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## **Factors associated with parental burnout: The role of parents' gender and children's age and gender**

## **Factores asociados al *burnout* parental: El papel del género de los/as progenitores/as y la edad y género de los/as hijos/as**

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## Abstract

Parental burnout syndrome is a growing phenomenon in western countries. Although there is ample evidence of its harmful consequences, more research is needed on the sociodemographic factors associated with it. Accordingly, the present study analyses the explanatory potential of being a mother or father, having a son or daughter, and having a child in primary or compulsory secondary education on each of the core symptoms of parental burnout: exhaustion, weariness with parenting, emotional distancing, and contrast with previous parental self. The participant sample consisted of 396 fathers and mothers (75% mothers, 25% fathers), selected by convenience sampling. In terms of educational stage, the distribution reported by mothers was very homogeneous in primary and secondary education, while 72% of fathers reported having children in compulsory secondary education. The gender distribution of children was uniform. The Spanish adaptation of the Parental Burnout Inventory was used as a measurement tool. QR codes were distributed with access to the questionnaires in digital format. Significantly higher levels of exhaustion, weariness and contrast with the previous parental self were found to be associated with being a mother, having a male child and having a child in primary school. Likewise, being a mother and having a child in primary education are significant predictors of this symptomatology. These findings suggest the advisability of designing educational policies that promote co-parenting and skills for managing parental stress.

*Keywords:* parental burnout; gender; children's age; primary education; secondary education

## Resumen

El síndrome de burnout parental constituye un fenómeno creciente en los países occidentales. Aunque existe amplia evidencia de sus perniciosas consecuencias, se precisa más investigación acerca de los factores sociodemográficos asociados al síndrome. En esta línea, el presente estudio analiza el potencial explicativo de ser madre o padre, de tener un hijo o una hija y de que el hijo/a esté cursando Educación Primaria o bien Educación Secundaria Obligatoria sobre cada uno de los síntomas nucleares del burnout parental: agotamiento, hartazgo, distanciamiento emocional y contraste con el yo parental anterior. La muestra participante se compone de 396 padres y madres (75% madres, 25% padres), seleccionados mediante un muestreo por conveniencia. Atendiendo a la etapa educativa, la distribución informada por las madres fue muy homogénea en Educación Primaria y en Educación Secundaria Obligatoria, mientras que el 72% de los padres informaban hijos/as en secundaria. La distribución por género de los hijos/as fue uniforme. Como instrumento de medida, se utilizó la adaptación validada al contexto español del Parental Burnout Inventory. Se distribuyeron códigos QR con acceso a los cuestionarios en formato digital. Se encontraron niveles significativamente más elevados en agotamiento, hartazgo y contraste con el yo parental previo, asociados a ser madre, tener un hijo varón y tener un hijo/a cursando Educación Primaria. Asimismo, ser madre y tener un hijo/a en Educación Primaria son predictores significativos de esta sintomatología. Estos hallazgos sugieren la conveniencia de diseñar políticas educativas tendentes a promover la coparentalidad y las habilidades para la gestión del estrés parental.

*Palabras clave:* burnout parental; género; edad de los/as hijos/as; educación primaria; educación secundaria

## Introduction

Parenting is not always rewarding. Being a mother or father can be a complex, stressful task (Uzun et al., 2025). Over recent years, research along these lines has grown and noted high rates of parental burnout, with a prevalence between 5% and 8% in western countries (Roskam et al., 2024).

The term burnout was originally linked to the workplace, typically in-person workplaces. It refers to a syndrome resulting from chronic exposure to occupational stress (Maslach, 2003), characterized by the manifestation of three symptoms: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment in the job (Maslach et al., 1996). In parallel to the occupational context, parental burnout syndrome (PBS) arises from the continued experience of high or severe levels of stress associated with a perceived failure to effectively respond to the demands of parenting (Mikolajczak et al., 2021). This continued gap between demands and resources leads to mothers and fathers feeling emotionally burned-out.

