

Families and Education In Portugal: Summary' Characterization

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Abstract

The family, in Portugal, is experienced as a core value, which holds almost exclusive responsibility for the education of young children. This paper presents some indicators that help to understand the situation of families in Portugal, with particular focus on their educational conditions. Alongside this, I mean the state's role in supporting educational family obligations, analyzing how this, along with civil society, promotes support parental actions. In this sense they are described some specific programs, especially developed with families at risk, and that allow us to know what is being done on the ground. The text ends with the raising of a set of comments and considerations to attend to promote the improvement of parental support programs.

Keywords: parental support; education; educational programs; family

The family, in Portugal, is experienced as a core value, which holds almost exclusive responsibility for the education of young children. The main elements of family education focus on the care of children in terms of health, security and other basic conditions of life, as well as on the transmission of social and moral values. Parenting, in constitutional terms, is the mutual responsibility of fathers and mothers, although, in practical terms, the latter are those who, in a much greater proportion, deal with the monitoring of children. Recent studies (Torres e Silva, 1998; Guerreiro, Torres e Lobo, 2009; Wall, Aboim e Leitão, 2010) show that there have been some changes in the distribution of roles within the family, highlighting an increased involvement of fathers, in particular when taking their children to school and monitoring their schoolwork are concerned; however, actual differences of involvement of fathers and mothers in children's rearing, when compared to those of the past are still few, which explains that, in this study, the living conditions of women, related with the care and monitoring of children, are highlighted. Parenting today is confronted with different conditions of life from those prevailing a few decades ago which, among other aspects, justifies some insecurity revealed by many parents in the exercise of their parental duties; this 'social task' of educating the children was, in past times, founded on common standards, which were reproduced, with minor adjustments, from one generation to the next. However, currently, internal and/or external conditions to families are obliged to constantly rethink this social commitment. In a very synthetic way, one relevant issue is the growing number of women entering the labor market, particularly since the 1960s. This situation, on the one hand, brings economic benefits and, above all, personal fulfilment, which is reflected in the family interactions, but, on the other hand, introduces different conditions for the monitoring of children, especially because, as Wall et al. state "the progressive 'conquest' of female the public sphere by women has not been reflected neither in equal opportunities and rewards, nor in an identical entry of men into the private domain" (2010: 34).

This situation, on the one hand, brings economic benefits and, above all, personal fulfilment with reflexes in family interactions, on the other hand, introduces different conditions for the monitoring of children, especially because, as says Wall et al. "the progressive 'conquest' of female public sphere has not reflected neither in equal opportunities and rewards, not in an identical entry of men in the private domain" (Wall, 2010: 34). The economic changes of the Portuguese society, the growth of female work associated with a situation of precarious employment and with the career strategies of parents, are relevant factors for the decrease in fertility, according to Sarmento (2009: 71), as well as people's readiness to exercise a truly responsible parenting. The report produced by the OECD, in 2004, about harmonization between family life and working life, shows us how, in comparative terms, Portuguese women, primarily responsible for the monitoring of children, work more hours per week than women of the countries used for comparison (Pt- 37,3 hrs; S: 28,6hrs; NZ: 31,9hrs); Portuguese women, as well, dedicate weekly more time to their working activities than their counterparts of all those countries; In addition, the tradition of part-time work is very weak in Portugal, especially when compared to these other countries (Pt - 10,6%; S - 73,5%; NZ - 45,8%). Another relevant issue is that the number of working hours of Portuguese women is not dependent on the age of their children, situation which differs from what occurs in other. Although this study has been conducted some years ago, the truth is that, in recent years, there have been no significant changes in the measures designed to support families. This assertion can be confirmed by analysis of the figure and tables which are annexed, withdrawn from *Society at a Glance 2011: OECD Social Indicators*, which show that Portugal is the European country of OECD where the number of weekly working hours is higher (see annex I), both in paid work as in unpaid work. One can also verify that the proportion of adults who work part-time is pretty low, when compared the one of most adults of other European countries, which is most evident in the case of Portuguese women, in comparison with most of the women of these other countries (see annex II). These numbers are a demonstration of the little relevance attributed by the Government to the support of families and of the difficulties in the way of finding alternatives to ensure such support. I.e., as an example, the Act of parenting increases the leave period to six months; however, in this case (option for a six months of parenting leave), the allowance is 83 percent of the value the parent's wage; if the parent chooses a leave of five months, the allowance is of 100 per cent, provided that it is shared between the mother and the father. However, in a society where the monitoring of the child by the father is not really instituted and, on the other hand, because of the economic constraints with which young couples are being faced, the risk of wages decrease leads them to give up the opportunity to extend the leave period. In addition, legislation was not created to support those who choose to work part-time in order to accompany their minor children.

