
THE THREE-MONTH-OLD BABY: PARENTS CONCEPTIONS¹

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ABSTRACT. The parental conceptions about child development reflect how mothers and fathers understand this development and can influence directly or indirectly on parent-infant interactions. This study aimed at analyzing the parental conceptions about early child development and verify what aspects parents consider important for the child's development. The participants were 20 mothers and 20 fathers of babies at the age of 3 months. A sociodemographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used. Data analysis followed the assumptions of qualitative content analysis. The results showed that parents understand three-month-old babies as children turning from a passive state to a phase with greater amount of activity, concerning motor, sociocommunicative and cognitive aspects. From the parents' point of view, the new acquisitions of the children allow more interaction between the babies and their caregivers. Most participants mentioned that stimuli are boosters of child development, although many of them have also highlighted the importance of biological and hereditary factors. In a general way, it could be noticed that parents have concepts that recognize the parental role as an essential aspect to boost the healthy development of children. We considered that this work contributes positively to the study on early child development, for it presents data on a period that is crucial for the baby's development as well as for parents' adaptation.

Keywords: Social perception; development; babies.

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RESUMO. As concepções parentais sobre o desenvolvimento infantil refletem o modo como as mães e os pais entendem esse desenvolvimento e podem influenciar, direta ou indiretamente, as interações pais-bebê. O objetivo do presente estudo foi analisar as concepções parentais sobre o desenvolvimento infantil inicial e verificar quais os aspectos que pais e mães consideraram importantes para promover o desenvolvimento. Participaram da pesquisa 20 (vinte) mães e 20 (vinte) pais de bebês com 3 (três) meses de idade. Foram utilizados um questionário sociodemográfico e uma entrevista semiestruturada. A análise dos dados seguiu os pressupostos qualitativos da análise de conteúdo. Os resultados apontaram que mães e pais percebem os bebês aos 3 meses como passando de um estado de passividade para maior atividade, tanto em termos motores quanto nos aspectos sociocomunicativos e cognitivos. Na visão dos pais, as novas aquisições infantis permitem maior interação entre os cuidadores e o bebê. A maioria dos participantes mencionou os estímulos como aspectos promotores do desenvolvimento, embora muitos também tenham destacado a importância dos fatores biológicos e hereditários. De modo geral, pais e mães apresentaram concepções que reconhecem o papel parental como essencial na promoção do desenvolvimento saudável dos filhos. Considera-se que esse trabalho contribui positivamente com a área de estudos sobre o desenvolvimento infantil inicial, tendo em vista que apresenta dados sobre um período crucial para o desenvolvimento do bebê e para a adaptação dos pais.

Palavras-chave: Percepção social; desenvolvimento; bebês.

EL BEBÉ DE TRES MESES: CONCEPCIONES DE PADRES Y MADRES

RESUMEN. Las concepciones de los padres de desarrollo infantil reflejan cómo las madres y los padres entienden este desarrollo y pueden influir, directa o indirectamente, en la interacción entre padres e hijo. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar las concepciones de los padres sobre el desarrollo infantil temprano y comprobar qué aspectos padres

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consideran importante para promover el desarrollo. Los participantes fueron 20 madres y 20 padres de los bebés a los 3 meses. Fueron usados un cuestionario sociodemográfico y una entrevista semiestructurada. Análisis de los datos siguió los supuestos cualitativos del análisis de contenido. Los resultados mostraron que las madres y los padres se dan cuenta de los bebés a los 3 meses como pasar del estado pasivo a una mayor actividad, tanto en los términos motores como en aspectos sociocomunicativos y cognitivos. En vista de los padres, las nuevas adquisiciones de los niños permiten una mayor interacción entre los cuidadores y el bebé. La mayoría de los participantes mencionó los estímulos como promotores de los aspectos del desarrollo, aunque muchos también han destacado la importancia de los factores biológicos y hereditarios. En general, los padres y madres presentaron conceptos que reconocen que el papel de los padres es esencial para promover el desarrollo saludable de los niños. Se considera que este trabajo contribuye positivamente con el campo de estudio sobre el desarrollo infantil temprano dado que muestra los datos en un período crucial para el desarrollo de la del bebé y para la adaptación de los padres.

