

Children, Families, and Early Childhood Educators: A Study on Social Confinement in Portugal

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a study about the interaction between children aged between 3 and 6 years and their families with early childhood education institutions in Portugal during social confinement due to the pandemic by COVID-19. Data collection took place during 2020 and early 2021 and, through the application of a questionnaire survey, included a universe of 490 respondent families. Data collected from the families focused on the structure and family organization; the routines implemented by the family in children's daily life; the activities valued/promoted by parents during this period; the interactions with early childhood educators; the existing difficulties and constraints. Among the various aspects analysed, the results showed a concern for maintaining interaction between the early years settings, children and families, and there was a regular interaction at a distance on the part. There was a concern for an adequate intervention at a distance that would fulfill family needs, taking place at regular and stable moments. For most families, proposals made by schools were meaningful for the children, reflecting the importance they attached to the role of the early childhood educator, even at a distance. Many families expressed that the children seemed to be adapting to a new routine, even though they missed school, their peers, and careers.

Keywords: childhood, educational intervention, families, social confinement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The pandemic time for COVID-19 brought enormous social and educational challenges. At various times, families had to retreat to prevent further spread of the virus, which caused children to leave educational institutions to be at home. Early years settings, however, although physically closed, remained active. The data from the Observatory for the Future of Early Childhood Education in the report I3 - Intervention, Interaction and Childhood (Pequito *et al.*, 2020) reflect that 99% of the surveyed institutions promoted distance activities and interacted with children and families during these challenging times.

In this context, the child was faced with a change in routine

and the estrangement from her peers and from some adults with whom she lived and interacted. This scenario brought about a different reality, which needs to be known. In fact, "we still know little about the impacts of all this on the lives of all people and our society" (Galian, *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). This is a concern of educational institutions, namely early childhood education settings and, also, higher education institutions for the training of early childhood educator that seek to prepare professionals for a better response to contemporary problems. Therefore, a study was developed focusing on the reality of children between 3 and 6 years old and their families, while socially distant and in the context of their relationship with early childhood institutions. This research, developed at the Observatory for the Future of Early Childhood Education, involved the application of a

questionnaire survey with electronic dissemination and collected data from 490 families in periods of social confinement, due to the pandemic by COVID-19, in Portugal, between 2020 and early 2021.

II. CHALLENGES FOR A NEW FAMILY REALITY

Family is the first context that welcomes a child and the main group that involves her. It is where the child builds the first moments of trust and integrity with itself. Family environment is a familiar context, and part of her daily life. Normally offers confidence for exploration and discovery with flexibility and ease.

Social confinement was a challenging and difficult reality for children and, especially for their families, as many are left “(...) without knowing exactly what to do and how to help children and adolescents and, simultaneously, respond to work demands and family logistics” (Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses, 2020a, p. 3). The constraints experienced by families with young children during confinement could influence children’s learning process and development, as difficult economic situations and parental stress negatively affect students’ performance and academic achievement (Sanz *et al.*, 2020, p.16–17). Therefore, it is relevant to know the challenges these families faced during this time, with the purpose of establishing “(...) a healthy and participatory relationship between preschool and family (...)” that could be harmonious and supportive for the child (APEI-Portuguese association for early childhood education educators, 2020, p.15).

Social changes resulting from technological development have brought many positive aspects, such as, for example, the ease of talking and communicating with people regardless of the distance. This new challenge, however, experienced by families has led to a reorganisation of routines, children’s education, and the articulation between professional and family demands (Linhares & Enumo, 2020; Magalhães *et al.*, 2020). A study developed by Magalhães *et al.* (2020) on the social impact of the pandemic showed that one of the greatest challenges experienced by families with young children was the change in the usual routines, which were marked by the difficulty in responding to professional tasks and caring for children. In addition to this, families also highlighted the concern regarding their children’s educational process, as “(...) they express pedagogical concern for children confinement in home-private would affect relationships beyond those of the home (...)” (p. 50). Also, family members’ lack of time is an important issue to reflect upon, since it is “a notorious characteristic of the current daily life” (Araújo Borges, 2009, p. 122).

Social confinement for families was a time where “(...) demands multiply, stress increases and emotions can be extreme (...)” (Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses, 2020b, p. 4). In this situation, early childhood educators emerged as a support person for children, but also families through the establishment of a communication that tried to make them “(...) feel accepted, welcomed, listened to and respected in their concerns, expectations and proposals (...)” (Sarmento & Bento, 2020, p. 5). The support provided by educational settings and the interaction with families was essential to

ensure the continuity of children’s learning (Tavares *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, the principle that “education cannot stop” (Guizzo, *et al.*, 2020, p. 4) supported the idea of maintaining a distance intervention developed in many contexts around the world, from Early Years Foundation Stage to Higher Education. Thus, understanding parent’s concerns and perspectives about this difficult period is essential, since in this process of interaction at a distance parent’s role is more important than ever. They are called to be the facilitators of their children’s learning (Col, 2020, p. 10).