In addition to the issues relating to the harmonization between work and family life, other factors can be identified as new scenarios for the exercise of parenting. Among others, there is the wide differentiation among families, which has significantly increased — single-parent families, separated parents, reconstructed families —, keeping some of the fundamental traditional characteristics of families, but with less standardized internal settings and dynamics. Another significant fact, which makes more difficult the good exercise of parenting, is the lack of experience of young parents in dealing with children, since they grew up in small families, and spent all their early years with people their own age (in kindergartens, in schools), and have no experiences of intergenerational interaction, which makes more difficult for them to have a correct perception of what a child is, of her/his educability and of how her/his education should be processed. The learning experiences that previously took place naturally in communities to which children belonged (in extended families, in public spaces of community interaction) are rare today, which causes that many adults establish their first responsive contact with a child exactly at the time when they become parents; at that

time their 'romantic idealization' of a child is confronted with the reality of a being who has her/his own wills, ways of thinking and of acting, which often contradict the previous expectations of her/his parents, making it more difficult for them to deal with their children in an educative way. Another new component in the functioning of families is the clear division between conjugality and parenting, i.e. being parent of a child does not translate immediately to being husband/wife of her/his mother/father. This is a recent social and emotional reality, which introduces new and multiple nuances in the educational dynamics, for several reasons: even though children are, mostly, under the custody and guardianship of their mothers, there remains a contact with their fathers, though less frequent, being expected of the male progenitors the exercise of an appropriate parenting. This situation becomes more evident in the case of a shared custody, encouraged by the Law of Parenting, by which children should spend a week with each of their parents. Thus, on behalf of the welfare of children, parents are expected to keep some form of educational balance, although there are no assurances that they shall receive a training that allows them to cope with this situation.

Current times, characterized by quick and constant changes, by uncertainties about the future, by a greater investment on children, by a concern for their well-being, by the difficulties parents feel about getting time enough to think about the education of their children and to spend time with them, by the economic difficulties they face to ensure the conditions whom they deem appropriate for their children, by the strengthening of conceptions about social participation and success, and by the pressures this exerts on families, among other factors, make the exercise of parenting to need to be well addressed by any type of family, and parents to feel supported, in order for them to be able to develop this central function.

In terms of numbers, it is known that there are many Portuguese families that live below the poverty threshold. Indicators from two reports on childhood and on the economic crisis that has befallen Europe, and, particularly, on Portugal, since 2008, the report of the Portuguese Committee of UNICEF and the report of the Observatory of Families and of Family Policies highlight, according to Sarmiento, Fernandes e Trevisan (2015), that "children are, since 2008, the generational group under greater risk of material poverty; one in four children lives in material deprivation and one in ten children in a situation of severe material deprivation (ibid: 87). Furthermore, the risk of poverty is higher in large families (41%), in monoparental families (31%), and in unemployed people (38%); monoparental families, in which the progenitor is unemployed, present an almost absolute risk of poverty (90%)" (ibid: 97). Even though there is no direct relationship between being poor and being a father or mother unprepared for parenting, we are aware that, as stated in the book we quoted, hard living conditions generate greater difficulties for the exercise of a good parenting, as well as there is a strong relation between poverty, unfortunableness and bad treating on the most vulnerable people, that is, in the case of families, on the children.