Palabras-clave: Percepción social; desarrollo; bebés.

Introduction

Family is the most important mediating element in the relationship between the baby and the environment. This space of development has an essential function of early child socialization. Considering this fact, it is understood that the development of children's new abilities is related to the first social interactions of the baby, especially with the parents, who, in general, are their first caregivers.

According to Alvarenga, Malhado and Lins (2014) and Mendes and Seidl de Moura (2013), the first social interactions allow the baby to modify his/her ways of knowing the world and relating to it. This process of new acquisitions, from the interactionist point of view, is permeated by co-constructive and bidirectional actions, i.e., the child behavior influences on and is influenced by the adult behavior in a continuous way. From the collaboration of the social others and of the interaction in the cultural media, babies develop new ways of understanding and acting, become more skillful and able to participate more actively in the cultural context (Seabra & Seidl de Moura, 2011).

In relation to the parents, the first interactions are crucial for the tie-bonding with the baby and help to organize the representational world formed in relation to the child during pregnancy. From the child's characteristics and behaviors, fathers and mothers re-evaluate their expectancies regarding the baby and their own role as parents (Castoldi, Gonçalves, & Lopes, 2014).

This way, the first interactions may be related to the paternity and maternity constitution, considering that the way that mothers and fathers experience this phase may have implications on the relations established and on the way that they see the baby. The transition to maternity and to paternity, with the arrival of the first child is a new development stage and demands many adaptations. This period is characterized by intense social and psychological transformations, in relation to the reality of the baby and to the marital relationship (Coltart & Henwood, 2012; Krob, Piccinini, & Silva, 2009; Piccinini, Silva, Gonçalves, Lopes, & Tudge, 2012).

A similar process occurs from the pregnancy and birth of the second child, which also establishes a new cycle in family life. The new phase implies changes to all family members, and modifies the relationships established among them. Castoldi, Gonçalves and Lopes (2014), among other authors, argue that after the birth of the first or the second child, the first weeks, and, particularly, the first three months, are crucial for family organization. During the first three months of a child's life, the demands are increased, requiring from parents routine re-organization in order to supply the needs of the baby and conciliate them with the necessities of the oldest child, in case of parents of two children. In this period, the parents also must re-organize their emotional conditions, build ties with the new baby, adapt to new roles and, particularly, learn shared care practice (Lopes, Vivian, Oliveira, Pereira, & Piccinini, 2012; Piccinini et al., 2012).

Authors such as Dessen and Oliveira (2013) argue that the complementarity between parents is essential for their adaptation to the new scenario demands. The father's participation at supporting the mother during this transition period, as well as his participation in the care of the baby and his relationship with the oldest child when he/she is emotionally affected by the arrival of the second child are fundamental for a successful adaptation of the family to the new situation. Considering this, it must be highlighted that the more the father knows the baby, the more sympathetic he can be towards mother's complaints,

strengthening the support he can give to the mother in the first months after the birth of the new family member.

Considering the content given by specific literature, we can find reasons that justify the realization of studies aiming to know aspects that can influence on the relationship father-mother-baby on the three first months of the baby's life. The role of each of those caregivers is highlighted, as well as the early social interactions and the factors that may influence on these interactions, and, consequently, on the development. This way, the conceptions that those adults have about their baby and about child development in general are factors that contribute to the interactions that will be established (Andrade et al., 2014; Seabra & Seidl de Moura, 2011).

Bueno and Vieira (2014) and Meteyer and Perry-Jenkins (2010) convey that studies carried out on parental practices and conceptions on early developmental stages are still few, either in national or in international contexts. However, they believe that researches in this area are important because they allow the establishment of precocious interventions, aiming at providing a healthy development to the child and his/her family in general.

Concerning that subject, the researchers are divided into three branches, according to Miguel, Valetim and Carugati (2009). The first branch tries to understand the parents' ideas, what parents think about child development and how they would explain the development of their children's abilities. The second branch of those studies aims at the analysis of the reasons and the sources of parents' ideas. The third one tries to know the consequences of these ideas to the child and to the dyadic interactions. Although the three branches are connected, the present study has, as its main focus, the first of them, i.e., understanding parental conceptions on the early child development, particularly on the first three months of baby's life.

