Parental Practices and Maternal Warmth as Protective Factors for Problem Behaviors in Mexican Preadolescents

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Epidemiological estimates indicate that approximately 12% of children and adolescents in Mexico are in clinical ranges for psychological disorders. Low-income families in need of psychological support generally encounter understaffed and sometimes inefficient public health services and thus, families frequently constitute the primary source of support for individuals affected by mental health disorders. Empirical studies in the Mexican context have demonstrated that positive parental practices are associated with positive developmental outcomes and low levels of problem behaviors for both children and adolescents. This study aims to identify if such practices act as protective factors for problem behaviors in 306 Mexican students in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades from 3 public elementary schools in Mexico City. Practices of maternal

autonomy and communication as well as maternal warmth were found to significantly diminish internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors, while parental involvement and communication only reduced externalizing problem behaviors. Findings have implications for social welfare programs that target positive youth development and supportive parenting.

Keywords: parenting practices, communication, involvement, autonomy, externalizing, internalizing

Background

According to UNICEF (2017), there are 39 million children and adolescents in Mexico, more than half of them living in poverty. Mexico was placed by UNICEF within the worst three countries in Latin America in relation to child-rearing and survival. Epidemiological estimates indicate that approximately 12% of Mexican children and adolescents are in clinical ranges for psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety (Mexican Association of Infant Psychiatry [AMPI], 2017). Yet during 2017 alone, less than a fifth of the general Mexican population diagnosed with a mental health disorder received treatment (Office of the Mexican Senate for Scientific and Technological Information, INCyTU, 2018). The National System for the Integral Development of Families in Mexico (SNDIF) is the main source of support for Mexican youth with psychological disorders from low-income families. Although the SNDIF states its psychological programs intend to provide youth the necessary resources to protect and guarantee mental, physical, spiritual, moral, and social development of Mexican youth (SNDIF p. 275), only a small number of services are preventive interventions, and most of these are aimed at diminishing childhood obesity, teenage pregnancy, and drug use. Regular consultation in the SNDIF is understaffed and sometimes inefficient as the service offers one worker for every 300 cases (UNICEF, 2018 p. 7) as well as scarce access to training in evidence-based mental health interventions. In addition, families in need of psychological support are confronted with the negative effects of stigma associated with mental health disorders in Latin America. Thus, families and other social networks frequently constitute the primary source of support for individuals affected

by mental health disorders (Gómez-Dantés & Frenk, 2018). For these reasons, the promotion of research with Mexican families focused on existing strengths is of great concern, as it refers to preventive interventions aimed to improve social welfare programs and policies.

The Mexican family has a marked hierarchical structure where Latin American mothers are expected to spend more time and be more involved in their child's daily activities, while fathers act as providers who supply instrumental support. Mexican children and adolescents perceive their mothers as loving, helpful, protective, and responsible. They scold when necessary but are understanding and empathetic; therefore, maternal practices are perceived more positively and have a higher impact on children and adolescents as opposed to paternal practices (Cox, 2014; Diaz-Loving & Andrade-Palos, 1996; Kline et al., 2016). The foundation of adequate family functioning is understood as maintaining close and harmonious relationships based on demonstrating respect towards figures of authority (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002; Livas-Dlott et al., 2010), as well as staying loyal to family members and placing commitment to the family over individual desires (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002; Steidel & Contreras, 2003). These cultural values have placed Mexican preadolescents at risk of developing problem behaviors given parental expectations (Calzada et al., 2015), their developmental demand for autonomy (Kader & Roman, 2018), and a lack of efficient resources to help them navigate through this developmental period.

According to Chainé and Pineda (2014), the most prevalent problem behaviors in Mexican preadolescents are opposition-defiance, irritability, anger, resentment, aggression, and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which generally persist into adulthood (Frick et al., 2014). In Mexico, empirical studies have demonstrated that positive parental practices (e.g., autonomy, communication, and involvement) are not only associated with lower internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors for children and adolescents, but are also related to high self-esteem and self-efficacy during their later development (Andrade Palos et al., 2012; Chainé et al., 2015; Cruz-Santiago & Ramírez García, 2011). Parental practices of autonomy are characterized by parental encouragement, favoring of preadolescent activities, and positive reinforcements aimed to develop youth decision making

capabilities, competence, a positive self-perception, privacy, and control over their personal activities and emotions (Gurland & Grolnick, 2003; Smetana, 2011; Washington, 2018). Latin American girls and adolescent girls report experiencing less autonomy than boys and are generally more responsive to autonomy than males (Darling et al., 2008).