Definitions of Parenting Support

In this study, concerning parental support in Portugal, we use the definition of positive parenting indicated in the recommendation of the EC (2006), i.e. "all functions that belong to parents with a view to educating and caring for their children". As stated in the Study about the role of parents and the support of Governments in the EU, this definition focuses on the relationship between parents and their children, promoting an approach that involves rights and duties, in order to foster the development and self-fulfilment of the child. At the same time, this definition considers positive parenting as the parental behaviour that ensures the satisfaction of the best interests of the child, i.e. "development, empowerment, non-

violence, providing recognition and guidance which involves setting limits, to enable the full development of the child". The recommendation of the EC indicates, as ideal conditions for the exercise of positive parenting, those which ensure access to adequate material, psychological, social and cultural resources, policy measures to promote better reconciliation between professional and family life and, in particular, the awareness of the value of positive parenting by the parents, by the children and by the State. Among these measures, in this study, we're going to focus on parental support, understanding it as concerted ways to help "families in the development of patterns of healthy relationships with their children, and which focus on the exercise of authority, dialogue, respect and education through affection, through the acquisition of skills in this field" (Abreu-Lima et al., 2010)10.

Following the definition of Brock, Oertein & Coufal (1993, in Abreu-Lima et al., 2010), parenting support is the process that aims to provide the specific expertise and the strategies that help promote the development of the child. In general terms, the main specific objectives of parental training programs, according to Abreu-Lima et al., are: i) to inform and to guide parents in the development and in the socialization of their child; ii) to prevent child development problems and to promote the family relationship; iii) to empower parents with strategies related to the control of the behavior of their child; iv) to encourage parental involvement in children's learning and in their school experience; v) to provide specific support to families of children with development problems; vi) to provide social support from the community (id, 2010: 18). Parental training can be offered in several different formats, be organized into structured programs or as direct advice to parents and other more flexible and circumstantial arrangements. As the ChildONEurope report on the Survey of the Role of Parents (2007), parenting education and counselling were among the most common forms of parenting support. Abreu-Lima et al (2010) presents us with the following distinction of parenting support: "There are manual programs and tailored interventions. Manualized programs refer to those where the manual exists which sets out explicitly what needs to be delivered in the program and that can be replicated. Tailored interventions follow a more flexible format, accounting for the specific desires and needs of the targeted group" (2010: 7).

Parental support, in Portugal, has been mobilizing a growing interest, as recognition that it can foster better conditions of life, of well-being and an overall success for children and society. The research produced, particularly in the field of education, of special education, of psychology and of sociology, has done major contributions to the recognition of the importance of the involvement of parents in the educational process, as a form of global social change. Initially assumed by religious organizations, today there is a significant number of local development associations, of private social solidarity institutions, of associations of parents, of schools and other entities, which integrate in their projects the area of parental support, as we show below. The State has supported, occasionally, some of these projects, though, as we shall see, it shows difficulties in defining and implementing policy measures to promote the effective support in this sector.

The State And The Civil Society Faced With The Worries With Parental Support

The Portuguese State, throughout the ages, and in different ways, has shown to be aware of its role of supporting families in their exercise of parenting. If, in the past, the legislation established a direct link between mothers and the monitoring of children, from 1984 onwards, with the Law No. 4/84 of 5 April, the Portuguese Government clearly assumes that "fathers and mothers have the right to the protection of the society and of the State in the exercise of their irreplaceable action relatively to their children, in particular with respect to their education.". Accordingly, in the article 2 of this law, some conditions that promote equal professional achievement and participation in civic life of the country for fathers and for mothers are laid

down, considering both equal in rights and obligations regarding the maintenance and the education of their children. In order to support parents in their parenting, the State undertakes to inform and to disseminate useful knowledge for the exercise thereof.

As shown throughout this paper, and in the sequence of that which has been stated, the parenting support for people to be able to exercise an adequate parenting, in Portugal, has been assumed by some public sectors as it is the case of public schools, as too private sectors working in the solidarity field, whether private, such as ONGs. The State, through its Government offices, such as the Comissão Nacional de Protecção de Crianças e Jovens em Risco (CNPCJR), has been supporting some parental support projects, even though this doesn't appear as a priority in Government's policies. The attention of the State towards children focuses mostly on the defence of the implementation of their rights. As Sarmento says (2009: 74), "In Portugal, the last few decades marked a very favourable development, as regards the legislation which safeguards the promotion and protection of children". In an analysis of that legislation, it is easy to find a connection between the implementation of children's rights and the parental support. Parents are progressively involved in organs which define aspects of the lives of children, such as, for example, in the Basic Law of the Education System, in the Framework Law of Pre-school Education; other references to the role and duties of parents in the promotion and protection of their children in the use of their rights, are found, for example, in the Program for the Eradication of Child Labour and in the legal separation of children who are victims of ill-treatment or negligence from children who commit criminal acts qualified as crimes. The articulation between parental support and use of children's rights is, however, blurred in all of the legislation, being referenced in the legislation establishing Commissions for the Protection of Minors, constituting a participated system, characterized as an inter-institutional and community-based protection of children; the Law of Adoption also provides for training of parents, so as to prepare them to bring up and support their children.

