




# Parents' Perceptions of their Acceptance and Rejection Behaviors: Benchmarking Spain and Ecuador

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## Abstract

Cross-cultural studies are necessary to test and understand how measures work in diverse multicultural societies. Positive parenting needs to be defined and the basic elements making up this construct need to be established. IPARTheory stands out as the main theory defining parenting focusing on the acceptance-rejection dimension. This study explored the factorial structure of the PARQ Questionnaire Parent Version (Short Form) in Spanish ( $n = 4169$ ), with age range 20 to 72 years old; and Ecuadorian ( $n = 569$ ) parents, with ages from 22 to 71 years old. This instrument assesses parents' perceptions of their acceptance and rejection behaviors towards their children. The questionnaire has a 25-item structure in four scales: warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect and undifferentiated-rejection. Confirmatory factor analysis supported the four-factor model in both samples, however the invariance of the model must be accepted with caution. In addition, an ANOVA test showed statistically significant differences in the four factors between Spanish and Ecuadorian parents. Spain and Ecuador are both Latin countries; however, there are differences between them, which may explain the differences found in this research. Authorities must encourage programs and social services to educate people in parental roles and tasks, besides public policies are needed to support positive parenting, but it is important to define the domains which make this construct.

**Keywords** Cross-cultural issues · Parenting · Quantitative methodology · Parental acceptance-rejection questionnaire · Parent version

According to the Parental Acceptance Rejection Theory (PARTheory) parental acceptance-rejection could be understood as a domain of parental behavior: on one hand, parents who show their affection and care to their children, verbally or physically and, another, those parents who feel rejection or disgust towards their children, and who exhibit excessive educational styles towards their children (Rohner 1975). The central statements of this theory focus on parental characteristics; perceived parental rejection is associated with personality traits. The theory goes beyond parental figures and includes people who can establish affective links throughout life (siblings, grandparents,

friends, teachers, partners, peers and so on). This framework theory aims to be an evolutionary perspective encompassing all of the research about acceptance-rejection. The PARTheory was redefined as Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory (IPARTheory, Rohner 2014), an evidence-based theory emphasizing that these dimensions work in many relationships besides parental structures (Rohner and Carrasco 2014; Rohner et al. 2005). Research in several countries into IPARTheory—Interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory—indicates that parents' and children's perceptions of acceptance-rejection are organized around a four behavior types: warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect and undifferentiated rejection (Gómez and Rohner 2011; Khaleque and Rohner 2002; Rohner and Khaleque 2002; Rohner and Khaleque 2010).

This theory focus on children's perception about parental's acceptance-rejection that is supported by three sub-theories: Personality Subtheory: emotional needs, attachment and positive replies, Coping Subtheory: interaction between self, other and context, and Sociocultural

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Systems Subtheory, this last subtheory explains that the parental behavior occurs in an ecological system defined by family, community and cultural subsystems (Del Barrio et al. 2014; Rohner et al. 2005; Fernández García et al. 2017)

According to Rohner (2016), acceptance and rejection are two poles of one domain; at one end are loving behaviors, and verbal and physical affection, and at the other end are parental rejection, the lack of, or withdrawal of affection and the presence of hurtful psychological and physical behaviors. Parental rejection has three different expressions: a) hostility and aggressiveness, b) indifference and neglect and, c) undifferentiated rejection. In addition, these domains must be examined within the ethnic and cultural contexts in which they appear (Rohner and Carrasco 2014).

