

## 5 Cs of Family Functioning and their Relationship with Parenting Styles

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**ABSTRACT** – It is intended to study the quality of the Family Functioning Scale (Portuguese version) and to understand/characterize the relationship between Family Functioning and Parenting Styles. The samples include 1757 Portuguese parents, 77.3% being female ( $N=1359$ ), aged between 20 and 80 years old ( $M=41.61$ ;  $SD=5.71$ ). The results confirm a relationship between the dimensions of family functioning and parenting styles, especially with the emotional support dimension. Parents between 36 and 45 years old have a more positive family functioning and a parenting style associated with higher levels of emotional support, lower levels of rejection, and moderate levels of control/supervision. It is concluded that it is a valid, sensitive, and robust instrument, and the results are a contribution to psychosocial research and intervention.

**KEYWORDS:** family functioning, parenting styles, healthy development, emotional support, family cohesion

## 5 Cs do Funcionamento Familiar e sua Relação com os Estilos Parentais

**RESUMO** – Pretende-se estudar a qualidade da Escala do Funcionamento Familiar (versão portuguesa) e compreender/caracterizar a relação entre o Funcionamento Familiar e os Estilos Parentais. A amostra inclui 1757 pais portugueses, sendo 77,3% do sexo feminino ( $N=1359$ ), com idades entre os 20 e os 80 anos ( $M=41,61$ ;  $DP=5,71$ ). Os resultados confirmam uma relação entre as dimensões do funcionamento familiar e dos estilos parentais, especialmente com o suporte emocional. Os pais entre 36 e 45 anos apresentam um funcionamento familiar mais positivo e um estilo parental associado a níveis mais elevados de suporte emocional, níveis mais baixos de rejeição e níveis moderados de controlo/supervisão. Conclui-se que é um instrumento válido, sensível e robusto, e os resultados são um contributo para a investigação e intervenção psicossocial.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** funcionamento familiar, estilos parentais, desenvolvimento saudável, suporte emocional, coesão familiar

Family functioning is a complex phenomenon that describes the structural and organizational characteristics of a family system and the patterns of interaction between family members. It reflects the way families manage their daily routines, fulfill their roles within the family, communicate, and bond emotionally (Haines et al., 2016).

Family functioning includes two axes: family competence and parental style. Family competence refers to the ability to adapt to changes over time. Parenting style is related to

the quality of family interaction and parenting (Caporino, 2020; Coulacoglou & Saklofske, 2017).

Families can be characterized in a multidimensional way, including the cohesion dimension (i.e., the emotional connection between family members or the extent to which they support and encourage each other) and the adaptability dimension (i.e., the family's ability to change in structure, role relationships, and rules of the relationship in response to stress) (Caporino, 2020; Garcia et al., 2019).

Parenting styles mean attitudes and behaviors that parents generally use in different contexts to manage their children's behavior, exercising affection, receptivity, control, and punishment (Bibi et al., 2021). Family dynamics can be characterized by three crucial dimensions: cohesion, flexibility, and communication. Cohesion refers to the emotional connection that family members have with each other. Flexibility implies the ability to adapt and change in the family, associated with management, control, discipline, negotiation styles, and rules. Communication represents a fundamental aspect of cohesion and flexibility. It consists of the ability to listen to other members with respect and share with them your feelings and experiences (Szcześniak & Tulecka, 2020).

The role of the family is central to the well-being of all those who are part of it. Its good functioning is related to dimensions such as fewer scenarios of domestic violence (Kivelä et al., 2018), greater satisfaction with school on the part of adolescents (Muscarà et al., 2018), and fewer relational conflicts between parents and adolescents (Longfeng et al., 2018). The family is organized based on the characteristics of each member that influence its dynamics (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), for example, parental styles may be a mirror of the influence between each member, as more positive family functioning and appropriate parental styles may be associated with greater family well-being and healthy development of the family and its members.

Differences in the functioning of parents and the family reveal a powerful impact on the growth and mental health of children, as none of the family members can be understood in isolation from the family system. In the study carried out by Saw (2016), the conclusion was that the democratic parenting style had a more positive impact on children's mental health than permissive and authoritarian parenting styles, both for fathers and mothers. The results revealed that family functioning mediates the relationship between maternal parenting styles and children's mental health, but not for paternal parenting styles and children's mental health. These results suggest the interconnection between different family processes, namely, parental styles and family functioning in children's mental health.