Monteiro and Manzini (2008) use the term *conceptions* as the result of the information body that allows people to describe a phenomenon, explaining its occurrence by means of the establishment of relations among the phenomenon itself and its consequences, creating strategies for intervention. Therefore, the conceptions involve a great amount of knowledge acquired during each person's life. This argument corroborates the thoughts of Rossi & Batista (2006), when they affirm that conception is a specific way of noticing, learning and understanding something. It is a particular construction of each individual on a certain phenomenon, considering his/her previous sensations and experiences. Moreover, Barrantes and Blanco (2004) argue that the conceptions are comprehensive, for they include beliefs, values, concepts, meanings, knowledge and preferences of each individual.

We agree with the authors who state that the conceptions are constituted within the interaction process with the other and are transformed within this process itself (Miguel et al., 2009; Monteiro & Manzini, 2008). The conceptions are result of a history, of a cultural inheritance, and are developed within a social-historical process, which includes the beliefs and the values of each individual. From the experiences lived, from information received, from intra- and inter-groups sharing, from culture and language, the conceptions are constructed, by means of a dynamic process.

Learning what parents think about their own roles concerning important elements for their children's development and how they evaluate this development is the main objective for the studies on conceptions. The way that the parents understand child development may, directly or indirectly, influence on the environment that they provide to their babies; it can also influence on the resources used and some interactions particularities that help to offer a healthy development. Depending on the factors that are noticed by the parents, some areas may be more stimulated than others (Bornstein, Cote, Haynes, Hahn, & Park, 2010).

In this way of thinking, researches with maternal participation are more common, because of the place that the mother takes as the person who is more occupied with the daily care of the baby, and the main participant of the early interactions (Andrade et al., 2014; Florentino, 2009; Souza, Machado, Nunes, & Braz Aquino, 2014; Ribas Jr., Seidl de Moura, & Bornstein, 2007). In general, mothers are the primary caregivers and spend more time with the baby, fact that makes her daily observations more susceptible to notice a greater variety of emotions and behaviors in many contexts, even when these contexts are not constant. The mother, in her role of caregiver, is considered an important source of sociocognitive, communicative and affective stimulation.

Seidl de Moura et al. (2013) tried to investigate the conceptions of Brazilian mothers about their children, particularly trying to identify how the subject “children’s autonomy” appears on the maternal discourse and to evidence which socialization aspects are considered important. For that, the authors interviewed 94 mothers of babies at the age of 17 - 22 months. In a general way, in that study, mothers described the children as having more positive temperament traits, if compared to negative traits. The results showed that the mothers value intelligence, activity, kindness and affective traits.

Although the studies with maternal participation are more frequent, the father’s role cannot be disregarded or minimized, giving him a secondary function. In the past, the idea of paternity was linked to the one of a man who goes out to work and obtain financial resources. In that period, the mother was represented as the main agent on the child’s personality development. Nevertheless, because of social changes, occurring specially after the 1960’s, new relations between men and women were established, causing the emergence of new family standards and the re-organization of roles (Meteyer & Perry-Jenkins, 2010; Seabra & Seidl de Moura, 2011).

It is understood that the paternal participation is also of vital importance to the psychic and emotional development of the child. This participation has been gaining more and more prominence on studies about parenthood, like many authors (Bueno & Vieira, 2014; Seabra & Seidl de Moura, 2011; Vieira et al., 2014) have highlighted. The father became more participative in children’s raising; instead of the distribution of specific complementary roles, a new ideal of co-parenthood arises. In this ideal, both parents share responsibilities and tasks regarding financial, domestic and children-care-taking domains in a more egalitarian way, resulting in the dilution of workload based solely on gender (Dessen & Oliveira, 2013; Meteyer & Perry-Jenkins, 2010; Seabra & Seidl de Moura, 2011).

