

Tilburg University

Three reasons why parental burnout is more prevalent in individualistic countries

Roskam, Isabelle; van Bakel, Hedwig; al., et.

DOI:

[10.21203/rs.3.rs-2109905/v1](https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-2109905/v1)

Publication date:

2022

Document Version

Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Roskam, I., van Bakel, H., & al, E. (2022). *Three reasons why parental burnout is more prevalent in individualistic countries: A 36-country study*. Research Square. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-2109905/v1>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Three reasons why parental burnout is more prevalent in individualistic countries: A 36-country study

Isabelle Roskam (✉ isabelle.roskam@uclouvain.be)

UCLouvain

Joyce Aguiar

University of Porto

Ege Akgun

Andrew F. Arena

Gizem Arikan

Kaisa Aunola

Eliane Besson

Wim Beyers

Emilie Boujut

Maria Elena Brianda

Anna Brytek-Matera

A. Meltem Budak

Noémie Carbonneau

Filipa César

University of Porto

Bin-Bin Chen

Géraldine Dorard

Luciana Carla Santos Elias

Sandra Dunsmuir

Natalia Egorova

Nicolas Favez

Anne-Marie Fontaine

Heather Foran

Julia Fricke

Kaichiro Furutani

Myrna Gannagé

Maria Gaspar

Lucie Godbout

Amit Goldenberg

James J. Gross

Maria Ancuta Gurza

Mai Helmy
Mai Trang Huynh
Taishi Kawamoto
Ljiljana B. Lazarevic
Sarah Le Vigouroux
Astrid Lebert-Charron
Vanessa Leme
Carolyn MacCann
Denisse Manrique-Millones
Marisa Matias
María Isabel Miranda-Orrego
Marina Miscioscia
Clara Morgades-Bamba
Seyyedeh Fatemeh Mousavi
Ana Muntean
Sally Olderbak
Fatumo Osman
Daniela Oyarce-Cadiz
Pablo A. Pérez-Díaz
Konstantinos V. Petrides
Claudia Pineda-Marin
Alena Prikhidko
Ricardo T. Ricci
Fernando Salinas-Quiroz
Ainize Sarrionandia
Céline Scola
Alessandra Simonelli
Paola Silva Cabrera
Bart Soenens
Emma Sorbring
Matilda Sorkkila
Charlotte Schrooyen
Elena Stănculescu
Elena Starchenkova
Dorota Szczygiel
Javier Tapia
Thi Minh Thuy Tri
Mélissa Tremblay
Hedwig van Bakel
Lesley Verhofstadt
Jaqueline Wendland
Saengduean Yotanyamaneewong

Moira Mikolajczak

UCLouvain

Research Article

Keywords: exhaustion, culture, individualism, mothers, fathers

Posted Date: October 4th, 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-2109905/v1>

License:  This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

[Read Full License](#)

Abstract

Purpose The prevalence of parental burnout, a condition that has severe consequences for both parents and children, varies dramatically across countries and is highest in Western countries characterized by high individualism.

Method In this study, we examined the mediators of the relationship between individualism measured at the country level and parental burnout measured at the individual level in 36 countries (16,059 parents).

Results The results revealed three mediating mechanisms, that is, self-discrepancies between socially prescribed and actual parental selves, high agency and self-directed socialization goals, and low parental task sharing, by which individualism leads to an increased risk of burnout among parents.

Conclusion The results confirm that the three mediators under consideration are all involved, and that mediation was higher for self-discrepancies between socially prescribed and actual parental selves, then parental task sharing, and lastly self-directed socialization goals. The results provide some important indications of how to prevent parental burnout at the societal level in Western countries.

Introduction

Having no energy left to take care of their children, feeling so exhausted in their parental role that sleeping does not allow them to recover, no longer being able to show how much they love their children, feeling zero pleasure in being with them, and feeling ashamed of the parents they have become: this is how thousands of mothers and fathers currently feel around the world [1]. These parents suffer from parental burnout, a condition characterized by physical and emotional exhaustion in parenting, emotional distancing from children, a loss of pleasure and effectiveness as a parent, and contrast with previous parental self, which results from a chronic imbalance between parenting stressors and resources [2, 3].

Over the past fifteen years, parental burnout has received increasing attention around the world [e.g., 4, 5–8]. In spite of this worldwide interest in the topic, the International Investigation of Parental Burnout (IIPB) recently highlighted considerable variations in the prevalence of parental burnout across countries [1]. A prevalence lower than 1% was observed in countries such as Thailand and Cuba, whereas parental burnout affects 5 to 8% of parents in Western countries like the United States, Canada, Poland, France and Belgium.

The significant variations in the prevalence of parental burnout across countries has led researchers to investigate the cultural factors associated with it. They have found that sociodemographic and economic factors contribute only marginally to parental burnout [e.g. 9, 10–12], whereas cultural values and, in particular, individualism explain a significant part of its variation across countries. The individualism of a country corresponds to a particular form of relationship between individuals and the groups to which they belong [13, 14]. In individualist countries, individuals maintain relatively loose ties and put their own needs before those of the group. In contrast, in collectivist countries, individuals are tightly connected and

the needs of the group are put before the needs of the individual. Based on his research, Hofstede ranked almost all countries in the world on a relative continuum from 0 (minimum level of individualism) to 100 (maximum level of individualism).

Based on a study of 42 countries around the world, the IIPB showed that the higher the level of individualism in a country, the higher the level of parental burnout reported by parents [1]. However, the mechanisms by which individualism leads to an increased risk of burnout among parents remain unknown. Investigating these mechanisms involves studying the mediators of the relationship between individualism measured at the country level and parental burnout measured at the individual level.

To identify possible mediators explaining why parents are more prone to burn out in individualistic countries, a look at the construct of individualism at the individual level is helpful. Individualistic people are characterized by autonomy and independence, individual achievement and responsibility, self-reliance [15], lack of concern for others [16], motivation for their own needs, goals and preferences, competition [17–19], self-direction, stimulation, power, hedonism [20–22], and perfectionism [23]. The characteristics of individualistic people provide important insights into how individualism can concretely affect the experience of parenting, from which we identified three relevant mediators to test.

