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Parenthood as a Determining Factor of Satisfaction in Couple Relationships

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Abstract This study aimed to meet whether there are differences in satisfaction with the relationship according to having children or not and whether these differences are determined by gender, and to establish predictive models explaining the satisfaction based on having children or not. This study included 620 volunteer participants (57.7% women and 42.3% men; 57.9% did not have children, and 42.1% did have), not minors and maintaining a couple relationship at that time. The Satisfaction in Couple Relationship Scale (SCR) was used in the study, made up of ten items and with a reliability of .93. The contrast of satisfaction between people with children and without children was carried out using the Student's t, and gender differences by using ANOVA (analyzing as well the interaction between gender and children with ANOVA of two factors —gender and children). Moreover, a multiple linear regression analysis identified a multivariate predictive model of the satisfaction with the couple relationship according to the gender. General results showed greater rates of satisfaction among the couples, although persons not having children show greater rates of satisfaction with the couple relationship. According to the gender, mothers show less satisfaction. On the other hand, the greatest predictive factor of the satisfaction is related to feeling excited about the couple relationship. In the face of results obtained, it can be concluded with the need for supporting couples with children in order to strengthen their relationships and hence being able to properly face the challenges of the parenthood.

Introduction

Couple relationships have very specific characteristics within the interpersonal relationships as it implies processes and expectations that are not found in other types of relationships, as those of faithfulness or romantic and emotional exclusivity (Vidal González et al. 2012). Currently, as stated by López Sánchez (2009), there are as many ways of being in a relationship as persons, and as many types of couples as relationships. This author acknowledged that, until recently, there was only a possible type of couple relationship in many countries: the union between a man and a woman intended to last a lifetime, with or without love, because it was an engagement on constant vigilance at religious and legislative level, and carried out by the Governments (mostly religious Governments). However, nowadays people have greater freedom to have sexual activities with or without a partner, being bonded or not with a partner, being able to establish different kinds of couple relationships, and making the decision to split up.

The continuous social, political, and economic transformation of the society affects the evolution and interaction of the couple relationships as a social component. A key determinant in the current configuration of the couple relationships is the social status of the woman in the ideological, training, and labor macrosystem. Until recently, and for a long time, couples within the family have been conceptualized and developed from a patriarchal perspective from which it was expected that men have a higher

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authority role, provide resources and play an instrumental role. On the other side, women were supposed to have an emotional role and accomplish household and care tasks (Valdivia Sánchez 2008). This popular consciousness of the couple is constantly changing, and it is being replaced by a more equitable view regarding gender on both couple relationships and family functions (Ajenjo Cosp and García Román 2014; Ruíz Becerril 2001). These changes depend on several factors, some trivial and some other more relevant, that make the stability within the couple relationships tend to be perceived with certain relativity (Sánchez Aragón 2009).

Among the constraints of the stability, the satisfaction with the couple relationship is a key element and becomes one of the most addressed topics within the couple analysis (García Meraz and Romero Palencia 2012). The satisfaction with the couple relationship cannot be considered a static factor, which is modified, with many other components as well, as the couple relationships progress over time. Couples, as well as families, go through different lifecycle stages that, besides following one another, they often overlap and connect with several transition stages that usually take place simultaneously (Narciso 1996).

According to the topic of this study, the satisfaction with the couple relationship has been defined as the degree to which intimacy, affection, and mutual support are shown by both partners (Collins et al. 2009), or as an emotional state in which the person is satisfied with the interactions, experiences, and expectations about the couple relationship (Ward et al. 2009). From their initial stage, the members of a couple have different expectations of their relationship according, among other factors, to gender, age, duration of the relationship, having or not children, and, to a large extent, their living and learning experiences with their family of origin (Garrido Garduño et al. 2008; Hernández Martínez et al. 2011). Eventually, these issues determine the development of the couple relationship and would affect the maintenance and the satisfaction with the relationship.