Preadolescent autonomy is a gradual and relational process consisting of commitment from youth, parental authority, discipline, and trust, given that parents generally believe their children are less autonomous and capable than they truly are (Rote & Smetana, 2015). When preadolescents perceive legitimate parental practices of autonomy, they generally feel obligated to show parents their capabilities as well as their tendency to follow rules (Kuhn et al., 2014; Vargas Barbosa et al., 2017). Parental practices of autonomy result in more adaptive development, as they provides youth with a sense of acceptance that makes them feel comfortable and safe in the relationship they have with their parents or other family members, thus directly and indirectly preventing the development of problem behaviors (Barbosa, 2014; Elmore & Gaylord-Harden, 2013).

Parental practices of communication include talking openly and frequently in the parent-child relationship, providing clear information, listening to each other, and being responsive to the messages shared by children and adolescents (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Preadolescents respond to these practices by verbalizing their own thoughts, ideas and feelings, listening actively, and respecting their parents (Seay et al., 2014). Communication is deemed key in the development of the parent-child relationship, as it both reflects and reinforces the quality of the relationship, while also favoring positive youth outcomes through the development of self-esteem, life satisfaction, social skills, and social support. It is also a means to reduce family conflict, improve collaborative problem solving, and foster trust within the parent-child relationship (Manczak et al., 2018). Empirical studies in Mexico have identified a negative association between maternal communication and problem behaviors in Mexican youth (Betancourt & Palos, 2011; Cobos, 2008). According to Castro-Castañeda, Núñez-Fadda, Musitu-Ochoa and Callejas-Jerónimo (2019), communication is not only a negative predictor of problem behaviors but aids in shaping parental involvement and supervision through building confidence and

respect towards their parents and adults in general. Parental practices of communication convey the values, rules and expectations parents have of their children, which then facilitate incorporation into the cultural group and favors youth regulation and more favorable outcomes for Latin American youth (Moreno Carmona, 2013). Given that maintaining family bonds and elder approval is greater in preadolescents girls, it comes as no surprise that Mexican girls generally report higher levels of maternal communication when compared to their male counterparts (Galaz et al., 2019).

Parental practices of involvement are defined by monitoring and supporting children, displaying affection, spending quality time together, being responsive, and communicating expectations (Morales Castillo & Aguirre Dávila, 2018). Eshel, Daelmans, Mello, and Martines (2006) found that parental support and cognitive scaffolding in parental involvement favors social development during preadolescence, making youth increasingly autonomous, given that parental involvement reinforces and models both cultural values and norms in youth. According to Lara and Saracostti (2019), parental involvement has been associated with lower levels of externalizing problem behaviors in Latin American youth. Although physical and tangible parental involvement diminishes through preadolescent development, ongoing parental support of activities and autonomy during preadolescence and adolescence is associated with positive outcomes in Latin American youth (Morales Castillo & Aguirre Dávila, 2018).

Emotional warmth and communication in parental involvement are related to parental expectations. When interactions in the parent-child relationship are emotionally rich, parents have a higher capability of influencing their children's emotional wellbeing and behavior (Inoa, 2017). For Anderson and Branstetter (2012), increasing parental involvement as a preventive strategy works best before severe problems emerge in youth. By knowing about the activities, relationships and locations of their children, parents accustom their children to supervision and parental involvement, leading to parents feeling efficacious and children experiencing a positive impact (Morales Castillo & Aguirre Dávila, 2018). Although involvement from both parental figures is paramount for Latin American youth, maternal resources and efforts have a higher influence than paternal,

especially in predicting academic and emotional outcomes (Lorenzo-Moledo et al., 2017). Mexican girls report higher involvement from both parents when compared to boys (Eguiarte & Arenas, 2019; Galaz et al., 2019). Latin American cultural beliefs influence ideas that girls should be looked after and paid attention to more than boys, as the latter are thought to be stronger, more aggressive, and independent (Buitrago-Peña et al., 2009).