In terms of family functioning patterns, it appears that less positive family functioning patterns, a parental style based on rejection, overprotection, and a significant presence of incomplete family systems are more frequent in children with risky behaviors. A study carried out by Matejevic et al., (2014) shows that there is a correlation between family functioning, parental style, and the presence of risk behaviors, which demonstrates the need for family support to adequately carry out the parental role. When organizing certain interventions within the family system, it is important to keep in mind that separately focused interventions targeting parenting have short-term effects and that influences targeting the functioning of the entire family system are much more appropriate.

The Family Functioning Scale (Trivette et al., 1990) measures the functioning of a family based on five dimensions: commitment, cohesion, communication, skills, and coping. This scale studies the positive aspects of family functioning by assessing the abilities and skills that its members believe they have. Studying how different family members apply their resources to satisfy family needs and provide appropriate responses to crises or stressful situations, contributes to the functioning and unity of the family.

Adolescence is a critical period of development that requires parents and children to renegotiate their relationships. Variation in parenting styles is related to differences in the characteristics of the relationship between parents and adolescents. Parenting styles (e.g., democratic, authoritarian) are closely related to the quality of parent-child relationships (e.g., cohesion, conflict). Parent-adolescent conflict is higher between parents and children in the presence of neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles than in democratic and permissive parents. The highest levels of cohesion with both parents were reported by children with democratic parents, followed by permissive, authoritarian, and neglectful parenting styles. Cohesion with mothers for young people with authoritarian or permissive mothers was greater for daughters than for sons (Gaspar & Matos, 2017; Gaspar et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2008).

Most studies consistently find that democratic parenting style is associated with higher levels of parent-child cohesion (Nelson et al., 2011) and lower levels of conflict frequency and intensity (McKinney & Renk, 2011). In contrast, an authoritarian parenting style is associated with lower cohesion (McKinney & Renk, 2011) and greater frequency and intensity of conflict (Bi et al., 2018; McKinney & Renk, 2011; Sorkhabi & Middaugh, 2014).

Good family functioning offers more availability and capacity to caregivers, also allowing them to provide greater emotional support to their children (Beavers & Hampson, 2000), which will, in turn, allow their children to grow up healthy (McCarty et al., 2005) and healthy development will lead to better family dynamics (Belsky, 1984).

There seem to be several variables that affect the way the family institution develops. Belsky's (1984) socio-contextual model of parenting supported this approach, stating that the personality, history, marital relationship, community, profession, and psychological health of parents could interfere with the way they interact with their children, consequently affecting their family relationships.

Parental age, gender, and culture can influence the belief system developed by different family members and, in turn, affect parental attitudes and decisions. Several authors have correlated a link between the environment and parenting (Murry et al., 2004; Sidebotham et al., 2001). Bronfenbrenner (2005) also mentioned this phenomenon, according to him an individual can modify their behavior towards different people or subsystems.

A relationship was established between family functioning and the gender of the parents, discovering gender differences concerning the type of parental characteristics used by parents. Mothers tend to offer emotional support to their children, regardless of their gender, while fathers show more involvement with their male children, which essentially focuses on a more practical type of support (Parke, 2004).

In the study carried out by Lisi and Lisi (2008), children saw family relationships as more positive when mothers were portrayed as permissive and fathers as authoritarian. In the study carried out by Garcia and Guzman (2017), most children were raised by traditional parents and felt closer to their mothers than to their fathers. Mothers, on average, spend more time with their children than fathers. Mothers spend more time looking after their children, are more likely to not work full time, are seen as more overprotective and attentive, spend more time with their children, and even talk to their children more often, and because of this, they feel them as closer. Another gender difference between fathers and mothers is related to the fact that fathers are more likely to overprotect their daughters more than their sons.