In fact, the interaction and communication established between the early childhood educator and families with young children has been shown to promote the development of educational activities, thus contributing to well-being (Reimers & Schleicher 2020). In the same perspective, UNICEF (2020, p. 2) argues that education provides protection and reduces the psychosocial repercussions of a crisis by offering a sense of normality, stability, and hope. The early childhood educator, in this pandemic period, established the “(...) bridge between school and families (...)” and kept “(...) parents informed about what they can do to support their children, and support them to do so” (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020, p. 16). In this sense, the educator’s support was to help families in the development of the children’s learning process. Maintaining the daily routine made children know “(...) what to count on” and adapted better to this new situation (Direção Geral da Saúde-Government board of health, 2020, p. 8). Having the possibility to interact with other children at a distance, it was up to the family, together with the early childhood educator, to create a routine that would allow children “(...) to continue to grow in a different environment and out of their daily routine, but without invading the family space and the way each one lives its own isolation (...)” (Sindicato dos Professores do Norte- Northern teachers’ union, 2020, p. 7). Children’s daily routine and their families should include different moments, technologically mediated, such as, for example, time for learning proposals and time for regular contact with other people (family, friends, educators, etc.) (Direção Geral da Saúde, 2020).

III. ADULT’S ROLE AND TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Early childhood educators have a very significant role in the child’s life and interactions. These professionals are responsible for providing learning experiences in a process that takes place continuously and dynamically. He is often a mediator on play contexts, “since play enables one of the most significant activities for learning.” (Man, 2009, p. 23). From this perspective, children who normally “establish affirmative mutual relationships with their parents and nannies or early childhood educators, gain from these relationships the courage they need to explore the world that exists beyond the mother” (Post & Hohmann, 2007, p. 32). The relationship that the child creates with the early childhood educator is a starting point for the child to learn and explore the world in a more secure and fearless way.

The importance of play and arts activities in the child’s daily routine during social confinement should be

highlighted, as “one learns with a spinning top rolling on the ground, one learns by listening to a story told by a classmate or an author, one learns in a thousand different ways (...)” (Gomes *et al.*, 2020, p. 10). “The deprivation of playing and being active in childhood may lead to a lower development of important areas of the prefrontal cortex and hinder the construction of a pro-social brain, essential, among other things, for proper decision-making” (Neto, 2020, p.40). Thus, during confinement it was important for families with young children to create a daily routine marked by moments of sharing (opinions, ideas, feelings) and the development of “(...) creative and pleasurable activities” (Brites *et al.*, 2020, p. 5). In addition, it was essential to maintain contact between the educational settings and families “(...) to receive guidance, negotiate deadlines or share difficulties, in order to find alternative strategies” (Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses, 2020a, p. 7).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, educators and careers used different technological supports to maintain contact with their children and families. Contact with families and children involves “(...) building opportunities in digital platforms, for the dissemination of the work done by children/students, as well as encouraging the establishment of regular communications between educators and students and among students. In pre-school education (...) this aspect assumes particular importance” (Direção Geral de Educação-Government board of education, 2020, p. 7). In this sense, digital platforms have been the main mediation resource (Federação Nacional de Professores-National teachers’ federation, 2020).

With young children, the development of interaction at a distance implied the constant presence of the adult helping to use digital resources. In this context, it was up to families to ensure monitoring the child during activities and establish a mediation between the child and the early childhood educator (Pequito *et al.*, 2020). Thus, for this mediation to be possible, it was important for the early childhood educator to help families understand technologies as an aid to the development of their children’s skills (Dias & Brito, 2018).

In this context, educators and families of young children should seek to establish a network of continuous contact with each other, through the most varied technological means (Pequito *et al.*, 2020). The maintenance of this network by all those involved in this process is necessary and fundamental (Sarmiento & Bento, 2020). It is important to take into consideration that the long-term confinement and isolation of educational contexts may harm social networks that children build with others and affect their sense of belonging and general well-being. Access to the internet has provided a means for this contact to persist but presents pedagogical limitations that do not occur in face-to-face contexts (Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, 2020).

In short, to know the reality experienced by the children’s families during social confinement and understand that the continuity of the children’s educational process during this time is only possible if educators/educators and families establish an interaction to support, cooperate and promote dialogue to meet the needs of all, and more specifically the children (APEI, 2020, p.15).

IV. METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The main goal of the study is to know how children between 3 and 6 years old and their families interacted with early childhood education institutions in Portugal during social confinement. Data collection had a national scope and took place during 2020 and early 2021. We wanted to know children’s family structure and organisation; family routines in children’s daily life; activities valued/promoted by parents during this time; interactions with early childhood educators; existing difficulties and constraints. The study had a quantitative nature and presupposed the collection of data in a disperse population in Portuguese territory. The extensive nature of the study implied that the questionnaire survey was the sole instrument.