Practices of maternal warmth consist of compliments, empathy, and physical and verbal demonstrations of love that develop confidence and support in children. This is a form of non-intrusive supervision and respect of children's opinions and ideas which is fostered through emotional closeness, limit enforcing, and caring (Borda Mas et al., 2019; Dadds et al., 2012). For Mexican youth, maternal warmth has been proven to be a protective factor against problem behaviors and more serious mental health disorders, such as psychosis. Maternal warmth is also associated with stable and positive adolescent development (Benitez Camacho et al., 2005; Cumsille et al., 2015). Maternal warmth may also serve as a protective factor in lessening the impact of harsh and negative parental practices such as intrusion and hostility, particularly in communities in which families face economic hardships and challenges because of poor neighborhood environments (Caughy et al., 2006). Similarly, McLoyd, Kaplan, Hardaway, and Wood (2007) found that it is the perception of parental warmth and support which mediates the relationship between certain parental practices and childhood outcomes, especially in groups where physical punishment is normative. Across cultures, parental warmth has been associated with greater competence and better outcomes in children that experience excessive parental control, aggression, and anger (Yildirim & Roopnarine, 2015). In the Mexican context, these findings have been confirmed by Morales Chainé, Martínez Ruíz, Nieto, and Lira Mandujano (2017) where warmth significantly diminished the effects of a plethora of risk factors in non-clinical range Mexican adolescents. Surprisingly, Mexican girls and preadolescents report less maternal warmth than their male counterparts and older adolescents (Eguiarte & Arenas, 2019; Galaz et al., 2019).

Since the 1990s, Latin America has faced an increasing number of divorces and fragmented households, as well as the incorporation of more women into the workplace (Moreno Carmona,

2013). As some Mexican parenting interventions build upon preexisting assumptions, such as stay-at-home mothers or intact and extended households, clinical interventions might not be efficient or effective in treating or preventing problem behaviors in Latin American preadolescents. To inform the design and implementation of evidence-based and culturally specific preventive parenting programs in Mexico, this research project seeks to identify the association that positive parental practices have on preadolescent problem behaviors by focusing on parental practices as perceived by children and their self-reported problem behaviors.

Our study hypotheses were: (1) A negative association between positive parental practices and both internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors will exist regardless of gender and grade level; and (2) There will be differences in problem behaviors and positive parental practices by grade, sex, and household configuration.

Method

Participants

Through a non-probabilistic sampling method, we recruited students from three public elementary schools in southern Mexico City during spring 2018. The project was carried out using the Mexican Psychological Society's code of ethics (Sociedad Mexicana de Psicología, 2010). Prior to data collection, participants, parents and staff were informed about the purpose of the research project, potential risks, benefits, and confidentiality. All students from 4th to 6th grade were eligible, but only those whose parents had provided informed consent and were in school at the time of data collection were selected to take part. The analytic sample was comprised of 306 students (48.8% girls, age M=10 SD=0.92) from 4th (33%) 5th (31%) and 6th (36%) grades.

Data Collection

Students were instructed to first read each item in the questionnaire silently, followed by the teacher reading the item aloud. Students answered all items on paper anonymously.

Confidentiality was re-emphasized during the administration. Students completed a sociodemographic questionnaire that included information on household composition. Maternal practices of autonomy and communication were measured with Andrade and Betancourt's (2008) scale of parental practices in its reduced version (Segura et al., 2011). The mother version contains 15 statements that reflect 5 factors (i.e., Communication [α=.92], psychological control [α=.8], imposition [α=.77], behavioral control [α=.8] and autonomy [α=.82]) to which the student responds on a Likert type scale (4 points, ranging from Never to Always) to such items as "My mother respects the decisions I make." The total scale of parental practices has adequate internal reliability with Mexican youth (α=.82).

Parental practices of involvement and communication were measured using the Spanish version of The Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (Escribano et al. , 2013), originally developed by Frick (1991). The APQ consists of 16 statements answered on a 5 point Likert Type scale (ranging from Never to Always) with 4 underlying factors showing moderate to high internal consistencies with Mexican preadolescents (Robert, 2009): inconsistent discipline (α=.57), positive parenting (α=.56), poor supervision (α=.63), and parental involvement (α=.85).