PBS is signalled by experiencing four core symptoms (Roskam et al., 2021; Suárez et al., 2022). The first is intense physical and emotional exhaustion related to the parenting role. This will lead to parents emotionally distancing themselves from their children (second symptom), so that their involvement will be limited solely to instrumental activity. The third symptom is weariness—becoming fed up with parenting, to the extent that parents feel incapable of dealing with problems calmly or effectively. All of that will ultimately result in the fourth symptom: parents' perceptions of themselves being very different from their perceptions of their past selves and from the image of parents that they would like to be.

PBS can bring significant harm to parents' physical and psychological health, fundamentally associated with alcohol abuse, sleep disorders, depression, anxiety, poor life satisfaction, thoughts of escape, and suicidal ideation (Manrique-Millones et al., 2022; Mikolajczak et al., 2023; Mikolajczak, Brianda, et al., 2018; Sarrionandia-Pena, 2019). It can also affect the family environment, since PBS is associated with increasing conflict between partners (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2020), negligent or violent behaviour towards children (Mikolajczak et al., 2019), and a higher incidence of serious behavioural problems in children (Boer & Elias, 2024).

### Explanatory factors of PBS

In view of the harmful consequences, various recent studies have attempted to determine the factors that can explain the sharp increase in cases of parents experiencing burnout. On the one hand, from a sociological perspective, it has been claimed that over recent years, western countries have

entered what researchers such as Hays (1996, p. 8) have called the “invasive parenting” era. This term defines the high social demands on the parenting role, based on the convention that parents must play a key role in their children’s optimum development (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2020). This would have notable psychological implications (e.g., controlling one’s emotions in the presence of the children, self-imposed requirements to be good parents and to have successful children), financial implications (e.g., medical and food bills, and provision of high quality academic and non-academic education), and significant investment in time spent on children each day. Through a more microsystemic lens, there has been analysis of a wide range of personal factors that would increase vulnerability to PBS (Ensanimehr et al., 2024; Ren et al., 2024), which include sociodemographic variables such as parental gender, the children’s gender, and the developmental stage of children.

### **Gender differences associated with PBS**

Despite modern-day western societies experiencing significant advances over recent years in equality between men and women, parenting continues to be the adult role that is most clearly linked to gender (Hipp & Bünning, 2021). In this regard, although men have been increasingly involved with their children’s care, the task still principally falls to women (Roskam et al., 2022; Verniers et al., 2022), so that women tend to experience greater difficulty balancing work and family demands (Wang et al., 2025). It is therefore no surprise that some recent studies have shown greater prevalence of PBS in mothers than in fathers (de Santis et al., 2025; Manrique-Millones et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2024; Roskam & Mikolajczak, 2020).

Various psychosocial reasons may explain the gender differences associated with burnout. On the one hand, the more extensive responsibilities that women assume in childcare would increase their exposure to stress (Roskam & Mikolajczak, 2020). In addition, social expectations around the parenting role would be higher for women, encouraging self-imposed demands to be good mothers and feelings of guilt for not meeting those standards (de Santis et al., 2025). Another reason might be frustration at the discrepancy between the values of equality that society promotes and the gender imbalance in parenting (Roskam et al., 2022).

Although research overall shows greater rates of PBS in mothers, it is important to note that fathers do also experience it, even earlier. In this regard Mikolajczak and Roskam (2020) concluded that mothers experienced PBS when the demands of parenting clearly outstripped their resources. However, fathers seemed “burned-out” before that. The consequences of the syndrome can also be more harmful to fathers, in that they exhibit greater desire to escape the parental role and a higher level of negligent behaviour in the care of their children (e.g., not helping the child when they need it, not comforting them when they are scared or upset).

## Gender and developmental stage of children

There has been less research attention paid to how children's developmental stage and children's gender influence development of PBS. The few studies along these lines suggest early infancy (up to 7 years old) as a vulnerability factor for paternal burnout (Mikolajczak, Raes, et al., 2018; Piotrowski et al., 2023), because the demands of caring for and dealing with children at this age are greater. These high demands can conflict with fulfilling other obligations outside of child-rearing (Oyarzún-Farías et al., 2021). Similarly, the time spent caring for children typically decreases during adolescence, as teenagers become more independent and spend more time with their peers (Lam et al., 2014). However, other studies indicate that children's developmental stage could have different effects on the symptomatology mothers and fathers with PBS experience. Infancy is therefore a risk factor for emotional exhaustion, while adolescence is associated with greater parental vulnerability to emotional distancing from children and to feeling like ineffective parents (Le Vigouroux & Scola, 2018).