The methodological design included dimensions and indicators that subsequently were converted into an electronic data collection tool. Ten dimensions of analysis were defined: characterization and family context; routines; use of technologies; family activities with the child; school in the child’s daily life; activities implemented by professionals; means used for the distance interaction; pedagogical issues.

The aim is thus to develop “(...) a study of a specific subject among a population, whose sample is determined in order to specify certain parameters.” (De Ketele & Roergiers, 1999, p. 35). This technique was chosen since it is “an integral part of a broader research, which provide feedback, in academically symbiotic processes” (Pereira & Ortigão, 2016, p. 1). Thus, the questionnaire survey is “a research technique that, through a set of questions, aims to elicit a series of individual discourses, interpret them and then generalise them to wider sets” (Dias, 1994, p. 5). In other words, Dias (1994) states that it is considered a developmental research practice to interpret individual people’s data to obtain a certain standard result. We are, however, aware of the methodological difficulty in generalising data in this study. With such a vast universe at national level, 490 completed surveys were validated, corresponding to the same number of families.

Having defined the electronic form as a means to collect data, a pre-test of the questionnaire was carried out. This consisted of sending the questionnaire by email to several people with similar characteristics to the public, to assess errors and improvements to be implemented, to detect any technical faults. The application of this pre-test allowed some questions to be rectified and the final version of the questionnaire to be drawn up. The questionnaire survey, in its final version, was sent to all the early childhood institutions in the country, using the “Carta Social-Portuguese online data base of educational and social institutions “database, requesting the survey to be forward to families of children aged between 3 and 6 years old. A total of 490 surveys were received and validated.

V. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Having in mind the need to control variables, we defined that the questionnaire survey should be completed by the person who accompanied the child during confinement. We found that the “Mother” was the person who was most responsible for completing the questionnaire. It represented 88% of the respondents (Fig. 1).

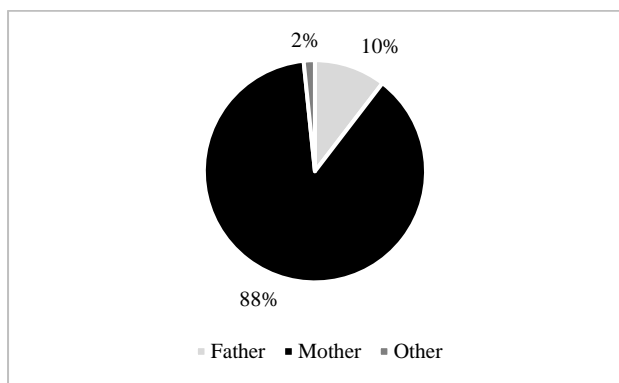


Fig. 1. Respondents (N=490).

Our choice of timing to collect data was related to the need to assess aspects that occurred during social confinement. For this reason, as the end of this time frame approached, it was the ideal moment for the respondent to be able to register, in a clearer way, families' perceptions.

Characterising the respondents, from the 490 surveys received, we noticed that at least 88% are mothers and 10% are fathers. The age range is mainly between 31 and 40 years old (58%). We also noticed that the academic qualifications register some diversity. Although a higher percentage (35%) has a degree, we can verify that 49% of the respondents have higher education (Graduates, Masters, and Phd.), while those who do not have this qualification are 44%.

Children's age was registered by 346 individuals. We noticed that the highest number of answers is centred on 4, 5 and 6 years old. We can also infer that this aspect may be related to the fact that a greater number of distance activities are implemented with older children and less with toddlers, up to 3 years old. We realize, however, that the distribution by age assumes a percentage aligned with the Portuguese reality: "243 719 children enrolled in 2018/2019, points to the existence of 29.6% with 3 years old, 32.5% with 4 years old, 33.5% with 5 years old and 4.4% with 6 years old or more" (CNE, 2020, p.110).

Regarding the type of schools that children attend, the sample shows a clear difference compared to the national reality. The study "State of Education 2019," reveals that "in 2018/2019, there were 5796 offers for preschool education-3545 (61.2%) in public establishments and 2251 (38.8%) in establishments of a private nature" (CNE, 2020, p. 109). Our sample presents most children as belonging to a private institution. It is possible that most interactions between children and early childhood educators occur within private schools' settings.

During social confinement period, children were mainly with their family nucleus. In some cases, children cohabited with siblings and some with grandparents. We noticed that, for the most part (96%), family context remained unchanged before and during the return from confinement. Only 4% of children changed the family nucleus with which they live.

A. Routines

It was expected that social confinement period, due to its length and limitation of actions in child's daily life, would create changes in routines. We wanted to understand this aspect. A very expressive percentage of 92% registered that there were changes in the child's routine. Closure of early

years schools, and the change to teleworking promotes considerable changes in the family organisation. We have already seen in the theoretical framework that parents assume, in this context, the role of learning facilitators (COL, 2020, p. 10). Asking families for a more specific and concrete data on the main changes in child's routine during social confinement (Fig. 2), it was possible to perceive that the highest percentages of answers focused on: getting up later, requesting more attention from adults, watching more television, having more time to play, and going to bed later.

