

**BIDIRECTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND  
EARLY ADOLESCENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS: THE  
ROLE OF MINDFUL PARENTING, ATTACHMENT, AND  
PARENTAL SELF-COMPASSION**

**PhD Candidate**

Maite Larrucea Iruretagoyena

**PhD Supervisor**

Izaskun Orue Sola

Department of Psychology

Faculty of Health Sciences

**University of Deusto**

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*“Nuestra naturaleza es depender las unas de las otras”*

Nerea Pérez de las Heras



## AGRADECIMIENTOS

Es curioso pensar que hace casi cuatro años estaba en la terraza de Laredo teletrabajando para mi equipo *Deusto Stress Research* sin tener idea de que en ese momento se me iba a presentar una oportunidad que hace que hoy este escribiendo estas líneas. Era julio de 2020, una fecha rara para todo el mundo, el primer verano después de haber estado en un confinamiento largo en nuestras casas, con mucha incertidumbre y sin saber muy bien qué iba a pasar. La pandemia coincidió con el final de mi máster. A finales de febrero del 2020 estaba volviendo de visitar a mi amiga Itxas de un viaje que organizamos Leire, Marina y yo para celebrar que habíamos defendido nuestro TFM. Me acuerdo que durante ese viaje a Groningen (Países Bajos) hablamos sobre nuestras expectativas de trabajo, dónde nos gustaría trabajar, qué nos depararía ahora el mundo fuera de la Uni... pero ninguna de las cuatro pensó que prácticamente dos semanas después estaríamos encerradas en nuestras casas durante mucho tiempo y que todas esas expectativas que teníamos se quedarían en el aire más tiempo de lo que esperábamos.

Fue una época complicada. Cuando acabas el máster, una tiene ilusión por empezar a buscar trabajo, a introducirse en el mundo laboral. La verdad que yo estaba muy ilusionada por emprender esa experiencia vital que me tocaba vivir, pero por las circunstancias en las que estábamos, era muy difícil hacer esa búsqueda. Por suerte, unas semanas antes de defender el TFM, Esther e Izas me ofrecieron trabajar como ayudante de investigación en el equipo y por supuesto, accedí a seguir formándome como investigadora en el equipo que prácticamente me ha enseñado todo lo que sé de estadística, metodología... así como de compañerismo, trabajo en equipo, escucha activa, respeto, disfrute, y numerosos temas profesionales, y no profesionales que he podido compartir durante todos estos años.

Mi contrato como ayudante de investigación comenzó en plena pandemia, y guardo muchos recuerdos de esa época: las reuniones por *meet*, los quebraderos de cabeza por adaptar nuestras investigaciones a la nueva normalidad, la defensa de la tesis de Nere de manera telemática... fue un momento repleto de retos y cambios a los que hacíamos frente y nos adaptábamos con los recursos que teníamos a nuestro alcance. Esas fechas también fueron complicadas en mi familia, la incertidumbre volvía a tocar a

nuestra puerta una y otra vez, y por desgracia teníamos que enfrentarnos a ella desde la distancia, lejos de donde queríamos estar.

Los meses fueron pasando y me vuelvo a encontrar en la terraza de Laredo, en una reunión con Esther donde me habla de una beca predoctoral FPI asociada a un proyecto que había propuesto Izas al Ministerio sobre salud perinatal. ¿Sabéis esos momentos donde a veces se te presentan oportunidades en la vida y curiosamente te encajan con otras cuestiones en las que has estado pensando recientemente? Pues eso es lo que me ocurrió a mí. Os cuento. Cuando acabé el máster, y siendo honesta, estaba un poco saturada del ámbito académico, tenía la sensación que lo mejor sería alejarme un tiempo de él y explorar otros entornos para así exponerme a diferentes tipos de trabajo que podían encajar conmigo. Sin embargo, desde hace muchos años me rondaba en la cabeza la idea de hacer el doctorado porque la investigación y la docencia siempre habían sido de gran interés para mí, por no decir que eran un sueño para mí. Además, a raíz de las prácticas del máster que hice en un centro de salud mental infanto-juvenil, empecé a leer mucho sobre salud mental en las familias, y sobre todo sobre salud mental en la maternidad. En ese tiempo, hubo un gran boom de personajes públicos que hablaban sobre sus experiencias con la maternidad y la verdad que estaba muy sorprendida con todo lo que se contaba acerca de este tema que era terreno desconocido para mí. Y como si se tratara de una señal divina, Esther me puso sobre la mesa una propuesta que no puede rechazar y que después de casi cuatro años me siento enormemente agradecida de haber tomado esa decisión en mi terraza de Laredo, en pantalones cortos, escuchando a las gaviotas del puerto de fondo.

Y os preguntaréis, esta chica ¿qué claras tenía las cosas para tomar una decisión tan importante de un día para otro en un momento histórico donde la incertidumbre era la protagonista de todas nuestras conversaciones, no? Pues he de confesaros que esta decisión fue muy meditada y que se tomó después de muchas charlas, sobre todo, con mi círculo más cercano. Y aquí viene lo gracioso, mi círculo cercano no se trata de una, dos o tres personas, es una larga lista de gente que no solo la compone mi familia, sino que también cuenta con grandes amistades y personas con las que trabajo día a día, a quienes me gustaría agradecer su apoyo y cariño durante todo este proceso como investigadora predoctoral.

A Ama y Aita les tengo que agradecer las oportunidades que me han dado y han hecho que sea una privilegiada en mi crianza: una casa, una familia, cariño, alimentos, educación, salud, ocio, música, cultura, danza, deporte, participación comunitaria, amistades, viajes, y un largo etcétera de cuestiones de las que he podido disfrutar y aprender desde que soy pequeña. También les quiero agradecer que me hayan cuidado y que me hayan ayudado a tomar decisiones importantes como la de hacer el doctorado con respeto, admiración, seguridad, cariño y protección. Asko maite zaituztet.

En todas estas charlas también ha estado mi hermano, que por supuesto siempre me ha expresado su opinión (firme y sin miramientos, como no jeje) y me ha aconsejado poniéndose en mi lugar. Aitortxu probablemente sea con la persona que más tiempo he pasado en mi vida y con la que más experiencias he compartido. Siempre nos han dicho que somos muy diferentes, como la noche y el día, y es algo que nunca he entendido. De pequeña me solía preguntar, si somos tan distintos ¿por qué nos llevamos tan bien? Así que he preferido entender que mi hermano y yo nos hemos complementado, que cada uno ha compensado la forma de ser del otro y que eso nos ha beneficiado a los dos para encontrar en alguien muy distinto a un aliado perfecto. Eskerrik asko Aitortxu.

Cuando Esther e Izas me propusieron que me presentara a la beca predoctoral también necesité que Oskar me escuchara y me aconsejara sobre todo esto. Oskar es una persona que independientemente de lo que propongas (aunque sea un churro) va a tope con cualquiera si observa que eso que propones es importante para ti. Así, a Oskar le pareció una idea brillante que me introdujera en esta aventura porque él sabía perfectamente que era algo que me ilusionaba y de lo que había hablado con él largo y tendido (porque otra cosa no, pero con Oskar nunca faltan temas para hablar jeje). Por apoyarme en todas mis decisiones, por escucharme, por cuidarme y por compartir conmigo un alquiler y todo lo que conlleva, eskerrik asko pisukide.

Las que también siempre tienen que estar al tanto de todos los movimientos que pasan en mi familia son mis Izekos. Algo que siempre me ha encantado de mis Izekos es que cuando ocurre algo en tu vida (ya sea conseguir un trabajo o tener un pequeño catarro) son las primeras en llamar para preguntarte qué tal estás. Lo que más me sorprende es que pese a que todas hagan lo mismo, cada una lo hace a su manera: una te hace todas las preguntas posibles para asegurarse de que estás bien, otra te trae algún

detallito, otra te hace un video musical para animarte el día y alguna siempre se emociona (independientemente de si lo que te ha pasado es bueno o malo). Cada una con su forma de ser, pero siempre todas con el objetivo de cuidarnos. Eskerrik asko a mis Izekos (y en este pack también voy a meter a Ama) por estar pendientes y por mostrarnos siempre dispuestas a aprender y entender a nuestra generación.

Mis Osabas también han estado muy presentes en mi día a día. Con ellos he podido acercarme a la vida de mi barrio, a la vida comunitaria y a la *euskal kultura*. También he tenido conversaciones muy graciosas e interesantes sobre temas que hemos vivido de manera diferente pero que siempre hemos sabido tratar desde la premisa de querer aprender y avanzar. Por todos esos libros y memes que hemos intercambiado, por toda la música disfrutada y por todos esos tornillos que han recolocado en mi vida, mila esker Osabas eta Aita.

¿A quién me llevaría a una isla desierta? A mis primos y primas, por supuesto. Como Aitortxu, mis primas y primos han sido mi otro gran complemento en mi infancia, adolescencia y ahora adultez. Con las personas que más he jugado, he visto películas, me he disfrazado, y he creado (canciones y todo jeje). Somos un grupo de primos y primas muy heterogéneo, de edades, gustos y estilos diferentes, pero os puedo asegurar que hemos encajado como esos puzles que se componen de piezas irregulares. Espero que nos sigamos ilusionando tanto de los logros de todas nosotras y nosotros y que sigamos apoyándonos y escuchándonos siempre que nos necesitemos.

Por suerte, he tenido la oportunidad de vivir y conocer a la gente mayor de mi familia. Una generación totalmente diferente a la mía, pero que siempre están muy presentes en mis decisiones. Una anécdota curiosa es que el día que finalmente decidí comenzar el doctorado, esa misma noche soñé con Aitite Javi. En el sueño me daba su bendición para que hiciera el doctorado jeje. Amama Txutxi, Amama Luisi, Aitite Alberto, Aitite Javi, la Tía Tere y el Tío Valen tienen cada uno su historia, con vivencias muy diferentes y de las que obtuvieron muchísimos aprendizajes que nos han querido transmitir. Me siento muy agradecida por haber podido escuchar y entender el pasado a través de sus historias que, por fortuna, siempre estarán conectadas con el origen de la mía.

Con las personas que sí he compartido generación además de Ikastola, hamaiketako, excursiones, vacaciones, confidencias, confesiones, fiestas, conversaciones, bienestar, malestar, el “hacernos mayores” ... son mis amigas y amigos. Pese a todos esos años de amistad a nuestras espaldas, seguimos quedando prácticamente cada semana. Con mi cuadrilla me divierto un montón, me siento segura, protegida y disfruto de todas las cosas que nos han ido pasando durante estos años. Han sido fundamentales para cuidar mi salud mental mientras he ido haciendo la tesis. Eskerrik asko guztioi.

Este texto empezaba con una historia que dio inicio en Laredo. Como se ve, Laredo es un sitio importante para mí, es mi casa de verano, mi sitio de vacaciones, de estar en la playa hasta las 21:00, de meriendas intergeneracionales... y es también el tiempo y lugar con mi amiga Maider. Maitxu es sin duda una de mis mejores amigas, con quien mantengo contacto constante, con quien comparto un montón de gustos, quien me regala experiencias como ir a la ópera, y quien me cuenta las historias más divertidas. Es una monologuista y humorista natural, con ella nunca te vas a aburrir. Junto a Maider, Maitane y June han sido mis dos grandes amigas desde muy pequeñas. Para mí Mai y June han sido el combo perfecto como amigas. Mientras que Mai sería algo así como mi hermana gemela, June sería mi Yin si yo fuera el Yan. En ellas he encontrado la combinación ideal para conservar una amistad de muchos años y exprimir entre las tres todas las cosas que nos han pasado y las que faltan por venir. Me siento enormemente agradecida por contar con ellas tres y por su apoyo incondicional.

Y además de Laredo, al principio también hablaba de mi equipo, *Deusto Stress Research*. Sé que la etapa del doctorado es muy estresante y que afecta muchísimo a la salud mental (hay estudios y todo sobre esto). También sé que hay un montón de variables que pueden afectar a tu bienestar mientras que estás haciendo el doctorado, pero creo que el contexto laboral tiene especial importancia. En mi caso me atrevería a decir que ha sido un contexto ideal donde he gozado de un clima laboral muy sano con compañeras y compañeros excepcionales, una directora de tesis con la que he construido una relación que me ha hecho disfrutar del proceso de tesis y una IP que me ha brindado con las mejores oportunidades que podría haber imaginado. Soy consciente de que mi vida laboral todavía es corta y que no me ha llegado todavía la época del

burnout jeje, pero me gustaría decir que mi equipo ha hecho que me encante la investigación y la docencia y ha hecho que disfrute muchísimo de mi trabajo. Estoy enormemente agradecida de haber conocido la investigación desde dentro de un equipo que consta de una larga trayectoria, con proyectos que me han acercado a realidades que, desconocida, y con un espíritu humano que me ha hecho encontrar a grandes amigas y amigos en él.