Maternal warmth was measured using a Spanish translation of Shaver and Fraley's Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (Tay-Karapas et al., 2015). The scale consists of 9 statements (e.g., It is very helpful for me to go with my mother in difficult times) that are agreed upon by using a Likert scale (from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), where higher scores indicate higher maternal warmth. The scale presents high internal reliability (α=.86) when used as a self-report with Latin American youth.

Internalizing and externalizing behaviors were measured using a Chilean translation (Rivera Gutiérrez, 2013) of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman et al., 2000). The SDQ consists of 25 items answered on a 3 point Likert type scale that ranges from "Not true" to "Absolutely true," where higher scores indicate a higher presence of problem behaviors in general (e.g., "I am easily distracted, it's hard for me to concentrate). Internalizing problem behaviors (α=.82) is a second-order latent variable derived from combining emotional symptoms and peer relationship problems (α=.81, α=.63), while externalizing problem behaviors (α=.88) is derived from combining

conduct problems with hyperactivity/inattention (α=.76, α=.86). Both the SDQ and the ECRM were found to provide valid and reliable measures for internalizing an externalizing behaviors as well as parental attachment in Mexican preadolescents (Fuentes-Balderrama et al., 2020).

Analysis

Missing data were managed by series mean imputation, never exceeding 16 cases per variable (5% of the total *n*). Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were carried out to assess measurement invariance and model fit using AMOS 23. A series of exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) were then implemented to extract valid and reliable construct measurements of problem behaviors, maternal and joint parental practices. A series of mean comparisons were carried out to test our secondary hypothesis. The data were exported to Mplus 7.1, where SEM was carried out to test our primary hypotheses. The estimator used was Maximum Likelihood Mean and Variance (MLMV), given its robustness with non-normal data.

Results

CFAs depicted non-significant and cross-factor loadings that evidenced configural and metric non-invariance across all 6 instruments, thus exploratory factor analyses were carried out to extract valid and reliable measures of the constructs (see Table 1).

For all inventories, extreme group discrimination t-tests and internal consistency analyses were used to suppress items that did not discriminate or posed threats to scale reliability. As to the EFAs, the method used was principal component analysis with varimax rotation, following Kaiser's criterion and these were paired with internal consistency analyses. Resulting KMOs ($\geq$.7) and sphericity tests indicated sampling adequacy as well as the presence of non-identity matrices and thus confirmed the appropriateness to perform EFAs. The ECR-M converged on a bifactorial solution identical to the one proposed by the authors. Maternal Warmth was measured by items 1-4 and presented an internal consistency of α=.86.

The factorial analysis of parental practices was performed with both parenting inventories in a same item pool in order

Table 1. Fit statistics for confirmatory factor analyses

Scale	df	χ^2	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	C.I.	SRMR
ECR-M	26	67.88***	0.95	0.94	0.07	0.05–0.09	0.06
PPSm	80	136.49***	0.94	0.92	0.04	0.03–0.06	0.05
APQ	98	163.44***	0.89	0.86	0.05	0.03–0.05	0.06
SDQ	57	618.4***	0.69	0.65	0.06***	0.06–0.07	0.09

*Note: ECR-M: Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (mother version), PPm: Parental Practice Scale (mother version), APQ: Alabama Parenting Questionnaire, SDQ: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. * .05 **.01 ***.001*

to have more parsimonious measures and to deal with possible overlap between items. A 5-factor solution was achieved, but for the purpose of this research only two factors were used. Maternal Autonomy and Communication consisted of Parental Practices Scale mother version items 2, 14, and 15, while Parental Involvement and Communication was a joint measure of the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire items 1, 2 and 3 and the Parental Practice Scale mother version item 1. Each of the factor scales have an internal consistency of α=.7.

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire presented a total internal consistency of α=.72 and was subdivided into Externalizing Problem Behaviors (items 2, 5, 10, 15 and 18, α=.66) and Internalizing Problem Behaviors (items 3, 8, 13, 16 and 24, α=.64). Although Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated non-normality for the factor scales, skewness and kurtosis values were far from the absolute cut-off values that would suggest a need for data transformation. Factor scale descriptives for the global sample, boys, girls, different grades and household configurations are presented in Table 2.