Data also reflected families' concern about the child's resting routine. Although only 8% stated that there were changes in the child's sleep, 56% said that children got up later and 41% also went to bed later. On the other hand, television is assumed as a child's partner, bearing in mind that 49% of children watched more television than before pandemic, and 5% of them even state that they monopolised this resource at home.

B. Family Activities

Throughout social confinement, 94% of families promoted activities with children, a particularly important aspect adapting to a new routine and assuming the perspective that children can maintain a routine of orientated activities "with their own carers, in a completely familiar space (their homes), although in a flexible, negotiable time" (Guizzo et al., 2020, p.7). The activities promoted at home were very diverse and most of them were paintings, drawings, and other related to arts (62.7%). Board games (25.8%), physical exercise (19.1%), cooking (13.4%) and reading and storytelling (12.6%) were also frequently mentioned.

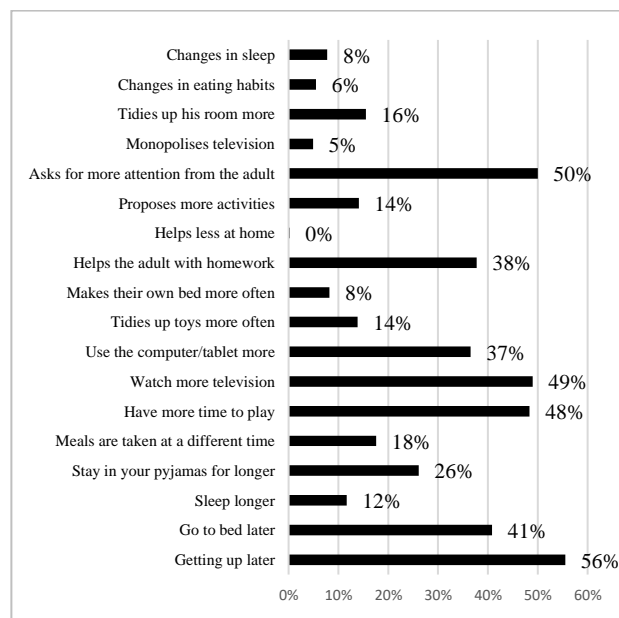


Fig. 2. Changes in children's routines during social confinement (N=490).

Activities proposed by early childhood educators were mentioned by 4.3% of families, which allowed us to understand that, according to the adult who accompanies the child, they were not the main activities at home. 80% stated that children autonomously proposed activities to do with adults or other children, while 20% stated that they were not autonomous enough (Fig. 3).

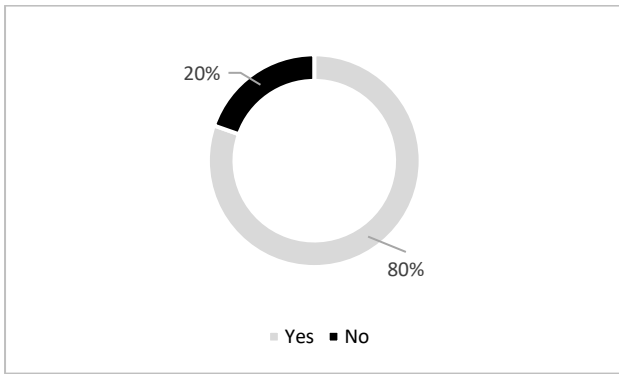


Fig. 3. Children that proposed activities during social confinement (N=490).

Regarding activities proposed by children, most frequently mentioned are paintings, drawings, and other related to arts (19.8%), which coincides with the activities most carried out at home (62.7%). Playing hide-and-seek, catch or statues game (16.3%), playing ball (12.5%) and cooking (12.5%) are among the activities most requested by children, which reveal the need for movement and access to wider spaces. Other activities were also mentioned such as “reading and telling stories” (9.7%), “playing make-believe” (8.7%), “physical exercise” (7.1%), “riding a bicycle” (7.6%), “constructions” (blocks and bricks) (6.9%), “dancing” (6.6%), “puzzles” (5.9%) and “various games” (boards, cards) (5.3%).

Regarding the type of games children propose, the respondents mainly mentioned constructions (76.12%). Memory games (45.1%), computer games (36.94%), reasoning games (30.82%), board games (29.18%) and puzzles (21.22%) were frequently mentioned. We realized that family gaming is recurrent, with 89% of respondents stating that there are moments for family gaming. Specifically, 55.5% of the adult respondent’s stated that families have daily moments to play together, 42.4% once a week, 1.6% every other week and 0.5% only once a month (see Fig. 4). These data show a concern from a relevant number of families to provide daily joint play times with their children.