The Warmth domain is one of the most studied variables in parental socialization. By warmth, researchers refer to emotional closeness, support, harmony and cohesion (Oliva 2006). Findings indicate the importance of parental affective involvement for children to achieve good social and psychological adjustment. Parental support leads to higher self-esteem, and psychological well-being (Cerezo et al. 2011; Darling and Steinberg 1993), these children also exhibit better academic performance and adjustment (Im-Bolter et al. 2013; Mounts and Steinberg 1995; Steinberg et al. 1992). In addition, there is a lower risk of substance abuse (Bahr and Hoffman 2010; Becoña et al. 2013; Calafat et al. 2014) and behavioral disorders are less common (Aunola et al. 2000; Pelegrina et al. 2002). Furthermore, research shows the significant relationship between a positive family structure, emotional cohesion and adaptability in emotional disorders (Milevsky et al. 2007; Oliva et al. 2008). In addition to its influence when facing and overcoming stressful life events, maintaining adaptive behaviors also produces more adaptive and resilient people (Fuentes et al. 2015; Milevsky et al. 2007; Suldo and Huebner 2004).

On the other hand, several studies report that when the affection need is not met, children tend to be more aggressive, hostile, and emotionally unstable. Several researches explain the importance of parental acceptance-rejection in psychological adjustment development of children (Ali et al. 2015); Rodríguez et al. 2016; Rohner et al. 2012). In family context, when children do not satisfy their affection needs, they could be a greatest risk to develop symptoms as hostility, aggression, low self-esteem, negative worldview, and dependency or defensive independence; generating psychological disorders as depression, anxiety, suicidal tendencies or delinquent habits. In addition, when children perceive rejection, they are more predisposed to develop behavioral disorders, and consume drugs and alcohol (Rohner et al. 2012). Perceived rejection and criticism, especially from the father, and a lack of maternal affection are related with different victimization

and aggressive bullying profiles (León del Barco et al. 2015).

The IPARTheory is defined as an ecological model which encompasses family, community and sociocultural contexts. The model is made up of seven elements: the natural environment, maintenance systems, parental behavior, child personality, developmental experiences, adult personality, and traditions, customs and culture in society (Rohner et al. 2005). Bidirectional relationships between these factors suggest that parental behavior is conditioned by factors such as family members' formative experiences, school support, family-related public policies, and by children's' temperaments and cultural knowledge about the role of the family in society.

Cross-cultural studies are a necessity in the modern world, as there are many differences between cultures. We may describe individualistic cultures, such as the USA, Canada, or Northern Europe, or collectivist cultures such as those in South America, or Southern Europe. Some cultures may have traditional, unequal gender roles whereas others may exhibit more equality. Cultural differences cannot be ignored in empirical research, and it is essential to consider the characteristic culture of the place where an instrument is applied. Merenda (2012) indicated the procedure to get a suitable version when an instrument is adapting into different language and culture. The mainly issues to be considered is the reliability and validity analysis, establish the translation the points of view (emic versus etic), and overall consider that some items will need to be modified to adapt idiomatic expressions to the target culture (Drasgow and Probst 2012).

Findings in cross-cultural studies indicate that race, ethnic group, social class and gender do not work as differentiating factors in the children being studied as to whether they feel accepted or rejected (Rohner et al. 2005). The research concludes that children, in any context, need positive acceptance responses from parents and other primary caregivers. Acceptance and rejection are parenting variables, which are present in all cultures. Acceptance is characterized by high levels of parental warmth and low levels of hostility, undifferentiated rejection and neglect (HRN); rejection is characterized by high levels of HRN and low levels of warmth toward the child (Putnick et al. 2012).

According to IPARTheory, the development of children's socialization is affected depending on how they perceive their parents' acceptance or rejection. Three versions have been developed, each with four scales: warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect and undifferentiated rejection. Warmth/affection evaluates behaviors such as kissing, hugging, cuddling; the hostility scale includes behaviors such as hitting, kicking, cursing, sarcasm or saying cruel things to or about the child.

Indifference/neglect refers to the parents' lack of attention to the needs of the child, and finally, undifferentiated rejection is shown through the child feeling uncared for and unloved. The aim of this study was to use a multi-group CFA to test the PARQ model with Spanish and Ecuadorian scores to confirm or refute the factorial invariance of the model.