As to mean comparisons, there were significant differences by sex where boys reported higher maternal warmth $t(293)$=2.03* Cohen's d=.23 and externalizing problem behaviors $t(293)$=2.017* Cohen's d=.23. Girls presented higher parental involvement and communication $t(285.33)$=-2.85** Cohen's d=.33. Schoolyear ANOVAs with Scheffé's post-hoc test as a measure to deal with unequal group sizes resulted in differences for maternal warmth $F(2,303)$=5.05** η=.03 and both internalizing $F(2,303)$=3.56* η=.02 and externalizing problem behaviors $F(2,303)$=6.86*** η=.04.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for factors among groups

	n	Internalizing		Externalizing		Maternal Autonomy and Communication		Maternal Warmth		Parental Involvement and Communication	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Global	306	8.33	2.42	8.84	2.44	9.76	2.22	16.08	8.24	12.55	2.89
Boys	151	8.19	2.3	9.09	2.48	9.53	2.18	17.22	7.83	12.12	3.11
Girls	144	8.49	2.61	8.53	2.34	9.98	2.25	15.29	8.55	13.07	2.51
4th grade	102	8.8	2.37	9.45	2.34	9.93	2.14	14.11	8.2	12.36	2.97
5th grade	92	8.3	2.46	8.89	2.61	9.77	2.24	16.39	8.76	12.84	2.97
6th grade	112	7.92	2.37	8.24	2.26	9.6	2.28	17.62	7.51	12.47	2.75
Intact	191	8.3	2.48	8.75	2.39	9.76	2.25	16.29	8.21	12.58	2.84
Fragmented	93	8.57	2.28	9.2	2.53	9.65	2.22	15.41	8.49	12.41	3.06

Sixth graders reported significantly higher maternal warmth when compared to 4th graders (Scheffé=3.5**) and significantly lower problem behaviors when compared to the same group (Internalizing=-.87* and Externalizing= -1.21***). No differences were found between fragmented and intact households.

The model was specified using parental practices as covarying exogenous variables that directly affect both problem behaviors. Externalizing problem behaviors were regressed on internalizing problem behaviors as well to test for possible mediation paths. During model building, Lagrange multipliers suggested adding covariances between the error terms of items: PPSm1–PPSm2 as well as ECR-M2–ECR-M3 (both pairs related to the frequency and quality of maternal communication). The model path diagram is presented in Figure 1.

The model resulted in S-B χ^2 (177): 207 p=.06, CFI: .97, TLI: .96, RMSEA: .02 (.00–.03), SRMR: .04, AIC: 16902.41 and BIC 17181.68, indicating absolute fit and low errors of approximation. All factor loadings were above the .4 threshold and significant; all latent variables presented significant variances as well.

Different Sobel tests with Bonferroni's adjustment were carried out to determine the significance of the mediation effects of internalizing problem behaviors between parental practices and externalizing problem behaviors. Maternal warmth as well as maternal autonomy and communication presented significant indirect effects on externalizing problem behaviors (maternal warmth β=-.17**, maternal autonomy and communication β=-.2*). Both direct and indirect effects for both outcome variables account for a moderate amount of explained variance (Internalizing R2=9%) (Externalizing R2=63%).

Discussion

Our model demonstrated significant negative associations between positive maternal practices and both internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors, which supports our principal hypothesis and confirms previous findings in Mexico and Latin America (Andrade Palos et al., 2012; Chainé et al., 2015; Cruz-Santiago & Ramírez García, 2011). Maternal practices of autonomy and communication are greatly associated with parental involvement and moderately related to maternal warmth, demonstrating that when mothers communicate clearly and openly, preadolescents

Figure 1. Parental practices and their effects on problem behaviors. (Lagrange multipliers not shown for clarity purposes)
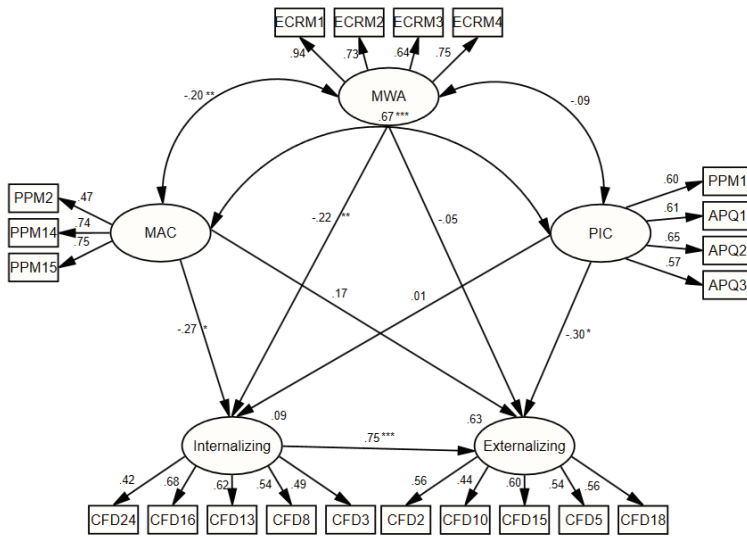
Note: MAC:Maternal Autonomy and Communication, MWA: Maternal Warmth, PIC: Parental Involvement and Communication.