Parental age is a factor that influences parenting styles, however, the impact of parental age on parenting styles and family functioning is not well documented and there is some inconsistency in the definition of the specific age/age group that characterizes a child, young or older mother/father. There is evidence that younger mothers tend to have higher levels of rejection and attempts to control (Canavarró & Pereira, 2007) and levels of competence and the degree of environmental adequacy tend to be lower when compared to older mothers. From the available information, it appears that the best parenting practices in families with older mothers were attributed to the so-called maternal maturity hypothesis, that is, to the fact that older mothers have accumulated more diverse life experiences, wisdom, financial and social resources, a repertoire of knowledge, skills and coping experiences that promote a more responsive family environment (Bornstein et al., 2006).

In studies comparing younger and older mothers (in two-parent families), there is a lack of attention to the other parent's comments, despite voluminous research showing the importance of fathers' contributions to the family's quality of life (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Older mothers are likely to be in partnership with older fathers and older fathers have demonstrated greater involvement in parenting and demonstrate more positive fathering affect than younger fathers. Older mothers have also been found to share more parenting tasks and trust their partners significantly more during early childhood than younger mothers (Bornstein et al., 2006). These results suggest that some benefits found in families with older mothers may be attributed to the partner and relational characteristics, rather than to benefits arising from older age (McMahon et al., 2007).

Numerous factors have been proposed to explain delayed parenthood, with the common belief that this delay is not

random but associated with personal factors (Bewley et al., 2005) that may influence the later family environment and well-being of parents. Comparisons between studies indicate that older mothers are more autonomous and less oriented towards parenthood than younger mothers. Specifically, older mothers are more likely to have completed a university education, have a stable job, are satisfied, and value work, in terms of personality, older mothers tend to be more resilient, autonomous, and less dependent on others. On the other hand, younger mothers tend to have more traditional attitudes toward the role of women in society, identify more with motherhood, and are less rejecting the negative aspects of caregiving than older mothers (McMahon et al., 2007). These personal factors may lead younger and older mothers to provide different types of environments for their children (e.g., warmth, hostility) and/or to differences in maternal well-being (e.g., anxiety, depression). Therefore, studies involving parental dynamics and relationships need to be examined with a broader context that includes the family environment and the well-being of parents (Boivin et al., 2009).

The characteristics of the family as a system, its members, socioeconomic status, violence and interpersonal conflicts between family members, parental psychopathology, and lack of social support are generally associated with risky behaviors and psychological distress in children (Gaspar et al., 2006). The evidence in the literature points to the existence of a significant relationship between the dimensions of parental styles, family functioning, and the quality of life and well-being of parents and children (Baumrind et al., 2010; Gaspar et al., 2010a; Pinto et al., 2014).

Furthermore, interaction between family members is also an important factor in the quality of life and development of children and adolescents (Gaspar & Matos, 2017; Gaspar et al., 2009; Gaspar et al., 2010b; Hair et al., 2008; Jiménez-Iglesias et al., 2014), as well as the emotional support provided by parents (Dwairy, 2010; Jiménez-Iglesias et al., 2014).

Parenting styles and family functioning assessed a positive perspective of families. Both can be defined as no right or wrong styles, but differentially effective styles that can be used in response to different life events and family situations (Trivette et al., 1990). Thus, it is understood that there seems to be a relationship between the systems that interact in an individual's life, in this way, family functioning, parental styles, and other characteristics of the family system seem to work for the development of the individual and the family system in which they are included (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The present study aims to study the quality of the Portuguese version of the Family Functioning scale by Trivette et al. (1990) and understand and characterize the relationship between Family Functioning and Parenting Styles in a sample of Portuguese parents.

## METHOD

### Participants

The sample included 1757 parents of children and adolescents between 6 and 16 years old, 77.3% of whom were female ( $n = 1359$ ), aged between 20 and 80 years old ( $M = 41.61$  and  $SD = 5.71$ ).

### Instruments

A sociodemographic questionnaire was used to collect sociodemographic information from the participants. Furthermore, the following instruments were used: to assess parental styles, the EMBU-P scale was used (Castro et al., 1997; adapted by Canavarro & Pereira, 2007); family functioning was measured using the scale proposed by Trivette et al. (1990).