## Method

### Participants

The participants comprised 4,738 people from either Spain or Ecuador (4,169 Spanish and 569 Ecuadorian). The Spanish sample was made up of 2002 fathers and 2,166 mothers, with ages ranging from 20 to 72 years old, the mean age was 40.64 years ( $SD = 6.04$ ), families had children at eight nursery and primary schools in the Principality of Asturias in Spain. A stratified sampling was used to select the schools; public, state assisted and private schools were chosen. The Ecuadorian sample comprised 284 fathers and 285 mothers with ages from 22 to 71 years old, the mean age was 36.55 ( $SD = 6.98$ ), families were from twenty primary schools in the Cuenca region. In order to select the schools, stratified sampling was applied according to funding (public or private), with non-proportional allocation. Both countries used the convenience non-probabilistic sampling type, due to some schools rejected taking part in the research; finally, schools were chosen considering only the ownership school. On the other hand, the difference in the samples size was important, for this reason, this issue was considered in analysis further.

### Procedure

First, we contacted Ronald Rohner in order to get authorization to adapt the instrument. For the Spanish sample, the research team contacted school principals, explaining the aim of the research and requesting approval. Once their approval was given, teachers gave their students an envelope with the two questionnaires: one for the mother and the other for the father, along with a cover letter explaining the objectives of the research and asking for their collaboration. Parents returned the answered questionnaires to their children's teachers. A similar process was performed with the Ecuadorian sample.

### Measure

*Parental Acceptance Rejection Questionnaire (parent version)-Parent PARQ* (Rohner and Khaleque 2005). This instrument is a scale of 24 Likert-type items (4 = *almost*

*always true* to 1 = *almost never true*). We used the Spanish version (Rohner and Carrasco 2004) which is a scale that evaluates parental acceptance-rejection and controlling behaviors of parents towards their children. The structure of the original version is: warmth/affection (8 items), hostility/aggression (6 items), indifference/neglect (6 items), undifferentiated rejection (4 items). In the original version the alpha Coefficient for the total PARQ was 0.86. Internal consistency of factors was: warmth/affection around 0.90, hostility/aggression around 0.87, indifference/neglect 0.78 and undifferentiated-rejection around 0.79. (Rohner 2005, p. 58).

### Data Analyses

The MPLUS 7.3 program (Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2012) was used to perform the confirmatory factor analyses (CFA). For this purpose, the sample was divided into two subsamples. With first subsample a CFA was carried out, so the re-specification model was guided by modification indexes, the second subsample was used for the second CFA in order to confirm the previous CFA model.

We first checked whether the data were suitable for CFA: normality of sample (skewness, kurtosis). The model fit measures included: the Chi-Square test of significance ( $\chi^2$ ), the Tucker Lewis index–non normed fit index (TLI-NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and Steiger's Root Mean Square error of approximation (RMSEA). The various CFA invariance models were compared using the  $\chi^2$  difference.

## Results

We performed a multiple-group CFA to determine if the country moderated the model structure. It was also deemed useful to assess the invariance of the model fit between countries. This analysis involved testing several models. Firstly, we performed two CFAs; one for the Spanish sample and another for the Ecuadorian sample, Models 1 and 2 (Table 1). Model 3 was the baseline model against which to judge the restricted models. Next, we examined whether the values of intercepts were constrained to be equal in the Spanish and Ecuadorian samples (Model 4). Model 5 was the invariance of residual, and whether the means of latent variables was equal was tested in Model 6 (Table 1). Model metric invariance (equality for factor loadings) was analyzed but the fit was very poor.

We used modified indices to improve the model, and then performed a second CFA to confirm each model,  $n_{s1} = 2109$ ;  $n_{e2} = 308$ . The  $\chi^2$  difference tests showed that factorial invariance must be interpreted with caution.