According to Dessen and Oliveira (2013) and Vieira et al. (2014), the increase of father’s participation in daily activities related to the children seems to strengthen a secure-basis relationship with the father, indicating that the experience with the care may facilitate the way that the parents interpret and respond to the children’s signs. It is understood that as the child grows, his/her social competence may be influenced by the positive paternal involvement, acting as a protection and development factor.

In relation to this topic, Silva and Piccinini (2007) carried out a study with three fathers, married with the mother of their children aging up to two years – two girls and one boy. The study aimed at understanding the fathers’ feelings on paternity and their involvement with their child. The results showed that the fathers had considerable satisfaction with paternity, recognizing the importance of their participation in the children’s development. As for their participation in the children’s daily lives, they reported that it should be higher, as for them, the little participation of fathers in their children’s routine would generate a conflict between real and ideal paternity. The authors also highlight that the interaction is the aspect of paternal involvement that most benefits the child’s development in the most effective way; on the other hand, the accessibility and the responsibility also affects the fathers, even though it is done in an indirect way, by means of the kind of relationship occurring between the father and the mother.

Considering those facts, it is also important to remark that, in spite of the increase of studies with paternal participation in the last decades, some topics are not commonly discussed in studies that have the father as a participant. Important subjects referring to paternal commitment, to fathers’ role and to differences between the “real” and the “ideal” father have been highlighted. However, there are only few studies that aim at the identification of the knowledge and the perceptions that father has on child development (Braz, Dessen, & Silva, 2005; Seabra & Seidl de Moura, 2011).

Facing this reality, this study aimed at analyzing the parental conceptions on the development of three-year-old babies, and verifying what aspects that mothers and fathers consider important to the development in this phase.

Method

Participants: 20 mothers and 20 fathers of three-year-old babies. Mothers’ ages varied from 20 and 36 years, with average 28.9 (SD=4.91). Among the mothers, 13 had education up to complete graduation; five of them were college dropouts and two had studied only until complete high school. Fathers’ ages varied from 23 and 35 years, with average 30.25 (SD=4.12). On their education, 12 of them had finished graduation, six were college dropouts and two of them had finished only high school. As for the number

of children, 14 couples have only one child, and six couples have two children. All the babies were born at term and presented typical development. Ten of them are boys and ten of them are girls.

Instruments: We have used a sociodemographic questionnaire, in order to know the parents' and babies' characteristics, and an interview about the parental conception on the global development of the child and the interactions developed.

Procedures for data collection: firstly, the project was submitted to the proper Research Ethics Committee. After the Committee approved it, the data started to be collected. The participants were defined at random, being indicated, at first, by people acquainted with the researchers and by the participants themselves. Therefore, by means of indications, the first author contacted the parents, showing the aims of the study, and, once they agreed to participate of the study, they were required to sign a Term of Free and Clarified Consent. All the ethical principles established by the Resolution 466/12 of CONEP/MS were respected. The interviews were carried out at the home of the participants.

Procedures for data analysis: firstly, the separation of the sociodemographic data was carried out. Regarding the interviews, they were transcribed complete and literally; after that, a fluent reading was carried out and the participants' answers were organized. Letter M followed by a number, was used to identify the speech of each mother. Letter P (which stands for "pai", Portuguese word for "father"), followed by a number, was used to identify the speech of each father. Then the content was analyzed, by following the categorization general guidelines given by Bardin (1977/2002). The data regarding the frequency of each answer among the participants were also raised, in order to identify which aspects were mentioned by most part of parents.

Results and discussion

The analysis of the data concerning the parental conceptions on child development allowed the elaboration of five thematic categories, according to the content of the questions presented and of the participants' speeches. The categories found were: 1) Description of the current development of the baby; 2) Child behavior that most calls parents' attention; 3) Child's behavior that parents have more difficulty to deal with; 4) Reasons that are attributed to child behavior; and 5) Aspects boosting child development. Each category is exposed and discussed as follows.

The first theme presented by the parents was the description of the current development of the baby. When the participants were required to describe the current development of their babies (at the age of three months), they reported motor, sociocommunicative, cognitive and emotional characteristics, and general aspects of the evaluation of the child development.