### Family Functioning Style

The Family Functioning Style scale is an instrument created by Trivette et al. (1990). The scale focuses on positive family functioning, assessing the strengths, resources, and competencies that each member considers existing in their family. Furthermore, it evaluates the mobilization and application of resources as a means of satisfying needs responding appropriately, and adjusting to different situations, which contributes to the good functioning of the family.

This scale is aimed at the adult population and consists of 26 items evaluated on a 5-position Likert scale. The original scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 for the total scale items. In the subscales, the following Cronbach's alphas were found: 0.84 for commitment, 0.85 for cohesion, 0.79 for communication, 0.79 for skills, and 0.77 for coping, this instrument is considered robust (Trivette et al., 1990).

### Parenting Styles

The Portuguese version of EMBU-P (Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran – Pais, original version by Castro et al., (1997), validated for the Portuguese population by Canavarro and Pereira (2007) was used. It measures the parents' parental status according to the parents' perception and consists of 42 items evaluated on a Likert scale, with 4 response alternatives (no, never; yes, sometimes; yes, often; yes, always). The scale is divided into three dimensions, called emotional support, rejection, and attempt to control.

The 14 items that make up the emotional support dimension reflect the verbal and physical expression of emotional support, parental acceptance, and physical and psychological availability of parents. The 17 items in the rejection dimension aim to demonstrate verbal and physical aggression and aggression and non-acceptance of the child.

Finally, the 11 items in the attempt to control dimension describe parents' actions and intentions aimed at controlling their children's behavior, manifestations of supervision over their children, and concerns about their well-being (Canavarro & Pereira, 2007).

The factorial structure of the Portuguese version of the EMBU-P was determined through analysis of the main components, with varimax rotation and the prior determination of three factors, which together represent 25.75% of the variance (in the case of the mother's responses) and 27.97% (in the case of the father's answers). These results were relatively superior to those obtained in the validation of the original instrument carried out by Castro et al. (1997) and Cronbach's alpha values remained like those obtained by the same authors, ranging from 0.71 to 0.82 (Canavarro & Pereira, 2007).

### Procedure

The research project was approved by the Scientific Directorate of the CLISSIS Research Center (*Centro Lusitana de Investigação em Serviços Social e Intervenção Social*) and approved by MIME (Monitoring of Surveys in the School Environment) of the Ministry of Education.

For data collection, the questionnaires were distributed to several schools, study centers, and leisure activity centers (school and educational context). In addition, an online questionnaire was also made available, the link to which was also provided to these locations. The questionnaires were self-completed, and all participants were informed about the objective of the study and signed informed consent.

### Data Analysis and Processing

First, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed to test the original 5-dimensional structure of the Family Functioning scale. Satorra-Bentler  $\chi^2$ , CFI, RMSEA, and 90% CI RMSEA were calculated to examine the model fit, following the indications of HU and Bentler (2002). The Lagrange multiplier test (LM test) was performed to improve the overall fit of the model. Second, internal consistency reliability was analyzed for each dimension and the entire scale by calculating Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . Third, descriptive statistics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) were studied for the dimensions of the Family Functioning scale and the dimensions of the Parenting Styles scale. Fourth, differences by gender and age were analyzed on both scales. Fifth, bivariate zero-order Pearson correlations were conducted to examine associations between dimensions of family functioning and parenting style. These analyses were developed with the SPSS 21.0 and EQS 6.3 statistical packages.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics and Relationships with Other Variables

Concerning the dimensions under study, we found that most of the dimensions of the Family Functioning and Parenting Styles scales present high internal consistency values ( $\alpha$ ), however, the coping dimension of the Family Functioning scale and the rejection and control dimensions of the scale of Parenting Styles have lower values, 0.72, 0.71 and 0.65 respectively. The means of all dimensions can be considered positive, with the highest values being highlighted in the cohesion dimension of the Family Functioning scale ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) and the Emotional Support dimension of the Parenting Styles scale ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ) (Table 1).