First, in line with the individualists' characteristics of independence, individual achievement, and self-reliance, we hypothesized that in individualistic countries, parents carry out their responsibilities towards their children (i.e. earning money, providing food, taking care of their needs, protecting, playing, rearing them, and so on) on their own rather than with others. The African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" does not apply in individualistic countries because the social fabric is rather loose. This may be a vulnerability factor, because social support is an important resource against parental burnout [9, 24–28]. We therefore hypothesized that carrying all demanding parental responsibilities alone rather than sharing some of the parental tasks with relatives in the social network, would increase the risk of burning out, and that parental task sharing should mediate the link between individualism at the country level and parental burnout.

Second, in line with the individualists' characteristics of autonomy, self-direction, and power, we hypothesized that in individualistic countries, parents pursue culturally consistent socialization goals for their children, particularly agency and self-directed socialization goals [29–31]. In other words, parents prepare their children to be (individualistic) people oriented to the satisfaction of their personal needs and preferences. This prepares their children to integrate into their social group, but at the same time, it means that they are also more self-oriented, more demanding, and less inclined to comply with their parent's wishes. We therefore expected that socialization goals oriented towards the child's agency would make parenting more taxing, and mediate the link between individualism at the country level and parental burnout.

Third, in line with the individualists' characteristics of personal achievement, stimulation and perfectionism, we hypothesized that in individualistic countries, parents are more prone to perceive a gap between the socially prescribed parental self and their actual self. Western countries, characterized by

high levels of individualism, are marked by high standards in parenting [32–34], and studies have shown that these standards are internalized by parents, driving them to make constant efforts that make them more vulnerable to parental burnout [35, 36]. In line with this, we expected that self-discrepancies between socially prescribed and actual parental selves would mediate the link between individualism and parental burnout.

In order to test these three mediating effects, we collected data from 16,059 parents in 36 countries across the globe. For each country, we obtained the level of individualism from Hofstede’s dimensions of cultural values (retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>) as the most widely used indicators of cross-cultural differences [37, 38]. For each parent, we measured parental task-sharing, agency and self-directed socialization goals, parental self-discrepancies, and parental burnout. Since there is inter-individual variability in the level of individualism of parents within countries, especially in heterogeneous cultures that tolerate deviations of in-group members from the group values [18, 39], we also assessed individualism at the individual level and introduced it as a control variable in the model.

Methods

Participants

A sample of 16,059 parents, composed of 4,419 fathers ($M_{age} = 42.38$, $SD_{age} = 9.83$, range: 18–89) and 11,640 mothers ($M_{age} = 38.03$, $SD_{age} = 7.97$, range: 18–88) from 36 countries, was drawn from the IIPB database collected between December 2017 and December 2019 (see Procedure below). Among the 42 countries that participated in the IIPB data collection, 36 countries were retained in the present sample because individualism at the country level was not available for Algeria, Burundi, Cameroun, Cuba, Rwanda, and Togo. Parents were eligible to participate if they had at least one child still living at home and were at least 18 years old. The sociodemographic characteristics of the pooled sample and of the sample in each country are detailed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Procedure

The data used in this study came from the IIPB, a large international research consortium on parental burnout set up in 2017. This aimed to include the widest possible range of countries in terms of geographical location, cultural values and socio-economic level. These countries were invited to use a common protocol which was translated into 21 different languages using translation/back-translation procedures conducted by the consortium members and coordinated by the first author [for more information about the IIPB Consortium, see 1]. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board both at UCLouvain and in each country. Ethics approvals in each country are presented in Table S1.

The IIPB data collection was carried out between January 2018 and March 2020. To avoid (self-)selection bias, the survey was presented as a study designed to improve understanding of parental satisfaction and exhaustion around the world, rather than as a study on parental burnout. Participants who gave their informed consent were asked to complete the survey anonymously, but could withdraw at any moment without providing any justification. The presentation of the survey (i.e., paper and pencil, or online) and the data collection procedure (newspaper advertisement, word of mouth, social networks, door-to-door, etc.) differed from country to country according to local practices. The data collection procedure in each country has been summarized in Table S2.

Measures

The common IIPB protocol included several measures addressing different research questions (e.g., comparing the prevalence of parental burnout across countries; exploring parenting cultures and the model of the child around the globe; investigating the relations between maternal burnout and gender egalitarian values at both country and individual levels). Because these questions are too different to be addressed in the same article, only the measures considered in the current study are presented below. The full IIPB protocol is available on Open Science Framework (OSF) at https://osf.io/94w7u/?view_only=a6cf12803887476cb5e7f17cfb8b5ca2.

Individual Level

Sociodemographic characteristics. Participants were first asked about: their gender; their age; their educational level (number of successfully completed school years from the age of 6); their working status (in paid work or not); the family type (two-parent family; single-parent family, step-family; others (e.g. polygamous family, two same-sex parents, multigenerational family)) the number of children living in the household; the age of the youngest and the oldest child; the number of women (e.g. co-wife, grandmother, nanny, helper, etc.) living in the household/direct entourage and caring for the children on a daily basis (including the participant); the number of men (e.g. grandfather, uncle, etc.) living in the household/direct entourage and caring for the children on a daily basis; the number of hours the participant spent with the children per day (excluding nighttime hours); and the neighborhood profile (disadvantaged; average; prosperous).

Parental burnout. Parental burnout was assessed with the Parental Burnout Assessment [PBA, 40], a 23-item questionnaire assessing the four core symptoms of parental burnout: emotional exhaustion (9 items) (e.g., *I feel completely run down by my role as a parent*), contrast with previous parental self (6 items) (e.g., *I tell myself I'm no longer the parent I used to be*), loss of pleasure in one's parental role (5 items) (e.g., *I don't enjoy being with my children*) and emotional distancing from one's children (3 items) (e.g., *I am no longer able to show my children that I love them*), on a 7-point frequency scale (never (0), a few times a year (1), once a month or less (2), a few times a month (3), once a week (4), a few times a week (5), every day (6)). The parental burnout score was calculated by summing the scores on the 23 items. The higher the score, the more severe the parental burnout symptoms.