Most mothers (13) and many fathers (8) reported general motor advances, such as the development of muscle tone and the increase of body movement, especially in response to the interactions established:

In relation to motor skills, he is evolving, I've been putting him with his belly down, then he is getting his backbone harder, he is starting to move his body forward, his head is getting like this [up] (M17);

Motor, I think he is like this, a little child, like, for his age, very well developed, because he, like, reacts well to stimuli. He makes gestures with the arms, with the legs, so when I'm playing with him, he likes to keep kicking with the legs, so that part is well developed (P13).

The fact that more mothers have mentioned this subject may be related to the observations that they make during the time that they stay with the babies, which, in general, is longer than the time spent by the fathers with their children in the first three months (Meteyer & Perry-Jenkins, 2010; Piccinini et al., 2012). However, considering the fathers' report on this aspect, it is important to mention that when they notice that the baby is "firmer", it is possible that they consider it as a facilitator for dealing with the baby.

Regarding this, Castoldi et al. (2014) and Krob et al. (2009) concluded that motor acquisitions tend to increase paternal commitment and facilitate the building of the father-baby tie. Besides that, the perceptions of fathers and mothers on the babies' movements in response to the interaction or to the frolics and on the child's interest in taking objects is an essential factor for didactic interaction. Similar data were found by Krob and co-workers (2009) in a study carried out with parents of babies aging between 2 and 3 months. The most active responses of the babies are able to cause positive feelings on parents and provide the quality of the interactive episodes (Lopes et al., 2009).

Half of the mothers (10) talked specifically about the babies' abilities to take objects. Four of them said that the babies try to take objects, but they still cannot do it. Six of them mentioned that their babies already have developed this ability. Regarding this topic, two fathers reported that the babies already try to take the objects, but still are not able to. Two mentioned that their babies have already developed this ability. *"She moves the hands, trying to grab things."* (M19); *"[The baby] Already grabs some things, already puts things in the mouth."* (P17). In the reports about these new motor acquisitions, it can be highlighted the relation of the baby with the environment, marked by behaviors of observation, manipulation and exploration of the objects found in their environment (Brazelton, 1994).

In sociocommunicative terms, four fathers mentioned the general communicative ability: *"In this communicative aspect, he interacts well, in relation to it I think he is well developed in this aspect"* (P13). The emissions of sounds as one of the main forms of child initial communication were mentioned by seven mothers and seven fathers:

Babbling is something that nobody understands, but it's already a... she already makes some voice noises. Sometimes we put her on the stroller and go do something, I leave her there playing to do something, she, when I stay away for too long, starts complaining soon, 'eeeeeee', shouting, calling me back (M14).

He interacts a lot with us, I start talking to him, right in the morning, I start talking, he starts to grumble in his own language, then I start to imitate him; the more I imitate him the more he extends that conversation, uh? So, this I always notice, he has been doing it (P20).

The vocalizations emitted by the babies in this phase are simple, only with vowels, and they are not called "babbling" yet. From them, the babies provide signs so that mothers and fathers interpret their child behavior, according to the context, and provide communicative meanings to those behaviors (Krob et al., 2009; Souza et al., 2014).

The smile was considered one of the sociocommunicative behaviors characteristic of the baby in the current phase, being mentioned by seven mothers and seven fathers: *"Only being some days old she responded to our smile, we smiled at her and she responded"* (M15). The smile, at the age of three months may be used as a response to human voice, and is one of the most effective ways for the baby to communicate. It can be understood as a sign that facilitates the closeness with the caregivers, and is used to keep the interactions (Mendes & Seidl de Moura, 2009; Souza et al., 2014). Similar results were found by Florentino (2009), in a research in which mothers described the smile as the main communicative act from the baby during interactive situations. Krob et al. (2009) also have found results like that, in a study in which fathers mentioned the smile as a stimulus for the exchanges between father and child.

