time of completion that defines homework, as it is usually done outside school hours.

To talk about homework is necessarily to make an explicit mention of family mediation and intervention. Few school resources are as important in the family context as homework. In fact, homework acts as the main link between the two contexts and is one of the topics most frequently dealt with in family tutorials. Thus, far from encouraging participation, these spaces for communication between family and school are aimed at monitoring study, performance and behaviour in the classroom, especially if this is problematic (García-Sanz et al., 2010; Rodríguez-Ruiz et al., 2019) at the national level, while internationally, a partnership of associationism with one focus on the school and the other on the community (Epstein, 1990; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995; Mylonakou and Kekes, 2005).

Among the models that analyse homework, as Álvarez-Blanco (2019) points out, the overlapping spheres model by Epstein (1990), the parental involvement model by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1995), the model of predictors of parental involvement by Grolnick et al. (1997) and the Syn-education model to promote parental involvement in the educational process developed by Mylonakou and Kebes (2005) stand out. From a global perspective, Trautwein et al. (2006) detail the relationships that occur on the learning environment, family behaviour, student characteristics, homework motivation and homework behaviour and their influence on academic performance (Rosário et al., 2018), the latter being the closest to our study.

Family involvement and, more specifically, homework support are two of the essential variables that determine overall school performance

(Martínez-Vicente et al., 2020; Wilder, 2014), and this is perceived as such by the entire school community, including the students themselves (Pérez et al., 2020; Pineda and Fraile, 2020). Focusing on family support for homework and academic performance, there is a great deal of controversy and no clear association has been established. Despite the multitude of studies that recognise that family involvement contributes to school improvement, the recent meta-analysis by Fernández-Alonso et al. (2022) concludes that family help with homework is not a predictor of good academic results, although it is likely that this paradoxical phenomenon is due to the fact that there is greater family involvement when students show poor school performance, learning difficulties, problems in the organisation of study and homework, or low motivation. Similarly, the stage with the highest volume of academic homework in Spain is Primary Education, although it has been noted that homework is of little use in this stage, as well as not being certain whether it has been done independently or whether it has been done by a family member or private teacher (Bailén and Polo, 2016). Even so, Nuñez et al. (2017) highlighted that indirect involvement, through motivation, has a more positive impact on performance than more controlled participation. All of this shows that the subject of homework presents elements that require analysis, study and clarification, despite the large volume of publications on the subject. Who accompanies homework, the type of accompaniment and how the person who accompanies has an impact on the perception of the usefulness or otherwise of homework, are aspects that have yet to be clarified.

Most theoretical models highlight the co-responsibility of parents or guardians in homework, especially in the case of the youngest children, since as they advance in the school system, students should gain in autonomy and assume the main responsibility for their homework (Murillo and Martínez-Garrido, 2013). In contrast, the results obtained by Valiente-Barroso et al. (2020) confirm that students receive more help from their families as they progress through school. However, we find that very few studies have considered, on the one hand, whether or not support is needed, and on the other hand, the role played by the person who assumes the support. In this respect, Hernández-Prados and Gil-Noguera (2022) found that students tend to do their homework alone, autonomously, especially in the case of children whose parents have higher education, while families with a lower academic level prefer the support of external professionals.

The perception of the usefulness of homework is controversial, as some studies highlight the benefits and skills that students should put into practice, attributing an intrinsic positivity to it (Sallee and Rigler, 2008; Tan et al., 2020), while others highlight its difficulties (Kohn, 2013), which is why it has also been questioned by various groups in the school community. Although teachers consider them to be an adequate resource to promote learning, they also point out that parental accompaniment is the most controversial issue, as students must work autonomously (Arias-Redondo et al., 2006), parents perceive the volume of homework to be high, question its effectiveness and usefulness, as it is repetitive, difficult and boring, but still attribute benefits (Feito-Alonso, 2020; Pérez et al., 2020), despite generating chaos in the family climate, conflict, stress and some discomfort (Pressman et al., 2015). All this has sparked an immense social debate, which was highlighted by the awareness-raising campaign launched by the Spanish Confederation of Parents' Associations (CEAPA) on the need to avoid collapsing students' family time with homework (Hernández-Prados and Gil-Noguera, 2018). In fact, it is difficult to balance homework support with extra-curricular activities (Pressman et al., 2015). Studies on peer support in homework have focused mainly on fathers and mothers (Murillo and Martínez-Garrido, 2013; Valiente-Barroso et al., 2020), and to a lesser extent, on the help provided by brothers or sisters or that received by external professionals. In addition, parental accompaniment is conditioned by gender, with a feminisation of this function being observed (Fernández-Freire et al., 2019; Lehner-Mear, 2021; Páez and Zúñiga, 2021; Valdés-Cuervo et al, 2022) and identifying a significant relationship between maternal characteristics and motivation towards tasks, so that an accompaniment focused on autonomous learning and the active role of the child decreases maternal involvement (Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2022). On the other hand, for mothers, school matters are part of the routine tasks of family life, but they are understood as a collective activity in which siblings can also collaborate by learning together to model study habits and time management (Bempechat, 2019). With regard to accompaniment between siblings, Van der Kaap-Deeder et al. (2017) showed that not only parents and mothers are role models for homework, but they also found that brothers and sisters play an important role in the development of autonomy, psychological support, motivation and improved academic performance. Moreover, in the case of