In the last years, it has become more evident the manifestation of State worries with the results of the bad accompanying by parents of their children, which can result in the increase of situations of bullying, and of socio-psychological uneasiness of children and youth; however, there exist no concrete measures to facilitate the intra-family accompanying. Only recently, in 1999, the State, through the Direction of Social Security, regulates one measure of Parenting Education, present in the Law of Protection of Children and Youth at Risk, to be managed by the Comissão Nacional de Protecção de Crianças e Jovens em Risco (CNPCJR), with a view to promote competences to the exercise of a positive parenting. As first step, the CNPCJR set up a committee, made up of a set of government and academic institutions, with the task of collecting and evaluation of the interventions in parenting education being implemented in the country, in order to, afterwards, propose a course of parenting education for families at risk.

According to purport of the Law of Protection of Children and Youth at Risk (LPCJP), we verify that art. 4, paragraph f), the "constitutional rule that bestows on parents the task of educating and having a behaviour adjusted to the needs of their children" is reinforced, as well as, in paragraph g), "it is determined that it ought to be given priority to the support measures that strengthen the ability of the family and the competences of the progenitors to preserve the environment of their families and the sufficient and adequate conditions to keep their children under their own responsibility". The same law defines the support to be given to the programs of parenting education as a psychopedagogical and social support. Participation in these programs can become mandatory, when it results from a court decision by the Court of Protection of Minors. Also, the families that receive the social pension named Rendimento

Social de Inserção, who have children, and it is considered useful for the educational promotion of their children, have to attend these programs too, lest they lose that social right, due to uncompliance with criteria and rules for its allocation. Other measure we ought to mention is the Iniciativa para a Infância e a Adolescência (INIA) , set up by the Portuguese government, which aims at defining a plan of action that respects the universality of the rights of children, having also as its objective the mobilization and the construction of a culture of cooperation and articulation between the institutions with responsibilities and committed to advocacy of the rights of children and the civil society. This project seeks to deepen and qualify the services and the responses, namely at the level of health, training, culture, environment, and safety, guaranteeing all children, adolescents and their families, living in Portugal, the respect for their fundamental rights, without any discrimination of race, religion, nationality, and physical and/or mental handicap. Centred on children, the INIA promotes programs of parenting education, regarding it as one important foundation for the implementation of the rights of children.

Prior to the role of the State, one ought to mention the action of the Church in the training of parents, especially with the courses of preparation to the matrimony realized by catholic brides and grooms. These sessions, even though they are realized to very restricted group, since the number of young people who wish to get married by the Church, have the potentiality of being perceived as important for all progenitors, both fathers and mothers, and not just to the ones who find themselves at social risk.

Besides the institutions already mentioned, one ought not to ignore the action undertaken by the Escola Nacional de Pais (EPN) [National School of Parents], a private association of public interest (IPSS) , working on a voluntary basis, without political or religious filiation, which, using informal methodologies, seeks to help progenitors in their exercise of parenthood. EPN was created in 1969, as a voluntary movement for an ongoing and updated education, with the goal of "helping the Family to recover its own true and fair meaning, leading progenitors to take responsibility for their parenthood. With its headquarters in a town of the North of the country (Porto), its activities extend to the whole of the national territory, integrating the International Federation of the Schools of Parents, which is based in Paris. One ought also to mention the associations of parents, which have as their primary concern to fight for their rights, as progenitors, to participate in the education and school life of their children, often take to themselves the task of parenting training as one of their fields of action. The role played by associations or movements of progenitors, whose members have handicapped children, both in advocating their children's rights and in their own training to help them to improve their children's lives, ought to be highlighted. Each association of parents has as its main connection the educational institution attended by their children. Until 1974 , the right of association was prohibited to all citizens; meanwhile, since that time, from the relative social invisibility of the associative movement of the parents, especially in the level of the education of children under 6 years of age , this movement spread, implementing diverse ways of interaction between the schools and the families. The training provided by the associations of parents seek to give occasional responses to issues occurring in the school context, with some more sequent and structured training courses organized in partnership with other entities, usually with associations of local development.