The look, mentioned by one mother and one father, and the gestures, mentioned by one father, were presented as other forms of communication. It is also important to remark that, in spite of the fact that the participants have highlighted important sociocommunicative behaviors, these data differ partially from most studies on this topic, in which crying is presented as the most frequent communicative behavior, especially in the first months (Andrade et al., 2014; Souza et al., 2014). However, this data does not mean that the parents do not consider crying as a baby's communicative behavior; they just did not mention it at the specific moment of the research.

In relation to the cognitive dimension, some mothers (5) and some fathers (8) said that from the age of three months, they noticed their babies more attentive to the world where they live, such as the reports that follow: *"I think she is more, like, paying more attention to the world, she notices that she is here now,*

she pays more attention to things ... So I think that she is more, uh, more open to the world" (M1). "Especially in the past month, he grew up a lot, not only responding when you stimulate him and so on, but he also interacts with the world by himself" (P4).

In relation to cognitive advances, the babies' ability to recognize their closer caregivers was mentioned by eight mothers and two fathers: "He can identify, identify us, identify people who are closer to him, when we get closer to take him, he already smiles to provide a response, and he recognizes us when he listens to our voice." (M20). Five mothers and four fathers reported that their babies pay attention to the television and seem to prefer colorful objects, such as in the example below:

In relation to the cognitive aspect, he notices things quickly, you know. If we are talking and the TV is turned on, he turns to it quickly and keeps looking. Bright colors, anything, if he sees someone's blouse, he stops and feels like taking it (P12).

These reports are in agreement with what Brazelton (1994) calls "cognitive awakening", period between 3 and 4 months of life, when the child presents an awareness awakening, characterized by a boost on the cognitive development. Generally, babies in this period become more attentive to new toys, colorful objects or television. Another typical ability of this phase is the fact that the baby can distinguish his/her parents from strange people, recognizing and interacting with them in a different way from the way he/she does with the mother and father. These new acquisitions, especially the ones regarding the recognition of parents, seem to provoke positive parental feelings (Brazelton, 1994; Krob et al., 2009).

Three mothers and one father said that their children already follow the actions of their caregivers with the eyes: "Very smart, he pays a lot of attention, you pass and he keeps looking, searching ... Like, now I can see him evolving well, in the past you passed and he kept stuck. Now, if you pass in front of him, he will look, he will keep searching" (P5). Three mothers and two fathers highlighted emotional and affective aspects of their children: "Very affectionate." (M4); "He is very affectionate, showing affection to the parents, to the sister, especially to the sister" (P16).

When comparing their children to others, six mothers and four fathers said that they believe that their children are at a more advanced development phase, such as in the report:

I think he is very advanced for his age... I think he, like I told you, I think he is more advanced, because I don't see other children in the same phase doing what he does. Sometimes people say 'you're doting', but no, it's cause we research a lot, we see, there are many children at the same age, like three friends of him, I compare lot to other kids and I notice he is very smart (M10).

Regarding the positive evaluation from the parents in relation to their children's development, Krob et al. (2009) claim that it is common for parents to highlight the things that they consider their children's best. Ribas Jr., Seidl de Moura and Bornstein (2007) claim that parents' knowledge is constantly used to evaluate the babies' behavior and development and to guide daily decisions towards the way that they will bring up their children. From parents' knowledge and understanding about child development, they create expectations in relation to the behaviors that the babies will be able to have at a certain age, and then, evaluate their performance.

The second thematic category refers to the child behavior that most calls parents' attention in a positive way. The main characteristics considered positive were related to sociocommunicative abilities, understood by the parents as communication tries from the baby, mentioned by 13 mothers and nine fathers: "The behavior that most calls my attention in a positive way is the fact that he is 'talkative'. I like this characteristic of him, he 'talks' a lot, to everyone" (M17). These behaviors are the ones that most call parents' attention because they offer more and better possibilities for commitment and interaction between parents and baby. The baby's communication tries evidence their active position in the didactic relations, and the parents tend to be happier and more satisfied when they notice that the baby, somehow, responds to the behaviors directed to him/her (Souza et al., 2014; Krob et al., 2009; Piccinini et al., 2012).

After that, cognitive abilities were cited, mentioned by four mothers and four fathers, such as, for example, recognizing the parents: "It's the fact that she recognizes us, I think it is the best part" (M1).