students from immigrant families, compared to their native-born peers, they turn more to their siblings than to their parents for homework help (Bempechat, 2019). On the other hand, older siblings who take on the responsibility for school care and support feel fatigued and stressed, find it more difficult to concentrate and their school performance decreases (Reimer and Hill, 2022).

In view of the above, there is no doubt that we are dealing with a relevant and complex relationship, as there is a multitude and diversity of variables to consider, beyond the quantity or difficulty involved, as well as different sources of information (mainly from students, teachers and families). Although the topic of homework has generated a great deal of research in recent years, a review of previous studies confirms that the variable, who is involved in homework, has been treated in a descriptive rather than a leading role as an element of possible differentiation. Thus, the main purpose of this study was to find out whether there are significant differences in the family's perception of homework depending on the person who is responsible for accompanying the child. This is articulated in a series of specific objectives that demarcate the organisation and presentation of the results:

- To check if there are differences in the difficulty, quantity and modality of homework according to the person who carries out the accompaniment.
- To find out whether the benefits and competences attributed to homework vary significantly according to the support agent.
- To find out whether the limitations and emotional exhaustion of the family depend significantly on the person responsible for the homework accompaniment.

Method

The study corresponds to a quantitative perspective of a descriptive-explanatory, comparative and non-experimental type. The survey technique was applied using a transactional design, i.e., an analysis was carried out at a specific moment in time (Sáez-López, 2017).

Sample

In the present research, 1787 families with children enrolled in a Spanish educational centre in the stages of Infant Education, Primary Education and Secondary Education participated, with 67.55% of the questionnaire being completed by the mothers and 32.45% by the fathers. Both mothers ($M= 42.73$ years; $S.D.= 12.49$) and fathers ($M= 44.70$ years; $S.D.= 6.49$) are slightly over 40 years of age on average. The sample includes families from all the Autonomous Communities, but the Region of Murcia (21.3%), Andalusia (17.1%) and the Community of Madrid (16.6%) are the most representative. More than half of the fathers (50.1%) and mothers (65.5%) have a university education, 10.1% of both genders are foreign nationals and there is a disparity with regard to employment, as 26.6% of mothers, compared to 13.0% of fathers, are unemployed. Finally, with regard to academic variables, on the one hand, 80.1% of the children attend public schools while 19.9% attend private-controlled schools and, on the other hand, almost half of the parents have children in Primary Education (48.7%), with a considerable sample of children also attending Secondary Education (36.2%), while those attending Infant Education (15.1%) are much lower. The only criteria for inclusion in the research were to be a resident in Spain and to have children enrolled in pre-school, primary or secondary education, thus selecting the participating population on the basis of non-probabilistic random sampling.

Instrument

Family accompaniment in homework was measured using an ad hoc questionnaire, designed by means of a systematic process that included a bibliographic search of national and international studies from the last five years indexed in the Dialnet, WOS and Scopus databases and a process of expert validation in which the following phases were followed: definition of the objectives and the evaluation instrument, delimitation of the characteristics for the constitution of the group of experts, carrying out rounds of consultation and analysis of the data obtained. In this way, seven former experts took part, four female teachers in non-university educational stages with a range of experience of five to ten years and three female university lecturers who are experts in educational research

methodology with a working experience of 10 to 20 years. These experts gave a quantitative (Likert-type scale from one to five) and qualitative assessment of each of the parts and all of the items of the initial instrument designed. The comments and assessments made contributed to the elimination of items, modification of feedback, inclusion of inclusive language, inclusion of new items, restructuring of the dimensions and the introduction of new clarifications in the introduction of the questionnaire. After this process, the final research questionnaire entitled: "Coping with homework in the family" was elaborated.