perceive their mother as supporting, caring, trustworthy, and involved (Betancourt & Andrade, 2011; Cobos, 2008; Darío Moreno Carmona, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2015). As opposed to the findings of Benitez Camacho et al. (2005), maternal warmth was not associated with involvement. Preadolescents in our sample may not experience support, supervision or communication through practices of maternal warmth.

Maternal autonomy and communication was the strongest protective factor for internalizing problem behaviors in the model, which is consistent with previous international findings (Lorenzo-Moledo et al., 2017). The combination of communication and autonomy as a protective factor is experienced by preadolescents when mothers provide clear messages on values, rules, and parental expectations in an interactive way. This appears to bolster youth decision-making capabilities, commitment with parents and control over their own activities while shaping parental discipline and supervision (Barbosa, 2014; Co-

bos, 2008; Cuervo, 2010; Moreno Carmona, 2013; Morales Castillo & Aguirre Dávila, 2018; Smetana, 2011; Vargas Barbosa et al., 2017; Washington, 2018). By supporting and shaping autonomy, mothers demonstrate trust and acknowledge preadolescent resources which, in turn, help preadolescents acknowledge parental support and acceptance, thus acting as a protective factor for internalizing problem behaviors. The indirect effect on externalizing problem behaviors is explained by clear cues of socially acceptable behavior as well as preadolescent commitment and respect of parental authority, through which they may start to regulate their behavior to prevent disappointing their parents and losing their privacy, among other privileges.

Similarly, maternal warmth acts as a protective factor for internalizing problem behaviors, which confirms previous findings from Mexico, Latin America, and the United States (Benitez Camacho et al., 2005; Borda Mas et al., 2019; Cumsille et al., 2015; Mestre et al., 2010; Morales Chainé et al., 2017; Steinberg, 2001). By providing compliments, being empathetic and engaging in both physical and verbal demonstrations of love, mothers reinforce parental emotional support, which might motivate preadolescents to seek new activities, increase their social networks and develop their own confidence and self-efficacy against internalizing problem behaviors. Maternal warmth may reinforce preadolescent participation in their family through recognition and support, thus aiding in the development of communication and autonomy while reinforcing family loyalty as transmitted by the Mexican culture (Borda Mas et al., 2019; Cobos, 2008; Dadds et al., 2012). Maternal warmth presented an indirect effect on externalizing problem behaviors, which might be explained through maternal emotional discharge; through parental reinforcement of emotional self-efficacy, being aware of maternal emotional support and sharing concerns, any possible emotional distress is no longer channeled into the development of externalizing problem behaviors.

As proposed by previous Latin American research, parental involvement and communication act as protective factors for externalizing problem behaviors, probably due to the strong supervision component it conveys (Lara & Saracostti, 2019; Moreno Carmona, 2013). By providing support, cognitive scaffolding, and quality time, parents indirectly reinforce preadolescent self-esteem and self-efficacy (Eshel et al., 2006; Morales Castillo

& Aguirre Dávila, 2018; Mosmann & Wagner, 2008). Supplying preadolescents with culturally appropriate behavioral schemes, boosting their social development, and supporting their autonomy prove to be protective factors for externalizing problem behaviors, comparable to what occurs with maternal autonomy and communication.

As to our secondary hypotheses, sex differences were found where boys reported higher maternal warmth while girls presented higher parental involvement and communication; this was in line with previous Latin American research (Eguiarte & Arenas, 2019; Galaz et al., 2019).