To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies that have directly analysed whether the child's gender is related to PBS. However, some studies suggest that both girls and boys feel that parents treat their sons more harshly (Sorbring, 2005). Similarly, the recent systematic review by Yaffe (2023) indicated that boys (in contrast to girls) tended to see their fathers as exhibiting more authoritarian parenting styles while their mothers had a more democratic style. Generally, authoritarian parenting styles are associated with more coercive practices with children, greater emotional distance, and lower tolerance for difference (Baumrind, 2012). In addition, boys often have greater difficulty managing their emotions in an adaptive way during childhood (Leaper, 2005), which can lead to increased conflict with their parents. These precedents provide indirect evidence that having a boy may be a risk factor in developing PBS.

## The present study

The present study aims to expand knowledge of PBS reported by parents, attempting to estimate the explanatory potential of being a mother or father, having boys or girls, and of the children being in primary (educational stage that typically coincides with childhood) or compulsory secondary education (educational stage that normatively coincides with early and middle adolescence). Based on the literature, the parent's gender and the child's developmental stage seem to play a significant role in development of PBS. Furthermore, the preceding research provides indirect evidence suggesting that the child's gender may also be related to SBP.

Although previous studies seem to leave little room for doubt that mothers are significantly more vulnerable to burnout, fathers are also susceptible to it. However, so far there has been no

analysis of gender differences considering each of the symptomatic manifestations of burnout in isolation (physical and mental exhaustion; emotional distancing from children; weariness with being a parent; and contrast with one's previous self). Based on previous research, we hypothesize that:

H1: Mothers will exhibit significantly higher levels of exhaustion, emotional distancing, weariness, and contrast with their previous selves than fathers.

In terms of children's developmental stage, there is no unanimity in the previous research about what ages are related to greater vulnerability to PBS, under the premise that age would have a different influence on burnout symptomatology that fathers and mothers experience. Hence, based on the work by [Le Vigouroux and Scola \(2018\)](#), we hypothesize that:

H2: Having a child in primary education will be related to a significantly higher level of emotional exhaustion.

This expectation is also based on the fact that emotional exhaustion is considered a starting point and the gateway to experiencing the other symptoms ([Leiter & Maslach, 2016](#)). In addition, assuming that adolescence usually brings with it increased conflict and emotional distance in parent-child relationships ([Branje et al., 2009](#)), we expect that:

H3: Having a child in compulsory secondary education will be related to significantly higher levels of parents' emotional distancing from children, weariness with the parental role, and parents comparing themselves with their prior selves.

When it comes to the children's gender, as previously indicated, research has so far not offered direct evidence of its influence on the development of PBS. Based on studies that conclude that boys tend to see their fathers as more coercive and their mothers as more democratic in their parenting, we expect that:

H4: Having a son will be a significantly greater risk factor for developing PBS than having a daughter.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 396 parents (75% mothers, 25% fathers) participated in the study. They had children in primary or compulsory secondary education in schools in Galicia (Spain) that were selected by convenience sampling. More specifically, 47% of the mothers and 28% of the fathers reported having children in the final years of primary school (between 4th and 6th year); 53% of the mothers and 72% of the fathers reported that they had children in compulsory secondary school (between 1st and 4th

year). Over half the parents (60% of the mothers and 55% of the fathers) reported having a daughter, while 38.5% of the mothers and 44.5% of the fathers reported having a son.