This instrument is made up of 24 items, which were evaluated on a Likert-type scale from one to four according to the following categorisation: one (not at all), two (a little), three (quite a lot) and four (a lot). All the items that make up the questionnaire are grouped into four dimensions:

- Organisation (items 1 to 5): difficulty, quantity, group tasks, individual tasks and digital tasks.
- Benefits (items 6 to 11): evaluates the improvements obtained by the children as a result of homework: learning and performance, interpersonal relationships, study habits, attitude towards school, curiosity and research, and family relationships.
- Competences (items 12 to 19): it asks about the children's capacities for this school performance, these are: knowledge mastery, understanding instructions, technological tools, time organisation, taking responsibility, effort, motivation and emotional management.
- Emotional attrition (items 20 to 24): the degree of discomfort caused to parents is measured from the following descriptors: discomfort, exhaustion, academic inability to help them, family conflict or lack of time.

The validity of the construct was evident from the application of an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in which Barlett's test of sphericity obtained a perfect value ($p=.000$) and a KMO coefficient categorised as very high (.910), representing four factors that account for 60.33% of the total variance, obtaining a value of over .500 in all factor loadings. Furthermore, from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), according to Kline (2005), an almost perfect goodness of fit is shown ($SB\chi^2=19855.006$; $gl=276$;

$p=.000$; $CFI=0.96$; $TLI=.91$; $RMSEA=.07$; $RMR=.06$). Finally, regarding the reliability of the instrument, from the use of Cronbach's Alpha parameter, high or very high values are obtained at the global level ($\alpha=.880$) and for its sub-dimensions: organisation ($\alpha=.743$), benefits ($\alpha=.847$), competencies ($\alpha=.911$) and emotional exhaustion ($\alpha=.830$) (Olson and Gorall, 2006).

Procedure

For the composition of the participant sample, communication was established with the educational centres and parents' associations by telematic means through e-mail, establishing contact with 50 in each autonomous community. The message contained a full description of the research (objectives, rights of participants and use of data), the guarantee of anonymous data processing and the complete questionnaire together with the link to invite families to fill it in. A total of 67 schools accepted the invitation by signing an informed consent form assuring the confidentiality of the data and the anonymity of the participant, following the principles set out in point 8.2 of the APA regulations.

Data analysis

Initially, the data were collected through Microsoft Excel and then transferred to the statistical package SPSS version 25.0. Before carrying out the comparison of the variables, all the dependent variables referred to in the four dimensions (24 items) were recoded from a 1 to 4 scale with four categories to a dichotomous variable: on the one hand, those who answered the value one and two (not at all and a little) and, on the other hand, those who selected the value three and four (quite a lot and a lot). This made it possible to obtain the frequencies of all the dependent variables from a new grouping according to the perception of the agent who helps the most in school tasks.

Subsequently, frequencies (percentages) were obtained for the question of who helps with the children's homework. Subsequently, through the normality test, it was determined that the sample does not follow the assumptions of normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and homoscedasticity (Levene's test), so non-parametric statistics were selected. Thus, in order

to compare two nominal categorical variables, the person who helps with homework and the items of the dimensions of organisation, benefits, competencies and emotional exhaustion, the Chi-Square test was used with a level of significance $\alpha= 0.05$. Finally, in order to determine the intentionality of the associations found, Cramer's V parameter was applied.

Results

Table I shows the statistical data regarding the frequencies of the categories of the main study variable for the identification of significant differences: Who helps with homework? The participating families point to mothers as the main agent of support (64.9%), with a considerable distance from the rest. Those families who consider that their children do not need help (17.3%) are higher than those who indicate the father (12.5%). The proportion of those who count on the collaboration of siblings (2.5%) or an external professional (2.7%) is minimal compared to the rest of the percentage values previously mentioned.