A Izas le quiero agradecer toda la dedicación, tiempo, cariño y guía que me ha ofrecido en todo este proceso. Sus consejos desde el principio me han servido para poder llevar a cabo una tesis que ha cumplido con todo lo que nos propusimos en un principio gracias a la planificación y a la practicidad con la que hemos trabajado mano a mano desde sus primeros bocetos. Siento que en gran parte he disfrutado tanto de este primer proyecto de investigación que diseñamos juntas gracias a la buena conexión y entendimiento que hemos tenido entre las dos. Mila esker Izas y mila esker Esther por todas las veces que habéis contado conmigo, por vuestras enseñanzas y por mostrarme vuestro deseo de aportar y avanzar desde la investigación.

A mis compañeras y compañeros de equipo, con los que más horas del día paso jeje, también quiero agradecer nuestra cotidianidad. Esas comidas en la mesa redonda, los cafés compartidos, la implicación de todo el grupo cuando alguien lo necesita, la escucha en todo momento, los aprendidos tanto personal como profesionalmente...Estoy enormemente agradecida de los y las compañeras de trabajo que me han tocado y de lo que me aportan cada una de ellas. Para mi Nere, Ainara, Joana y Liria son referencia y admiración; Aitor, Sara, Ángel, Juan, Esti, Joana, Aida, Naiara y Laura son compañerismo y amistad; Andere, Gonzalo, Aitziber y Naiara son ilusión y nuevas oportunidades. Eskerrik asko equipo, por eso, por ser mi equipo.

Por último, aparte de Laredo y *Deusto Stress Research*, comenzaba esta historia con un viaje que hice con mis amigas de la Uni. Con Itxas, Naia, Paula y Leire he compartido nuestra formación como psicólogas, así como la vida universitaria que me hizo salir por primera vez de mi zona de confort (he estudiado toda la vida en una Ikastola pequeña de barrio donde conocía a la mayoría gente), y me empujó a entablar nuevas amistades con gente que venía de diferentes lugares. Desde que entramos juntas a clase en primero hemos sido muy buenas amigas, nos hemos entendido muy bien y lo hemos

pasado muy bien en los años de Uni. Por suerte, hemos mantenido nuestra amistad pese a que cada una tomó su camino, profesionalmente hablando. Por muchas más quedadas y viajes juntas, eskerrik asko chicas.

Y hablando de viajes, me gustaría agradecer a la Universidad de Deusto y al Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación la oportunidad con la que me han brindado de disfrutar del doctorado y todo lo que conlleva ello como las dos estancias que pude hacer en la Universidad de Brown (Estados Unidos) y en la Universidad Libre de Ámsterdam (Países Bajos). En estos viajes no solo he tenido la oportunidad de trabajar y colaborar con el Dr. Justin Parent y la Dra. Mirjam Oosterman, sino que también he tenido la enorme suerte de encontrarme a Leni y Barbara por el camino, quienes hicieron que en mi estancia en Estados Unidos y posteriormente en Leiden me sintiera acompañada por unas buenas amigas a las que siempre agradeceré que se acercaran a mí. Al Dr. Justin Parent y Dra. Mirjam Oosterman también quería agradecerles su hospitalidad y el acogimiento que me hicieron en sus laboratorios. Ambos fueron muy generosos conmigo y estuvieron pendiente de mí en todo momento. También quiero aprovechar a agradecer a los centros educativos que participaron en mi tesis su disposición y tiempo para organizar y llevar a cabo la recogida de muestra en sus centros. Soy totalmente consciente de que la recogida de muestra de mi tesis se hizo en un momento de muchísima incertidumbre para los centros educativos y en un momento donde se tuvieron que hacer muchos cambios para adaptarse a la nueva normalidad. Pese a los retos a los que se tenían que enfrentar, los centros educativos que participaron se mostraron muy abiertos a seguir colaborando en nuestros estudios, lo cual es de agradecer y de destacar.

Y con todo este apoyo empezó mi viaje de tesis que acaba hoy con estas líneas. Un proceso de aprendizaje que creo que me ha ayudado a trabajar y desarrollar un montón de capacidades. La investigación me ha empujado a conocer y analizar también no solo los temas de interés, sino que también ha hecho que madure mi pensamiento crítico tanto en cuestiones científicas como de mi propio contexto y el de las demás personas. Así que la tesis también me ha supuesto un trabajo de conocimiento propio que me ha hecho valorar los privilegios con los que he contado para poder terminar la tesis en el tiempo que me propuse y poder combinarlo con mis objetivos vitales. Una gran parte de

## AGRADECIMIENTOS

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haber podido realizar la tesis como se planeó desde un principio tienen mucho que ver con que haya podido tener salud durante el proceso, una casa donde vivir y donde me han cuidado muy bien, y una red de familia, amistades y de trabajo muy estable y acogedora. Toda esto y muchas cosas más han sido clave en mi formación como investigadora, por lo que me siento profundamente agradecida del entorno y el contexto en el que he podido disfrutar de mi proceso de tesis.

Tenía la ilusión de escribir este apartado de agradecimientos con pequeñas historias y anécdotas porque creo que es la forma más bonita y que más me representa para contaros lo importantes que habéis sido en todo mi proceso. Este es un regalo que os hago en forma de cuento. Espero que os guste la tesis.

Asko maite zaituen,

Maite

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**ABSTRACT**

The goal of this doctoral thesis is to investigate the bidirectional relationships between psychological symptoms exhibited by parents and early adolescents. The thesis will also examine the role of attachment, mindful parenting, and parental self-compassion on these relationships.

The doctoral thesis is comprised of seven chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of existing family theories and points out some gaps that need attention from the scientific community. Among others, these gaps include the lack of gender perspective in family studies and the reciprocal influence between parents and their children. The second part of the chapter focuses on early adolescence, highlighting the challenges and difficulties experienced by early adolescents at both individual and social levels. Moreover, a section devoted to the challenges and issues of parenting early adolescents is included, addressing internalizing symptoms in parents and their relational challenges with their offspring. Potential protective factors of these relationships including mindful parenting and parental self-compassion, are explored in a subsequent section. Chapters II through VI comprise the five empirical studies included in the doctoral dissertation. The references for the five empirical articles can be found below:

- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., & Orue, I. (2024). Bidirectional Relationships between Parental Anxiety, Internalizing Symptoms, and Peer Victimization and Aggression among Early Adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 44(1), 96–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02724316231160146>
- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., & Orue, I. (2022). Spanish Validation of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures Questionnaire for Pre-adolescents. *Revista de Psicología Clínica con Niños y Adolescentes*, 9(2), 57–64. <https://doi.org/10.21134/rpcna.2022.09.2.7>
- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., & Orue, I. (2023). The Mediating Role of Mindful Parenting in the Relationship Between Parental Anxiety and Youth's Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 52(7), 1471–1480. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01752-3>

- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Parent, J., & Orue, I. Family-Centered Profiles of Mindful Parenting: Longitudinal Associations with Negative Parenting and Youth Emotional and Behavioral Problems (under review).
- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Orue, I., & Calvete, E. Parents' Self-Compassion as a Moderator Between Children's Emotional Regulation Difficulties and Parents' Depressive Symptoms (under review). <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3163409/v1>

The first three articles have been published in Journals with Journal Citation Reports (JCR) impact. The fourth and fifth articles are currently being evaluated by reviewers at the time of the deposit of this doctoral thesis. The first study found that the internalizing symptoms of early adolescents predicted anxiety symptoms in their mothers, but did not find that the anxiety symptoms of any of their parental figures predicted either internalizing or externalizing symptoms in their offspring. The second study validated an attachment dimension measurement tool and found significant associations between attachment dimensions (avoidant and anxious) and emotional and behavioral problems, as well as difficulties with emotional regulation, among early adolescents. The third study indicated that maternal mindful parenting mediates the relationship between maternal anxiety symptoms and emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents. Furthermore, this study revealed that emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents can negatively affect paternal mindful parenting practices. The fourth article presents a model of three mindful parenting profiles, which distinguish the first family profile with high levels of maternal mindful parenting, the second family profile with average mindful parenting, and the third profile with low levels of mindful parenting in both parents. The profile exhibiting low levels of mindful parenting demonstrated the most significant association with negative parenting practices, including physical and psychological punishment, as well as emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents. The fifth article demonstrated that parental self-compassion serves as a protective factor in coping with emotional difficulties in early adolescents.

The final chapter of this dissertation presents a discussion of the overall findings emphasizing the significance of analyzing families from diverse viewpoints while considering the outlook of both early adolescents and their parents. The study

results suggest a reciprocal influence between parents and early adolescents. Mindful parenting and self-compassion may have a role in the explanation of these relationships. The present thesis findings not only evaluate families, their dynamics and development, but also emphasize the significance of practicing mindful parenting and parental self-compassion to optimize interventions aimed at enhancing family well-being.



## RESUMEN

El objetivo principal de la presente tesis doctoral es explorar las relaciones bidireccionales entre los síntomas de problemas de salud mental de figuras parentales y de preadolescentes, y observar la función del apego, *mindful parenting* y la autocompasión parental en estas relaciones.

La tesis doctoral consta de siete capítulos. El primer capítulo resume por un lado las teorías predominantes en el estudio de familias, así como las lagunas que se han detectado en ellas y que requieren de atención por parte de la comunidad científica como es la influencia recíproca entre las figuras parentales y sus hijos e hijas o la falta de perspectiva de género en el estudio de las familias. Segundo, se hace un repaso de la etapa de la preadolescencia y de las dificultades y retos a los que hacen frente los y las preadolescentes a nivel individual y social. Tercero, se incluye un apartado sobre la parentalidad en la preadolescencia dedicado a los retos y problemas que se observan a la hora de criar a preadolescentes tanto a nivel individual (p.ej. síntomas internalizantes) como a nivel relacional con sus hijos e hijas. Finalmente, se incluye un apartado con posibles mecanismos y factores protectores de los problemas que se han ido detectando durante la introducción entre los que se encuentran el *mindful parenting* y la autocompasión parental.

Los capítulos II, III, IV, V y VI reúnen los cinco estudios empíricos que son parte de la tesis doctoral. A continuación, se incluyen las referencias de los cinco artículos:

- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., & Orue, I. (2024). Bidirectional Relationships between Parental Anxiety, Internalizing Symptoms, and Peer Victimization and Aggression among Early Adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 44(1), 96–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02724316231160146>
- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., & Orue, I. (2022). Spanish Validation of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures Questionnaire for Pre-adolescents. *Revista de Psicología Clínica con Niños y Adolescentes*, 9(2), 57–64. <https://doi.org/10.21134/rpcna.2022.09.2.7>
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- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Parent, J., & Orue, I. Family-Centered Profiles of Mindful Parenting: Longitudinal Associations with Negative Parenting and Youth Emotional and Behavioral Problems (under review).
- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Orue, I., & Calvete, E. Parents' Self-Compassion as a Moderator Between Children's Emotional Regulation Difficulties and Parents' Depressive Symptoms (under review). <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3163409/v1>

Los tres primeros artículos están publicados en revistas de impacto JCR. El cuarto y quinto se encuentran en revisión en dos revistas con impacto JCR. En el primer estudio se encontró que los síntomas internalizantes de los y las preadolescentes predijeron síntomas de ansiedad en sus madres, pero no se encontró que los síntomas de ansiedad de ninguna de sus figuras parentales predijera síntomas ni internalizantes ni externalizantes en sus hijos e hijas. En el segundo estudio no solo se validó un instrumento para medir las dimensiones del apego, sino que también se observó que las dimensiones del apego (evitativo y ansioso) se asocian significativamente con problemas emocionales y comportamentales, y las dificultades de regulación emocional en preadolescentes. Los resultados que se presentan en el tercer estudio indicaron que el *mindful parenting* materno media la relación entre los síntomas de ansiedad maternal y los problemas emocionales y comportamentales en preadolescentes. Asimismo, en este estudio se observó que los problemas emocionales y comportamentales en preadolescentes pueden empeorar la práctica de *mindful parenting* en los padres. En el cuarto artículo se presenta un modelo de tres perfiles de *mindful parenting* diferenciando un primer perfil familiar con niveles altos de *mindful parenting* materno, un segundo con niveles promedio de *mindful parenting* tanto en madres como en padres, y un tercero con niveles bajos de *mindful parenting* en ambas figuras parentales. El perfil con niveles bajos de *mindful parenting* fue el que demostró tener una relación más significativa con la práctica de crianza negativa (castigo físico y psicológico), y con problemas emocionales y comportamentales en preadolescentes. El quinto artículo mostró que la autocompasión parental es un factor protector a la hora

de gestionar las dificultades emocionales en preadolescentes de igual forma en madres y en padres.