Krob et al. (2009) also concluded that the baby recognizing the caregivers is an ability that calls parents' attention and contributes to the interactions.

Five mothers and three fathers mentioned temperament characteristics: *"Many things call my attention positively, but, like, she is calm, when she's with me she's a calm child"* (M18). In relation to this, the literature points out that parents tend to emphasize their children's positive characteristics, mainly referring to their virtue rather than their negative traits (Krob et al., 2009; Seidl de Moura et al., 2013). These results are important, for when children are recognized by their parents as having positive temperament traits, they tend to provoke more parental responsiveness (Melchiori, Biasoli, Alves, Souza, & Bugliani, 2007).

Malhado and Alvarenga (2012), in a research carried out with 28 pairs of mother-baby, noticed that there is a co-relation between child behavior and maternal enabling actions. According to the results found by those authors, the more the baby's behavior was considered easy-going until the age of 8 months, the higher was the number of maternal enabling actions identified in the second period of the investigations, when babies were 18 months old.

Motor skills are aspects that also call the attention of four mothers and two fathers: *"What calls my attention is that she is very firm for a three-month-old, she already wants to sit down by herself, wants to stand up by herself"* (M9).

The third thematic category refers to behaviors that the parents have difficulties to deal with. Difficulties to cope with crying/tantrums were mentioned by four mothers and by most fathers. (11): *"He doesn't cry much, he doesn't cry frequently, but when he cries heavily and I don't know how to calm him down I feel a little despaired, my first child, you know?"* (M4); *"When she cries, like, she cries so loudly, we feel kind of distressed, even though you are a father, son on, but we get a little worried"* (P14).

Because of the time spent with the child and because of the previous experience, it is possible that mothers can differ the cry of the baby faster, and, identifying the reason for the discomfort, they can supply his/her necessities efficiently. The fathers, however, for spending shorter time with the child and for being less involved to take care of him/her, have more difficulties to identify the reasons why the baby is crying. Similar results were found by Castoldi and co-workers (2014), in a study in which parents report having difficulties to be involved with child care, particularly when the baby cried. In a research carried out by Piccinini et al. (2012), most participants expressed having difficulties and/or a feeling of incompetence facing the care of the baby, specially difficulties to soothe the crying baby and make him/her sleep. Some fathers, in that study, mentioned lack of patience or motivation to assist the baby, and, concomitantly, feelings of inexperience and inadequacy.

The difficulty to make the baby sleep was highlighted by some mothers (5) and some fathers (4):

Because when she was a baby, she would be breastfed and sleep. Now she is smarter, so she is giving us a little hard time, so for me it's the hardest, the sleeping time, she makes me a bit angry. Some days I give him the baby and say: "stay with her a little, cause I have... let me go take a breath before I come back" (M1).

Difficulties concerning temperamental aspects of their babies were reported by three mothers: *"More difficulty, I believe that she is stressed out, like, when changing her clothes, she... I realize she will have a stronger personality than my other daughter's"* (M16). When negative temperamental traits are expressed, difficulties to deal with baby care are also evidenced (Krob et al., 2009). Difficulties to handle health issues of their babies, such as reflux crises, for example, were mentioned by one mother and one father, and they are probably related to specific characteristics of their children.

The parents also provided answers about what are the positive and the negative characteristics that they would attribute to their children, topic of the fourth category. In this aspect, six mothers and ten fathers highlighted the biological factors that control the child development: *"I think our baby took over the grandfathers, one of them is a politician and the other is too talkative"* (M17); *"I think it's really instinctive, I doubt it's tantrum, like people say"* (P5).

Ten mothers and two fathers claimed that environmental factors, such as stimuli, characteristics of the parent's relationship among themselves and with the baby, and the routine are responsible for determining the characteristics mentioned about their children:

I think it's because we stimulate her, since she was a little baby we have always been talking to her, stimulating. I try to be always stimulating her, I don't stay with her like this, only carrying her so she doesn't cry, I try to always interact with her (M2).

Two mothers and four fathers attributed the evolvement of the child development to interactionist aspects, which they consider as being environmental and biological factors.