TABLE I. Frequency of agents providing homework help

Who helps?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Father	224	12.5
Mother	1160	64.9
Siblings	44	2.5
External professional	49	2.7
No help required	310	17.3

Source: Compiled by author

The results of the relationship between the helping agent and the consideration of the families with respect to the items of the homework organisation dimension, shown in Table II, show significant differences with respect to the frequency of group homework ($X^2 =53.993$, $p=.000$) and digital homework ($X^2 =34.628$, $p=.001$), being higher than the minimum level of significance .050 in the rest of the items. In the first of the cases, with respect to group homework, depending on the consideration of the support agent, a low consideration of the amount of this type of homework is identified in all the agents, although this is less pronounced

in those families who identify the sibling as the main support. In relation to digital homework, those families who perceive the parent as the main agent identify a lower amount of digital homework than those who consider the siblings, an external professional or none at all as the agent. However, for all items, the strength of association is weak as the Cramer's V value is less than .200.

TABLE II. Chi-square test of the association between the homework organisation dimension and the support agent

Category Organisation	Who helps?	Consideration		X ²	p	Cramer's V
		Low n (%)	High n (%)			
Number of homework assignments	Father	76 (33.0)	148 (67.0)	14.408	.275	-
	Mother	426 (36.7)	734 (62.3)			
	Siblings	10 (22.7)	34 (77.3)			
	Professional	14 (28.6)	35 (71.4)			
	Not required	108 (33.8)	202 (66.2)			
Difficulty of homework	Father	209 (83.3)	15 (16.7)	18.302	.107	-
	Mother	1097(94.6)	63 (5.6)			
	Siblings	27 (61.4)	17 (38.6)			
	Professional	27 (55.1)	22 (44.9)			
	Not required	221 (71.3)	89 (28.7)			
Number of group homework assignments	Father	209 (93.3)	15 (6.7)	53.993	.000**	.100
	Mother	1097 (94.6)	63 (5.5)			
	Siblings	36 (81.8)	8 (18.2)			
	Professional	46 (93.8)	3 (6.2)			
	Not required	289 (93.3)	21 (6.8)			
Number Individual homework	Father	50 (22.3)	1074 (77.7)	10.417	.579	-
	Mother	259 (22.3)	901 (77.7)			
	Siblings	10 (22.7)	34 (77.3)			
	Professional	7 (14.3)	42 (85.7)			
	Not required	61 (19.6)	249 (80.4)			
Digital homework	Father	63 (28.1)	161 (71.9)	34.628	.001**	.080
	Mother	378 (32.6)	782 (77.4)			
	Siblings	8 (18.1)	36 (81.9)			
	Professional	11 (22.4)	38 (77.6)			
	Not required	57 (18.4)	253 (81.6)			

* = p< .050; ** p< .010

Source: Compiled by author

TABLE III. Chi-square test of the association between the homework benefit dimension and the support agent.

Category Benefits	Who helps?	Consideration		X ²	p	Cramer's V
		Low n (%)	High n (%)			
Academic	Father	118 (53.7)	106 (46.3)	10.436	.578	-
	Mother	609 (52.5)	551 (47.5)			
	Siblings	20 (45.4)	24 (54.6)			
	Professional	19 (38.5)	30 (61.5)			
	Not required	147 (47.4)	163 (52.6)			
Relationship with colleagues	Father	183 (81.7)	41 (18.3)	64.990	.000**	.186
	Mother	1091 (85.4)	167(14.6)			
	Siblings	28 (63.6)	16 (36.4)			
	Professional	39 (75.5)	10 (24.5)			
	Not required	207 (66.8)	103 (33.2)			
Work habits	Father	113 (50.5)	111 (49.5)	22.730	.030*	.067
	Mother	525 (46.1)	635 (53.9)			
	Siblings	20 (45.4)	24 (54.6)			
	Professional	16 (32.6)	33 (67.3)			
	Not required	138 (44.5)	172 (55.5)			
Attitude to school	Father	128 (57.1)	96 (42.9)	21.012	.057	-
	Mother	669 (57.7)	491 (42.3)			
	Siblings	22 (50)	22 (50)			
	Professional	25 (51.1)	24 (48.9)			
	Not required	160 (51.6)	150 (48.4)			
Initiative and entrepreneurship	Father	130 (58.1)	94 (41.9)	65.172	.000**	.191
	Mother	708 (61.9)	452 (39.0)			
	Siblings	23 (52.3)	21 (37.7)			
	Professional	24 (48.9)	25 (51.1)			
	Not required	126 (40.6)	184 (59.4)			
Family relations	Father	132 (58.9)	92 (41.1)	18.600	.099	-
	Mother	658 (56.7)	502 (43.3)			
	Siblings	17 (38.7)	27 (61.4)			
	Professional	24 (48.9)	25 (51.1)			
	Not required	184 (59.4)	126 (40.6)			