En el último capítulo de la presente tesis doctoral se recogen las conclusiones generales que ponen de manifiesto la importancia de analizar a las familias desde diferentes perspectivas teniendo en cuenta la mirada tanto de los y las preadolescentes y de sus figuras parentales. Los resultados de los estudios indican que existe una influencia recíproca entre figuras parentales y preadolescentes, y que variables como el *mindful parenting* y la autocompasión parental pueden jugar un rol importante en estas relaciones. Los hallazgos de la presente tesis no solo sirven para evaluar a las familias, sus dinámicas y el desarrollo de éstas, sino que también subrayan la importancia de trabajar la práctica de *mindful parenting* y la autocompasión parental para optimizar las intervenciones focalizadas en mejorar el bienestar familiar.



## LABURPENA

Doktoretza-tesi honen helburu nagusia gurasoen eta aurrenerabeen osasun mentaleko sintomen arteko bi norabideko harremanak aztertzea da, bai eta harremana horietan atxikimenduak, *mindful parenting*-ak eta autokonpasioak duten funtzioa behatzea ere.

Doktoretza-tesiak zazpi kapitulu ditu. Lehenengo kapituluan, alde batetik, familien ikerketan nagusi diren teoriak laburbiltzen dira, baita horietan hauteman diren eta komunitate zientifikoaren arreta behar duten hutsuneak adierazten dira, hala nola gurasoen eta haien seme-alaben arteko elkarrekiko eragina edo familien ikerketan genero-ikuspegirik aztertzearen falta. Bigarrenik, nerabezaroaurreko etaparen eta aurrenerabeek maila indibidualean eta sozialean dituzten zailtasunen eta erronken erreposoa egiten da. Hirugarrenik, nerabezaroaurreko gurasotasunari buruzko atal bat garatu da, non gurasoek aurrenerabeak hazteko dituzten erronkak eta arazoak azaltzen diren, bai maila indibidualean (adibidez, gurasoen sintoma barneratzaileak), bai seme-alabekiko harremanei dagokienez. Azkenik, sarreran detektatu diren arazoetatik babesteko mekanismo eta faktore posibleak biltzen dituen atal bat dago *mindful parenting* eta gurasoen autokonpasioan zentratua.

II., III., IV., V. eta VI. kapituluek doktoretza-tesiaren parte diren bost ikerketa empirikoak biltzen dituzte. Jarraian bost artikuluen erreferentziak agertzen dira:

- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., & Orue, I. (2024). Bidirectional Relationships between Parental Anxiety, Internalizing Symptoms, and Peer Victimization and Aggression among Early Adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 44(1), 96-118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02724316231160146>
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- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Parent, J., & Orue, I. Family-Centered Profiles of Mindful Parenting: Longitudinal Associations with Negative Parenting and Youth Emotional and Behavioral Problems (under review).
- Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Orue, I., & Calvete, E. Parents' Self-Compassion as a Moderator Between Children's Emotional Regulation Difficulties and Parents' Depressive Symptoms (under review). <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3163409/v1>

Lehenengo hiru artikuluak JCR inpaktu-aldizkarietan argitaratu dira. Laugarrena eta bosgarrena berrikusten ari dira JCR inpaktua duten bi aldizkaritan. Lehenengo ikerketan, nerabeen barneratze-sintomek amen antsietate-sintomak aurreikusi zituztela ikusi zen, baina ez zen aurkitu gurasoen antsietate-sintomek seme-alabengan sintoma barneratzaile edo kanporatzaileak aurreikusi zituztenik. Bigarren ikerketaren bidez, atxikimenduaren dimentsioak neurtzeko tresna bat balioztatzeaz gain, atxikimenduaren dimentsioak (saihesgarria eta antsietatezkoa) emozio- eta portaera-arazoekin eta aurrenerabeen emozioak erregulatzeko zailtasunekin modu esanguratsuan lotzen direla ikusi zen. Hirugarren ikerketako emaitzek amen *mindful parenting*-a amen antsietate-sintomen eta aurrenerabeen emozio- eta portaera-arazoen arteko erlazioaren bitartikari dela adierazten dute. Era berean, ikerketa horretan ikusi zen aurrenerabeen emozio- eta portaera-arazoen aiten *mindful parenting* praktika okertu dezaketela. Laugarren artikuluak *mindful parenting*-eko hiru profileko eredu bat erakusten du: lehen familia-profila, amen *mindful parenting* maila altuekin; bigarren profila, bi gurasoen batezbesteko *mindful parenting* maila baxuekin; eta hirugarren profila, bi gurasoen *mindful parenting* maila baxuekin. Maila baxuko *mindful parenting* familia-profila izan zen hazkuntza negatiboko praktikekin (zigor fisikoa eta psikologikoa) eta aurrenerabeen emozio- eta portaera-arazoekin harreman esanguratsuenak erakutsi zuen profila. Bosgarren artikuluan aurkezten diren emaitzek erakutsi zuten gurasoen autokonpasioa faktore babeslea dela aurrenerabeen zailtasun emozionalak kudeatzeko orduan.

Doktoretza-tesi honen azken kapituluan, ondorio orokorrak biltzen dira. Hauek agerian uzten dute garrantzitsua dela familiak hainbat ikuspegitatik aztertzea,

aurrenerabeen eta haien gurasoen ikuspuntua kontuan hartuta. Ikerketen emaitzek adierazten dute gurasoen eta aurrenerabeen artean elkarrekiko eragina dagoela, eta *mindful parenting-ak* eta guraso-autokonpasioak rol garrantzitsu bat izan ahal dutela harreman horietan. Tesi honen aurkikuntzek familiak, haien dinamikak eta horien garapena ebaluatzeko ez ezik, *mindful parenting* praktika eta gurasoen autokopansioa lantzeko garrantzia ere azpimarratzen dute, familiaren ongizatea hobetzera bideratutako esku-hartzeak optimizatzeko xedearekin.



Chapter I

# **Introduction**



## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### 1. The Study of Families

The emergence of a systemic perspective in family studies has been important in contextualizing new research and organizing the existing literature on child development, parenting, and the construction of family relationships (Kerig, 2019). This approach has enabled the broadening of knowledge about family systems by viewing family members as interdependent entities (Minuchin, 1985). This paradigm is primarily supported by the family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997).

#### 1.1. Theory of Family System

In the following, the theory of family systems and its main characteristics are introduced. Interdependency and circularity are key features in understanding the theory of family systems, which defines a family as a "complex, integrated whole" in which members interact and influence each other (Gilbertson et al., 2018).

##### 1.1.1. Interdependency

The family systems theory explains that families work as system with their own unique rules, roles, traditions, relationships, and communication patterns (Cox & Paley, 1997). Within families, there are various subsystems consisting of dyads (i.e. mother-child, father-child, mother-father) or triads (i.e. mother-father-child) as part of the ecological family system (McGinnis & Wright, 2023). Therefore, each member is not only interdependent on each other, but also interdependent on each system (Schermerhorn & Cummings, 2008). For example, a father at the individual level could influence the mother-child subsystem, or the father-child subsystem could influence the mother at the individual level. As such, family systems theory centers around examining behaviors, relationships, parenting, along with other constructs through interdependent family dynamics (Kerig, 2016).

##### 1.1.2. Circularity

Another closely related concept to interdependence, to which family systems theory alludes, is circularity. This paradigm understands that family relationships and influences are bidirectional and reciprocal, rather than unidirectional (McGinnis & Wright, 2023). A large part of the studies aimed at studying family relationships, or

the influence among its members, have focused on studying the influence of parents on their children. Among other factors, various studies have examined the impact of parenting practices (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019) and attachment dimensions (Khan et al., 2020) on child development, as well as the potential effect of parental emotional and behavioral difficulties on their children (Goodman et al., 2011; Vismara et al., 2022) and the transmission of mental disorders from parents to children (Goodman, 2020; Rice, 2022). However, limited research has been dedicated to analyzing the impact of children on their parents, and even less attention has been given to investigating the bidirectional relationship between parents and children (Johnco et al., 2021; Schulz et al., 2021).

Therefore, it has been identified that a proposal is necessary to examine family processes that assume bidirectional pathways and consider the impact of these pathways. Based on the transactional model of development (Sameroff, 2009), a theoretical framework was developed to analyze the circularity and interdependence of family dynamics and processes materialized.

### **1.2. The Transactional Model and Family Dynamics**

Transactional theory posits that the interaction between the child and their environment is key in comprehending the positive as well as negative outcomes of the child's development (McGinnis & Wright, 2023). Despite the general acceptance in the scientific community that the child's development is influenced by the interplay between nature and nurture, not many conceptual models have been put forward to explicate this viewpoint (Sameroff, 2009). In recent years, one of the most acclaimed conceptual models in the scientific literature has been the transactional model for families.

#### **1.2.1. Conceptualization**

The transactional model for families stems from challenges identified in the literature in relation to the study of the family from a systemic approach (Schermerhorn & Cummings, 2008). Among others, it was detected that, first, most studies focused on assessing only one direction of influence, leading to a unidirectional pathway. Second, many of the studies conducted with families overlooked the idea that families are organized and nested in dyads and triads, resulting in different levels of

analysis that need to be considered when designing studies. Third, family processes, interactions, and dynamics occur in the moment or over time, making it imperative to examine these issues cross-sectionally and longitudinally.

Therefore, the primary objective of developing this transactional model was to address the gaps identified in the literature (Kerig, 2019). In particular, “Transactional family dynamics refers to the myriad ways in which family members influence one another, that is, mutual influence processes within families. For example, these processes may include complex patterns of influence in interparental father–child, mother–child, and sibling relationships. Notably, our interest is in transactional processes—not unidirectional processes—that is, influence processes continuously moving in both directions over time” (Schermerhorn & Cummings, 2008, p. 188).

### **1.2.2. Evidence on Bidirectionality**

Family research based on the transactional model indicates bidirectional associations between variables, such as internalizing and externalizing symptoms in parents and children (Hou, Benner et al., 2020; Hughes & Gullone, 2010). Reciprocal depressive symptoms have been observed between parents and children, among other findings (Johnco et al., 2021). The aggressive behavior of parents has an impact on the aggressive behavior of their children, and vice versa (Eriksson & Mazerolle, 2015; Lansford et al., 2011). Additionally, bidirectionality has been observed between self-regulation in children and the parenting styles of parents (Moilanen et al., 2015). However, there is a scarcity of literature on the reciprocal influence between parents and children, as the general tendency has been to analyze these pathways unidirectionally, particularly from mothers to children (Wang et al., 2022).

## **1.3. Gender Perspective in Family Studies**

### **1.3.1. Care System in Families**

Traditionally, women have shouldered and continue to shoulder the burden of family care, resulting in mothers being widely acknowledged as primarily responsible for their children's development and education (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2019). According to feminist theories, this societal perception of women's role, and consequently, that of mothers as the primary caregivers of their children, has been reflected in some of the leading trends of psychology (Barry, 2020). Feminist theories contend that classic

psychological models have prioritized mothers and their issues (such as psychopathological diagnoses) as the primary predictors, triggers or risk factors for their children's developmental problems (O'Reilly, 2019). Considering the context and time in which these theoretical models were proposed, along with the social status and portrayal of women at the time, is crucial (Hewett, 2019). This correlation is evident in the literature produced during that time, as scientific advancements are intertwined with concurrent social changes, particularly in fields such as psychology.

### **1.3.2. Paternal Representation in Literature**

There has been a growing push in recent decades towards producing scientific knowledge with a gendered perspective, resulting in alterations and improvements in research queries (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2023). Numerous scholars have noted incidences of gender-based prejudices embedded within scientific standards, norms, and methodologies (Crasnow & Intemann, 2020). Feminist theory posits that implicit sexist and androcentric values have influenced science, leading to gender biases that have gone undetected (Borgerson, 2011). To address these biases, feminist scholars recommend making these values more visible and subjecting them to critical evaluation from a feminist perspective (Goldenberg, 2015).

A gender perspective has been incorporated in the investigation of families due to various gaps in literature that indicate a deficit in gender perspective in research (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020). Research into parent-child relationships, parenting, and family processes has mainly involved mothers' samples, leading to a significant absence of representative samples of fathers in family studies (Sicouri et al., 2018). This has led to generalized conclusions about both parents, including fathers, based solely on data collected from mothers (Schulz et al., 2021). Additionally, studies on family issues or children's development usually exhibit significantly lower participation rates from fathers than from mothers (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2019). Some scholars have theorized that the limited involvement of fathers in childcare may explain their low participation (Rollè et al., 2019). Therefore, the scarcity of research on fathers highlights a general lack of knowledge about their role in the family setting (Wang et al., 2022).