Parental task-sharing. Parental task-sharing was measured with 23 items specifically created for the IIPB. They were based on LeVine's conceptual framework of universal parental function [41], encompassing 6 items on task-sharing regarding basic needs (e.g. *Being present during the child(ren)'s meals*), 5 items on task-sharing regarding material subsistence (e.g. *Earning money to pay for food*), and 11 items on task-sharing regarding childrearing (e.g. *Teaching children what is and is not allowed*). The items were briefly introduced as follows: "*Being a parent encompasses a set of tasks and responsibilities. These can be shared among several adults who raise the child(ren) together. For the following tasks and responsibilities, indicate whether you take care of it on your own or together with someone else (e.g. the other parent, grandparents, relatives, brothers and sisters, people you trust in your community, ...).*" Parents answered the items on a 5-point-scale (me exclusively (0), mainly me (1), half me and half someone else (2), mainly someone else (3), someone else exclusively (4)). The parental task-sharing score was obtained by summing the scores on the 23 items. The higher the score, the more the parent shared his/her parental tasks and responsibilities.

Agency and self-directed socialization goals. Agency socialization goals were measured with the 12 items of the agency and self-direction subscales of the Goals and Values in Adulthood Questionnaire [GVAQ, 42]. A list of long-term goals and values that can be transmitted to child(ren) by parents was provided (e.g. *Thinking for yourself: having your own views even if they differ from those of the others*). Parents were asked to indicate how important they felt it was for their child(ren) to acquire or have each of these values as adults. Parents answered the items on a 6-point-scale (not important (0), somewhat important (1), important (2), very important (3), extremely important (4), the most important (5)). The agency score was obtained by averaging the scores on the 12 items. The higher the score, the more pronounced the agency and self-directed socialization goals.

Parental self-discrepancies. The discrepancy between parental selves was measured using a variation of the S-DS [43]. In the current study, the respondents were first invited to freely name five characteristics that the society in which they were raising their child(ren) considered that an ideal parent should possess (*Indicate in the following boxes five features that an ideal mother/father should have in the view of the society in which you live*). Second, they evaluated the actual/socially prescribed discrepancy through the following item: *As a parent, do you behave the way society expects you to?*, rated on a scale from 0 to 100% ranging from "I don't behave in this way at all" to "I behave exactly in this way", so that higher scores reflected *lower* parental self-discrepancies.

Individualism. Individualism at the individual level was assessed with the 11 independence items (e.g. *I try to do what is best for me, regardless of how that might affect others*) of the Singelis Self-Construal Scale [44]. Parents answered on a 6-point-scale (strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), somewhat disagree (3), neither agree nor disagree (4), somewhat agree (5), agree (6), strongly agree (7)). The individualism score at the individual level was obtained by averaging the scores on the 11 items, so that higher scores reflected higher individualism.

Country Level

Individualism. Individualism at the country level was retrieved from Hofstede's work [45]. Individualism scores ranged between 0 and 100 (retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>). In the present sample, Individualism scores ranged between 8 (Ecuador) and 91 (USA). They are displayed in Table 2 for the 36 countries.

Statistical analyses

Stata17 [46] was used to perform the statistical analyses. The full syntax and dataset are available on OSF at https://osf.io/h5fdx/?view_only=7947a23e5e2b4dd8b5a503064b758e22. Preliminary analyses were conducted in order to test the validity of the measures (i.e., measurement invariance across languages), normality, and correlations between all variables. Details about the preliminary analyses are provided in the supplemental material.

For the main analyses, we estimated a structural path model in which individualism at the country level predicted parental burnout both directly and indirectly through the three mediators, i.e. parental task-sharing, agency socialization goals and parental self-discrepancies, and the control variable, i.e. individualism at the individual level. The model also controlled for the relation between individualism at the country level and individualism at the individual level, as well as for covariances between the three mediators, and between the three mediators and the control variable, i.e. individualism at the individual level. The maximum likelihood method of estimation was used to estimate the model, with the option `mlmv` so that we used all the information available without listwise deletion. We then tested the direct, indirect and total effects of individualism at the country level on parental burnout. Since the specific effects of the three mediators were confounded in the indirect effect coefficient, we tested the equality of coefficients to identify if some mediators played a more important role in the model. Finally, we compared the total effect of individualism at the country level on parental burnout through each of the significant mediation processes by multiplying the coefficient of the path between individualism at the country level and the mediator, by the coefficient of the path between the mediator and parental burnout, plus the coefficient of the direct link between individualism at the country level and parental burnout.

Results

The results of the mediation model are presented in Fig. 1. They confirmed our hypotheses about the mediation processes. As expected, when individualism at the individual level was controlled for, individualism at the country level predicted lower parental task-sharing, higher agency socialization goals and higher parental self-discrepancies. In turn, low parental task-sharing, high agency socialization goals and high parental self-discrepancies predicted higher parental burnout.

As shown in Fig. 1, the standardized estimate of the direct effect of individualism at the country level on parental burnout was .19, $z = 21.66$, $p < .000$. The indirect effect was .05, $z = 16.12$, $p < .000$, and the total effect was .24, $z = 27.01$, $p < .000$. We can deduce that 79% (.19/.24) of the effect of individualism at the country level on parental burnout was direct after controlling for the three mediators and individualism at the individual level, whereas 21% (.05/.24) of the effect was indirect through the three mediators. In other

words, after controlling for the three mediators and individualism at the country level, the majority of the effect of individualism at the country level on parental burnout was direct. There was a sizeable but smaller percentage of the effect that was indirect. Overall, the mediation model explained 7% of the variance in parental burnout.

With regard to the equality of coefficients between the three mediators and parental burnout, we found a higher effect of parental self-discrepancy compared to parental task-sharing, $\chi^2(1) = 106.65, p < .000$, or agency socialization goals, $\chi^2(1) = 518.04, p < .000$, as well as a higher effect of parental task-sharing compared to agency socialization goals, $\chi^2(1) = 191.87, p < .000$.

In sum, the results of the direct, indirect and total effects, as well as the tests of the equality of coefficients, suggest a hierarchy in the contribution of mediators: the total effect of individualism at the country level on parental burnout was highest through the mediation effect of parental self-discrepancies ($-.11^*-.22 + .19 = .214$), then through the mediation effect of parental task-sharing ($-.12^*-.11 + .19 = .203$), and finally through the mediation effect of agency socialization goals ($.11^*.05 + .19 = .195$).