Among the determining factors of the satisfaction with the couple relationship, the partners consider parenthood as an essential component. Among the stages of the couples' lifecycle, the birth of the first child implies a substantial change in the interaction, in the social life and the sexuality of the couple. So, the members of the couple tend to have less time to spend together. There are also more moments of high fatigue; the concerns tend to be mainly focused on the baby and becomes hence the principal topic of discussion. It has also been noticed that mothers tend to spend much time with the child and fathers tend to feel out of place (Marina 2012).

Rodrigo and Palacios (1998) set the time when a couple becomes couple and parents as the most significant one for the family configuration. The couple would suffer hence a restructuring and redefinition if the family continues to grow with the birth of more children since it would involve the establishment of new dynamics, where the relation between siblings has to be endorsed to the existing previous relations.

The birth of the first baby can lead to a certain disruption in the couple relationship—mainly in the first months of life —given that the transition to parenthood tends to be related to changes in personal habits and couple routines, less time to spend together, and a need for adjustment of the roles played by each partner within the couple and the family. Consequently, the quality of the couple relationship and the satisfaction may be affected, particularly among those couples that already had high levels of problems before becoming parents, insecure parents or those couples that had bad-tempered children (Doss and Rhoades 2017; Hidalgo and Menéndez 2003).

In this regard, Hidalgo García and Menéndez Álvarez-Dardet (2009) stated certain decrease in the intensity and satisfaction of sexual intercourses attributed to the transition to parenthood. More specifically, the decline perceived in the quality of the relationship after the birth of the children is usually most notably among women, mostly because mothers face more and severe changes than those faced by fathers. Medina et al. (2009) came to a similar conclusion; despite the joy that implies the birth of a child, several studies showed a significant reduction of the marital satisfaction due to the transition to parenthood.

Hidalgo García and Menéndez Álvarez-Dardet (2009) stated as well that becoming parents lead to a remarkable personal and family transition that tests the coping strategies since it is an individual and interpersonal instability period in which new significant support needs arise. On a personal level, these authors highlighted that the most substantial changes that paternity involves are those arising in the couple relationship. Although most couples end up successfully and appropriately undertaking their parent roles, this transition becomes complicated or is not properly achieved in many cases, triggering hence the breakdown of the relationship.

The existing studies on this issue according to the gender require a progressively up-to-date given the continuous changes of the society that affect as well the involvement of both men and women in their works, in their families and the care of their children. This study aims to contribute to the current analyses of the situation within the Spanish context, where people face many difficulties in reconciling work and family life —particularly with regards to the care of their children. This fact creates hence many conflicts in the relationship that reduce the satisfaction with the couple relationship, that may contribute as well to the high divorce rate of Spain (Armenta-Huarte et al. 2012; Eguiluz Romo 2004; Flores Galaz 2011). The results would allow to

contrast this trend and, where appropriate, to suggest certain lines of action on this matter.

Accordingly, this study aims to meet if there are differences in satisfaction with the relationship according to whether they have children or not and whether the gender determines these differences, which would allow updating the existing data on this matter within the Spanish context. Likewise, this study aims as well to identify whether there are certain differentiating factors in the couple relationship that would allow to predict or explain the satisfaction with the couple relationship depending on having or not children. The identification of these factors could lead to the orientation of tailored intervention and counseling actions for couples with children and couples without children according to their unique needs in order to improve their satisfaction.