From 1974 until 2015, the cooperation between the educational institutions and the families has been marked by very diverse dynamics, and by antagonic social representations of the families about the schools and of the schools about families, especially if one pays attention to the different educational levels. The field of education for children under 6 years of age is the one where there is a greater degree of collaboration between parents and educators, with a

greater willingness to different kinds of action, namely with a greater disponibility to participation in courses of parenting training. Reasons such as the greater vulnerability of these children, the lesser experience of the progenitors in the educational relationship, the tradition of the greater ease of the educators to work with the communities, facilitates the creation of a more open hearted empathy between the parents and the professionals, which makes it possible the insertion in training practices in the scope of parenting support, of which we can give some examples in the following sections.

Overview Of The Parenting Training In The Process

As stated previously, the training of parents in Portugal has the character of a casual and informal process, being guided by local development associations, by parents associations, by health centers in the area of maternal and child health, by CPCJ and by schools. Among the parental training programs indicated in the report *Avaliação de Intervenções de Educação Parental: relatório*, most of those cited which correspond to the parental education interventions, and which constitute the most significant and systematic courses in this context, are directed to families with specific issues (neglect, drug addiction, ill-treatment, etc.) and will be treated in the following sections.

At this point, it is interesting to focus on educational institutions which have a very important role in the organization and development of parental training, even though they are mostly promoted on a voluntary basis, striving to organize it in an articulated way, following specific pedagogical projects.

Portuguese children four months old and above spend most of the day in educational institutions: from 0 to 3 years in day nurseries or at nannies' houses, supported, or not, by the Social Security, and from 3 to 6 years in kindergartens. The daily frequency of these institutions is, on average, of 9.5 hrs a day, which corresponds, roughly, to the time their parents are at work and the time they spent in transports, going and coming from the working place to their homes. Parental training is very common within kindergarten, and it is articulated in several modalities, mainly through forms of parental involvement. Parental involvement is well defined by Don Davies (1989), as all forms of collaboration between parents and teachers in education of their children. According to different types of parental involvement (Davies, 1989), this collaboration can range from the identification and response to the children's basic needs in terms of health and safety to parents' effective participation in educational projects. From the interaction occurred between teachers and parents, it is possible to identify specific areas in which it makes sense to organize training processes. Although these processes are not generalized and, in many cases, there is some resistance on the part of the professionals relatively to the collaboration with parents, and, above all, difficulties of acceptance that with this collaboration they can learn with each other, there has been a growing openness to this formative relationship. Except in rare cases of private colleges, especially those linked to the Church, standardized courses that develop parental training, in most kindergartens, the educational investment follow more informal types of support, of direct advice, sporadic and of short duration. In private institutions, where the staff includes a psychologist, this has an important role in individual cases, helping parents of children with a specific need, transitional or of other kind. It is also very common to organize conferences, with the support of invited experts, selected from areas regarded as significant. Summarily, we can say that the educational institutions have a very important role in the organization and development of parenting training, which voluntarily promote, seeking to stimulate it in an articulated fashion with the pedagogical projects in process.

We can tell, as an example, the strategy used by one educator, who resorted to a rag doll that was a gift of a girl's grandmother, which becomes a member of the class. Simon, the name that was attributed to the doll, is perceived as just one more child, who, as such, cannot be abandoned in the kindergarten, during the week-ends. Thus, intentionally, the educator gives it a notebook, in which, along the week, the activities it "develops" are registered, highlighting those from which the educator can use to point out some adequate practices, such as, for example, not forgetting to brush the teeth after meals, or the visit to a museum in the scope of a cultural journey. Each week-end, Simon goes to the home of one of the children, taking with him the book note, so that their parents can get to know it better and its activities, with the task of, jointly with their children, register each period spent with that family. Thus, in a very informal fashion, training messages are being exchanged between educator, children and parents, taking the shape of a creative modality of parenting training.