The information indicated in Table 2 is related to the correlations between the dimensions of each of the scales under study and the correlation between the dimensions of both scales. It is worth highlighting the high positive and statistically significant correlation between the dimensions of the Family Functioning Scale, the emotional support and control dimensions of the Parenting Styles scale are

also positively and statistically significant correlated, with the emotional support dimension revealing higher correlations. The rejection dimension of the same scale reveals a different pattern, the correlations are low and negatively correlated. Most dimensions are correlated in a statically significant way, except for the correlation between the cohesion and coping dimensions of the Family Functioning scale, where there are no statistically significant correlations.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was carried out to test the structure of the family functioning scale, in its original version with five dimensions, that is, commitment, cohesion, communication, skills, and coping. Factor saturation was greater than 0.60 in most cases, the lowest value is found in item 7 of the coping dimension, which presented a very low coefficient ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 3 and Figure 1).

The same was true at the level of internal consistency (Table 1), all dimensions presented a high internal consistency

Table 1  
Descriptive and Internal Consistency – Family Functioning and Parenting Styles

Scale	Dimensions	Average	DP	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Family Functioning (range 1-5)	Total Family Functioning	3.82	0.72	0.84
	Commitment (C1)	3.86	0.82	0.88
	Cohesion (C2)	4.05	0.76	0.83
	Communication (C3)	3.45	0.85	0.83
	Competence (C4)	3.90	0.82	0.83
	Coping (C5)	3.00	1.02	0.72
Parenting Styles (range 1-4)	Emotional Support (SE)	3.35	0.40	0.83
	Rejection (Rej.)	1.62	0.28	0.71
	Control/Supervision (C/S)	2.60	0.39	0.65

Table 2  
Correlations – Scale and Dimensions of Family Functioning and Parenting Styles

	FFT	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	IF	Rej
Total Family Functioning (FFT)	--							
Commitment (C1)	0.93***							
Cohesion (C2)	0.90***	0.82***						
Communication (C3)	0.92***	0.81***	0.76***					
Competence (C4)	0.91***	0.85***	0.84***	0.75***				
Coping(C5)	0.88***	0.75***	0.71***	0.82***	0.67***			
Emotional Support (SE)	0.36***	0.32***	0.35***	0.32***	0.33***	0.26***		
Rejection (Rej.)	-0.08*	-0.11*	-0.05	-0.06*	-0.09*	-0.04	-0.22***	
Control/Supervision (C/S)	0.11*	0.06*	0.11*	0.11*	0.06*	0.12*	0.25***	0.32***

note:\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*p < 0.05



value ( $\alpha > 0.83$ ), with the coping dimension having the lowest although reasonable value ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ).

The initial model found through confirmatory factor analysis points to a poorly adjusted model ( $\chi^2 = 1419.31$ ,  $df = 265$ ),  $p = 0.001$ ,  $NCFI = 0.84$ ;  $CFI = 0.86$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.065$ ,  $RMSEA$  confidence interval = 0.061, 0.068,  $AIC = 889.31$ .

After integrating the recommended associations with the Lagrange multiplier test, a more robust model was achieved ( $\chi^2 = 975.06$ ,  $df = 265$ )  $p = 0.001$ ,  $NCFI = 0.90$ ;  $CFI = 0.91$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.052$ , confidence interval  $RMSEA = 0.048, 0.055$ ,  $AIC = 459.06$  (Table 4).

## Descriptive Statistics and Gender and Parental Age Differences

Comparing fathers and mothers, we found statistically significant differences in the commitment dimension of the Family Functioning scale and the emotional support and control dimensions of the Parenting Styles scale. For all the statistically significant differences found, mothers have higher values in terms of commitment, emotional support, and control.

Table 3

*AFC – Saturation, Error, and Explained Variance – Dimensions of the Family Functioning Scale*

DIMENSION	$\lambda$ (saturation of indicators in factors)	E (residual error)	R2 (Variance explained)
C1 – Commitment			
9	0.797	0.604	0.636
12	0.788	0.616	0.621
16	0.816	0.578	0.666
19	0.818	0.576	0.669
25	0.514	0.858	0.264
C2 -Cohesion			
1	0.593	0.805	0.352
4	0.708	0.706	0.502
6	0.818	0.576	0.669
22	0.617	0.787	0.381
24	0.738	0.675	0.545
C3 -Communication			
3	0.445	0.896	0.198
5	0.735	0.678	0.540
8	0.809	0.587	0.655
17	0.467	0.884	0.218
18	0.703	0.711	0.494
21	0.794	0.608	0.630
C4 -Competence			
13	0.783	0.623	0.612
20	0.839	0.544	0.704
23	0.725	0.689	0.525
26	0.698	0.716	0.487
C5 -Coping			
two	0.601	0.799	0.361
7	0.240	0.971	0.058
10	0.630	0.777	0.397
11	0.697	0.717	0.486
15	0.812	0.583	0.660