#### **1.4. Summary**

The absence of a gender perspective in the analysis of families has led to incomplete models that lack the presence of fathers in their samples (Reeb et al., 2015). Consequently, there is a need to reconsider the models of analysis applied in family studies. This has resulted in an incomplete representation of families and a failure to consider them as a complex, integrated whole.

Hence, the transactional models proposed by the family systems theory are not only suitable for addressing challenges and gaps found in the literature but also offer a multifaceted portrayal of families from a gender perspective (McGinnis & Wright, 2023). Thus, achieving a more comprehensive view of the care system within the family permits a reformulation of the research questions solely analyzed in the mother-child relationship with unidirectional pathways (Wang et al., 2022). This creates an interesting area for future research to explore.

Families experience diverse changes during their formation, growth, and development (Ambert, 2020). These changes might arise from various dynamics, processes, events, or other family-specific issues (Buehler, 2020). Nevertheless, there are also universal concerns that are important to consider when examining these changes. Among these, an essential factor is the developmental stage of the offspring (Kirby & Tellegen, 2020).

From birth through adolescence, there are progressive changes that impact not only the child's own development but also their environment (McGinnis & Wright, 2023). Among other things, developmental changes can influence the functioning of families, parenting, and parental well-being (Baxter et al., 2022). As a result, it is important to consider a child's developmental stage when researching families. The present thesis will be focused on the early adolescent stage.

## **2. Early Adolescence**

Early adolescence is a transitional phase between childhood and adolescence wherein the initial physical, psychological, and social changes that form during adolescence become apparent (Petersen, 2021). Researchers posit that early adolescence typically spans from 9 to 14 years of age (Blum et al., 2014). This stage is

characterized by the biological changes, specifically puberty, which precede shifts in individual development and social contexts (Petersen, 2021). Therefore, early adolescence represents a vulnerable period for both young individuals and their families, highlighting the crucial importance of recognizing the complexities and challenges that arise during this developmental stage (Salavera & Usán, 2019).

### **2.1. Early Adolescents and Individual Development**

Mental health is one of the aspects most influenced by changes during early adolescence, which marks a turning point due to a shift in the prevalence of mental health issues (Fink et al., 2015). Among others, internalizing and externalizing symptoms become more common among early adolescents. Internalizing and externalizing symptoms describes the ways in which individuals present symptoms of suffering and distress (Achenbach, 2016). In essence, internalizing symptoms such as sadness, fear, phobia, and worry arise from inward projection, whereas externalizing symptoms such as aggression, impulsivity, and irritability stem from outward projection (Edwards & Hans, 2015).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (American Psychological Association, 2013) employs these internalizing and externalizing factors to categorize disorders, grounded in research evidence (Achenbach, 2016). For instance, anxiety disorders, depression, or somatic disorders are characterized by internalizing symptoms. Externalizing symptoms are typically associated with disruptive behavior, substance abuse, or impulsive disorders. The manifestation of internalizing and externalizing symptoms is significantly correlated with the challenges associated with emotional regulation experienced by early adolescents, which often occur in tandem with the changes of their developmental stage (Aldao et al., 2016).

Emotional regulation involves managing the emotional response to a stimulus through cognitive and behavioral strategies (Thompson, 1991). Prior knowledge and understanding of emotions are necessary to implement such strategies for regulating them effectively (Zeman et al., 2006). During early adolescence, individuals often face new sensations and emotions they have not previously experienced, which can make identification and regulation more challenging. Not being aware of these novel

sensations and emotions leads to higher levels of emotional dysregulation in early adolescence compared to childhood (Riediger & Klipker, 2014). Consequently, early adolescence becomes a stage of emotional exploration that presents difficulties for early adolescents in identifying effective strategies to regulate themselves, ultimately resulting in the development of internalizing and externalizing symptoms that may result in mental disorders (Aldao et al., 2016). During early adolescence, mental disorders commonly exhibit internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Ghandour et al., 2019). Hence, identifying and preventing these symptoms is crucial to prevent their development in adolescence and their persistence into adulthood (Salavera & Usán, 2019).

UNICEF (2021) released a report on the mental health of adolescents, which includes data collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. The report reveals that 13.2% of adolescents globally had been diagnosed with a mental disorder, with the majority of them showing the first symptoms in early adolescence. The report also highlights that Spain had a diagnosis rate of 20.8%.

Some studies and meta-analyses have examined the prevalence of the most common mental disorders in early adolescence and adolescence both nationally and internationally. For instance, anxiety disorders were diagnosed in around 6.5-8%, of adolescents globally (Polanczyk et al., 2015), while in Spain, the rate was roughly 11.8% (Canals-Sans et al., 2019). A study recently concluded that the diagnostic rate for some type of depressive disorder among Spanish early adolescents was 3.4% (Canals-Sans et al., 2018), compared to 2.6% in other international countries (Wang et al., 2016). Worldwide, 5.29% of students, have been diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, while the rate in Spain is 5% for students aged 3-18 (González-Collantes et al., 2015). Moreover, eating disorders are one of the most prevalent disorders among early adolescents, aged 13, with a diagnosis rate of 11% (Micali et al., 2014). On the other hand, the occurrence of disruptive disorders was recorded to be approximately 5.7% in a systematic review where the participants were between 6 and 18 years old (Polanczyk et al., 2015).

While the presented data are concerning, the particularly notable issue is the significant rise of mental health diagnoses during adolescence over the past two

decades, highlighting the exponential growth after the COVID-19 pandemic (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2022). In a recent systematic review, the authors observed variability in the increase of mental health problems between countries and cultures (Oliveira et al., 2022). However, all countries experienced a rise in these issues because of the pandemic. In Spain specifically, a 27.4% increase in emotional disorders was observed among children aged 3 to 12 years old (Romero et al., 2020). Similarly, Vallejo-Slocker et al. (2020) found that 74% of children and adolescents exhibited fear related to the pandemic according to a study conducted by the Spanish Government.

A systematic review was conducted to investigate whether appropriate mental health care had been received by adolescents in response to the observed increase in mental health challenges (Ghafari et al., 2022). The authors' findings highlighted a significant proportion of adolescents who did not receive mental health care and the potential consequences at both an individual level (such as increased mental health issues in adulthood) and a social level (such as impacts on family and peer relationships).

### **2.2. Early Adolescents and Social Context**

The relationships that children establish with their parents in their early years have a significant impact on their subsequent interactions with peers and other individuals (Rubin et al., 2004). For many years, researchers have investigated the influence of family and friendship relationships on the psychological development and functioning of children. Therefore, it is critical to analyze both parental and peer relationships in assessing the psychosocial well-being of young adolescents, as evidenced by existing research (Buehler, 2020).

The relationship between parents and their children undergoes a transformation during early adolescence (Andrews et al., 2020). As previously discussed, adolescence is a period of transformation, which results in early adolescents undergoing significant changes on an individual and social level (Petersen, 2021). Generally, early adolescence and adolescence have been widely regarded as challenging and complex stages, with adolescents often depicted as impolite, disrespectful, and prone to defying their parent's authority without moral values (Blum et al., 2014). Nonetheless, recent literature has attempted to provide a more

compassionate perspective on the study of adolescence, acknowledging that the path to adulthood is fraught with risks and challenges for adolescents to overcome (Smetana, 2010). Early adolescents initiate a persistent quest for self-sufficiency and self-determination that instigates an alteration in their relationship with their progenitors. They seek to detach from their parents and explore their environment, which can lead to conflicts in parent-child interactions (Dahl et al., 2018).

Although there is a common inclination to emphasize family conflicts as the most significant aspect of adolescence, studies suggest that these conflicts are not as frequent as commonly believed and are often minor disruptions, particularly in stable, compassionate, and cohesive families (Smetana et al., 2006). During early adolescence, individuals develop reasoning skills which enable them to better distinguish between personal, moral, and prudential considerations (Eisenberg et al., 2005). Early adolescents' cognitive development allows them to challenge parental authority, leading to enhanced argumentative and communicative skills, enabling them to defend their perspectives more vigorously (Smetana & Judith, 2011). Consequently, conflicts intensify, generating increased discord between adolescents and parents.

In their exploration of the outside world, early adolescents increasingly view their peers as a primary point of reference and turn to them more readily (Brown & Larson, 2009). Changes at the individual, social, and normative levels prompt early adolescents to prioritize their peers, leading them to spend more time with same-aged peers unsupervised by adults (Andrews et al., 2020). Thus, early adolescents progressively identify with a peer group with whom they share interests, hobbies, beliefs, and fashion sense, among others (Gremmen et al., 2018). Consequently, peer opinions gain importance and new relationships develop, particularly romantic ones, during the later early adolescent stage (Costello et al., 2023). Thus, when investigating the mental well-being of early adolescents, it is crucial to analyze the influence of both parental and peer relationships (Rubin et al., 2004). According to the vast majority of researchers, the starting point for understanding the influence of these relationships on early adolescent functioning is attachment (Bretherton, 2000).

### 3. Early Adolescents and Attachment

“Attachment is one specific and circumscribed aspect of the relationship between a child and caregiver that is involved with making the child safe, secure and protected. The purpose of attachment is not to play with or entertain the child (this would be the role of the parent as a playmate), feed the child (this would be the role of the parent as a caregiver), set limits for the child (this would be the role of the parent as a disciplinarian) or teach the child new skills (this would be the role of the parent as a teacher). Attachment is where the child uses the primary caregiver as a secure base from which to explore and, when necessary, as a haven of safety and a source of comfort” (Benoit, 2004, p. 541).

This definition is framed within attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), a theory that is closely related to, and considered a branch of, the family systems model. Attachment theory analyses family relationships from a dyadic (parent-child) perspective, which in turn is part of a family system. Both theories advocate the importance of developing adolescents' autonomy, considering that their attachment figures are available and accessible when needed (Bortz et al., 2019).

Children's first attachment figures are usually their parents. According to attachment theorists, children who receive responsive and sensitive parenting from their caregivers integrate an internal model of that caregiver as secure and trustworthy (Rubin et al., 2004). When this experience of trustworthiness is repeated throughout the child's development, the child learns a secure and reciprocal relationship model that can then be implemented in other relationships (e.g., peer relationships).

However, when children are raised by attachment figures with whom they have relationships based on mistrust, insecurity, fear, or anger, children are at risk of maladjustment and thus insecure relationships (Colonnesi et al., 2011). The potential consequences of insecure attachment are difficulties in emotional regulation, internalizing symptoms and social problems in relationships with peers, parents or partners (Bortz et al., 2019). The attachment relationships thus become a model for future relationships that children will form throughout their lives (Miller & Hoicowitz, 2004).

### 3.1. Attachment Assessment

The assessment of attachment has been, and continues to be, one of the longest running debates (Crowell et al., 2016; Jewell et al., 2019). Attachment theorists continue to debate whether a categorical or dimensional conceptualization best measures attachment (Raby et al., 2021).

#### 3.1.1. Categorical Assessment of Attachment

Traditionally, attachment has been measured in terms of four attachment patterns known as secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent and insecure-disorganized attachment (Oliva-Delgado, 2004). This classification was proposed by Ainsworth et al. (1978), who described each of the categories as follows:

**Secure attachment:** Ainsworth described securely attached children as those who show a healthy pattern in their relationship with their attachment figure. The child feels loved, accepted and valued because of the sensitivity, protection, security and ongoing care provided by the attachment figure. Children who develop this type of attachment show confidence and an active role in interacting with their environment and are observed to be emotionally attuned to their parents and peers. These children have no fear of abandonment and have no difficulty in forming relationships and emotional bonds with other people while maintaining their independence.

**Insecure-avoidant attachment:** This type of attachment is often confused with secure attachment because children with this type of attachment are independent and unafraid to explore their environment. However, they do not look to their primary caregivers for security and protection. In fact, these children assume that they cannot rely on their caregivers, so they withdraw from them and avoid close contact. This type of attachment develops because the caregiver is insensitive to the child's needs and therefore rejects the child's demands. It is common for children with insecure-avoidant attachment to have difficulties with emotional regulation and to refuse to form intimate relationships with others.

**Insecure-ambivalent attachment:** Because caregivers are inconsistent in how they care for their children, sometimes being warm and sensitive and sometimes being cold and insensitive, children develop insecure-ambivalent attachment. Because

caregivers are sometimes there and sometimes not, children distrust their caregivers and develop a constant sense of insecurity. In fact, children need the approval and constant vigilance of their caregivers to avoid feelings of abandonment. In this case, children expect their caregivers to always be looking out for them, and they expect to receive more care than they give. Children with insecure-ambivalent attachment become emotionally dependent in their relationships.