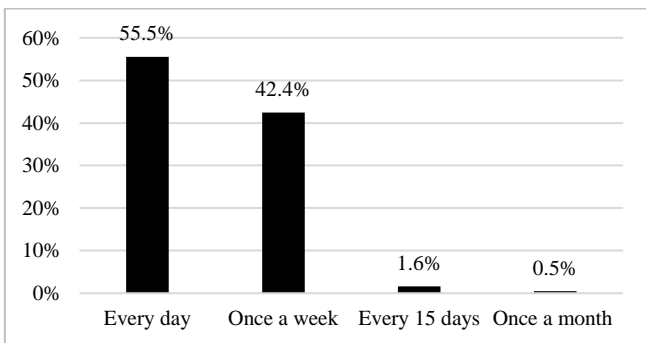


Fig. 4. Frequency of family play moments during the social confinement (N=436).

C. Early Years Schools in the Child’s Day-to-Day Life at Home

While being at home, a significant number of children remember schools. Most children (86.7%) seem to remember activities that took place in school and 86.3% remember or talk about their classmates, which reflects the importance of these settings in the child’s life (Fig. 5). In addition, an

important fact is that 62.2% of children asked if they could return to school during social confinement.

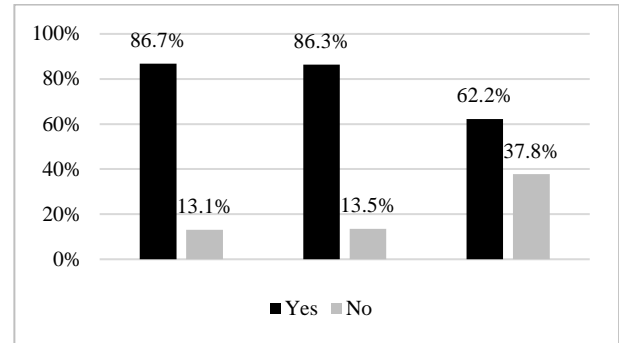


Fig. 5. Children’s references to early years schools during the social confinement (N=490).

Regarding children’s opinion about social confinement and consequent separation from school, according to the adults accompanying them, they asked mainly for their friends (52%), showing a desire to socialize with their peers, but also asked for their early childhood educators (45.7%) and other careers. It is curious to note that a group of children, 37.3%, declared they liked school but preferred to stay at home, and 36.5% said they missed it and recreated moments that they usually lived in early childhood settings (Fig. 6). We also noticed the existence of other contexts such as, for example, children asking to contact school (3.1%) or crying and asking to return (1.8%). Some families mentioned that the child does not express any type of feelings or opinion (9.6%) on these issues.

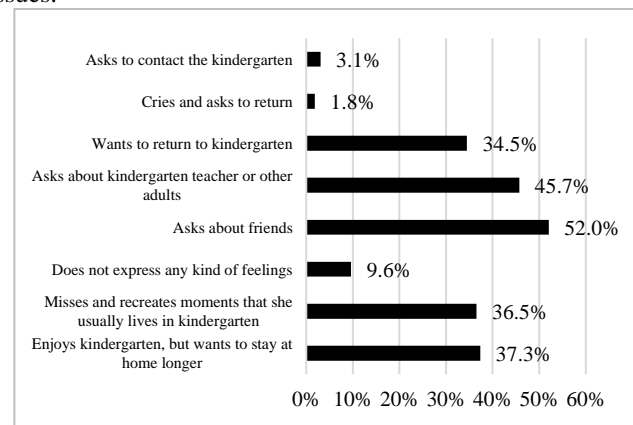


Fig. 6. Main feelings expressed by children during social confinement (N=490).

Families’ perspective on how children were living social confinement, it was perceptible to find more answers stating that children have shown to be well (20.7%), happy (8.5%), calm (7.7%), indifferent or conformed (5.9%), despite missing school (14%).

In general, these answers allow us to perceive that, although children demonstrate missing school, their peers, and adults, they seemed to be adapting to a new routine. More concretely, the adult accompanying the child states, for example:

“Positive, have fun, apart from the bit about having to be at home more. Not being able to be with family is the hardest!!! “

“Quietly and playfully, although claiming a lot of attention from adults. Has an older brother 5 years old and feels very keen to play with children of the same age and girls.”

“My son is experiencing this period very well as it has been explained to him why he is not going to day-care and about the virus. As there is a playground whenever the weather is nice, he spends his time there playing with his toys riding his tricycle.”

“Very good adaptation and likes to be with his family all the time. He is happy. “

We have already noticed that a percentage of children (14%) who seem to reveal that they miss school, are sad (4.8%), anxious (3%), impatient (3%), tired (1.1%) or afraid (0.7%). About this issue, adults register:

“He says he enjoys being with his mum and playing, but he misses school a lot.”