Discussion

The objective of the current study was to investigate the mechanisms by which individualism leads to an increased risk of burnout among parents. We therefore studied three mediators of the relationship between individualism measured at the country level and parental burnout measured at the individual level. The results confirm that the three mediators under consideration are all involved.

The first and most important mediator was parental self-discrepancy. Parents from individualistic countries are more prone to perceive a gap between the socially prescribed parental self and their actual self. In turn, parents who perceive such a gap are at higher risk of burning out. The standards of parenting that prevail in Western societies seem to be internalized by parents and foster a sense of underachievement in their role as parents [36, 47]. Our results suggest that the expectations of Western societies may be so demanding that some parents might feel that they are never doing enough for their children and that they must constantly try harder to become more perfect parents and have better children, leaving them exhausted and unfulfilled in their parental role [35, 48].

In the order of significance, the second mediator at play was parental task-sharing. The responsibilities that must be assumed and the tasks that must be accomplished as a parent are broad and demanding, especially in societies with high standards of parenting. In individualistic countries, parents feel that these responsibilities belong to the parent alone. They aim to accomplish everything by themselves without asking for help. Parenting responsibilities and tasks are therefore not readily shared with other caregivers. Our results are fully in line with previous research in other fields and samples such as physicians [49, 50] and employees [51], suggesting an association between individualistic cultures that both promote self-reliance and impede help-seeking behavior, and burnout, depression or medication use.

The third mediator involved was agency and self-directed socialization goals. The transmission of the values that prevail in the social group to which one belongs is an important mission for parents as they prepare their children to take their place in their group. Parents raising their children in individualistic countries therefore transmit the values of independence, self-direction and power. From an early age, children from individualistic cultures learn that their needs and desires are primary. They are encouraged to make their own choices and find their own path in life [52]. These self-oriented socialization goals would be associated with a decrease in parental guidance and authority in favor of negotiation and compromise between parent and child when the adult is required to constrain the child's choices and limit individual freedom. Parents should then justify their requests more, rather than impose them, in order to obtain the child's compliance. This would make the parent's educational task not only more demanding but also more stressful because the parent is never assured of obtaining the child's obedience.

These three mediating mechanisms were responsible for 21% of the effect of country-level individualism on parenting burnout. This percentage matters. However, the mechanisms by which cultural values translate into individual behaviors or symptoms are very complex, and this study indicates that 79% of the effect of country-level individualism on parenting burnout is mediated by other mechanisms that were not measured here. We will return to this point in our discussion of future directions below.

Furthermore, the estimation of the percentage of variance explained in parenting burnout showed that 7% could be attributed to the variables considered in the model. Parental burnout results from multiple factors originating from the social and cultural context on the one hand [about 1/4 of the variance, see 1], and from inter-individual differences on the other hand [about 3/4 of the variance, see 1]. Consideration of other mediating mechanisms could help increase the proportion of variance explained at the societal level. A better understanding of these mechanisms is essential if we are to prevent parental burnout in individualistic societies, where it is reaching worrying levels of prevalence [1]. These levels have further increased during the pandemic [53]. It is not in the interest of Western societies for parents to burn out, given their responsibilities for optimal child development, the need to balance work and parenting responsibilities, the risks to the physical and mental health of burnt-out parents [54], and the risk of increased neglect and violence towards their children [2, 9].

The mechanisms that we have detected in this study provide indications of how to prevent parental burnout at the societal level. In particular, they suggest first that the high standards associated with ideal parenting should be questioned in terms of their relevance and their impact on parents and their children. Second, our results should lead us to reconsider the social support available to parents. Solidarity between parents, and more generally between adults, is important to ensure that childrearing is the responsibility of the social group or community, and not of the parent alone. Consider extending the concept of co-parenting to include the involvement of the other parent, but also of other caregivers available in the child's environment, could help us to carry the debate forward. Third, our results point to potential derives that may be taken by the rearing of children as it prevails in individualistic societies. Childrearing in this context may lead children to be narcissistic [55, 56], and exclusively focused on the satisfaction of their needs without regard for those of others. The dangers of such tendencies for

democratic societies have recently been raised with regard to ego inflation [57] and mixed attitudes toward collective concerns like environmental protection in both Europe and the United States [58, 59] for example.

Limitations And Future Directions

In this study, we tested mediators of the link between country-level individualism and parental burnout. Nevertheless, the higher prevalence of parental burnout in individualistic countries should not hide its prevalence in collectivistic countries too. Mechanisms specific to these cultures should also be explored and tested. It is the researchers from these cultures who must develop hypotheses about the mediators at work. We hope that our study will stimulate researchers to do so in order to move away from exclusively WEIRD (i.e., western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) knowledge about parenting.

With regard to the cultural roots of parental burnout in individualistic countries, our study is far from having identified and estimated all the relevant mechanisms. New studies will have to be devoted to these still unexplored mechanisms; some of the possible candidates are briefly outlined below.

As suggested by our results on parental task-sharing, social support is probably a mediator in the relation between individualism at the country level and parental burnout. One limit of the current study is that we only measured social support with regard to parenting task-sharing. Glazer [60] showed that social support, in a broader sense, varies across cultures. In particular, in the job domain, people from Western countries are more likely to perceive support from their supervisor but less likely to perceive support from their coworkers. Similarly, we would expect that Western parents perceive less social support from those in their social circle (i.e., the other parent, the grand-parents, neighbors or friends), despite the fact that this is an important resource for coping with stress [61, 62]. Its protective effect against parenting stress [63], parental exhaustion [64], and parental burnout [9, 24–28] have now been largely demonstrated. Its effects are potent [9, 65] and it is therefore a very strong mediation candidate.

Another potential mediator that has not been measured here is children's externalizing behavior. By virtue of agency and self-directedness amongst other factors, the prevalence of externalizing behaviors is higher in Western countries than in Asian countries [66] and they have been associated with increased parenting stress and exhaustion [see 67 for a meta-analysis]. They are thus a likely and possibly potent mediator between individualism and parental burnout.

A third possible mediator is parenting role restriction, i.e., the perceived loss of freedom associated with one's parental role. Parenting role restriction is probably higher in individualistic countries because of individualistic parents' focus on their own desires on the one hand, and the sacrifices needed to raise a child, which stand in the way of parents' self-realization, on the other hand. The fact that parenting role restriction has been shown to be strongly associated with parental burnout [12] as well as to be associated with parental regrets in Western countries [68] makes it a very likely candidate mediator.