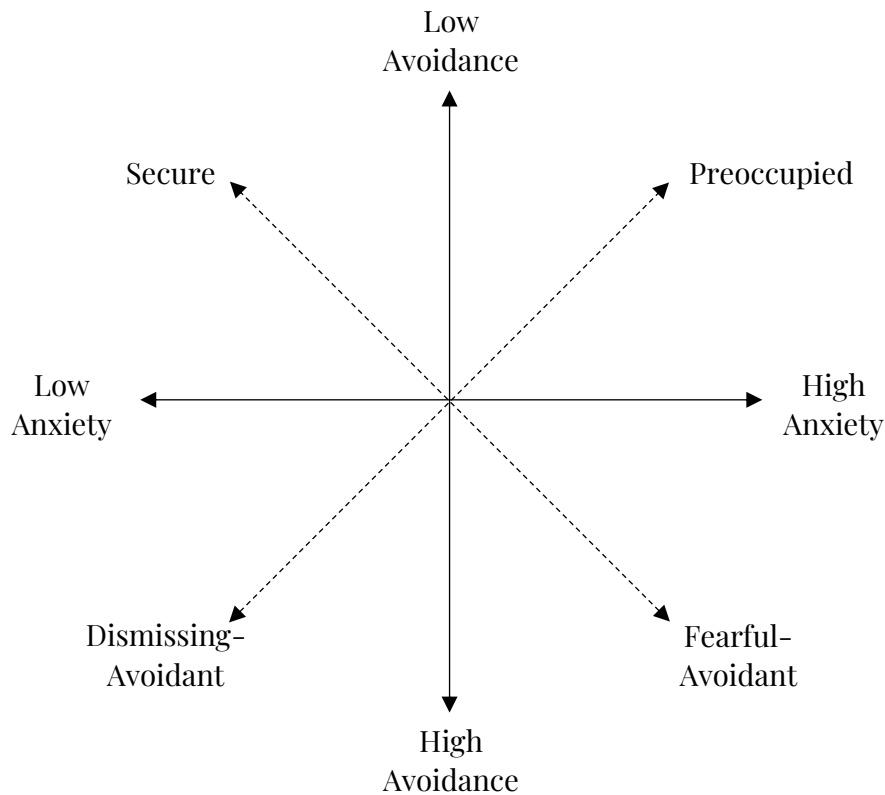
**Insecure Disorganized Attachment:** Many theorists describe this type of attachment as a total lack of attachment. Children with this type of attachment have suffered neglect or have been victims of neglectful or insecure relationships with their primary caregivers. Children lose trust and may feel fearful of their caregiver. As a result, children behave in contradictory and inappropriate ways, resulting in impulsive, destructive and explosive behavior. They also have great difficulty relating and bonding with other people as they avoid intimacy because they do not have the adequate tools to manage their emotions.

### **3.1.2. Dimensional Assessment of Attachment**

The categorical classification of attachment types has been a very important tool in the assessment of attachment, as it has facilitated the study and empirical advancement of not only the construct itself, but also its association with psychosocial development from infancy to adulthood (Fraley & Spieker, 2003). Other theorists, however, propose to analyze attachment in terms of two dimensions (anxious attachment and avoidant attachment) (Raby et al., 2021). The combination of these two dimensions allows different classifications and levels of attachment to be distinguished. Below is a diagram of all the possible combinations that can be obtained by combining the anxious and avoidant attachment dimensions:

**Figure 1.1**

*The Two-dimensional Model of Attachment (Fraley et al., 2015)*



*Note.* From “Are adult attachment styles categorical or dimensional? A taxometric analysis of general and relationship-specific attachment orientations”, by R. C. Fraley, N.W. Hudson, and N. Segal, 2015, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 109(2), 354–368. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000027>. Copyright 2015 by American Psychological Association.

**Attachment anxiety dimension:** this dimension of attachment describes the degree to which a person shows concern or fear that their attachment figure will not be available when needed.

**Attachment avoidance dimension:** this other dimension refers to the degree to which a person is uncomfortable in bonding with another person, and for fear of emotional dependence and closeness.

Dimensional assessment allows for a more individualized approximation of attachment type by classifying people on a continuum, rather than in a specific

category (Oliva-Delgado, 2004). Social psychology tends to favor the dimensional approach to attachment, whereas in clinical practice the categorical approach is more common (Nóblega et al., 2018). As such, it is understood that each approach serves different study objectives, and both approaches continue to be implemented in attachment research (Martínez & Santelices, 2005).

As the dimensional perspective is more recent, instruments to measure attachment from this method are scarce (Khan et al., 2020). One of the best known in this sense is the Experiences in Close Relationships–Relationship Structures questionnaire (ECR–RS; Fraley et al., 2011), a self-report instrument that not only measures attachment to parental figures, but also allows us to evaluate people's attachment to their friends and romantic partners (Rocha et al., 2017). Attachment is not just a matter of the parent–child relationship, but extends to other relationships we form over time (Harrison, 2003). In early adolescence, attachment relationships can develop with both parents and peers (Nickerson & Nagle, 2005).

### **3.2. Peer Attachment in Early Adolescents**

The attachment formed during childhood with parental figures has a significant impact not only on the parent–child relationship but also on the attachment children develop with their peers (Rubin et al., 2004). Attachment theorists suggest that attachment relationships are not limited to a single individual, such as the mother, but can also be formed with other relevant figures in our lives (Fraley et al., 2015).

As previously mentioned, peers play a significant role in the lives of early adolescents, leading them to form bonds and attachments in a manner similar to that of their parents (Delgado et al., 2022). According to literature, the attachment pattern between parent and child is commonly mirrored in the bond between early adolescents and their peers (Rubin et al., 2004). However, this variability is not consistent across all cases since there may be significant changes at the individual, familial, or contextual level during the time between childhood and early adolescence that can alter attachment (McConnell & Moss, 2011). Therefore, it is recognized that although attachment generally remains stable, it can be subject to modification over time (Aikins et al., 2008).

Early adolescents who securely attach to their peers exhibit greater social competence, pro-social behaviors, optimal emotional development, including good emotional regulation, and strong social skills compared to those who attach insecurely to their peers (Gorrese, 2016; Lee & Park, 2017; Schoeps et al., 2020). The social impairments of early adolescents with insecure peer relationships have been linked to one of the most prevalent social phenomena that starts to emerge during pre-adolescence, namely, bullying (Murphy et al., 2017).

### **3.2.1. Attachment and Bullying**

Bullying represents a prominent social issue in the educational sphere (Rettew & Pawlowski, 2016). It is defined as a situation wherein one or more students repeatedly exhibit aggressive behavior (such as threats, physical violence, social exclusion, or psychological harassment) towards another student, with a clear power disparity between the victim and the offender (Olweus, 1993). In recent decades, researches have analyzed the individual, relational, and social characteristics that contribute to children's involvement in bullying. Studies have found that children who struggle with emotional regulation or impulsivity, have low levels of empathy, or have experienced neglectful, unsupervised parenting and inter-parental conflict are more likely to be involved in bullying situations (Ding et al., 2020; Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2019; Machimbarrena et al., 2019).

The literature indicates that the type of attachment established with parents and peers is an important determinant when analyzing the characteristics of bullying agents (Nickerson et al., 2008). Associations have been observed between being a bully, victim, or bully/victim (when a child is both a bully and victim) and having developed an insecure attachment (Eliot & Cornell, 2009; van der Watt, 2014). Furthermore, it has been observed that adolescents who are bullies, victims, or bully/victims are associated with higher levels of anxious and avoidant attachment to their parents (Charalampous et al., 2019; Mohammadzadeh et al., 2020). On the other hand, other researchers have analyzed that children with higher levels of secure attachment tend to participate less in bullying situations compared to those with higher levels of insecure attachment (Groh et al., 2014; Pallini et al., 2014).

Regarding evidence on the association between attachment to peers and bullying, literature is scarce, which is surprising considering bullying occurs among peers (Pinheiro Mota, 2020; Schoeps et al., 2020). The limited studies in this area demonstrate that, similar to parental attachment, adolescents with secure attachment to their peers are much less likely to become victims, bullies, or bully/victims than those with insecure attachment to their peers (Murphy et al., 2017). This highlights the need for further research into the link between peer attachment and bullying behaviors as both victim and perpetrator.

#### **4. Parents of Early Adolescents**

Attachment studies underline the significance of analyzing the role parents play and the relationships they build with their children in promoting the well-being of early adolescents (Risi et al., 2021). Additionally, the introduction has frequently mentioned the impact of changes occurring during early adolescence on early adolescents' development. However, it is important to consider that these changes also have an influence on the environment of early adolescents (McGinnis & Wright, 2023). Therefore, it is important to understand what it means to become parents of an early adolescent and to be aware of the changes, challenges, and impact on the well-being that parents experience (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2019).

Raising early adolescents is a challenging responsibility. On the one hand, parents must confront the realization that their children are entering a crucial stage on the path to maturity (Soenens et al., 2019). As a result, early adolescents desire more self-sufficiency and freedom, often leading them to distance themselves from their parents to foster independence and explore their surroundings (Dahl et al., 2018). For parents, this is the outset of comprehending that their children will start to interact with others, and occasionally seek protection and security from sources other than themselves (Andrews et al., 2020). Accepting and incorporating this new facet of their child's development and the transformation in their bond is a challenging and protracted journey for many parents (Rogers et al., 2020). Similarly, as previously stated, the transition into early adolescence results in a reorganization of communication and relational dynamics between parents and children, often leading to an increase in misunderstandings (Hou, Benner et al., 2020). This can have a significant impact on the

emotional development of the early adolescent, as well as the well-being of the parents. Therefore, it is important to consider the emotional challenges that parents of early adolescents' face (Soenens et al., 2019).

The existing literature on the emotional and mental challenges encountered by parents during their children's transition from childhood to adolescence is restricted. Recent research demonstrated that the occurrence of mental disorders in mothers increases as their children get older (Abel et al., 2019, Möller et al., 2016). The majority of research concentrates on parental wellbeing during the perinatal period or in the early stages of their children's development (Field, 2018). Primarily, the studies have concentrated on evaluating the indications of depression in parents during the early stages of their children's lives (Vismara et al., 2022). Furthermore, recent research has supplied information regarding anxiety symptoms, which is an internalizing symptom that has not been as extensively examined as depression (Gamliel et al., 2018).

Some studies have reported on the mental health of parents of adolescents, including depression symptoms (Chen et al., 2009) and anxiety symptoms (Akgül & Atalan Ergin, 2021). However, most studies have focused on analyzing the mental health of mothers and their relationship with their children, but little is known about the status of fathers. Thus, another gap in the research is the absence of studies on fathers, making it challenging to determine the frequency of mental health issues in fathers and to discern any differences in this regard between mothers and fathers (Schulz et al., 2021; Sicouri et al., 2018). Therefore, these two gaps identified in the literature emphasize the requirement for studies that incorporate equal numbers of mothers and fathers and investigate challenges faced by parents during the transition from childhood to adolescence, specifically early adolescence (Hughes & Gullone, 2010). Such studies can enhance understanding of this crucial stage of development.

Traditionally, literature has prioritized analyzing the impact of parental mental health problems, often specifically maternal (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2019), on their children's social, behavioral, and developmental difficulties (Goodman, 2020). This points to the significance of considering parental mental health problems as potential predictors of their children's challenges throughout their developmental stages (Côté et al., 2018). However, it is important to acknowledge that this influence cannot be

understood unilaterally (Wang et al., 2022). Therefore, various studies have been conducted in recent years to assess the impact of children's difficulties on the mental health issues of their parents.

As previously stated, there is a lack of literature regarding studies examining the impact of adolescents on their parents. However, some studies have found that symptoms of internalization in adolescents were significant predictors of maternal depression (Hou, Chen et al., 2020) and anxiety symptoms (Schulz et al., 2021). Although there have been limited investigations on the impact of emotional and behavioral challenges faced by adolescents on the mental wellbeing of their parents, existing studies have demonstrated this effect (Hughes and Gullone, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial to further investigate this area and gather more information to elucidate the bidirectional relationship between parents and children as posited by family systems theory (Johnco et al., 2021).

In the family setting, researchers have taken interest in the relationship between mental health issues in parents and their parenting practices (Cheung et al., 2019; Drake & Ginsburg, 2011; Seymour et al., 2015). It has been speculated whether such mental health problems in parents have negative implications for parenting practices, thus affecting the social and psychoemotional development of the children (Hentges et al., 2021; Möller et al., 2016). At the same time, some researchers have questioned whether there are additional relational factors beyond individual parental problems, like internalizing symptoms, that may predict parenting practices, such as the attachment bond between parents and their children (Howard, 2010; Van Ijzendoorn et al., 2023).

Parenting encompasses a broad range of parental attitudes and behaviors towards raising children (Yaffe, 2023). The most frequently used theoretical term to refer to this construct is parenting styles (Smetana, 2017). However, some authors favor referring to this concept as parenting practices to include other factors such as discipline, parent-child communication, or dispositional characteristics of each parent when parenting (Parent, 2016; Sullivan et al., 2023). Therefore, to distinguish between parenting practices, some authors propose referring to them as positive and negative parenting practices (Chen & Raine, 2018; Clayborne et al., 2021).