“He’s fine psychologically, but he misses the routine. “

“He is enjoying it as he is at home with his mother and sister and can play, but he says he misses his early childhood educator and friends a lot. “

“Very fussy about not being able to play wherever and however she wants.”

“He gets more restless because he can’t leave when he wants to.”

D. Activities Implemented by the Early Childhood Schools

According to the adult accompanying the child, activities proposed by early childhood educators only influenced 4.3% of families and had little influence on the family’s choice of activities. When questioned about whether educators develop activities at a distance during social confinement, we noticed very clear answers, with 94% of the respondents mentioning that children’s activities were supported by early years educators’ proposals. As regards children’s acceptance of activities at a distance, the majority reacted with enthusiasm (64%), however, 22% showed little enthusiasm and 14% were indifferent.

Data on activities implemented at a distance, synchronous or asynchronous, allowed us to see that the interaction between early childhood educators and children took place mostly in synchronous sessions (Fig. 7).

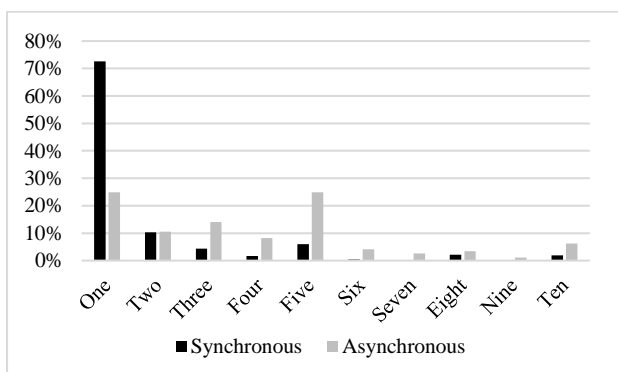


Fig. 7. Number of weekly synchronous and asynchronous moments (N=463).

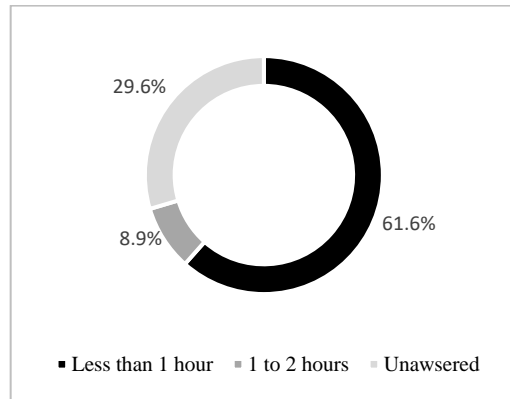


Fig. 8. Duration of synchronous sessions (N=463).

Despite this trend, there was also a positive perspective towards the relationship between the number of weekly activities and the type of communication. In other words, when early years educator organised activities once or twice a week, the choice seemed to focus on synchronous activities (83%), i.e., videoconferencing. When the choice was daily or more frequent, three (14%), four (8%) or five (25%) times a week, the tendency changed to asynchronous strategy without direct contact with the children (47%).

According to families’ perspectives, regarding the time early childhood educators were online with children in synchronous sessions, most professionals spent less than one hour in direct activity (61,6%), an aspect certainly related to age appropriateness, anticipating that children’s ability to concentrate at these ages was a considered factor (Fig. 8).

Still on synchronous sessions, some aspects deserve our attention. When asked about the existence of a fixed schedule for proposed activities. There seems to be no clear trend: 58% stated that there was a fixed schedule and 42% stated that there wasn’t.

About the adequacy of activities proposed by educators to family life, and children needs, there seemed to be an adequacy, either to the family routine, or to the needs of the children. These aspects are shown in clear percentages of 83% and 92% respectively. Although there may be a need for greater adaptation to the family life, most respondents affirmed that it was adequate (see Table I).

TABLE I: SYNCHRONOUS ACTIVITIES ADEQUACY TO FAMILY ROUTINE AND CHILDREN’S NEEDS

	Adequacy of the timetable to family routines (N=277)	Adequacy of the timetable to the children’s needs (N=383)
Yes	83%	92%
No	17%	8%

The existence of synchronous sessions with fixed and non-fixed timetables, left us some doubts as to the adequacy of the family and children’s needs. In this sense, by cross-referencing indicators, we realised what seemed to be expected: synchronous strategies with a fixed schedule and, very possibly developed on a regular basis, appeared, in general terms, to relate better to the family routine, as well as to the children’s needs (see Table II). On the other hand, synchronous activities without a fixed schedule, revealed to be less adequate to family routines according to respondents. However, the perception of a great adequacy with the

children’s needs remains.

TABLE II - ADEQUACY OF SYNCHRONOUS ACTIVITIES WITH AND WITHOUT FIXED TIMETABLE TO THE FAMILY ROUTINE AND CHILDREN’S NEEDS

	Adequacy of the timetable to family routines (N=277)		Adequacy of the timetable to the children’s needs (N=383)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Fixed hours	90%	10%	94%	6%
Non-fixed schedule	65%	35%	89%	11%

E. Pedagogical Issues

When questioned about activities implemented at a distance, we noticed that, from the families’ point of view, activities with a practical component, such as science, arts, physical activities, among others, were, to a large extent, most frequent. According to data, there seemed to be a great concern with the diversity of proposals and activities implemented/sent to families.