* = p< .050; ** p< .010

From the Pearson Chi-Square statistic, analysing the data shown in Table III, significant differences are found according to the families' consideration of the support agent in homework with the following benefits derived from homework: improvement in the relationship with classmates ($X^2=54.990$, $p=.000$), development of work habits ($X^2 =22.730$, $p=.030$) and progress in the attitude of initiative and entrepreneurship in the academic field ($X^2=65.172$, $p=.000$). Analysing the frequencies in the significant associations, both in work habits, the relationship with peers and initiative and entrepreneurship, it is the families who perceive the sibling or the external professional as the main agent who have a greater identification of these benefits. With respect to Cramer's V value, more consistent relationships are found with respect to the relationship with peers and greater initiative and entrepreneurship in the academic field, given that the values are close to the moderate value (.200). Finally, it should be noted that there is no relationship of significance according to the support agent perceived by the families with respect to academic progress, positive attitude towards school or improved family relationships.

By means of the distribution analysis using Pearson's Chi-Square statistic, an important relationship of significance was found between the family's identification of the support agent for their children's homework and the children's degree of ability to cope with this educational duty, as can be seen in Table IV. In fact, the significance value is maximum ($p < .01$) in all the categories of the dimension, although, according to Cramer's V value, these differences are of greater intensity in the following skills: responsibility (Cramer's $V=.206$), time organisation (Cramer's $V=.215$) and technological ability (Cramer's $V=.234$). With the exception of the development of motivation and emotional management, in all cases, children who do not receive support are considered to have higher levels of skills. Families who indicate that they have an external professional or their own siblings as homework support are those who identify motivation and emotional management as one of the skills most present in their children when facing this task.

TABLE IV. Chi-square test of the association between the homework skills dimension and the support agent.

Skills categories	Who helps?	Consideration		X ²	p	Cramer's V
		Low n (%)	Alta n (%)			
Domain Knowledge	Father	88 (39.3)	136 (60.7)	83.092	.000**	.198
	Mother	492 (47.6)	668 (52.4)			
	Siblings	18 (40.9)	26 (59.1)			
	Professional	16 (32.7)	33 (67.3)			
	Not required	57 (17.4)	253 (82.6)			
Understanding instructions	Father	89 (39.7)	135 (60.3)	77.051	.000**	.163
	Mother	485 (41.8)	675(58.2)			
	Siblings	17 (38.6)	27 (61.3)			
	Professional	24 (49.0)	25 (51.0)			
	Not required	63 (20.3)	247 (79.7)			
Technological tools	Father	89 (39.7)	135 (60.3)	167.771	.000**	.234
	Mother	572 (49.3)	588 (50.7)			
	Siblings	14 (31.8)	30 (68.2)			
	Professional	12 (24.5)	37 (75.5)			
	Not required	49 (15.8)	261 (84.2)			
Time management	Father	131 (59.0)	92 (41.0)	147.664	.000**	.215
	Mother	757 (65.2)	403 (34.8)			
	Siblings	14 (31.9)	30 (68.1)			
	Professional	23 (46.9)	26 (53.1)			
	Not required	105 (33.9)	205 (66.1)			
Responsibility	Father	112 (50.0)	112 (50.0)	135.300	.000**	.206
	Mother	656 (56.6)	504 (43.0)			
	Siblings	14 (31.9)	30 (68.1)			
	Professional	22 (44.9)	27 (55.1)			
	Not required	82 (26.4)	228 (73.6)			
Effort	Father	101 (45.1)	133 (54.9)	67.822	.000**	.192
	Mother	561 (48.3)	599 (51.7)			
	Siblings	18 (40.9)	26 (59.1)			
	Professional	20 (40.8)	29 (59.2)			
	Not required	90 (29.0)	220 (71.0)			

(Continued)

TABLE IV. Chi-square test of the association between the homework skills dimension and the support agent (Continued)

Skills categories	Who helps?	Consideration		X ²	p	Cramer's V
		Low n (%)	Alta n (%)			
Motivation	Father	140 (62.5)	84 (37.5)	70.297	.000**	.194
	Mother	738 (63.6)	422 (36.4)			
	Siblings	17 (38.6)	27 (61.4)			
	Professional	21 (49.0)	28 (57.0)			
	Not required	134 (43.2)	176 (56.8)			
Emotional management	Father	135 (60.2)	89 (39.8)	28.419	.005**	.073
	Mother	708 (61.0)	452 (39.0)			
	Siblings	17 (38.6)	27 (61.4)			
	Professional	21 (42.8)	28 (57.2)			
	Not required	167 (53.8)	143 (46.2)			