Positive parenting practices encompass a range of styles, behaviors, skills, dispositions and discipline that foster compassionate, functional and respectful parent-child interaction and communication (Seay et al., 2014). Such practices entail warmth, attentive listening, positive reinforcement, respect, authoritative parenting styles and mindful parenting, among others (Cprek et al., 2015; Holtrop et al., 2015; Kil et al., 2021). All these aspects of positive parenting practices have been linked to better outcomes in children compared to negative parenting practices. Positive parenting practices, for instance, have been noted to have a protective impact on the development of social and emotional deficits in children (Yamaoka & Bard, 2019), childhood developmental delays (Sullivan et al., 2023), and less depression and higher self-esteem in adolescents (Smokowski et al., 2015).

On the contrary, negative parenting practices comprise of styles, behaviors, skills, dispositions or discipline, which have a neglectful, disrespectful and ineffective function in parent-child interaction/communication (Smokowski et al., 2015). These practices include hostility, behavioral control, harassment, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, physical and psychological punishment, psychological control, among others (Chen & Raine, 2018; Mak et al., 2020; Tucker et al., 2018). Researches suggests that negative parenting practices are linked to challenges in children's emotional regulation (Planalp et al., 2022) and internalizing symptoms in adolescents (Clayborne et al., 2021; Gorostiaga et al., 2019).

Some studies have investigated why some parents choose to use positive or negative parenting practices (Hadjicharalambous, 2021; Thomson et al., 2014). It has been noted that culture and context play a crucial role in shaping the concept of parenting, as it varies based on the values inherent in different cultural settings (Smetana, 2017). Other research suggests a significant relationship between parents' mental health status and their parenting practices (Parent et al., 2010). For instance, a recent study demonstrated that mothers with depressive symptoms are more inclined to utilize physical and psychological aggression with their children, including young children and adolescents, in comparison to mothers without such symptoms (Wolford et al., 2019). The literature on whether mental health problems influence parenting

practices is scarce, so it is a line of study that still needs to be further explored, as is the relationship between attachment and parenting practices.

Attachment relationships not only serve as relational models for children's social development, but have also been associated with parents' parenting practices. Some studies have examined the links between parenting styles and attachment types. Research suggests that a secure attachment style is linked to positive parenting (Scott et al., 2011), whereas an insecure attachment style is associated with negative parenting (Kim et al., 2021). For instance, Doinita and Maria (2015) demonstrated a positive correlation between secure attachment and authoritative parenting style. Conversely, Safdar and Zahrah (2016) found a positive relationship between insecure attachment and authoritative or punitive parenting styles.

From a dimensional perspective on attachment, some studies have linked avoidant and anxious attachment dimensions to negative parenting styles such as authoritarianism (Doyle et al., 2010), parenting stress (Nijssens et al., 2018), adverse parenting, or perfectionism (Ko et al., 2019). Recent studies have investigated the association of attachment dimensions with positive parental practices such as mindful parenting (Gouveia et al., 2016; Moreira et al., 2016, Parent et al., 2021). These studies have found that mindful parenting is not only associated with lower levels of avoidant and anxious attachment dimensions but also that both attachment dimensions negatively predict mindful parenting. These findings demonstrate that high levels of avoidant and anxious attachment are associated with more negative parenting practices (Nijssens et al., 2018). In contrast, low levels of avoidant and anxious attachment may provide a foundation for parents to develop positive parenting practices such as mindful parenting (Coatsworth et al., 2018; Parent & DiMarzio, 2021).

## **5. Mindful Parenting and Parental Self-compassion**

As it has been mentioned and evidenced, early adolescence represents a period of vulnerability for both parental and early adolescent well-being. Therefore, identifying protective factors and tools that can ameliorate the challenges associated with this process of change and vulnerability is crucial. In recent years, there has been

an emphasis on aspects originating from mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997), such as mindful parenting and self-compassion.

## **5.1. Mindful Parenting**

### **5.1.1. Conceptualization**

The concept of mindful parenting was introduced by Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997/2014) in their book *Everyday blessings: The inner work of mindful parenting*. The authors defined mindful parenting as a practice of parenting in which caregivers endeavor to provide awareness, attentive focus, impartial acceptance or nonjudgmental acceptance, and compassion, while maintaining high levels of self-regulation, to both themselves and their offspring during their ongoing interactions. In a recent article published by the same authors, they commented that “mindful parenting is not a project to create better or optimal children (whatever that might mean), or to be better or optimal parents, but to embrace in moment-to-moment awareness as best we might the entire enterprise of parenting our children in a mutuality of love and discovery and not-knowing (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2021)”. Given the fast-paced and stimulating lives that are commonplace today and the stressful events that we experience in our daily lives, mindfulness has become an essential means of mitigating the negative effects of these adversities (Weis et al., 2021). At the family level, mindful parenting has become a vital element, particularly for the most vulnerable and stressful moments of parenting, such as the transition from childhood to adolescence of one's children (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2014).

The surge in publications on mindful parenting in recent years highlights the scientific community's interest in analyzing the role of mindful parenting in cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. This interest has prompted authors to re-examine the concept itself, resulting in different theoretical models proposed to describe mindful parenting.

Starting with its original authors, Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997/2014) described three fundamental elements of mindful parenting in an objective and concise manner: acceptance, sovereignty, and empathy. First, authors indicated that parents must practice acceptance by avoiding subjective evaluations and accepting their children for who they are in the present moment, rather than attempting to change

them based on personal expectations and desires. Second, authors argued that sovereignty entails allowing the child to be their genuine self and recognizing their inherent qualities. Finally, authors addressed that empathy involves perceiving situations through the child's perspective. For this purpose, occasionally, parents must detach from their emotions and perceptions to embrace their children's viewpoints.

Another author who has extensively researched the concept of mindful parenting is Duncan (2009). This author proposes a model of mindful parenting composed of five dimensions: (1) nonjudgmental acceptance of the self and child, (2) compassion of the self and child, (3) listening with full attention, (4) self-regulation in the parenting relationship, and (5) emotional awareness of the self and child. Duncan's model has been the basis for developing one of the most used instruments, if not the most, to measure mindful parenting: The Interpersonal Mindfulness in Parenting scale (IM-P; Duncan, 2007), validated in different languages: Dutch (de Bruin et al., 2014), Korean (Kim et al., 2019), Chinese (Lo et al., 2018; Pan et al., 2019), Portuguese (Moreira & Canavarro, 2017) and Spanish (Orue et al., 2023). Each of the dimensions of mindful parenting is described below:

*Nonjudgmental acceptance of the self and child:* non-judgmental acceptance requires awareness of the parent's expectations, beliefs, and attributions relating to their children and parenting practices. It is important to accept that parents may encounter complicated situations while also acknowledging that mistakes are part of the parenting journey. Acceptance does not equate to permitting inappropriate behavior in a child, but rather explaining acceptable behaviors.

*Compassion of the self and child:* this dimension entail empathic concern for both oneself (parent-self) and their child. This requires parents to adopt a less rigid attitude towards parenting practices, avoid self-blame when things do not go as expected, and reduce their fear of social judgment. Parents benefit from recognizing the effort put into parenting rather than solely focusing on parenting achievements or goals.

*Listening with full attention:* this dimension includes to pay attention with awareness to what children is wants to communicate and to their non-verbal signals. Active listening is particularly crucial during adolescence as parents can facilitate an

environment where adolescents feel comfortable expressing themselves in a precise manner. This can help minimize conflicts and misunderstandings.

*Self-regulation in the parenting relationship:* it requires avoiding automatic or impulsive reactions before responding to a child's behaviors or emotional expressions. Additionally, parents can facilitate practices that enhance children's self-regulation skills, including labeling and discussing emotions.

*Emotional awareness of the self and child:* Parents need to be cognizant of both their own and their offspring's emotions to identify emotional patterns that could impact cognitive processes or automatic behaviors, affecting their parenting behaviors. Emotional awareness enables deliberate decision-making rather than instinctual reactions.

Recently, McCaffrey and colleagues (2017) sought to re-evaluate the five-dimensional model of mindful parenting in order to distinguish between components of mindful parenting that apply to parents and those that apply to children. The authors built on previous research indicating differences between parents and children (de Bruin et al., 2012) by proposing the grouping of Duncan's (2009) five dimensions of mindful parenting into two factors. On the one hand, they proposed the factor *being in the moment with the child* to refer to the dimensions that are child-centered such as compassion for the child, emotional awareness of the child, nonjudgmental acceptance of the child and listening with full attention. On the other hand, they proposed the factor *mindful discipline* to group the dimensions that focused on parents and their parenting practice: nonjudgmental acceptance of the self, emotional awareness of the self, and compassion of the self. This differentiation allows for a separation between the dimensions related to mindful parenting towards the child and the practice of mindful parenting by each parent towards themselves and their parenting.

### **5.1.2. Evidence on Mindful Parenting**

The growing interest in mindful parenting has prompted research on the cross-sectional and longitudinal relationship between mindful parenting and various family context variables. In cross-sectional studies, mindful parenting has shown positive correlations with various outcomes, including child well-being (Medeiros et al., 2016),

maternal warmth (Wang et al., 2018), and secure attachment style (Moreira et al., 2016), among others. Mindful parenting has also been found to be positively associated with authoritative parenting style and positive parenting practices (Gouveia et al., 2016; Kil et al., 2021). Conversely, other studies suggest that mindful parenting has a negative association with adolescents' psychological inflexibility (Moreira & Canavarro, 2017), parental stress (Emerson et al., 2021) and psychological symptoms in parents (Kim et al., 2019). Moreover, it has been indicated that mindful parenting is negatively associated with permissive and authoritarian parenting styles (McCaffrey et al., 2017) and negative parenting practices (Kil et al., 2021). Regarding the cross-sectional relationship between mindful parenting and internalizing and externalizing symptoms in adolescents, findings are contradictory. Some studies have found a positive association between these two variables (Maglica et al., 2021; Parent et al., 2016), but other studies have not found these associations (Han et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). This is an area of research that continues to be open and requires further exploration.

Over time, research has consistently demonstrated that high mindful parenting is linked to positive parent-child communication (Coatsworth et al., 2018), reduced parenting stress, and better mental health outcomes for children (Parent & DiMarzio, 2021). In a recent study, Lippold et al. (2021) highlighted that mindful parenting practices predict higher levels of disclosure and parent solicitation among adolescents. However, cross-sectional studies offer mixed results on the impact of low mindful parenting on adolescent problems. Studies that established a direct association between mindful parenting and internalizing and externalizing symptoms in adolescents found some mechanism that explain this relationship such as parent-child communication (Yang et al., 2021) or parenting practices (Duncan et al., 2009; Han et al., 2021). However, the literature is scarce in this regard, it would be relevant to investigate these mediating mechanisms in the association between mindful parenting, parental practices, and internalizing and externalizing symptoms amongst adolescents.

When studying families as a system, one approach that may provide a more comprehensive and intricate perspective of family systems is family-centered profiles (Jun et al., 2022). For instance, dispositional mindfulness profiles have recently been proposed. In a study by Calvete et al. (2021), they examined whether the impact of

mindful parenting was moderated by adolescents' dispositional mindfulness profiles. According to this study, adolescents with a poorer dispositional mindfulness profile benefited more from mindful parenting than those with an adequate dispositional mindfulness profile. Furthermore, the family-centered profiles approach provides a deeper analysis of different patterns that arise within families and their associations with other variables. This approach has not yet been employed to analyze the diverse profiles of mindful parenting. Consequently, its analysis could prove advantageous in comprehending the patterns of mindful parenting and their corresponding correlation with other variables like parenting practices and internalizing and externalizing symptoms among early adolescents.

In brief, research on mindful parenting holds significant potential for analyzing family processes and interactions between parents and children. This evidence is of great interest and can supplement interventions based on mindful parenting. Interventions based on mindful parenting have yielded promising outcomes in enhancing family well-being and reducing symptoms in adolescents and parental stress, as indicated in studies by Anand et al. (2021) and Burgdorf et al. (2019). Thus, the investigation of mindful parenting from a family systems model can be a considerable advancement in developing family-centered interventions tailored to each family's circumstances.

## **5.2. Parental Self-compassion**

### **5.2.1. Conceptualization**

Another facet of mindfulness that is closely connected to mindful parenting is self-compassion. Self-compassion is characterized by “being open to and moved by one’s own suffering, experiencing feelings of caring and kindness toward oneself, taking an understanding, nonjudgmental attitude toward one’s inadequacies and failures, and recognizing that one’s own experience is part of the common human experience (Neff, 2003, p. 87)”. In recent years, several studies have attempted to analyze the application of self-compassion in the context of parenting, considering the challenges that arise when raising children (Jefferson et al., 2020). Consequently, recent studies have focused on analyzing the impact of parental self-compassion on parenting quality and the mental health of parents and their children.