Method

Participants

In this study, 620 persons in a couple relationship voluntarily participated, 57.7% women and 42.3% men (97.3 were heterosexual, and 2.7% were homosexual participants; given the limited representation of same-sex couples, this study does not analyze the differences between both types of couples). All participants were in a couple relationship when fulfilling the questionnaire. Likewise, both members of the couple fulfilled the questionnaire in 77.7% of the cases. As for the age, 48.5% of participants were between 18 and 31 years old, 26.5% between 32 and 45 years old, and 25.2% more than 45 years old (M = 35.5 years old and Mdn = 35 years old; in the case of people without children, M = 25.4 years old and Mdn = 28 years old; in the case of people with children, M = 46.7 years old and Mdn = 49 years old). Regarding the residence, 54.7% lived in northern Spain (the Principality of Asturias) and 43.5% lived in southern Spain (Malaga province) (remaining 1.8% were partners of persons who do live in these provinces). Also, most participants of the sample (88%) lived in urban areas.

Regarding the level of education, 53% completed university studies, 28.1% completed secondary school or vocational education, 16.6% completed compulsory levels of education, and 2.3% did not complete official education. According to the employment status, 41.2% worked as wage employees in private or public sector, 23.4% were students, 19.7% were unemployed, 11.1% worked as a freelance, and 4.6% were retired or pensioners.

About marital status, 54.5% of participants were not married, and 45.5% were married or common-law couples. The duration of the couple in 19.4% of cases was 2 years or less, 20.6% had been together between 3 and 5 years, 18.7%

between 6 and 10 years, 17.4% between 11 and 20 years, and 23.9% more than 20 years (M = 12.1 years and Mdn = 8 years; in case of people without children, M = 5.9 years and Mdn = 3 years; in case of people with children, M = 20.7 years and Mdn = 23 years). As for the children, 57.9% indicated not having any child (39.1% of women and 46.2% of men) compared to 42.1% who indicated being parents (60.9% of women and 53.8% of men). In particular, persons who had children and indicated the age of their children stated an average age of the first child (n = 256) of 19.29 years old and an average age of the second child (n = 171) of 16.28 years old (only 26 participants have three children and 4 participants have four children). Lastly, the predominant gender both of the first child (61.5%) and the second child (50.3%) was female.

Procedure

For the selection of the sample, the non-probability method known as snowball sampling (Goodman 1961) was used. Firstly, many participants of different ages and cultural levels were selected because they have the characteristics expected to take part in the study. The requirements established to take part in this study were being in a couple relationship at that moment, not being minor, and living in the selected Spanish provinces –at least one partner of the couple.

In addition to fulfilling the questionnaire, the participants provided copies of the questionnaire to other couples, these last couples to different couples until the study attained the required sample. In all cases, the participation was voluntary and any participant did not receive any kind of compensation.

Information was collected in two ways. On the one hand, an envelope with two questionnaires was provided for each member of the couple, with a brief presentation letter and filling directions as well as two other empty envelopes, one for each member of the couple, to be returned separately once the questionnaire was filled out. According to the directions, each member of the couple should fulfill their own questionnaire separately, without any interaction with their partners.

On the other hand, the questionnaire was computerized using the tool GoogleForms to obtain a greater sample diversity without relinquishing the first data collection way; despite the increase of new information technologies, there still were people who did not use or did not have access to these technologies. For the application of the electronic questionnaire, the snowball method was used again, thus firstly providing the link to the questionnaire to personal and professional contacts and asking them to spread the link throughout their social networks' profiles to other potential participants that meet the required characteristics.

In both cases, the estimated time to fulfill the questionnaire was 10 min. The questionnaire in paper form was spread between the months of January and July of 2016; the questionnaire in digital form was available from February to August of 2016.