**Table 1** Fit indices for CFA models tested. ( $n_{s1} = 2060$ ;  $n_{e2} = 261$ )

	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\chi^2$ difference
Model 1. Spanish sample	908.245	225	0.00	0.94	0.92	0.02	0.03	
Model 2. Ecuadorian sample	402.119	225	0.00	0.93	0.91	0.03	0.04	
Model 3. Unconstrained model	1534.915	492	0.00	0.86	0.84	0.04	0.07	Model 3-4 98**
Model 4. Constrained intercepts model	1436.910	480	0.00	0.87	0.86	0.04	0.07	Model 3-5 224.22**
Model 5. Constrained residuals	1759.14	478	0.00	0.82	0.79	0.04	0.08	Model 3-6 310.50**
Model 6. Constrained means model	1224.414	454	0.00	0.90	0.87	0.04	0.07	

*df* degrees of freedom, *CFI* Comparative fit index, *TLI* Tucker–Lewis index, *RMSEA* Root mean square error of approximation, *SRMR* Standardized root mean square residual

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

The model behaved differently in the two populations; the meaning loads in the indifference-neglect factor were not the same. In the Spanish sample the loads were negative, in other words, this factor was defined as non-indifferent/non-negligent behaviors, whereas in the Ecuadorian sample the loadings were positive, so the factor was defined as indifference/negligent behaviors. Correlations between factors were different between countries, mainly the relationships of warmth-affection with hostility-aggression and undifferentiated-rejection, hostility-aggression with indifference-neglect, and indifference-neglect with undifferentiated-rejection (Fig. 1).

Means and standard deviations (Table 2) were significantly different in the four dimensions, as indicated by the ANOVA test. We carried out an analysis of variance to test assumed parametric requirements (normality and homogeneity of variance). The Ecuadorian parents had higher values in warmth ( $F = 7.75$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.002$ ), and exhibited more hostility ( $F = 92.45$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ) and rejection behaviors ( $F = 33.86$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ) than the Spanish parents. Meanwhile the Spanish parents exhibited more neglecting behaviors ( $F = 2564.28$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.37$ ). In terms of total PARQ score, the Spanish population scored significantly higher than the Ecuadorian parents (36.32 vs 33.42;  $F = 147.68$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ). This means that the Spanish parents exhibited more rejection behaviors than Ecuadorian's parents. Due to the large difference in sample sizes between the two groups, we re-compared means using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. The results were the same, with differences in all dimensions and the total score.

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to use CFA analyses to examine measurement and structural invariance in Spanish and Ecuadorian parents' scores in the PARQ, Parent version.

The results showed that there was a good fit of the four factor model in both Spain and Ecuador. The item loadings were similar in all domains. However, it is necessary to analyze the differences between the two cultures in terms of the adaptation of the PARQ test. The model worked better when it was evaluated in each country separately. In both the Spanish and Ecuadorian samples, the indices indicated a good fit to the four-factor model. There were differences between item loads by factor. In the Spanish sample, the highest load was in item 23, "I care about what my child thinks and encourage her/him to talk about it", whereas in the Ecuadorian sample the highest loads were in items 15 and 29: "I make my child feel wanted and needed" and "I treat my child gently and kindly". In the hostility/aggression domain, in the Spanish sample item 17 had the maximum load, "I hurt my child's feelings", however in the Ecuadorian sample the maximum was item 12 "I say unkind things to my child". In indifference-neglect, item 2, "I pay attention to my child", had the highest load in the Spanish sample (in the original version is item was stated in a negative form "I pay no attention to my child"); in the Ecuadorian sample the highest load was item 16 "I pay a lot of attention to my child". There were also differences in undifferentiated rejection. While in the Spanish sample, the top load was in item 19 "When my child misbehaves, I make him/her feel I don't love him/her anymore", in the Ecuadorian sample the highest load was in item 10, "I resent my child".