### **5.2.2. Evidence**

The literature on parental self-compassion is sparse because it is a relatively new area of research. However, there are some findings from previous studies that suggest the importance of analyzing parental self-compassion and its relationship to other variables in the family context. Recent publications show that parental self-compassion is negatively associated with children's externalizing symptoms (Beer et al., 2013), negative parenting practices (Gouveia et al., 2016), and parents' internalizing symptoms (Felder et al., 2016; Fonseca & Canavarro, 2018). At the longitudinal level, one of the few studies conducted in this regard indicates that parental self-compassion negatively predicts parental depressive symptoms (Cheung et al., 2022). However, there is little research on the predictive role of self-compassion and its protective function against different associations that occur in family settings, such as the relationship between depressive symptoms in parents and difficulties in their children (Soysa & Wilcomb, 2015). This is an open line of research that requires attention and study, as the protective role of self-compassion may be an aspect to consider in interventions in the family context (Ford et al., 2017; Körner et al., 2015).

## **6. Conclusions**

The thesis introduction critically examines the literature and identifies gaps in the current research on early adolescence within the family context. Family systems theory was explored to underscore the significance of studying the family as an interdependent complex system involving both parents and children. This highlights the significance of creating studies utilizing multi-informant approaches to examine bidirectionality between parental and child variables.

Similarly, this thesis emphasizes the increasing scientific interest in integrating gender perspectives in the formation and examination of research inquiries. In the context of family studies, a major concern is the prevalence of studies conducted solely with samples of mothers, leading to a scarcity of literature on fathers. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the majority of research has concentrated on examining the impact of mothers and, to a lesser extent, fathers on their children's well-being. Nonetheless, more recent studies have highlighted the bidirectional nature of parent-child relationships. Therefore, conducting studies involving the participation of mothers,

fathers, and early adolescents not only supplements theories proposed by family systems models, but also addresses issues outlined by feminist theory in the scientific community.

This thesis focuses on early adolescence, a vulnerable stage with significant changes in families. The transition from childhood to adolescence affects both early adolescents and parents, commonly leading to significant mental health impacts on the whole family. The introduction's literature review highlights various problems detected in parents and early adolescents. Concerning early adolescents, there has been a notable rise in mental health issues, including internalizing and externalizing symptoms, emotional regulation difficulties, and bullying. As for parents, both symptoms of anxiety and depression and negative parenting practices have been cited. Similarly, the significance of considering attachment dimensions in examining family relationships has been highlighted, as attachment plays a crucial role for early adolescents while establishing bonds with their peers.

Early adolescence appears to be a period of significant challenges, changes and new encounters that challenge the parent-child relationship, making both parents' and early adolescents' psychological wellbeing highly vulnerable. Although early adolescence has often been characterized as a period during which reaching early adolescents can prove challenging and difficult, recent literature offers potential mechanisms and protective factors that could help with this phase of life. This thesis concentrates on two pertinent factors that derive from mindfulness: mindful parenting and parental self-compassion. Both variables may be included to enhance mindfulness-based interventions for families by promoting mindful, respectful, and compassionate parenting. This could be particularly useful in addressing the challenges and difficulties that early adolescents and parents encounter during the transition from childhood to adolescence. Therefore, the literature highlights the significance of exploring the roles of mindful parenting and parental self-compassion in the context of family.

## **7. Objectives and Hypotheses**

Thus, the present thesis aims to investigate the bidirectional impact between parents and early adolescent on their mental health problems through a multi-informant and longitudinal study design. It focuses on a sample comprising mothers, fathers, and early adolescents. Additionally, the thesis examines the impact of three factors, namely attachment, mindful parenting, and parental self-compassion on the parent-child relationship. Through the course of this research, five studies were conducted, each with specific objectives and methodology detailed in Table 1.

Table 1.1

STUDY	OBJECTIVES	METHODS
<p>Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., &amp; Orue, I. (2024). Bidirectional Relationships between Parental Anxiety, Internalizing Symptoms, and Peer Victimization and Aggression among Early Adolescents. <i>The Journal of Early Adolescence</i>, 44(1), 96–118. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/02724316231160146">https://doi.org/10.1177/02724316231160146</a></p>	<p>To evaluate the bidirectional relationships between parental anxiety symptoms and early adolescents' internalizing symptoms, peer victimization, and aggression. To explore differences between mothers and fathers regarding these bidirectional relationships, resulting in two hypothesized models: one related to maternal anxiety and the other to paternal anxiety. Examine gender and age invariance in the models.</p>	<p><b>Study type:</b> Longitudinal and multi-informant design. <b>N</b> = 288 early adolescents. <b>Gender:</b> 54% of the early adolescents identified as girls and 46% identified as boys. <b>Mean age of early adolescents (SD)</b> = 12.84 (1.22). <b>Mean age of mothers (SD)</b> = 46.72 (4.6). <b>Mean age of fathers (SD)</b> = 48.91 (5.44).</p>
<p>Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., &amp; Orue, I. (2022). Spanish Validation of The Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures Questionnaire for Pre-adolescents. <i>Revista de Psicología Clínica con Niños y Adolescentes</i>, 9(2), 57–64. <a href="https://doi.org/10.21134/rpcna.2022.09.2.7">https://doi.org/10.21134/rpcna.2022.09.2.7</a></p>	<p>To validate the nine-item version of the ECR-RS in a sample of Spanish early adolescents. To examine the gender differences in the ECR-RS and assess the invariance of the measurement model across gender. to analyze the associations between ECR-RS and early adolescents' prosocial behavior, emotional and behavioral problems, and difficulties in emotional regulation to test convergent validity.</p>	<p><b>Study type:</b> Cross-sectional <b>N</b> = 795 early adolescents. <b>Gender:</b> 49.1% of the early adolescents identified as girls and 50.9% identified as boys. <b>Mean age of early adolescents (SD)</b> = 12.91 (1.29).</p>

<p>Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., &amp; Orue, I. (2023). The Mediating Role of Mindful Parenting in the Relationship Between Parental Anxiety and Youth's Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties. <i>Journal of Youth and Adolescence</i>, 52(7), 1471-1480. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01752-3">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01752-3</a></p>	<p>To evaluate the mediating role of mindful parenting in the relationship between parental anxiety and youth's emotional and behavioral difficulties.</p>	<p><b>Study type:</b> Longitudinal and multi-informant design.  <b>N</b> = 290 mother-youth dyads and 241 father-youth dyads.  <b>Gender:</b> 54% of the early adolescents identified as girls and 46% identified as boys.  <b>Mean age of early adolescents (SD)</b> = 12.84 (1.22).  <b>Mean age of mothers (SD)</b> = 46.72 (4.6).  <b>Mean age of fathers (SD)</b> = 48.91 (5.44).</p>
<p>Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Parent, J., &amp; Orue, I. (under review). Family-Centered Mindful Parenting Profiles and their Predictive Association with Negative Parenting and Youth Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties.</p>	<p>To examine family-centered profiles of mother and father mindful parenting.  To explore of family mindful parenting profiles longitudinal predicted negative parenting practices and youth psychosocial outcomes.  To analyze the differences between dyadic mindful parenting profiles with respect to negative disciplinary practices and youth's emotional and behavioral problems, cross-sectionally and longitudinally.</p>	<p><b>Study type:</b> Longitudinal and multi-informant design.  <b>N</b> = 441 early adolescents.  <b>Gender:</b> 49.1% of the early adolescents identified as girls and 50% identified as boys.  <b>Mean age of early adolescents (SD)</b> = 12.91 (1.29).  <b>Mean age of mothers (SD)</b> = 46.72 (4.6).  <b>Mean age of fathers (SD)</b> = 48.91 (5.44).</p>

To analyze the protective role of self-compassion in the predictive association between child's emotional regulation difficulties and their parents' depressive symptoms. To address gender differences between parents in the study variables and in the longitudinal associations between children's emotional regulation difficulties and parents' depressive symptoms, as well as between parents' self-compassion and depressive symptoms.

**Study type:** Longitudinal and multi-informant design.

**N** = 214 early adolescents, 213 mothers, and 187 fathers.

**Gender:** 53.3% of the early adolescents identified as girls and 46.7% identified as boys.

**Mean age of early adolescents (SD)** = 12.71 (1.37).

**Mean age of mothers (SD)** = 46.74 (4.42).

**Mean age of fathers (SD)** = 48.85 (5.42).

Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Orue, I., & Calvete, E. (under review). Parents' Self-Compassion as a Moderator Between Children's Emotional Regulation Difficulties and Parents' Depressive Symptoms. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3163409/v1>



## Chapter II

# Study One

### **Bidirectional Relationships between Parental Anxiety, Internalizing Symptoms, and Peer Victimization and Aggression among Early Adolescents**

Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., & Orue, I. (2024).

*Journal of Early Adolescence*, 44(1), 96–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02724316231160146>



## Chapter III

# Study Two

**Spanish Validation of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship**

**Structures Questionnaire for Pre-adolescents**

Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., & Orue, I. (2022).

*Revista de Psicología Clínica con Niños y Adolescentes*, 9(2), 57–64.

<https://doi.org/10.21134/rpcna.2022.09.2.7>



## Chapter IV

# Study Three

### **The Mediating Role of Mindful Parenting in the Relationship Between Parental Anxiety and Youth's Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties**

Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., & Orue, I. (2023).  
*Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 52(7), 1471-1480.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01752-3>



## Chapter V

# Study Four

**Family-Centered Profiles of Mindful Parenting: Longitudinal Associations with Negative Parenting and Youth Emotional and Behavioral Problems**

Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Parent, J., & Orue, I.

(under review)



## Chapter VI

# Study Five

**Parents' Self-Compassion as a Moderator Between Children's Emotional  
Regulation Difficulties and Parents' Depressive Symptoms**

Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, M., Orue, I., & Calvete, E.

(under review)



Chapter VII

**Summary and  
Conclusions**



## CHAPTER VII: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### 1. Conclusions

The primary aim of the present thesis was to explore the bidirectional relationships between parents and early adolescents on their mental health issues, while assessing how attachment, mindful parenting, and parental self-compassion impact the parent-youth relationship. The thesis comprises five studies, each addressing a specific aspect of the central theme. A summary of the most significant results of each paper is presented below, followed by an overarching conclusion of the thesis. Finally, the thesis's strengths and limitations are included, along with recommendations and suggestions for future research.

#### 1.1. Study One

The study analyzed the bidirectional relationship among parental anxiety, internalizing symptoms of early adolescents, peer aggression, and victimization. In addition, it was also tested whether the relationships were influenced by early adolescents' age and gender. Unexpectedly, no bidirectional patterns were discovered among the study variables, as was initially hypothesized. Significant findings indicated that internalizing symptoms in children predict maternal anxiety, but not paternal anxiety, suggesting that mothers continue to be the primary caregivers and are therefore more susceptible to their children's issues, which may impact the well-being of mothers more than that of fathers (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2019).

On the other hand, neither peer victimization nor aggression showed any transversal or longitudinal associations with parental anxiety. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to explore other externalizing parental variables that could potentially exhibit such bidirectionality with peer victimization and aggression. Considering the results of this study, it appears that the relationship between parental and early adolescent variables is domain-specific. However, further research in this area is required (Schulz et al., 2021). Similarly, none of the relationships between early adolescent and parental variables were found to be moderated by gender or early adolescent age.

Regarding the associations between early adolescents' own variables, it was observed that: 1) internalizing symptoms predict peer victimization, 2) girls who are victimized tend to become aggressors more than boys, and 3) younger early adolescents score higher on both peer victimization and aggression compared to their older counterparts. The first and second results align with the existing literature, while the third finding is only partially consistent. This might be because bullying peaks at the age of 12 years (Pichel et al., 2021).

Thus, the first study in the thesis highlights the significance of examining the psychological symptoms of mothers, fathers, and early adolescents through complex models that consider the family context and the dynamic relationships among family members.

### **1.2. Study Two**

The second study aimed to validate the 9-item version of the ECR-RS, which comprises of the avoidant and anxious attachment dimensions with regards to their parental figures and friends. The study also examined whether the ECR-RS is gender-invariant among early adolescents. Furthermore, the study assessed the convergent validity of the ECR-RS by examining its association with emotional and behavioral problems, difficulties in emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior. This study is in line with previous research conducted in other countries (Sarling et al., 2021) which confirmed the reliability and validity of the ECR-RS for measuring dimensions of avoidant and anxious attachment in different relational domains (mother, father, friends) among early adolescents. As anticipated, the dimensions of anxious and avoidant attachment showed no intercorrelation, indicating that high levels in one dimension do not necessarily imply high levels in the other dimension. This study explores how different combinations may emerge based on the two dimensions. Significant associations were found between attachment dimensions to both mothers and fathers, indicating a common pattern in attachment development to both parents (Moreira et al., 2015).