## Measures

Parental burnout was measured using a validated version of the Parental Burnout Inventory (PBI, Roskam et al., 2017) adapted to the Spanish context by Suárez et al. (2022). This instrument allows evaluation of four factors: *exhaustion* (9 items; e.g., “I feel completely exhausted by my role as a parent”); *emotional distancing from one’s own children* (3 items; e.g., “I do what I’m supposed to do for my children, but nothing more”); *saturation or weariness with the parenting role* (5 items; e.g., “I am fed up with my role as a parent”); and *contrast with prior parental self* (6 items; e.g., “I don’t think I’m as good a parent for my children as I used to be”). The participants gave their responses to the items on a seven-point scale (1 = *never... 7 = always*). In the present study, the instrument showed the following reliability values: exhaustion ( $\alpha = .91$ ,  $\omega = .92$ ), emotional distancing from one’s own children ( $\alpha = .56$ ,  $\omega = .57$ ), saturation or weariness with the parenting role ( $\alpha = .61$ ,  $\omega = .70$ ), contrast with prior parental self ( $\alpha = .87$ ,  $\omega = .87$ ).

As one might expect conceptually for mental health indicators in a general, non-clinical population, various items demonstrated non-normality—*asymmetry and kurtosis*—showing a distribution that was positively biased for almost all items about emotional distancing from one’s children, weariness with the parental role, and comparison with previous parental self.

## Procedure

To collect the data, contact was made with various schools in [omitted information]. There were informed of the study objectives and asked to take part voluntarily. Schools who were interested in participating were included in the study and contact was made with parents and legal guardians of students in the 4th, 5th, and 6th years of primary or the 1st-4th years of secondary school. Parents and guardians were given detailed information including the voluntary, anonymous nature of the participation, and the confidentiality of the data collected. QR codes were distributed to the parents, providing access to digital versions of the questionnaires via the Microsoft Forms platform. The participants could choose to complete the questionnaires either at the schools or at home as they preferred.

## Data analysis

First, we analysed the differences in burnout—*exhaustion with the parental role, emotional distancing from the children, weariness, and comparison with prior parental self*—between mothers

and fathers, and according to the children's school stage and gender. This was done using the Mann-Whitney U statistic, given the lack of normality of the variables analysed in this study (see [Table 1](#), [Table 2](#), and [Table 3](#)). The level of significance considered for the study was  $p < .05$ , while effect sizes were assessed with values of  $d = 0.20$  or less indicating a very small effect,  $d = 0.20$  to  $d = 0.49$  indicating a small effect,  $d = 0.50$  to  $d = 0.79$  indicating a moderate effect, and  $d = 0.80$  or above indicating a large effect ([Cohen, 1988](#)).

Subsequently, we analysed how well the variables parental gender (being a mother or father), child gender (reporting about a son or daughter), and the child's school stage (whether the child is in primary or secondary) were able to predict the four core symptoms of PBS (exhaustion with the parental role, emotional distancing, weariness, and comparison with prior parental self). This was done using logistic regression analysis, following the forwards stepwise regression procedure based on the Wald statistic. As [Alderete \(2006\)](#) noted, this statistical procedure has a number of advantages over linear regression: (a) it does not require compliance with multivariate normality and homoscedasticity; (b) it allows the use of continuous and categorical independent variables; (c) it has direct test statistics; and (d) it can incorporate non-linear effects.

The fit of the proposed models was examined using two indicators: Nagelkerke's  $R^2$ , which indicates the percentage of variance explained by the model ([Nagelkerke, 1991](#)); and the percentage of correctly classified cases, which allows determination of how useful the predictors will be in estimating the criterion variable in each proposed model. Given the categorical, dichotomous nature of the model's predictors, we assumed a value of 1 for the presence of PBS symptomatology and 0 for absence, based on the sample medians.

## Results

### Differences in burnout based on parental gender, child gender, and child educational stage

The descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation, asymmetry, and kurtosis) of the four core PBS symptoms as a function of parental gender are given in [Table 1](#). There were significant differences between fathers and mothers, in exhaustion, weariness with the parental role, and contrast with prior parental self. Mothers reported feeling more emotionally and physically exhausted than fathers, and more fed up with their role as parents than fathers did. Mothers also reported being further away from the image of a parent that they used to have. The Mann-Whitney test indicated a small effect for these differences in all cases.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics for the components of burnout syndrome by parent gender*

Symptoms of burnout	<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>As</i>		<i>Ku</i>		<i>z (d)</i>
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	
Exhaustion	1.61 (1.00)	1.90 (1.02)	2.35	1.75	5.46	3.18	-4.10** (0.42)
Distancing	1.61 (0.83)	1.62 (0.93)	1.42	2.27	1.13	6.11	-0.24 (0.02)
Weariness	2.38 (0.65)	2.51 (0.67)	3.45	2.53	15.47	8.23	-2.74* (0.26)
Comparison	1.35 (0.61)	1.50 (0.84)	2.30	3.18	5.82	13.64	-2.05* (0.23)

Note: z scores (Mann-Whitney test): Effect size values (Cohen's d) are shown in parentheses.