* = p < .050; ** p < .010

Source: Compiled by author

As can be seen in Table IV, as in the skills dimension, all the categories related to emotional exhaustion are significantly associated with the agent of accompaniment in school tasks perceived by families (p=.000). In the case of discomfort and nervousness, mental exhaustion and danger in reconciling family life, families who identify fathers and mothers as the agents are the ones who most identify these items as a detriment caused by homework accompaniment. As far as family distancing and conflict are concerned, this is more evident in families who have a professional to carry out their children's homework. Meanwhile, incapacity is more perceived as a detriment in the case of families who identify siblings as responsible for advising and monitoring their children's homework. However, the intensity of the associations results in a moderate value in the items that are more identified when parents are the agents of reference, namely: mental exhaustion (Cramer's V=.265), discomfort and nerves (Cramer's V=.201) and the imbalance of family reconciliation (Cramer's V=.202).

TABLE V. Chi-square test of the association between the dimension of emotional exhaustion caused by homework and the support agent.

Category emotional exhaustion	Who helps?	Consideration		X ²	p	Cramer's V
		Low n (%)	Alta n (%)			
Discomfort and nervousness	Father	169 (75.2)	55 (24.8)	129.462	.000**	.201
	Mother	772 (65.5)	389 (34.5)			
	Siblings	32 (72.8)	12 (27.3)			
	Professional	37 (75.6)	12 (24.4)			
	Not required	276 (89.1)	34 (10.9)			
Mental exhaustion	Father	154 (68.8)	70 (31.2)	291.235	.000**	.265
	Mother	667 (57.5)	493 (42.5)			
	Siblings	31 (70.5)	13 (29.5)			
	Professional	39 (79.6)	10 (20.4)			
	Not required	284 (91.6)	26 (8.4)			
Disability	Father	201 (89.7)	23 (10.3)	32.745	.000**	.083
	Mother	993 (85.6)	167 (14.4)			
	Siblings	32 (72.7)	12 (27.3)			
	Professional	37 (80.5)	12 (19.5)			
	Not required	276 (89.1)	34 (10.9)			
Distance and family conflict	Father	191 (85.3)	33 (14.7)	78.525	.000**	.196
	Mother	896 (77.2)	264 (22.8)			
	Siblings	36 (81.8)	8 (18.2)			
	Professional	36 (73.5)	13 (26.5)			
	Not required	282 (90.9)	28 (9.1)			
Attempts to reconcile work and family life	Father	145 (64.7)	79 (35.3)	88.917	.000**	.202
	Mother	701 (60.4)	459 (39.6)			
	Siblings	33 (75.0)	11 (25.0)			
	Professional	34 (69.4)	15 (30.6)			
	Not required	254 (72.0)	56 (28.0)			

* = p < .050; ** p < .010

Source: Compiled by author

Discussion and conclusions

Traditionally, the education and upbringing of offspring has been a function biologically and culturally attributed to women (Hernández-Prados et al., 2020). After years of fighting for equality, and the proliferation of pedagogical movements calling for responsible, involved

and committed parenting (Rodrigo et al., 2015), this study shows that the person who usually helps with homework is mostly the mother, followed far behind by the father, and to a lesser extent by siblings. It should be remembered that the study is based on families' perceptions of homework, which indicate in each case who is the main agent providing help and how they perceive each of the dimensions analysed. In this way, we understand that it is women who are primarily involved in helping with their children's educational tasks, as supported by most studies in this field (Fernández-Freire et al., 2019; Gónida and Cortina, 2014; Hernández-Prados and Gil-Noguera, 2022; Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2022). In this sense, Lehner-Mear's (2021) analysis of the gender impact of homework in families attributes this differentiation to cultural pressure, as it is perceived that the label of good mother is given to those who help with homework, and conversely, bad mothers to those who resort to other alternative practices such as external support. In short, homework support is conceived by mothers as an unequivocal act of love for others (Páez and Zúñiga, 2021).