Regarding gender invariance, the findings differ from the limited research conducted in this area (Del Giudice, 2019). In this study, boys exhibited higher levels of anxious attachment towards their friends, whereas girls exhibited higher levels of

avoidant attachment towards their friends. Nevertheless, there is insufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that gender differences exist in attachment dimensions, and further research is necessary. Finally, both attachment dimensions were linked to higher emotional and behavioral problems, as well as difficulties with emotional regulation in early adolescents. Surprisingly, only anxiety attachment was negatively associated with prosocial behavior. Therefore, this study not only validates the ECR-RS, but also presents evidence of links between attachment dimensions and other variables that go through significant changes during the transition from childhood to adolescence.

### **1.3. Study Three**

The third study of the thesis focused on assessing the mediating role of mindful parenting in the relationship between parental anxiety and emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents. The proposed model examined maternal anxiety as a predictor of negative maternal mindful parenting in mother-child dyads, which subsequently predicted higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents. Furthermore, the mother-child dyad model showed that maternal mindful parenting only predicted the emotional and behavioral problems of early adolescents from W2 to W3, and not from W1 to W2. The explanation given for this outcome is that mindful parenting appears to have a greater influence on older early adolescents (12 to 14 years), hence it is reasonable that the association was not observed between W1 and W2, but between W2 and W3 due to the passage of time. Nevertheless, we propose this to be a hypothesis requiring validation in future studies.

In the model that focused on parent-child relationships, mindful parenting was not found to mediate the relationship between paternal anxiety and early adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems. However, the findings revealed that there is a noteworthy relationship between fathers and children. One notable result is the potential bidirectional association between paternal mindful parenting and early adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems. This bidirectionality was partial because paternal mindful parenting marginally predicted emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents. Therefore, it seems that adolescents' problems may influence their parents' parenting practices, providing new evidence about the

understudied issue of adolescents' impact on their parents' parenting practices (Hou et al., 2020).

The third study presents new findings regarding the mediating mechanism of maternal mindful parenting in the relationship between maternal anxiety and emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents, while also providing evidence for the theory of intergenerational transmission of psychological symptoms (Cerniglia & Cimino, 2020). Additionally, the study highlights the impact of early adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems on their fathers' practice of mindful parenting.

#### **1.4. Study Four**

The primary aim of study four was to investigate family-centered profiles of mindful parenting exhibited by both mothers and fathers. The findings revealed a three-profile model, consisting of a family profile displaying low levels of mindful parenting in both parents, another family profile demonstrating high levels of mindful parenting by the mother, and the last profile illustrating average levels of mindful parenting by both parents. The profiles demonstrate varied mindful parenting levels of both parents, providing significant advancement in comprehending mindfulness within family systems.

Finally, it was also examined the extent to which the three mindful parenting profiles were predictive of negative parenting practices and emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents. It was found that the low mindful parenting family profile was associated with the highest scores on both maternal W<sub>1</sub> and paternal W<sub>2</sub> negative parenting practices. Additionally, the low mindful parenting profile was linked to the highest scores on emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents, whereas the high maternal mindful parenting family profile was associated with the lowest scores on these outcomes. The profiles did not differ in the predictive association between W<sub>2</sub> negative parenting and W<sub>3</sub> emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents. These results show the importance of analyzing the impact of mindful parenting on the psychosocial environment of families, as the findings show its relationship with negative parenting and early adolescents' problems in both the short and the long term (Coatsworth et al., 2018).

Findings stress the study of parenting and its relationship with other variables through the analysis of mindful parenting profiles, which helps not only to address the differences in the characteristics between profiles but also the differences between profiles regarding their association with other family factors. This will make it possible to adjust intervention strategies for each family profile in order to improve cohesion and the family environment (Jun et al., 2022).

### **1.5. Study Five**

The fifth study examined self-compassion as a protective factor in predicting the association between early adolescents' emotional regulation difficulties and depressive symptoms in their parents. Additionally, this study evaluated gender differences between parents in the study variables and longitudinal associations using a multilevel design.

Consistent with prior research examining the moderating effect of self-compassion (Wong et al., 2016), this study found that parental self-compassion buffers the impact of emotional regulation difficulties in early adolescents on their parents' depressive symptoms. These results highlight the protective role that parental self-compassion can play in coping with emotional difficulties in their children. Regarding the relationship between self-compassion and parental depressive symptoms, it is noteworthy that self-compassion was not found to be a significant predictor of parental depressive symptoms, but rather cross-correlated with it. However, other studies have revealed that self-compassion is a significant predictor of parental depressive symptoms (Cheung et al., 2022). Therefore, this subject area remains open for further evaluation.

On the other hand, it was found that emotional regulation difficulties in early adolescents predicted depressive symptoms in their parents. These findings are in line with previous research but provide additional insight by utilizing a multi-informant approach and focusing on a specific internalizing symptom (i.e. depressive symptoms). As a result, we can conclude that emotional difficulties experienced by early adolescents may contribute to the mental health issues faced by their parents.

Finally, no gender differences were identified between mothers and fathers in relation to their levels of self-compassion or depressive symptoms. As there is limited literature available on gender differences in self-compassion between mothers and fathers, it is difficult to conclude whether our outcomes align with other research studies. In contrast, substantial evidence indicates that mothers score higher on depressive symptoms than fathers (Shafer et al., 2017). The absence of gender moderation in the longitudinal associations suggests that emotional regulation difficulties affect both mothers' and fathers' depressive symptoms alike. Equally so, self-compassion acts as a buffer for this relationship.

This last study of the thesis contributes to the literature by providing relevant findings on the effect of early adolescents' emotional regulation difficulties on their parents' depressive symptoms. It also demonstrates the ability of self-compassion to mitigate this effect. This could be very useful for future interventions to cultivate self-compassion as a protective factor.

## **1.6. General Conclusion**

The current project/thesis yields new findings into the bidirectional impact of mental health on parents and early adolescents, presenting novel evidence about the development of psychological symptoms in the family environment from a longitudinal and multi-informant perspective. Similarly, the current thesis underscores mindful parenting as a potential mediator between the challenges posed by family members. Additionally, it suggests parental self-compassion as a feasible protective factor in mitigating the influence on family mental health problems. Finally, the relationship between attachment dimensions with the difficulties reported by the early adolescents, and with the parents' practice of mindful parenting is indicated.

The most important conclusions of this thesis are described below:

- The development of emotional and behavioral problems in the family setting is connected between parents and early adolescents. Emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents are equally predictive of depressive symptoms in both mothers and fathers, but only predict anxiety symptoms in mothers and difficulties in mindful parenting in fathers.

- Attachment dimensions have a significant association with emotional and behavioral problems and difficulties in emotional regulation in early adolescents. These results suggest that attachment dimensions play a predominant role in the problems presented by early adolescents.
- The mediating mechanism of mindful parenting occurs especially in the relationship between maternal anxiety and emotional and behavioral problems of early adolescents, thus suggesting that intergenerational transmission of psychological symptoms could be explained especially by maternal mindful parenting. This particular mediation mechanism, however, was not found to be present in fathers.
- The three-profile model uncovers three patterns that consists of one family profile with high maternal mindful parenting, one family profile with average mindful parenting in both parents, and a final family profile with low mindful parenting in both parents. The low mindful parenting family profile is connected to increased rates of negative parenting and emotional and behavioral problems in early adolescents.
- Parental self-compassion was a protective factor in coping with their children's emotional difficulties for both mothers and fathers.

## **2. Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions for Research**

Although this thesis has made significant scientific progress, certain limitations must be addressed to consider them for future research. The initial limitation stems from the project's sample, comprising only normative families from educational centers in Bizkaia (Spain), making it challenging to extrapolate the findings to different contexts. While the thesis design considered the gender perspective to address the identified literature gaps, our studies failed to consider various sociodemographic variables critical in analyzing the phenomena described in the five studies. Variables like sociodemographic status, race, culture, or religion were not a part of our study, despite playing an important role in family development. Therefore, future research should consider these issues to contribute to scientific knowledge from a gender perspective and create evidence that considers intersectionality, which affects individuals in different ways. Additionally, we encourage future research to evaluate

single-parent, LGBTBIQ+, multicultural, and other types of families in their studies since it was not evaluated in the analysis of the current thesis.

It is important to note that data collection began in May 2021, during the post-pandemic period. This temporal coincidence may have impacted the findings on mental health issues experienced by parents and preadolescents, as reports during that time indicate a significant rise in such problems (Samji et al., 2021). The historical context is always important to consider when analyzing research data, so it would be interesting for future research to control this issue that surely had an effect on the results obtained in the present thesis.

Regarding sample collection, the exclusive use of self-report questionnaires in the thesis studies poses limitations on the derived conclusions. To overcome this, we propose that future research utilizes additional methods, such as observation or interviews, in conjunction with self-report instruments. This will enable the complementation of self-report information while compensating for the social desirability bias that is inherent in such instruments. This opens the way for an interesting debate on the possible combination of methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the different perspectives.

Despite the limitations mentioned earlier, this thesis has noteworthy strengths. One such strength is the significant commitment made to not only gather a considerable early adolescent sample but also to reach out and maintain contact with both the mothers and fathers of these individuals. As previously stated, studies that invite parent participation typically receive a response primarily from mothers, resulting in significant sample loss during follow-up and hindering the ability to conduct longitudinal studies. Therefore, this thesis not only sought to increase parent participation in the project but also to track the progress of all participants.

The methods utilized for data analysis in this thesis are noteworthy. Throughout our research, we have prioritized incorporating multi-informant designs with similar samples of both mothers and fathers, alongside longitudinal methodologies (excluding the second study). Furthermore, we conducted profile analysis, multilevel analysis, path-analysis, and instrument validation analysis. These approaches provide multiple

perspectives, which allowed us to draw various conclusions. This has enabled us to analyze the data from multiple angles and extract the relationships between the study variables. Including both mothers and fathers in all of the studies that comprise this thesis allowed us to address a primary concern in the literature regarding a lack of studies with a multi-informant perspective that includes both genders. This approach ensures that our research adheres to gender perspectives and can contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge in this area.

This thesis aims to fill the gaps identified in previous studies that are based on family systems theory. The study analyzed bidirectional relationships between parents and their children, as well as the role of parents. The aim was to address specific issues, including mindful parenting, self-compassion, and attachment in the development of mental health problems in early adolescents and their parents. Furthermore, our research concentrates on early adolescence as a fundamental phase in the development of children and in the alterations that take place in family systems. Early adolescence is one of the most under-studied evolutionary phases relating to childhood and adolescence, making it a crucial area of exploration.

### **3. Implications**

The thesis's conclusions have considerable theoretical and practical implications, as detailed below. First, the findings underscore the complexity of family dynamics and their influence on the well-being of family members and parental practices during the early adolescent stage. The current thesis expands understanding of the mutual links in psychological symptoms between parents and early adolescents, as well as the intervening and protective factors that prevent the perpetuation of these connections. This study expands on the understanding of family systems theory, which provides a comprehensive framework for integrating various concepts explored in the thesis, including mental health issues in families, parenting, attachment, and mindful parenting profiles (Bortz et al., 2019).

All of these ideas can be integrated into the evaluation and prevention of difficulties experienced by parents and early adolescents, considering the influence detected between parents and early adolescents. Furthermore, recent findings on

parents and the bidirectionality in parent-child relationships underscore the need to include a gender perspective and consider the foundations of family systems theory not only in assessment but also when intervening with families. Families are complex and diverse, and understanding them requires historical and contextual analysis. The present thesis expands knowledge about fathers and their role in early adolescent families. The results reveal that when evaluating and intervening with families, considering both parents is essential.

Additionally, studies three and four found that mindful parenting plays a significant role within family systems, and mindfulness-based programs for families may benefit as a result. Maternal mindful parenting has demonstrated potential as a mediator of maternal anxiety symptoms on their early adolescents' emotional and behavioral problems. Furthermore, patterns of mindful parenting have been observed to influence both parenting practices and early adolescents' well-being. Thus, mindful parenting profiles could provide a framework for developing individualized interventions that optimize treatment of familial challenges. It may be crucial to identify factors such as parental self-compassion as key skills to include in intervention programs for both mothers and fathers.

In brief, the thesis offers insights into the literature, outlining gaps that require further research. Additionally, it serves as a basis for exploring topics such as profiles of mindful parenting, bidirectionality between parents and early adolescents, and the role of parents in greater depth. It is important to expand our understanding of these subjects through ongoing investigation.

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