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .001$

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the PBS symptoms by child gender. The Mann-Whitney test again indicated significant differences between parents of boys and parents of girls in exhaustion, weariness with the parental role, and contrast with prior parental self. The effect sizes were small in all cases. Therefore, parents of sons reported more exhaustion, being more fed up of being a parent, and being further away from their desired image of a parent.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive statistics for the components of burnout syndrome by child gender*

Symptoms of burnout	<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>As</i>		<i>Ku</i>		<i>z (d)</i>
	Son	Daughter	Son	Daughter	Son	Daughter	
Exhaustion	2.00 (1.12)	1.70 (0.92)	1.43	2.35	1.70	6.39	-2.71* (0.28)
Distancing	1.69 (0.93)	1.56 (0.88)	1.61	2.56	2.18	8.56	-1.33 (0.13)
Weariness	2.56 (0.70)	2.42 (0.63)	2.58	2.90	8.12	11.50	-1.96* (0.18)
Comparison	1.56 (0.87)	1.40 (0.71)	2.73	3.71	10.40	19.62	-1.98* (0.19)

Note: z scores (Mann-Whitney test): Effect size values (Cohen's d) are shown in parentheses.

\* $p \leq .05$

Lastly, Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the four PBS symptoms in terms of the child's educational stage. There were significant differences in exhaustion (medium effect size), weariness (small effect size), and contrast with prior parental self (small effect size). Therefore, parents of children in primary school reported greater levels in these three symptoms of PBS than parents of children in secondary school.



**Table 3***Descriptive statistics for the components of burnout syndrome by child educational stage*

Symptoms of burnout	<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>As</i>		<i>Ku</i>		<i>z (d)</i>
	PE	CSE	PE	CSE	PE	CSE	
Exhaustion	2.10 (1.13)	1.66 (0.91)	1.62	2.06	2.50	4.34	-5.10** (0.54)
Distancing	1.74 (1.04)	1.55 (0.81)	1.94	2.07	3.83	5.73	-1.68 (0.16)
Weariness	2.59 (0.76)	2.41 (0.59)	2.81	2.44	9.23	7.70	-3.83** (0.36)
Comparison	1.58 (0.96)	1.39 (0.65)	3.08	2.68	12.34	8.88	-1.96* (0.19)

Note: PE = Primary Education; CSE = Compulsory Secondary Education; z scores (Mann-Whitney test): Effect size values (Cohen's d) are shown in parentheses.

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .001$

### Predictive capacity of parental gender, child gender, and child educational stage on PBS

Four logistic regression models were produced considering parental gender, child gender, and child educational stage in order to estimate exhaustion, emotional distancing from one's own children, weariness with being a parent, and contrast with prior parental self.

The explanatory model for parental exhaustion would correctly classify 61.8% of the sample ( $\chi^2 = 24.84$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Analysis of the final step suggested including the variables parental gender and child school stage. The forwards stepwise regression procedure based on the Wald statistic (Table 4) shows that the child's educational stage and being a mother or a father would explain a small percentage of reported parental exhaustion (Nagelkerke's  $R^2 = .085$ ). Considering the parameter coding, parental exhaustion is more likely in mothers ( $W = 10.70$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ) of children in primary school ( $W = 10.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 4***Results of stepwise logistic regression for probability of parental exhaustion*

Steps	Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>EE</i>	Wald	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Exp( <i>B</i> )	CI (95%)	
								<i>LCI</i>	<i>UCI</i>
Step 1	GEN_P*ET_ED	0.782	0.215	13.238	1	< .001	2.186	1.435	3.332
	Constant	-0.674	0.138	23.770	1	< .001	0.510		
Step 2	GEN_P	0.864	0.264	10.703	1	.001	2.373	1.414	3.981
	ET_ED	0.723	0.218	10.953	1	< .001	2.060	1.343	3.161
	Constant	-1.311	0.248	28.028	1	< .001	0.269		

Note: GEN\_P = Parental gender (Mother/Father); ET\_ED = Educational stage (Primary/Secondary).