As the above-mentioned examples show, there are many other candidate mediators and these should ideally be tested in multiple and sequential mediation models. It is likely that agency and self-directedness goals reduce the strength of discipline, thus increasing externalizing behaviors, which may in turn eventually increase parental burnout. Future studies that go deeper into the complex mediating pathways between individualism and parental burnout are thus needed, and it is our hope that the current study will stimulate such research efforts. These are crucially needed to determine the best targets to prevent parental burnout.

Declarations

Funding

I.R. and M.M. were supported by a Coordinated Research Grant from the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles in Belgium (ARC Grant n°19/24-100). This fund did not exert any influence or censorship of any kind on the present work.

Authors' Contribution

Original idea for the study: Isabelle Roskam. Study design: Isabelle Roskam, Moïra Mikolajzac, and Madaï Valdés Pacheco. Data collection: All authors. Data management and data analysis: Isabelle Roskam. Writing of the first draft of the paper: Isabelle Roskam and Moïra Mikolajzac. The final draft has been read and approved by all coauthors.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing financial interests or funding source that could have influenced the data collection, analysis or conclusions. M.M. and I.R. have now founded a training institute which delivers training on parental burnout to professionals. The institute did not participate in the funding of this study nor did it influence the process, the results or their interpretation in any manner.

Acknowledgment

The authors thank the International Investigation of Parental Burnout (IIPB) Consortium (<https://www.burnoutparental.com/international-consortium>) for collecting and providing the data on which this study is based.

Availability of data and material

The full protocol, database, and syntaxes are available on OSF https://osf.io/94w7u/?view_only=a6cf12803887476cb5e7f17cfb8b5ca2.

References

1. Roskam, I, J Aguiar, E Akgun, et al. (2021) Parental Burnout Around the Globe: a 42-Country Study. *Affective Science* 2:58–79. 10.1007/s42761-020-00028-4
2. Mikolajczak, M, JJ Grossl Roskam (2019) Parental Burnout: What Is It, and Why Does It Matter? *Clinical Psychological Science* 7:1319–29. 10.1177/2167702619858430
3. Mikolajczak, M, JJ Grossl Roskam (2021) Beyond Job Burnout: Parental Burnout! *Trends Cogn. Sci.* 25:333–36. 10.1016/j.tics.2021.01.012
4. Wang, W, S Wang, S Chen, et al. (2022) Parental burnout and job burnout in working couples: An actor-partner interdependence model. *J. Fam. Psychol.* 36:704–12. 10.1037/fam0000953
5. Kerr, ML, KA Fanning, T Huynh, et al. (2021) Parents' Self-Reported Psychological Impacts of COVID-19: Associations With Parental Burnout, Child Behavior, and Income. *J. Pediatr. Psychol.* 46:1162–71. 10.1093/jpepsy/jsab089
6. Lin, G-XD Szczygieł (2022) Basic Personal Values and Parental Burnout: a Brief Report. *Affective Science*. 10.1007/s42761-022-00103-y
7. Manrique-Millones, D, GM Vasin, S Dominguez-Lara, et al. (2022) Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA) in Different Hispanic Countries: An Exploratory Structural Equation Modeling Approach. *Front. Psychol.* 13. 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.827014
8. Sodi, T, LB Kpassagou, O Hatta, et al. (2020) Parenting and parental burnout in Africa. *New Dir. Child Adolesc. Dev.* 2020:101 – 17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20386>
9. Szczygieł, D, M Sekulowicz, P Kwiatkowski, et al. (2020) Validation of the Polish version of the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA). *New Dir. Child Adolesc. Dev.* 2020:137 – 58. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20385>
10. Vigouroux, SLC Scola (2018) Differences in Parental Burnout: Influence of Demographic Factors and Personality of Parents and Children. *Front. Psychol.* 9. 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00887
11. Kwiatkowski, PM Sekulowicz (2017) Examining the Relationship of Individual Resources and Burnout in Mothers of Children with Disabilities. *Int. J. Spec. Educ.* 32:823–41.
12. Mikolajczak, M, M-E Raes, H Avalosse, et al. (2018) Exhausted parents: Sociodemographic, child-related, parent-related, parenting and family-functioning correlates of parental burnout. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 27:602–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0892-4>
13. Hofstede, G (1980) Culture and Organizations. *International Studies of Management & Organization* 10:15–41. 10.1080/00208825.1980.11656300
14. Hofstede, G. in *Contemporary issues in cross-cultural psychology*. 4–20 (Swets & Zeitlinger Publishers, 1991).
15. Ho, DY-FC-Y Chiu (1994) Component ideas of individualism, collectivism, and social organization: An application in the study of Chinese culture. (eds) *Individualism and collectivism: Theory, method, and applications*. Sage Publications, Inc, Thousand Oaks, CA, US, 137 – 56
16. Hui, CHHC Triandis (1986) Individualism-Collectivism: A Study of Cross-Cultural Researchers. *J. Cross Cult. Psychol.* 17:225–48. 10.1177/0022002186017002006