The gender difference may be due to the cultural belief that girls are weaker and less independent than boys, thus they experience more parental involvement and supervision. Additionally, they may be influenced by cultural beliefs that girls should be taught to maintain family bonds and seek parental approval (Buitrago-Peña et al., 2009; Darling et al., 2008; Galaz et al., 2019). In contrast with previous research in Mexico and the United States, no difference in maternal autonomy and communication was found between sexes (Darling et al., 2008; Galaz et al., 2019). By not encountering differences in problem behaviors or parental practices by household configuration, the results suggest an intact household is not a necessary condition for positive preadolescent development in Mexican families. SEM model comparison between intact and fragmented households would confirm if preventive factors have similar mechanisms that serve as protective factors for children in fragmented households, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. Age-wise, younger preadolescents reported lower maternal warmth and higher problem behaviors. This is probably due to developmental processes where 4th graders apparently have begun a separation process in favor of their own autonomy where they perceive their mothers as less supportive than their older, more experienced counterparts. Despite our results, the cross-sectional design of this study cannot establish causal relationships between our variables, nor can it provide a reliable measurement of preadolescent development. A longitudinal study would also be beneficial in describing the association between parental practices and problem behaviors over time.

Implications for Social Welfare Policy

In accordance with Chainé and Pineda (2014), more research should be done to identify the efficacy in parental behavior training interventions such as Modularized Cognitive Training (Chorpita et al., 2011), or PMTO (Patterson et al., 2010) with Mexican parents. Additionally, new and existing programs need to be adapted with the nature of Mexican culture and parenting in mind. Interventions centered around parental behavior training can serve the dual purpose of developing efficient employment of parental practices as well as successful implementation of protective factors in Mexican families Before engaging in an intervention, Mexican parents should seek assistance in identifying the severity of preadolescent problem behaviors, as positive parental practices would not be as effective for children in clinical ranges of problem behaviors (Anderson & Branstetter, 2012).

Social programs for positive youth development and improved parenting need to be developed with an understanding that Mexican mothers benefit from developing communication skills aimed at reducing family conflict and improving collaborative problem solving with their children. By explaining the emerging need for autonomy of their children as well as including planning strategies aimed at maintaining respect among family members and acknowledging the importance of family loyalty, social programs will reinforce the mothers' position and build effective communication channels during adolescence (Manczak et al., 2018). Increasing maternal communication that makes expectations clear and includes preadolescents in family decisions increases parental involvement and serves as protective factor.

By reinforcing and recognizing preadolescent compliance with parental expectations while also allowing children to explore their own autonomy, mothers develop trust in the mother-child relationship while also supporting preadolescent autonomy. If preadolescents cannot balance parental expectations and autonomy, instructing mothers to not lose their temper or employ negative responses would offer them with an opportunity to provide preadolescents with support and guidance to learn from their mistakes. By not reacting in antagonistic ways, mothers reinforce seeking maternal help in similar situations in the future, while also reinforcing unconditional support. Coaching mothers in discriminating involvement from supervision and intrusion might help preadolescents perceive

parental involvement as supportive, while providing parents with information of potential contextual and social threats to overcome, without being a threatening or uncomfortable presence to their children.

As to cultural values, gender roles are highly reinforced from childhood and by engaging in more neutral practices or beliefs, mothers might be able to provide preadolescents with the practices they need, and not just what culture expects them to need. Mothers could reinforce duty and loyalty to family while being less supportive of the belief that an individual's behavior is representative of the whole family, or that individual desires and needs are less important than the family's. Similarly, parents would benefit greatly from being flexible in their hierarchical structure when making family decisions, as children have a right to share their opinions of what happens in the family.

This study was not without its limitations. The use of self-report questionnaires might have rendered biased answers from the sample, despite the inclusion of a confidentiality statement and relative privacy while answering questions. Although valid and reliable subscales were extracted from the APQ and SDQ, the results should be interpreted with caution as those measures were not originally designed to capture preadolescent perceptions. Future directions in this line of research should employ a stronger sampling procedure in order to compare structural equation models between subsamples. Incorporating negative parental practices into the model would provide a more realistic test of these parental practices as protective factors, while a longitudinal design would further explain the mechanisms and limitations of these protective factors. Incorporating paternal parental practices would probably indicate how maternal practices herald paternal, therefore incorporating the household hierarchical structure into models would provide higher external validity.

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