We wanted to understand the perspectives of adults on whether the change of context to distance learning influenced children’s development.

The perception of the families about the activities and their importance for the child, appeared to be consensual. A very significant majority of 94% said that the activities were significant for children, which also registers the importance that they attributed to the role of the early childhood educators at a distance. Regarding the enthusiasm of children towards activities at a distance, 36% declared they were not very enthusiastic or even indifferent. This data seemed to predict that activities might not effectively reach all children or, alternatively, did not capture their interest, and they might have found a greater interest in other activities at home.

Also related to educators’ proposals, the time taken to complete each activity, whether synchronous or asynchronous, varies from less than one hour to two hours (Fig. 9). Considering the autonomy and concentration ability of these children, as well as their characteristics, we can foresee a significant degree of dependence on the adult to carry out the activities. Therefore, we are not talking about the natural play of the child; we are referring specifically to activities organized and proposed by the adult.

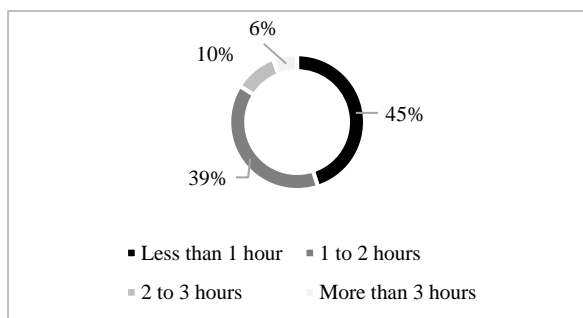


Fig. 9. Average time it takes children to complete tasks proposed at a distance by early childhood settings (N=463).

About autonomy, we noticed that they believed that activities did not seem to allow the promotion of the child’s autonomy. We know from family’s answers that, due to this

lack of autonomy to complete tasks/activities, an adult was the person at home that helped and supported children in the distance interaction. There were about 99% of those who did it. In addition, the adult supporting the child at home during social confinement did so for most part “as long as the child needed” (58%) (Fig. 10). Family is therefore a fundamental pillar in this process of supporting the child in collaboration with the school.

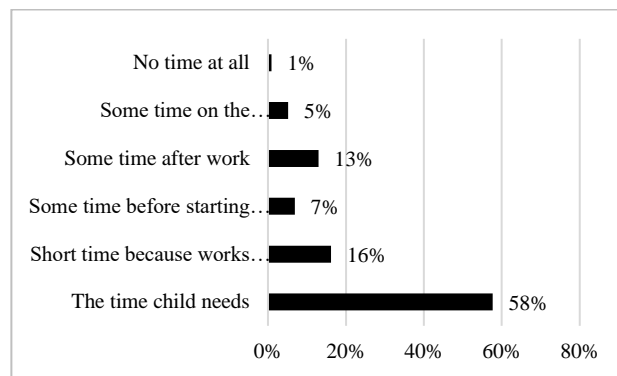


Fig. 10. Adult time available to support child during the social confinement (N=463).

F. Constraints Faced with the Activities

The quantitative nature of data raised the need to understand in a freer and more open way some family perspectives on the activities implemented by educators during social confinement. We perceive that many considered having no constraints (23%) (Fig. 11). On the other hand, contrary to data in the project I3-Intervention, Interaction and Childhood (Pequito *et al.*, 2020), in which educators’ constraints were related to training in technologies and equipment needs, families revealed a totally different reality: only 3% refer not having resources and 1% not having technological skills. The fact that the data collection instrument was digital excludes, to a large extent, the possible respondents who effectively lack resources and have gaps in training and technological literacy.

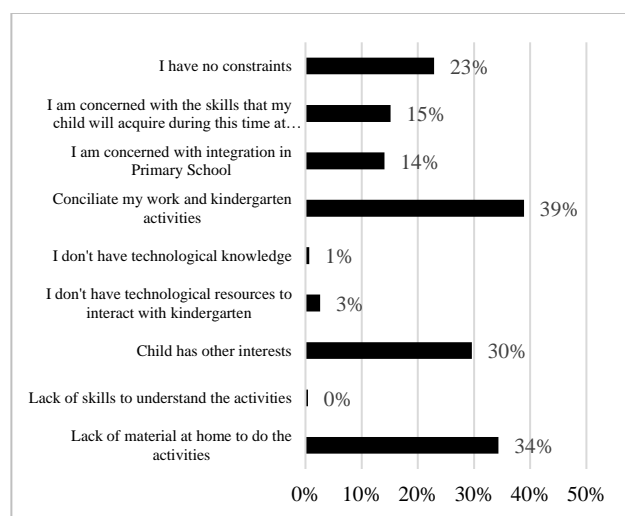


Fig. 11. Constraints about distance activities implemented by early childhood educators during social confinement (N=463).