Table 4

*AFC – Adequacy Indices*

	$\chi^2$	dl	$\chi^2/df$	NNFI	CFI	RMSEA	(CI 90%)	AIC
Initial model	1419.31***	265	5.36	0.84	0.86	0.065	(0.061,0.068)	889.31
Final model	975.06***	258	3.78	0.90	0.91	0.052	(0.048, 0.055)	459.06

note:\*\*\* $p < 0.001$

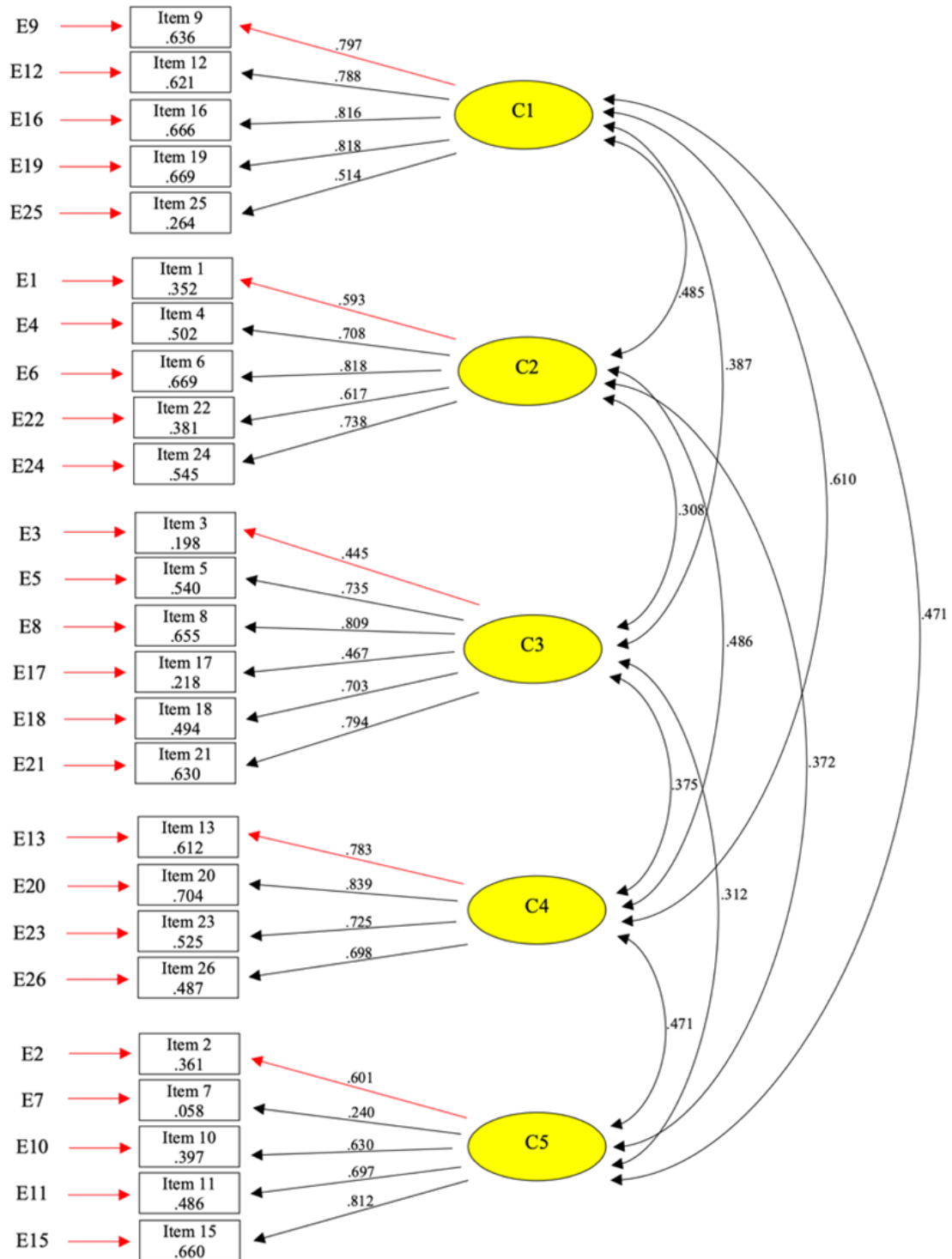


Figure 1. Graphical Representation of the CFA Model of the Family Functioning Scale

Comparing three age groups of participants, we found statistically significant differences for all dimensions of both scales under study. Concerning the Family Functioning scale and its dimensions, parents aged between 36 and 45 years old have the highest values, with the lowest value being highlighted to the coping dimension of parents in the older

age group (46 years or more). About the Parenting Styles scale, it is also parents in the older age group who present lower values of emotional support and younger parents (up to 35 years of age) who present higher values of control and rejection.

Table 5  
ANOVA – Family Functioning and Parenting Styles According to Parental Gender

Dimensions	Woman		Man		F
	<i>M</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DP</i>	
Total Family Functioning (FFT)	3.84	0.73	3.78	0.66	1.12
Commitment (C1)	3.93	0.82	3.83	0.75	3.85*
Cohesion (C2)	4.07	0.84	4.04	0.74	0.36
Communication (C3)	3.63	0.76	3.56	0.70	2.00
Competence (C4)	4.01	0.84	3.93	0.84	2.51
<i>Coping</i> (C5)	3.59	0.74	3.52	0.66	2.75
Emotional Support (SE)	3.40	0.37	3.20	0.45	71.27***
Rejection (Rej.)	1.62	0.28	1.63	0.30	0.47
Control/Supervision (C/S)	2.62	0.39	2.54	0.38	11.86***

note:\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*p < 0.05

Table 6  
ANOVA – Family Functioning and Parenting Styles According to Parental Age

Dimensions	Up to 35 years		Between 36-45 years old		46 years or older		F
	<i>M</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DP</i>	
Total Family Functioning (FFT)	3.74	0.82	<b>3.87</b>	0.67	3.70	0.79	5.14**
Commitment (C1)	3.86	0.80	<b>3.95</b>	0.77	3.80	0.87	4.96**
Cohesion (C2)	3.99	0.88	<b>4.11</b>	0.78	3.96	0.89	3.38**
Communication (C3)	3.57	0.84	<b>3.67</b>	0.71	3.47	0.82	6.39**