Parental support for children below 6 years old is generally realized on a voluntary basis and thanks to the goodwill of the professionals, who recognize its importance in helping a balanced development of children and, as such, it is not an activity that creates jobs. In recent years, research and specialized training on, and in, this area have been increasing, and we verify the existence of curricular units focused on it, either in university degree courses or in master's degrees and doctorates, promoted by different scientific specialties, in particular education, psychology and sociology. Although there is not a market for employment in this sector, people with this training are enabled to cross parental training with other areas of action.

Programs Addressing Specific Targets Of Population

A summary analysis to the programs of parenting training that we have contacted allows us to say that they are developed, mostly, by local associations, are financed by the entities themselves, often with the support of state funding, sometimes with the support of European funding, such as Ser Criança and Escolhas, among others, of free attendance, structured on the basis of the psychology and the social psychology, with a duration lasting from six to fifteen weeks, whose trainees, often, have a support to pay their expenses with their transportation and meals, organized for progenitors of children belonging to specific age ranks, sometimes for progenitors who have to deal with complex issues, such as parents of drug addicts, using active methodologies, with exchange of experiences, dynamics of group, movie watching, among others.

Parents of families at social risk, such as those that find themselves in a situation of poverty, those who have (or are) addicted to drugs, as well as those who have one or more children with special educational needs are identified as lacking a more specific parental support. Researchers from early childhood intervention considering that this constitutes a fundamental role on providing support to families, namely by identifying resources that respond to their children's needs, relieving the stress, improving well-being and consequently improving parent-child interaction patterns (Serrano, and Boavida, 2011). Another group of parents with difficulties in their parenting is composed of ethical and/or cultural minorities, such as Roma and immigrants, particularly as regards issues of socialization.

Among the programs examined in more detail we can refer to three: Pais que Cuidam, Construir Famílias and Oficinas de Pais. The programme Pais que Cuidam is promoted by the Associação de Solidariedade Social Ermesinde Cidade Aberta, and its promoters are the professionals who develop it, and it has already had three editions. For its development, it was established a partnership with the Commission for the Protection of Children and Young People of Valongo and a protocol with the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Oporto. This project, targeted at parents with children with ages

ranging from 0 to 18 years who are beneficiaries of the Minimum Income (RSI – Rendimento Social de Inserção, in Portuguese) or that are required to attend training as a measure of promotion and protection enacted by the family and young court, indicates as its goals the sharing and the exchange of experiences relating to parenting, encouraging sharing, moments of reflection and change, increasing and strengthening parenting skills. It addresses issues such as domestic violence, nutrition, parents' relationship with their children, violence and sexual abuse against children. The technical staff integrates an expert from the theatre area, on the grounds that art is a means of humanization and of socio-cultural overcoming for the participants. The course, developed in 17 sessions, biweekly, finds its theoretical grounds in systemic theories, in the ecological model of human development of Bronfenbrenner, as well as in social learning theories, with particular emphasis on empowerment. The dynamics of formation is based on active methodologies, with group work, debates, theoretical lectures and interactions with various guest speakers. Although we do not have references on the internal evaluation of the project, the triple re-editing of the program, as well as the news that came to our knowledge through the newspaper *Voz de Ermesinde*, allow us to conclude that it is a case of success.

The second programme worth mentioning is *Construir Famílias*, it is promoted by the *Associação para a Educação e Solidariedade Mundos de Vida* (Association for Education and Solidarity World of Life), and it is targeted to a selective group of parents of children from 0 to 18 years old, who receive the RSI and/or are under the protection and promotion measures enacted by the family and juvenile court. The program follows a model created by a researcher at the University of La Laguna, Spain, and it is overseen by a researcher of the Institute of Education, University of Minho, with whom the association has a partnership agreement. This project, self-financed, has as its main objectives to improve situated cognition, the understanding of family models and their effects on the educational plan, the empowerment and strengthening the sense of parental agency, the strengthening of family support networks. The theoretical rationale of the program lies in the theories of development and in the eco-systemic theories. The parental training course is developed on the basis of an experiential model, with a methodology that encourages the active participation of users, flexibly and in a structured way, which begins with reflection on real accounts of daily life, combining the information with the effective support of professionals. Of free attendance, the course runs for eight months, with weekly meetings of two hours. This long period of time allows the monitoring of the implementation of new practices in families, which is understood as a sign of the innovation of the program and of its validity. The presence of participants is supported through the provision of transport, the babysitting service and the supply of a snack, apart from other possible bonuses.