The fifth thematic category refers to aspects that parents consider important to boost child development. Most of them, in both groups, answered that the stimuli are essential, idea that seems to contradict the answer of half of parents mentioned in the former category. If the stimuli are the most important factors to boost baby's development, it can be understood that they consider that the acquisition of new abilities is also related to environmental factors. This way, it is implied that many participants, even without verbalizing it clearly, have an interactionist view of development, when highlighting biological aspects, but, concomitantly, emphasizing the importance of stimulation.

Among the 20 participants, 19 mothers and 18 fathers mentioned many elements as possible stimuli, such as the presence of parents, varied ways to play with the baby, care affection and love expressions, conversations, care, teachings. It was illustrated in many parts of the interview, such as:

Stimulus, incentive. I try to stimulate her to take something, even though she is not able to, uh, always stimulating... I talk a lot to her, so much that she keeps trying to talk, uh, yawning, feeling like saying something. I talk a lot to her, talk to the dolls, saying the color of the dolls, saying they are dolls (M2).

In a certain way, we stimulate him, we talk to him. I consider affection, affection, important,, The more affection, love, we give, I realize from my other son who is older, the more the child evolves... paying attention to him stimulates his intelligence, uh? The get very smart (P20).

Regarding this topic, all the participants in the study of Souza et al. (2014), who were mothers of babies aging up to 3 months, emphasized the stimuli and the care as the main boosters of child development. Half of mothers believes that the good child development is closely related to the affection that they offer the baby. Other mothers noticed that the way that they take care of the baby (feeding, bathing, etc.) or the way that they raise the baby is the factor that stimulates his/her development. It could be verified, considering the speeches of the participants of the present study, that the parents recognize themselves as agents boosting child development.

The results found also point out that, in general, the fathers, and specially the mothers, notice and highlight aspects characteristic of the phase in which their babies are. These data refer to the idea of responsivity, in which the parents, interpreting the child's behavior adequately, respond in an effective and sensitive way to the demands and behavior of the baby. According to Alvarenga, Machado and Lins (2014), the responsivity may be considered a variable that can predict children's acquisition of new abilities and autonomy.

Final considerations

This study aimed at analyzing the parental conceptions on babies at the age of three months and verifying which aspects fathers and mothers consider important to boost development in this phase. The results showed that mothers and fathers notice that the three-month-old baby is turning from a passiveness state to a state with more activity, in motor, sociocommunicative and cognitive terms. Concerning the new motor and cognitive acquisitions, the baby's relation with the environment can be highlighted. It is marked by behaviors that include observation, manipulation and exploration of the objects in the environment.

In sociocommunicative dimension, the emission of sounds and the smile were highlighted by the parental reports. These behaviors seem to facilitate the interaction between the baby and his/her caregiver, once mothers and fathers consider their children's expressions as positive actions, which favor communication. This way, the sociocommunicative aspects were frequent when mothers and fathers

described their children's behaviors that most positively called their attention. Among the main difficulties found, mothers and fathers mentioned difficulties to deal with the cry of the baby and to make him/her sleep. As for the aspects boosting child development, most participants highlighted the stimuli, presenting conceptions that recognize the parents themselves as having an essential role for providing a healthy development for their children.

We consider that this research contributes to the field of study on initial development, for identifying how mothers and fathers understand the child development and for showing elements that can contribute to the elaboration of actions of parental advising. As for the study limitations, we believe that the data obtained cannot be generalized, considering the number of participants and the peculiarities of the specific context. Besides that, the fact that the couples were volunteers, and therefore willing to talk about their experiences, makes it possible to imply the idea that they were parents who value parenthood and their participation in child development. Our data may illustrate only the ideas of a certain group of parents, subjected to similar sociodemographic characteristics, such as socioeconomic and educational level.

It is suggested that further longitudinal studies are carried out, in order to analyze how the conceptions are characterized as the child grows up, influenced by their new acquisitions. It is also proposed that researches are conducted in other contexts, including, for example, parents of different socioeconomic levels and of urban and non-urban contexts.

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