The explanatory model for *weariness* with being a parent would correctly classify 62% of the sample ( $\chi^2 = 19.87$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Analysis of the final step suggests including the variables parental gender and child school stage. The forwards stepwise regression procedure based on the Wald statistic (Table 5) shows that the child's school stage and being a father or mother would explain a small percentage of weariness with being a parent (Nagelkerke's  $R^2 = .067$ ). Considering the parameter coding, weariness with being a parent is more likely for mothers ( $W = 4.74$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ) and for parents of children in primary school ( $W = 12.81$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 5**

*Results of stepwise logistic regression for probability of weariness with being a parent*

Steps	Variables	B	EE	Wald	df	p	Exp(B)	CI (95%)	
								LCI	UCI
Step 1	GEN_P*ET_ED	0.823	0.214	14.777	1	< .001	2.278	1.497	3.465
	Constant	-0.757	0.139	29.634	1	< .001	0.469		
Step 2	GEN_P	0.554	0.255	4.740	1	.001	1.741	1.057	2.867
	ET_ED	0.774	0.216	12.812	1	< .001	2.168	1.419	3.311
	Constant	-1.156	0.235	24.119	1	< .001	0.315		

*Note:* GEN\_P = Parental gender (Mother/Father); ET\_ED = Educational stage (Primary/Secondary).

The results for the omnibus tests on the coefficients of the explanatory model for the variable “contrast with prior parental self” indicate that the explanatory model would correctly classify 56.6% of the sample ( $\chi^2 = 4.32$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The analysis only suggests including the child's educational stage. The forwards stepwise regression procedure based on the Wald statistic shows that the child's school stage explains a small percentage of the contrast with prior parental self (Nagelkerke's  $R^2 = .015$ ). Considering the parameter coding, this contrast with previous parental self is more likely when children are reported as being in primary school ( $W = 4.31$ ;  $p = .038$ ).

## Discussion

Although recent research leaves little room for doubt about the significant growth of parental burnout in western societies over the last few years, we are still a long way from an accurate characterisation of the factors that affect the development of the syndrome. Along this developing line, the present study examined the role of paternal gender, the children's educational stage and the children's gender as possible significant factors associated with PBS.

In line with previous research (e.g., de Santis et al., 2025; Manrique-Millones et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2024), the results of our study indicate that PBS is significantly more pronounced in mothers than

in fathers. Our findings, however, allow us to go one step beyond this general conclusion, in that they show that the differences between mothers and fathers manifest in three of the four characteristic PBS symptoms. More specifically, they show that the physical and emotional exhaustion related to parenting was overwhelmingly predominant in mothers. Being a mother was also more strongly associated with the symptoms of being fed up of parenting and contrasting oneself with one's previous parental self.

This seems to confirm, as other studies have noted (Roskam et al., 2022; Verniers et al., 2022), that there is a notable imbalance associated with the role of gender in the care of children, specifically in three of the four core dimensions of PBS. The regression models confirm these differences, and indeed being a mother was shown to be a significant predictor of exhaustion and weariness with being a parent. This palpable difference between mothers and fathers does not, however, exclude the possibility that the syndrome (at least in some of its symptomatic manifestations) can be present in fathers, as suggested by Mikolajczak and Roskam (2020).

With regard to the relationship between the child's educational stage and PBS, our starting hypothesis was partly confirmed. As expected, exhaustion was significantly more pronounced in parents of primary-school children. However, in contrast to our hypothesis, it was also parents of primary-school children who had significantly higher levels of weariness with being a parent and feeling a long way from how they would like to be as parents at the present time. Backing up this evidence, the regression models clearly show that having a child in primary school significantly predicts these three symptoms of burnout.