Aware that parents of children with disabilities face additional demands, the association Parents Network (PER – Pais em Rede, in Portuguese), decided to go ahead with the Workshops of Parents, parental training programs with a view for parents' to learn skills, in order for them to be able to play their role of educators and to manage the process of integration of their children. This program is developed on the basis of a partnership between the PER, the Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada and the Gulbenkian, and sponsored by the High Commissariat for Health (Alto Comissariado para a Saúde). The program is developed in 36 hrs, its attendance is free of charge, and parents are supported through the payment of transport and lodgings. The methodology of this program derives from presentation, theoretical analysis and proposals for intervention from real experiences. There is a set of tutor parents supporting new parents, as well as specialist trainers and advisers who monitor

situations of everyday life. These workshops, in addition to the relevance of specific disability knowledge with which every family is faced and of the forms of appropriate intervention to promote better well-being and stimulation of children, is valued by parents as fundamental in terms of emotional support.

EVALUATIVE SUMMARY

In an overall assessment about the parental training developed currently in Portugal, we present, firstly, a summary of the evaluation on the effects of parental or other parental figures involvement, performed at the request of the CPCJ, and later, a reflexive summary based on the analysis of the data employed in this study.

So, the *Avaliação de Intervenções de Educação Parental: relatório*, drawn up in accordance with validated scientific procedures, shows that this realization helps parents: i) to become more aware of their educational practices; ii) to realize the need to change some of their behaviors and practices; iii) to perceive themselves as being more empathetic towards the feelings and needs of their children, differentiating them from their own needs; iv) to decrease the importance of physical punishments as a formative strategy; v) to become more respectful of the time and identity of their child; v) to perceive a sense of competence, lessening the stress associated with the exercise of the parental role; vi) to feel less depressed, less socially isolated and more supported by their informal network; vii) to perceive a reduction in the number and in the intensity of behavioral problems and difficulties of their children.

In the continuity of the assessment, it shows that parents who attended expressed great satisfaction for their parental training participation, justifying it by having the feeling of being recognized as persons, validated in their skills and difficulties, because they have learned strategies to deal with the problems of everyday education, showing to understand the importance of organizing their day to day life, and expressing their willingness to change their operating styles.

The literature allows for the following considerations, regarding the effectiveness of parenting support programs, highlighting some specific recommendations:

- parental support is highlighted, in scientific studies and in the observed practices, as very important for the promotion of the welfare of children, families and society; However, without articulation of parental training with policies to support families, such as work schedules that allow the coordination between family life and working life and, among other things, guarantees of economic stability, the change in educational quality is not easy;
- the direct knowledge that we have of good practices of parental training, specifically in the case of the involvement of parents in educational practices in formal contexts (kindergartens and schools), shows us that when parents understand and verify the benefits of reflecting and working together to promote the development of their children, they tend to repeat these experiences and to remain vigilant and participatory throughout their children's school life;
- in addition, parents have expressed that their integration in a network of training ensures them greater self-confidence, in their quality of parents in the exercise of parenting, being also evident that their self-esteem, their enjoyment for being mothers and fathers, increases;
- when it comes to training of parents, we are referring essentially to mothers, since these remain, essentially, the ones who ensure the monitoring of children. Besides awareness-

strategies for the involvement of men-fathers in parental training, some strategies should be used to achieve a reformulation of perspectives and intra-family practices;