Competence (C4)	3.86	0.87	<b>4.04</b>	0.81	3.90	0.90	5.70**
<i>Coping</i> (C5)	3.58	0.75	3.60	0.71	<b>3.49</b>	0.77	3.14*
Emotional Support (SE)	3.37	0.40	3.38	0.38	<b>3.26</b>	0.43	14.11***
Rejection (Rej.)	<b>1.68</b>	0.33	1.62	0.28	1.61	0.27	4.08*
Control/Supervision (C/S)	<b>2.73</b>	0.38	2.60	0.40	2.54	0.37	15.02***

note:\*\*\*p < 0.001; \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05

## DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to study the quality of the Portuguese version of the Family Functioning scale by Trivette et al. (1990) and understand and characterize the relationship between Family Functioning and Parenting Styles in a sample of Portuguese parents.

With the first objective, we analyzed the correlation between the dimensions of the scales that constitute the Family Functioning Scale (EFF), the internal consistency of the dimensions, and the robustness resulting from the model found through Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

To achieve the second objective, the dimensions of the Family Functioning and Parenting Styles scales were studied, and differences linked to the gender and age of the parents were also analyzed.

The present study had several contributions, namely, the results provided evidence of a factorial structure of the

Portuguese version of the Family Functioning scale composed of five dimensions, respectively, commitment, cohesion, communication, skills, and coping. All dimensions showed good internal consistency reliability. Good average values were observed in family functioning, with higher values in cohesion. The dimensions are positively and statistically significantly correlated, except for the correlation between the cohesion and coping dimensions, where there are no statistically significant correlations. It should be added that Family Functioning and its dimensions present a positive and significant correlation with the emotional support dimension and a negative, significant although low, correlation with the rejection dimension of the Parenting Styles scale.