It was notorious, however, the lack of material for activities at home, which probably meant that educators incorrectly assumed the existence of material at home. Two other concerns stand out as constraints. On the one hand, the

concern with children development soon entering primary school, particularly children with 5 years old. On the other hand, the lack of time, as most families have probably, combines children's activities with their own jobs, often teleworking.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The emergence of the pandemic, due to COVID-19, caused a sudden change in everyone's lives. This change, especially in families with young children, seemed to be particularly worrying when associated with the need to continue to work from home. The confinement of families in the same space, for such a long period of time, began to promote a change of routines and practices from the one existing in early years environments, usually spaces of privileged presence. At the same time, we know that many early childhood educators implemented activities with families and children in a diversified way (Pequito *et al.*, 2020). This study presents a portrait of family's perspectives who, at home, supported children in their distance interactions. We highlight some hints for reflection:

Who supports children at home: in data collection we asked who the person was supporting the child during social confinement. 88% of the respondents were registered as "mother." Such a disparity could reveal a family organization where the woman appeared to have played an important role on the direct support of the child during social confinement.

Early years settings that promote interactions with children at a distance: one of the aspects we already know from the study I3-Intervention, Interaction and Childhood (Pequito *et al.*, 2020) concern school's initiative to interact with children and families during social confinement. In this study, as we have already seen, it was recorded that 99% promoted activities at a distance. Considering that the criterion for filling in the questionnaire survey was related to the fact that children had interacted with early years settings, respondents registered as families with children attending private institutions. We infer that there is probably a higher tendency for private institutions to implement a distance interaction strategy.

Children's receptivity towards interaction at a distance: we confirm the existence of regular activities at a distance promoted by the early childhood educators. We noticed that, according to families, although 64% of the children show enthusiasm in participating in these activities, 36% show little enthusiasm or indifference (22% and 14% respectively). We do not know the real reasons for the existence of these values, but we understand that distance intervention presents itself as a strategy with limitations in comparison with the face-to-face reality. Aspects such as lack of equipment or material, concentration levels, development or autonomy, difficulty of supervision by families, among others, may be inhibiting aspects of greater interaction. In parallel, we must assume that, for many children, time at home is also a different time and may allow new events and contexts that are also challenging.

Child and early years schools: a consolidated relationship: the relationship between children and educators was quite visible in this study. We noticed that the references they make

to the adults and other children were recurrent. Together with families they recall, verbalize, and reproduce contexts and concrete situations. Therefore, it is important in future studies to reflect upon the relationship that children establish with schools, to value the manifestations/evidence of this relationship that occurred in the family environment.

Family activities: family activities have their own characteristics. It was possible to perceive that they did not depend, for the most part, on the proposals made by educators. Only for a very small percentage of respondents the activities sent home were implemented by the family. This aspect seemed to provide an important indicator for professionals in early childhood education regarding intervention at a distance. It is important that proposals made by schools could be appropriated by families and adapted to family contexts.

Suitability-synchronous or asynchronous? Families seemed to prefer fixed timetables for activities. In reality, when the early childhood educators organise activities once or twice a week, the choice seemed to be centred on synchronous strategies, i.e., videoconferencing. When the choice is more frequent, the tendency changes to asynchronous strategies without direct contact with the children. Families also refer that the synchronous activities with a fixed timetable and, very possibly developed on a regular basis, relate better to the family routine, as well as to children's needs. This aspect may be related to the need to maintain stable routines considered necessary for children's development and well-being.

We noticed a clear concern from educators and an appreciation on the part of the families for activities that promote group skills, arts, and physical activity. These were the most explored areas and perceived by the families as significant. We noticed, however, that children were not always motivated, which revealed a difference between the adult's perception and the children's reactions.

We also noticed a positive recognition from families towards activities promoted by educators-94% of them stated that they were significant for the children, thus reflecting the importance they attach to the role of the early childhood educators at a distance.

Adapting to a different routine: in general, records allowed us to recognize that, although children showed that they miss school, their peers, and adults, they seemed to be adapting to a new routine. Most interactions between children and educators were mainly made in synchronous sessions and Zoom is the most used platform. In addition, there were other social interaction platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, or Messenger. In the Report I3-Intervention, Interaction and Childhood (Pequito *et al.*, 2020), this trend towards the use of social interaction platforms in activities with children had already been registered. However, there is one caveat: while for early childhood educators' email was then the most used resource (Pequito *et al.*, 2020, p. 18), for families, in our study, this resource was hardly used.

Faithful to what characterises research, this study, in addition to the suggested hints for reflection, has revealed challenges that are worth answering in the future: to understand family perception on activities that characterise Childhood.

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