This difference was most important when the correlations between factors are considered. The relationship between warmth and hostility was different depending on the country. With the Spanish parents, the correlations were significantly negative, whereas in the Ecuadorian parents they were positive. This finding may explain the higher hostility level exhibited by Ecuadorian parents, and the results suggest the need for a different conception of the acceptance domain in each sample. In the Spanish sample the acceptance domain is defined with two poles (warmth

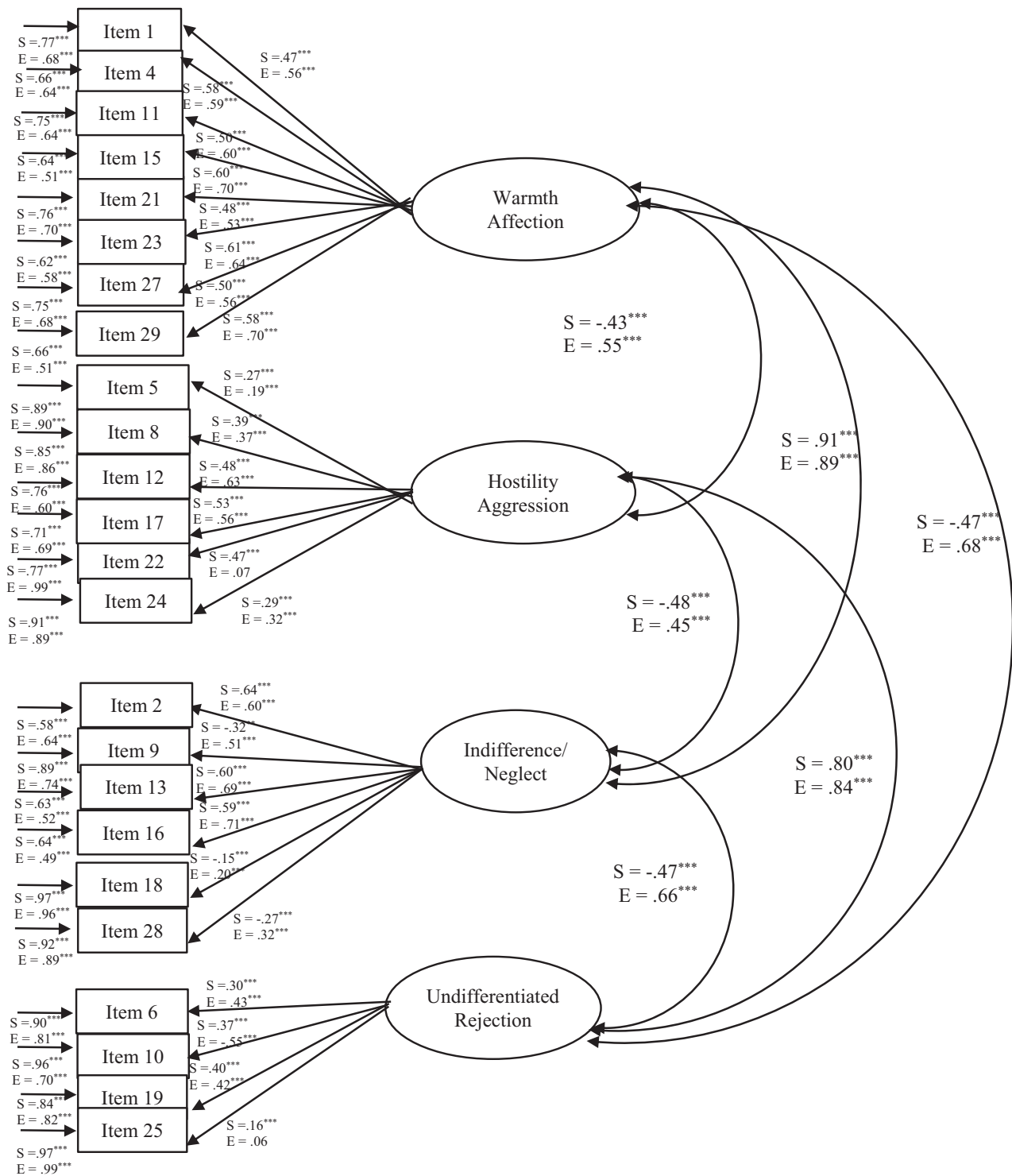


Fig. 1 Confirmatory factor analysis. Parent PARQ. Short Form \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

and hostility), whereas in the Ecuadorian sample these two opposing poles are not clear. In terms of parental rejection, defined by indifference/neglect and undifferentiated/rejection, the data supported PARQTheory in the Ecuadorian sample, however, in the Spanish sample the correlation was

negative as a result of negative loading in some non-neglect behavior items. In addition, the positive correlation between warmth and indifference in the Spanish sample is explained by load factor changes. This explanation also sheds light on the difference in correlation between warmth and