Family functioning is significantly related to parenting styles. The family must be considered a dynamic system, where each member influences and is influenced by the



characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of other members. A family that presents a more adequate functioning, with high levels of commitment, cohesion, communication, skills, and coping, is more easily associated with a predominantly democratic parental style, characterized by high levels of emotional support, low levels of rejection, and levels of moderate control/supervision. More adequate family functioning and parenting styles are associated with greater well-being in the family and its members, with greater opportunity for development and healthy growth (Baumrind et al., 2010; Dwairy, 2010; Gaspar et al. 2010a; Gaspar & Matos, 2017; Gaspar et al., 2009; Gaspar et al., 2010b; Hair et al., 2008; Jiménez-Iglesias et al., 2014; Olson, 2000).

Differences related to the gender and age of the parents were identified. Comparing fathers and mothers, we found statistically significant differences in the commitment dimension of the Family Functioning scale and the emotional support and control dimensions of the Parenting Styles scale. In all these cases, it is mothers who present higher values in terms of commitment, emotional support, and control. Although there is a progressive increase in the involvement of parents (men) in the education and development of their children, it is mothers who are most often the main caregivers and educators, spend more time with their children, carry out more recreational, educational and domestic activities with their children and more often have a closer relationship with them (Canavarro & Pereira, 2007; Lisi & Lisi, 2008; Garcia & Guzman, 2017; Parke, 2004). However, this more intense connection can be exhausting and lead to the adoption of more inappropriate parenting styles and less positive family functioning. In these situations, the role of the father and/or

other sources of social support is fundamental in improving family functioning and the healthy and positive development of children (Jeynes, 2016; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001).

Comparing three age groups of participants, we found statistically significant differences for all dimensions of both scales under study. About the Family Functioning scale and its dimensions, it is parents aged between 36 and 45 who present higher values, with the lowest value being highlighted concerning the coping dimension of parents in the older age group (46 years or older). With the Parenting Styles scale, it is also parents in the older age group who have lower values of emotional support and younger parents (up to 35 years old) who have high values of control and rejection.

The analysis of these results leads to the reflection that parents in the intermediate age group, aged between 36 and 45 years, are those who present the most appropriate parenting styles characterized by a high level of emotional support, a low level of rejection, and moderate at the control/supervision level. Younger parents more often use parenting styles related to rejection and control. Older parents (46 years or older) show more difficulties in coping with family functioning. Parents around 40 years of age reveal a greater capacity for adjustment, adaptation, and competence when compared to younger parents (Canavarro & Pereira, 2007). Parents in their 20s/30s are more likely to have less life experience, knowledge, skills, and financial and social resources than parents in their 40s (Bornstein et al., 2006). On the other hand, younger mothers tend to have more traditional attitudes toward the role of women in society, identify more with motherhood, and tend to be less rejecting the negative aspects of caregiving than older mothers (McMahon et al., 2007).

## CONCLUSION

The study of the Portuguese version of the Family Functioning scale and the confirmation of the robustness of its dimensions is an important contribution to future national studies that include this variable and its dimensions, as they provide access to a valid and robust instrument.

The present study has some limitations associated with the greater involvement of mothers in completing the questionnaires than of fathers, which may influence the results and the fact that the sample, although large, is not random and consequently is not statistically representative of the Portuguese population.

One of the most important results of the study is the differences identified in terms of family functioning and parenting styles in different age groups of parents. In the

future, it will be interesting to deepen these results by considering the age of the children, the number of children, and marital status of the parents among other important variables that would provide a greater understanding of these results.

The knowledge acquired is an important contribution to research around family and parenting, as well as providing empirical knowledge for psychosocial intervention with parents, future parents and families, communities, and professionals working in these contexts. It is concluded that when the family can use its strengths to cooperate with adversities constructively, it becomes stronger and capable of advocating for the well-being of each of its members and the family system.

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