17. Triandis, H (1995) Individualism and Collectivism. Westview Press, Boulder, CO
18. Triandis, HC (1989) The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychol. Rev.* 96:506 – 20. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.96.3.506>
19. Triandis, HC, C McCusker, H Betancourt, et al. (1993) An Etic-Emic Analysis of Individualism and Collectivism. *J. Cross Cult. Psychol.* 24:366–83. 10.1177/0022022193243006
20. Schwartz, SH (1990) Individualism-collectivism: Critique and proposed refinements. *J. Cross Cult. Psychol.* 21:139–57. 10.1177/0022022190212001
21. Schwartz, SH (1992) Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. (eds) *Advances in experimental social psychology*, Vol. 25. Academic Press, San Diego, CA, US, 1–65
22. Schwartz, SH (1994) Are There Universal Aspects in the Structure and Contents of Human Values? *Journal of Social Issues* 50:19–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb01196.x>
23. Curran, TAP Hill (2019) Perfectionism Is Increasing Over Time: A Meta-Analysis of Birth Cohort Differences From 1989 to 2016. *Psychol. Bull.* 145:410–29. 10.1037/bul0000138
24. Weiss, MJ (2002) Hardiness and social support as predictors of stress in mothers of typical children, children with autism, and children with mental retardation. *Autism* 6:115–30. 10.1177/1362361302006001009
25. Ardic, A (2020) Relationship between Parental Burnout Level and Perceived Social Support Levels of Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *International Journal of Educational Methodology* 6:533–43.
26. Lindström, C, J AmanA Lindhal-Norberg (2011) Parental burnout in relation to sociodemographic, psychosocial and personality factors as well as disease duration and glycaemic control in children with Type 1 diabetes mellitus. *Acta Paediatr.* 100:1011–17. 10.1111/j.1651-2227.2011.02155.x
27. Yamoah, J (2021) The Role of Social Support in Mitigating Parental Burnout for Mothers of Children with Medical Complexity [Doctoral dissertation]. Southeastern University
28. Lebert-Charron, A, J Wendland, S Vivier-Prioul, et al. (2021) Does Perceived Partner Support Have an Impact on Mothers' Mental Health and Parental Burnout? *Marriage & Family Review* 1–21. 10.1080/01494929.2021.1986766
29. Tamis-LeMonda, CS (2003) Cultural Perspectives on the 'Whats?' and 'Whys?' of Parenting. *Hum. Dev.* 46:319–27.
30. Keller, H, B Lamm, M Abels, et al. (2006) Cultural Models, Socialization Goals, and Parenting Ethnotheories: A Multicultural Analysis. *J. Cross Cult. Psychol.* 37:155–72. 10.1177/0022022105284494
31. Li, Y, P CostanzoM Putallaz (2010) Maternal Socialization Goals, Parenting Styles, and Social-Emotional Adjustment Among Chinese and European American Young Adults: Testing a Mediation Model. *The Journal of genetic psychology* 171:330–62. 10.1080/00221325.2010.505969

32. Nelson, MK (2010) *Parenting out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain Times*. New York University Press, New York
33. Faircloth, C (2014) Intensive parenting and the expansion of parenting. In: E Lee, J Bristow, C Faircloth, J Macvarish (eds) *Parenting culture studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 25–50
34. Hays, S (1996) *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. Yale University Press, New Haven
35. Lin, G-X, L Hansotte, D Szczygieł, et al. (2021) Parenting with a smile: Display rules, regulatory effort, and parental burnout. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 38:2701–21. 10.1177/02654075211019124
36. Meeussen, LC Van Laar (2018) Feeling Pressure to Be a Perfect Mother Relates to Parental Burnout and Career Ambitions. *Front. Psychol.* 9. 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02113
37. Bleidorn, W, RC Arslan, JJ Denissen, et al. (2016) Age and gender differences in self-esteem—A cross-cultural window. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 11:396.
38. Taras, V, BL Kirkman, P Steel (2010) Examining the impact of culture's consequences: A three-decade, multilevel, meta-analytic review of Hofstede's cultural value dimensions. *J. Appl. Psychol.* 95:405.
39. Uz, I (2014) The Index of Cultural Tightness and Looseness Among 68 Countries. *J. Cross Cult. Psychol.* 46:319–35. 10.1177/0022022114563611
40. Roskam, I, ME Brianda, M Mikolajczak (2018) A Step Forward in the Conceptualization and Measurement of Parental Burnout: The Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA). *Front. Psychol.* 9. 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00758
41. LeVine, RA (1977) Childrearing as cultural adaptation. In: PH Leiderman, SR Tulkin, AH Rosenfeld (eds) *Culture and infancy*. Academic Press, New York, 14–27
42. Suizzo, M-A (2002) French parents' cultural models and childrearing beliefs. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 26:297–307.
43. Philippot, P, V Dethier, C Baeyens, et al. (2018) Validation of the Self-Discrepancies Scale (S-DS). A tool to investigate the self in clinical and research settings. *Eur. Rev. Appl. Psychol.* 68:69–77. 10.1016/j.erap.2018.04.001
44. Singelis, TM (1994) The Measurement of Independent and Interdependent Self-Construals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 20:580–91. 10.1177/0146167294205014
45. Hofstede, G (2001) *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*. Sage publications, London
46. StataCorp. (StataCorp LLC, College Station, TX, 2021).
47. Sorkkila, MK Aunola (2020) Risk Factors for Parental Burnout among Finnish Parents: The Role of Socially Prescribed Perfectionism. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 29:648–59. 10.1007/s10826-019-01607-1
48. Lin, G-X, D Szczygieł, K Piotrowski (2022) Child-Oriented Perfectionism and Parental Burnout: The Moderating Role of Parents' Emotional Intelligence. *Pers. Individ. Dif.*

49. Lund, S, A-L D'Angelo, R Busch, et al. (2022) With a Little Help From My Friends: The Negating Impact of Social Community and Mentorship on Burnout. *J. Surg. Res.* 278:190–95.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jss.2022.04.062>
50. Rangel, EL, M Castillo-Angeles, M Kismet, et al. (2020) Lack of Routine Healthcare among Resident Physicians in New England. *J. Am. Coll. Surg.* 230:885–92. 10.1016/j.jamcollsurg.2019.11.005
51. Littman-Ovadia, H, L OrenS Lavy (2013) Attachment and Autonomy in the Workplace: New Insights. *Journal of career assessment* 21:502–18. 10.1177/1069072712475282
52. Van Petegem, S, M VansteenkisteW Beyers (2013) The Jingle–Jangle Fallacy in Adolescent Autonomy in the Family: In Search of an Underlying Structure. *J. Youth Adolesc.* 42:994–1014. 10.1007/s10964-012-9847-7
53. Bakel, Hv, C Bastiaansen, R Hall, et al. (2022) Parental Burnout Across the Globe During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Perspectives in Psychology* 11:141 – 52. 10.1027/2157–3891/a000050
54. Mikolajczak, M, ME Brianda, H Avalosse, et al. (2018) Consequences of parental burnout: Its specific effect on child neglect and violence. *Child Abuse Negl.* 80:134–45. 10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.03.025
55. Eberly-Lewis, MB, M Vera-HughesTM Coetzee (2018) Parenting and Adolescent Grandiose Narcissism: Mediation through Independent Self-Construal and Need for Positive Approval. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 179:207–18. 10.1080/00221325.2018.1472549
56. Yilmaz, H (2020) Possible result of extreme parenting: Power of helicopter parenting attitude to predict ego inflation. *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction* 10:523–54. 10.14527/pegegog.2020.018
57. Dupont, S, M MikolajczakI Roskam (2022) The Cult of the Child: A Critical Examination of Its Consequences on Parents, Teachers and Children. *Social Sciences* 11:141.
58. Gray, SG, KT Raimi, R Wilson, et al. (2019) Will Millennials save the world? The effect of age and generational differences on environmental concern. *J. Environ. Manage.* 242:394–402. 10.1016/j.jenvman.2019.04.071
59. VanHeuvelen, TN Summers (2019) Divergent roads: A cross-national intercohort analysis of affluence and environmental concern. *Soc. Sci. Res.* 82:72–91. 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2019.04.001
60. Glazer, S. 605 – 22 (Elsevier Science, 2006).
61. Schwarzer, RA Leppin (1989) Social support and health: A meta-analysis. *Psychol. Health* 3:1–15. 10.1080/08870448908400361
62. Thoits, PA (1995) Stress, coping, and social support processes: where are we? What next? *J. Health Soc. Behav. Spec No*:53–79.
63. Masarik, ASRD Conger (2017) Stress and child development: A review of the Family Stress Model. 85–90. 10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.05.008
64. Gillis, AI Roskam (2019) Daily exhaustion and support in parenting: Impact on the quality of the parent–child relationship. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 28:2007–16. 10.1007/s10826-019-01428-2