**Table 2** Means and standard deviations of Spanish and Ecuadorian scores

Dimensions of Model	Spain		Ecuador	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Warmth/affection	28.85	3.09	29.26	3.12
Hostility/aggression	7.72	1.94	8.54	1.95
Indifference/neglect	12.90	1.42	9.28	2.49
Undifferentiated-Rejection	4.61	2.56	4.89	1.07

undifference/rejection. The reason for the positive correlation between these two factors in the Ecuadorian sample was due to differences in the translation process in Ecuador, in which some of the items were translated with the opposite meaning to the original version from the USA. Although, the Ecuadorian version had differences in translation procedure, the validity model was assumed due to the fit values were very adequate, as Table 1 depicted.

The presence of differences in the comparative analysis of the model supports the argument that PARQTheory works differently in each country. Moreover, the analysis of variance identifies these differences; in this study, Spanish parents were shown to exhibit less warmth or hostility than Ecuadorian parents and reported lower levels of attention to their children's needs.

Despite different cultures, beliefs, languages and customs, we share the same need in terms of interpersonal relationships and, especially, in family relationships (Rohner and Carrasco 2014). Public policies are needed to support positive parenting. Authorities must encourage programs and social services to educate people in parental roles and tasks, (Center for Parenting and Research 2006; Consejo de Europa 2006; Moreno 2010; Sanders et al. 2003; Tur et al. 2012; Vargas-Rubilar and Arán-Filippetti 2014). Parental education programs should be highlighted during pregnancy, or in subsequent child development, to support children's education, to prevent school dropout, and to promote collaboration between parents and schools. These kinds of public policies are well supported by cross-cultural studies, as the models have been tested in various countries and cultures (Rohner 2016). The findings found, in this research, have shown that warmth/affection's behaviors are the major reported by parents, as Spanish as Ecuadorian sample, and they reported less undifference and hostility conducts; however it would be necessary to deepen the meaning of these dimensions with fathers and mothers. The parenting programs allow educating to strength parental skills, however, it is necessary to know how these dimensions work in each culture to be able to adapt a program in several cultures (World Health Organization 2013).

## Limitations and Future Research Directions

The results of this research need to be viewed in the light of certain limitations. Firstly, the samples were not randomly selected, so the reach of these results is limited. The Spanish sample was from a single region in Spain, so one must be cautious in generalizing from these results. The Ecuadorian sample is from an extensive region in that country. For those reasons, it would be useful to replicate this study with random samples from more regions. Secondly, the gender, socioeconomic, and educational levels of the parents need to be identified in order to have a better, deeper understanding of the structure of PARQ.

Although Spain and Ecuador share the same language, there are many cultural differences. Future studies will particularly further an understanding of the invariance found in this study. These findings emphasize the fact that parents behave differently in each society and that there are specific factors associated with inter-societal variations (Rohner et al. 2005). Spain and Ecuador have socioeconomic differences and this is an important factor in the development of positive parenting programs. To address this limitation, future studies should be carried out with samples of differing socioeconomic status, both in Spain and in Ecuador. Furthermore, it would be useful to gather information from other sources to complement the results, for instance, from teachers, children and grandparents. Considering the bi-directional model in parent-child relationships, it would be advisable to assess the acceptance-rejection domain from the child's point of view. In addition, teachers have a privileged standpoint from which to see daily behaviors.

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**Author Contribution** STL: conceived the study including methodological design, also participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of data, and wrote the manuscript. MDPM: participant recruitment and data collection. JCMO: data collection. JVPC: participant recruitment, collaborated in the writing and editing of the final manuscript. MIC: conceived the study including methodological design, also participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of data, and wrote the manuscript.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964

Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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