On the other hand, the research carried out reveals, in general, significant differences in relation to who helps with homework (fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, external professional or doing homework alone) and the dimensions of organisation of homework, perceived benefits, development of skills and emotional exhaustion produced in the family. Thus, with regard to the task organisation variable, corresponding to the first objective, we can conclude that, regardless of who accompanies them, families value individual tasks much more highly than group tasks. Perhaps because the teacher depends too much on individual activities programmed in textbooks (Pineda and Fraile, 2020) and group activities are sporadic (Drechsler, 2021; Kaur, 2011). Only families in which siblings help out consider group work to be significantly important, probably because the generation gap is smaller. Regarding digital homework, it is significantly more highly valued in families that delegate professionals or siblings, while in families where parents, especially mothers, help out, there is more reticence towards this type of homework. This digital divide has been widely studied, despite the fact that "new technologies and group work seem to function as an "escape valve"" (Pineda and Fraile, 2020, p.298).

In general, in relation to the second objective, the data show that families' perception of homework is positive, considering that it provides

multiple benefits (Orozco-Vargas et al., 2022; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Homework favours, on the one hand, the acquisition of work habits, as has already been shown in other studies Tan et al. (2020), although significantly in families who use private academies, and on the other hand, initiative and entrepreneurship, especially when homework is done independently, as recognised by Feng et al. (2019). In contrast, homework does not contribute to fostering peer relationships and a favourable attitude towards school, especially during the isolation period (Drechsler, 2021), although families with sibling helpers are the ones who value these attribution benefits the most.

However, this issue is not without controversy and, as if it were two sides of the same coin, academic homework is also perceived negatively, altering intrafamily relationships and emotional health (Sánchez-Lissen, 2015), the book *Cómo sobrevivir a los deberes de tu hijo* by Bailén (2016) is an example of this. More specifically, the data indicate, in relation to the third objective, that mothers stand out significantly in conceiving homework as something that makes them uncomfortable, stresses them, exhausts them mentally and makes it difficult to reconcile family life, showing a tendency contrary to that found in previous studies that recognise that parents find this role of helping unpleasant and stressful (Páez and Zúñiga, 2021). Sibling apprenticeships are sometimes used to free parents and facilitate reconciliation. However, the inability to assume support in school duties is the main constraint significantly attributed to siblings, although Reimer and Colina-Hill (2022) noted emotional problems and burnout. Finally, the performance of homework is a conflictive issue that deteriorates family relationships (Bailén and Polo, 2016), preferring to delegate this function to external professionals. Hence, this difficulty has been significantly highlighted by families who opt for these alternative practices.

Finally, the families participating in the study attributed significantly more skills to children who tackle homework autonomously, without help or mediation, except for the ability to organise time, motivation and emotional management, which are assigned to children who receive help from their siblings. Autonomy with respect to homework is the goal desired by teachers and families, as it denotes self-efficacy in various capacities (Feng et al., 2019; Hernández-Prados and Gil-Noguera, 2022; Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2022). Moreover, collaboration with siblings enables the development of the more emotional level (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2017).

Research is not without limitations, most of which are the result of the choices made. In the present study, some of them have been identified. Firstly, with regard to the coverage of the data, being a cross-sectional study, it does not allow us to check how the way of coping with homework evolves as autonomy is achieved and does not require family accompaniment. Secondly, data could have been collected from adolescents in order to be able to compare whether there are differences with respect to the perception of parents.

From the position in the emerging line of research that questions family support and its relationship to academic success, focusing on how this support is given rather than how much (Fernández-Alonso et al., 2022), the present study adds new elements of discussion that contribute to scientific, academic and family development. Specifically, some questions such as: What type of help is provided, what impact does accompaniment have on the children and on the helper, how does the helper value homework, what are the reasons for doing so, why do men delegate this family responsibility to women, require further analysis, since, as Valle et al. (2015) point out, it is no longer a question of the amount of time invested in doing homework, but rather of the use of time and efficiency in accompaniment.

Finally, seeking and promoting aspects that guarantee adequate support for each of the agents involved is an essential element in improving the educational reality, compensating for difficulties and making it possible to get more out of homework in terms of the benefits and competences attributed to it. In this respect, the results obtained contribute to the understanding that homework from the perspective of co-responsibility implies that its improvement does not depend exclusively on family members. Teachers should receive specific training on homework to prevent it from becoming repetitive (Feito-Alonso, 2020), and to promote quality tasks that encourage debate, exchange, the establishment of rules and autonomous responsibility (Álvarez-Blanco, 2019). All of this will result in a healthier family climate.

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