65. Lin, G-X, A Goldenberg, G Arikan, et al. (in press) Reappraisal, Social Support, and Parental Burnout.. British Journal of Clinical Psychology.
66. Crijnen, AA, TM AchenbachFC Verhulst (1999) Problems reported by parents of children in multiple cultures: the Child Behavior Checklist syndrome constructs. Am. J. Psychiatry 156:569–74. 10.1176/ajp.156.4.569
67. Barroso, NE, L Mendez, PA Graziano, et al. (2018) Parenting stress through the lens of different clinical groups: A systematic review & meta-analysis. Journal of abnormal child psychology 46:449–61.
68. Moore, JJS Abetz (2019) What Do Parents Regret About Having Children? Communicating Regrets Online. Journal of family issues 40:390–412. 10.1177/0192513X18811388

Tables

Table 1 is available in the Supplementary Files section.

Table 2. Individualism Score (at Country Level), Mean Level of Parental Burnout, Parental Task Sharing, Agency Socialization Goals, Parental Self-Discrepancy, and Individualism Score (at Individual Level) for Each Country (Standard Deviations are in Parentheses).

	Individualism Score (at Country Level)	Parental Burnout	Parental Task Sharing	Agency Socialization Goals	Parental Self-Discrepancy	Individualism Score (at Individual Level)
Argentina	46	20.50 (20.85)	59.44 (14.94)	4.56 (.75)	57.98 (25.85)	5.06 (.86)
Australia	90	24.57 (25.07)	58.10 (14.90)	4.59 (.82)	69.67 (22.17)	4.98 (.69)
Austria	55	21.58 (19.41)	60.03 (9.68)	4.79 (.61)	56.38 (21.02)	4.70 (.74)
Belgium	75	36.77 (31.13)	57.79 (13.93)	4.73 (.71)	59.04 (20.75)	4.72 (.75)
Brazil	38	16.02 (19.34)	61.62 (15.42)	-	68.27 (27.51)	4.78 (.75)
Canada	80	32.82 (29.48)	56.51 (15.12)	4.49 (.69)	64.08 (20.27)	4.85 (.76)
Chile	23	28.99 (25.70)	59.72 (11.48)	4.93 (.68)	55.91 (24.99)	5.27 (.67)
China	20	10.83 (17.95)	61.79 (12.45)	4.00 (.98)	70.64 (19.44)	4.48 (.75)
Colombia	13	17.95 (19.71)	52.91 (13.61)	4.90 (.79)	65.38 (25.55)	5.34 (.65)
Costa Rica	15	24.34 (25.21)	64.73 (10.89)	5.27 (.62)	59.21 (27.98)	5.46 (.65)
Ecuador	8	19.47 (19.97)	60.23 (12.01)	4.92 (.88)	57.58 (26.66)	5.43 (.81)
Egypt	25	33.43 (24.00)	61.81 (10.02)	4.32 (.89)	82.45 (15.65)	-
Finland	63	31.96 (27.38)	58.59 (11.39)	4.73 (.66)	63.03 (21.90)	4.68 (.68)
France	71	29.24 (28.23)	53.24 (19.25)	4.49 (.72)	56.27 (23.65)	4.79 (.70)
Germany	67	25.06 (21.71)	57.99 (13.90)	4.82 (.72)	57.50 (26.22)	4.63 (.67)
Iran	41	15.49 (21.06)	57.78 (15.01)	5.03 (.85)	81.68 (19.83)	5.16 (.78)
Italy	76	16.08 (17.03)	62.29 (10.65)	4.73 (.79)	54.60 (26.37)	4.60 (.70)
Japan	46	12.76 (22.63)	63.78 (14.51)	3.54 (.92)	56.04 (23.79)	4.51 (.64)