- in terms of the quantity of public covered, parental training is manifestly insufficient, involving a small percentage of the population. In addition, structured training, with an average duration of 12 sessions, following scientifically validated training models, is directed almost exclusively to vulnerable families, understanding these as being those who are at social risk or who have a disabled child, so most so-called normal families have no space for the attendance of these programs. However, some of today's social conditions seriously disturb the exercise of parenting to most parents (lack of time, little experience of parents for educational accountability, etc.), with repercussions on the fragility or evident difficulty of this exercise for a high percentage of parents, whatever their socio-economic situation. It is our opinion that parental training has to be extended to new audiences and not be restricted almost exclusively to vulnerable families;
- one cannot submit a parental training model as being the ideal, but it has to be sought, for each situation, each group of parents and each socio-cultural context, the most appropriate way to promote such training. Outreach training, understood as the one which is performed by professionals who are in daily contact with children (teachers, psychologists, youth workers, others), although it can be very short-lived and have great flexibility, is often more effective to help resolve, in a short space of time, some difficulty emerging in the child and in her/his family. In addition, it seems to us very important that parents should become seriously involved in the definition and development of parental training programs, while respecting their agency and the right to make themselves heard, and have their will and knowledge validated, since only with their effective participation change can occur. These arguments also serve to affirm the importance of diversifying the training modalities, adjusting them to each context;
- we believe that it is not up to the State, through its direct action, to promote parental training, except in the case of children who are under its custody, such as, for example, abandoned children. However, it is its responsibility to support the structures of the civil society which, in close proximity to local populations, play this role, seen as very important;
- one of the ways the State can support parental training is by creating a legislative framework in which this training has the same status as other trainings, thus becoming compulsory for employers to create the necessary conditions for their employees to be able to realize it.

Finally, we think that, faced with the social reality in which we live, parental training has to be understood and promoted as a component of a community education project, where there is a good articulation of services in the promotion of shared responsibility by supporting the appropriate development of each child.

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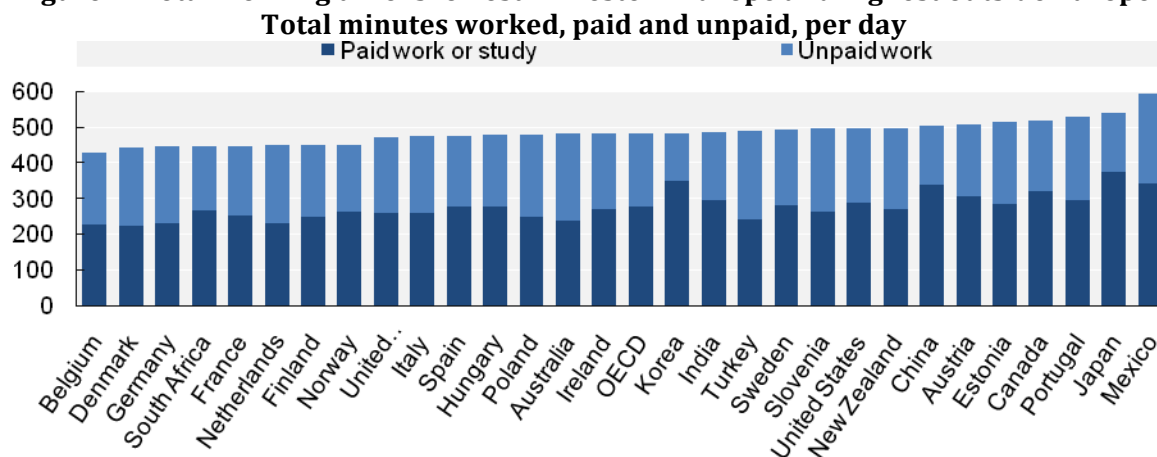
Law 315/84, of 28 de September – Law of Parental Associations

Law n.º 4/84, of 5 de April– Law of protection of maternity and paternity

Law 7/77, of 1 de February – Law of Parental Association

ANNEX 1

Society at a Glance 2011: OECD Social Indicators - © OECD 2011

Figure 1. Total working time is lowest in western Europe and highest outside Europe

	Paid work or study	Unpaid work	Total work
Belgium	227	200	427
Denmark	225	217	441
Germany	232	212	445
France	251	197	448
Netherlands	231	219	450
Finland	250	201	451
Norway	263	188	451
United Kingdom	261	211	473
Italy	259	215	474
Spain	276	198	475
Hungary	277	200	477
Poland	249	230	479
Ireland	271	213	483
OECD	277	207	484
Sweden	281	213	494
Slovenia	265	231	495
United States	289	207	496
Austria	306	203	509
Estonia	284	232	516
Portugal	295	233	528

Source: OECD's Secretariat estimates based on national time-use surveys