These results seem to support the idea, suggested by other studies (Mikolajczak, Raes, et al., 2018; Piotrowski et al., 2023), that PBS decreases as children get older. One possible explanation may be a reduction in the demands of parenting between primary- and secondary-school children. Parents usually spend a lot of their day-to-day time looking after their children when they are younger, which can sometimes conflict with non-parenting obligations (Oyarzún-Farías et al., 2021). In contrast, less time is spent on looking after children as they progress through secondary school, and adolescents (typically representative stage of development in secondary school students) generally spend more time with their peers than with their families (Lam et al., 2014). Given that PBS is the result of a profound imbalance between demands and resources associated with childcare (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018), this interpretation is certainly plausible.

Lastly, the study also confirmed the hypothesis about significantly higher levels of PBS in parents of boys than in parents of girls. More specifically, our results show that parents of sons reported being more physically and emotionally exhausted by parenting. They also felt further away from their ideal

image as parents, and more fed up of being parents. Although we lack previous research directly examining this question, some studies suggest that both boys and girls feel that parents treat their sons more harshly (Sorbring, 2005). Similarly, it seems that boys generally exhibit greater difficulty than girls managing their emotions during childhood (Leaper, 2005). This means it is not out of the question that this greater tension between parents and sons would result in the appearance of burnout syndrome. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, according to our results, the fact of having a son is not a significant predictor of experiencing parental burnout symptoms. This may indicate that although parents of boys are more vulnerable to PBS than parents of girls, the child gender variable itself is insufficient to explain the appearance of the core symptoms.

Taken together, the results of our study suggest that parental gender, child gender, and the educational stage the children are in are factors that are significantly associated with three of the four core symptoms of PBS. However, in terms of predictive capability, the findings seem to emphasise the role of parental gender and the child's educational stage. More specifically, exhaustion, weariness with being a parent, and contrast with prior parental self are more likely when parents have children in primary school. In addition, being a mother is an explanatory variable for symptoms of exhaustion and weariness with being a parent.

### **Implications of the results**

The results of the study suggest various implications. Without disregarding the idea that both parents can experience parental burnout, our results seem to confirm that family responsibilities are a long way from exhibiting the gender equality that has been achieved in other areas (Roskam et al., 2022). This means it is essential for educational policy in terms of equality to adopt specific measures to mitigate the disproportionate societal and self-imposed demands placed on women when they take on the care of children.

Along these lines, coparenting —understood as not only greater involvement from fathers, but also from other members in the family and community (Roskam et al., 2024)—appears to be one priority course of action. Implementing measures aimed at encouraging work-life balance would also contribute, given that mothers experience more conflicts in this area (Wang et al., 2025).

In addition, it is important to consider the higher levels of exhaustion, weariness with being a parent, and dissonance with one's previous parental-self experienced by parents of children in earlier school stages. This might indicate that the imbalance between parental demands and resources is particularly high in the early years, such that provision of social and personal resources to parents is especially important during this period (Maia et al., 2022). These resources should include implementation of psycho-educational interventions aimed at developing skills for managing parental

stress. Such interventions have been shown to be effective in reducing family conflict (Chaplin et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2021), which is why, among other benefits, they may help prevent and reduce parental burnout associated with the children's gender.

### Limitations of the study

The contributions of this study are not without limitations. Firstly, the transversal nature of the study design does not allow causal relationships between the variables to be established. The number of participants and the sampling procedure are also a potential bias when it comes to extrapolating from the results. This means that additional studies are needed that explore the impact of the sociodemographic factors examined in this study using more comprehensive methodological designs (e.g., longitudinal designs, probabilistic sampling). More specifically, research is needed that seeks a more balanced representation of numbers of mothers and fathers, given the lower participation of the latter in our study. This methodological requirement takes on particular significance given the scarcity of data on male participants often found in studies of the family context. Our study has not been immune to this empirical reality; therefore, the results should be interpreted with due caution. In addition, the present study did not consider variables such as family type (e.g., single-parent, separated, or divorced), the number of children, or even possible multiple parenthood (i.e., parents who have sons and daughters or who have children in primary and compulsory secondary education at the same time). The ownership (public or private) of educational institutions is another factor to consider in future research. Therefore, future studies should examine the influence of such variables on parental burnout syndrome.

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