Lebanon	40	19.47 (26.71)	67.11 (6.79)	4.45 (1.08)	81.91 (16.29)	5.22 (.60)
Pakistan	14	17.70 (14.78)	55.69 (15.03)	3.77 (.87)	3.37 (1.29)	3.90 (.86)
Peru	16	18.43 (18.31)	59.90 (14.87)	4.38 (.91)	70.97 (24.83)	4.80 (.86)
Poland	60	39.41 (30.46)	63.24 (30.46)	4.71 (.76)	59.06 (23.79)	4.76 (.68)
Portugal	27	17.06 (20.70)	62.53 (9.27)	-	66.23 (28.19)	4.92 (.62)
Romania	30	22.26 (25.72)	64.39 (9.71)	4.84 (.90)	60.93 (25.87)	4.74 (.67)
Russia	39	26.93 (29.32)	59.58 (11.01)	4.28 (.85)	55.18 (26.77)	4.60 (.68)
Serbia	25	18.90 (18.97)	61.11 (12.46)	3.88 (.59)	65.54 (25.45)	4.94 (.65)
Spain	51	22.64 (25.28)	60.23 (12.84)	4.85 (.74)	62.83 (32.16)	4.62 (.57)
Sweden	71	20.26 (21.97)	55.35 (17.28)	4.36 (.67)	59.99 (23.69)	4.76 (.72)
Switzerland	68	31.80 (28.05)	60.14 (11.88)	4.57 (.70)	56.55 (23.05)	4.75 (.76)
Thailand	20	5.74 (9.17)	62.15 (11.19)	4.69 (.88)	80.71 (13.34)	4.92 (.64)
Netherlands	80	19.17 (21.35)	60.35 (17.61)	4.52 (.66)	64.22 (21.42)	4.90 (.67)
Turkey	37	12.1 (13.87)	60.55 (15.04)	5.24 (.78)	78.56 (21.27)	5.23 (.74)
UK	89	28.01 (24.68)	61.30 (10.88)	4.48 (.74)	60.90 (21.49)	4.66 (.70)
Uruguay	36	12.03 (13.62)	63.86 (9.71)	4.59 (.82)	78.56 (16.10)	4.87 (.94)
USA	89	32.41 (32.92)	56.02 (16.85)	4.70 (.89)	64.88 (24.78)	5.00 (.83)
Vietnam	20	12.16 (16.40)	63.22 (9.72)	3.02 (.99)	67.39 (27.09)	3.57 (.81)
Pooled sample	-	24.61 (26.35)	59.30 (14.03)	4.55 (.89)	63.48 (25.04)	4.78 (.79)

Note. Data about agency socialization goals were not collected in Brazil and Portugal. Data about individualism (in individual level) were not collected in Egypt.

Table 3. Correlations between Individualism (at Country Level), Parental Burnout, Parental Task Sharing, Agency Socialization Goals, Parental Self-Discrepancy, and Individualism (at Individual Level).

	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Individualism (at country level)	.21***	-.12***	.10***	-.11***	-.01
(2) Parental burnout	-	-.14***	.06***	-.25***	-.07***
(3) Parental task-sharing		-	-.05***	.05***	-.06***
(4) Agency socialization goals			-	.03***	.35***
(5) Parental self-discrepancies				-	.09***
(6) Individualism (at individual level)					-

*** $p < .001$

Figures

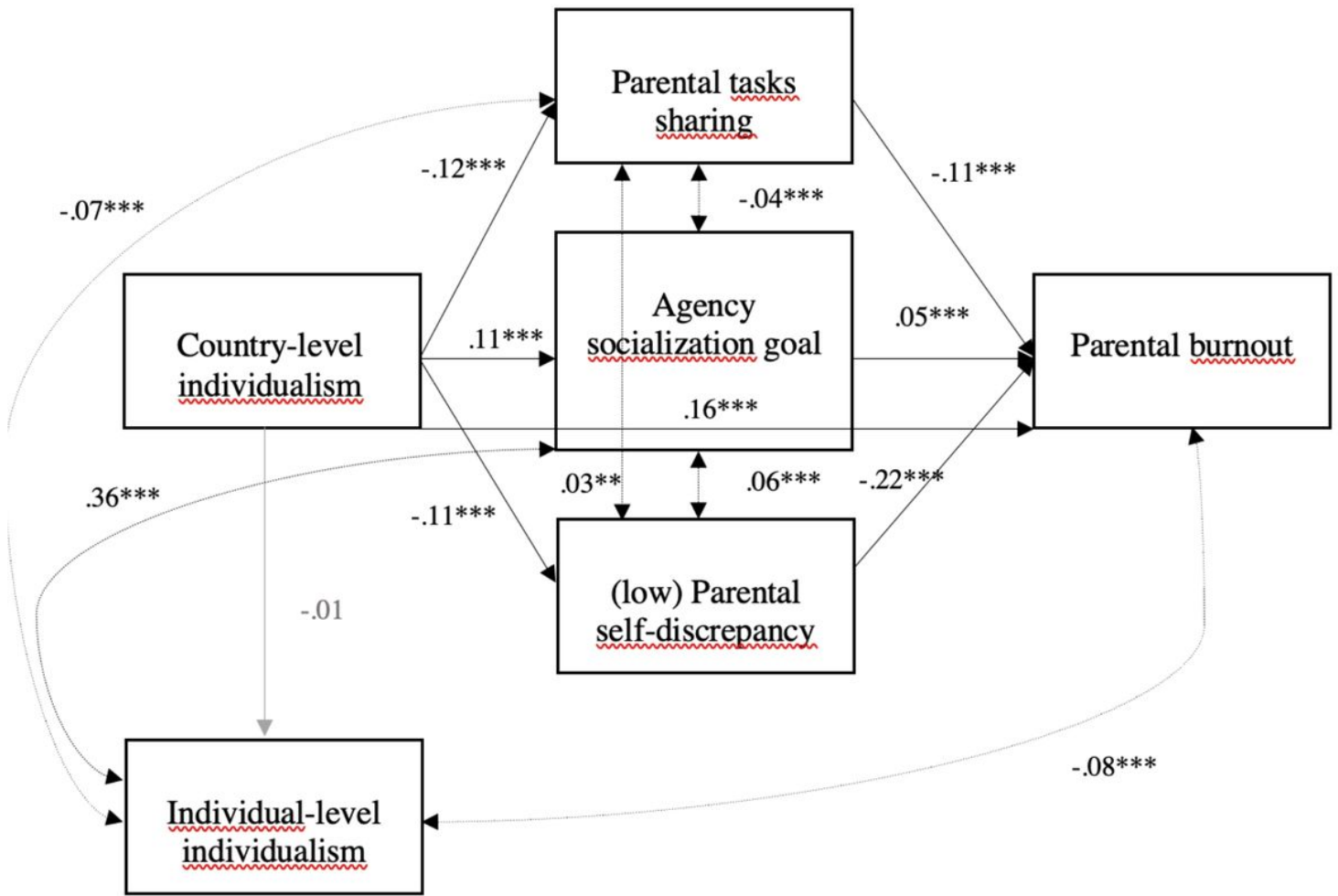


Figure 1

Mediation Model Testing Three Mediation Processes in the Relation Between Individualism at Country-Level and Parental Burnout at Individual Level

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [SupplementalMaterialSPPE270922.doc](#)
- [Table1.docx](#)