Measures

The instrument used for collecting data was the Satisfaction in Couple Relationship Scale (SCR) (Urbano-Contreras et al. 2017), made up of 10 items with four points Likert-scale responses (1 = *total disagreement*; 2 = *disagreement*; 3 = *agreement*; and 4 = *total agreement*), thus avoiding intermediate positions. The development of this scale was carried out specifically within the Spanish context given the scarcity of existing instruments built in this country to analyze the satisfaction with their couple relationships of the current population, influenced by the personal, family, social and work circumstances in which they live. Already existing and well-known scales built within different cultural contexts were revised, some of them applicable as well to the Spanish context, during the development procedure of this scale, i.e.: (1) The *Marital Satisfaction Scale* (MSS) (Roach et al. 1981) with 48 items (Cronbach's alpha .97); (2) The *Kansas Marital Satisfaction* (KMS) Scale (Akagi et al. 2003; Schumm et al. 1983), adapted to the Spanish context by Montes-Berges (2009), with only three items (Cronbach's alpha .93 in its latest review); (3) The *Relationship Assessment Scale* (RAS) (Hendrick 1988), with seven items (Cronbach's alpha .86). All of these scales have a single-factor structure with a limited number of items.

The Satisfaction in Couple Relationship Scale (SCR) (Urbano-Contreras et al. 2017), as in the aforementioned revised scales, presented a single factor (Satisfaction with the couple relationship) made up with 10 items that explained the 54.14% of variance. The questionnaire's internal consistency or reliability, estimated by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach 1951), was .93, rated as excellent according to George and Mallery (2003). This alpha coefficient remained stable both among men and women by calculating it separately.

Along with the scale items, a new item with Likert-scale response ("I am satisfied with my couple relationship") was added, following the single factor results obtained by the authors of aforementioned revised scales. This item was meant to be a criterion variable to analyze the concurrent validity of the scale by calculating the Pearson correlation between the resulting factor and the external variables selected as criterion. As mentioned, this item was selected taking into consideration information from the reviewed literature on other measures of relationship satisfaction (i.e., MSS, KMS, RAS, Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Locke-Wallace Short Marital-Adjustment Test, Marital Satisfaction Inventory) to summarize the underlying objective of the research. This item proved to be a good predictor of the factor "Satisfaction with the couple relationship," with a Pearson correlation between them of .718 (p ≤ 0.00 bilateral).

Data Analyses

Collected data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0. The potential significant differences in satisfaction with the couple relationship between persons with children and persons without children were analyzed through statistical test Student's *t* for two independent samples. The effect size was calculated with statistical Cohen's *d*, considering that values of $0 < d < .20$ indicates a small size, values of $.20 < d < .50$ indicates a medium size, and $d > .50$ indicates a large size (Cohen 1988). It is noteworthy as well that even a small effect size may have a practical significance (Kirk 1996).

Secondly, it was checked whether the possible differences in responses of persons having or not children could be biased by the variable "gender". It is with that goal in mind that a variance analysis was carried out taking a new variable, "gender and children", using the categories Woman with children (W-C), Woman without children (W-NoC), Man with children (M-C) and Man without children (M-NoC) according to the suggestions provided by Pardo et al. (2007) to take the potential interaction between the factors "gender" and "children" into consideration. In this regard, an analysis of variance with two factors—gender and children—was carried out through a univariate general linear model with fixed factors to see the possible influence of the interaction between both factors on the variables of satisfaction with the couple relationship, considering significance values p ≤ .05. For the analysis of variance, the effect size was verified using partial ETA-squared (η2), which describes the ratio of each dependent variable that is explained by the effect of the predictor variable ("gender and children"). It was considered that the effect size was small if ≤.06, medium between .06 and .14, and large if ≥.14 (Cohen 1973); its value varies from .00 to 1.00 which, multiplied by 100, indicates the percentage of variance explained (Keppel 1982). This analysis was completed by applying Scheffé Test as a post-hoc test, highly recommended when the number of individuals in each group is different (Atil and Unver 2001).

This univariate analysis was completed with another multivariate predictive analysis that would allow to identify how the set of variables analyzed contributes to explain the satisfaction with the couple relationship (criterion variable, "I am satisfied with my couple relationship"), according to the correlations between them. Therefore, a multiple linear regression analysis was carried out by the stepwise

Table 1 Differences in satisfaction with the relationship according to whether they have or not children

Variables for satisfaction with the couple relationship	Children M (SD)	No children M (SD)	p	d
1. I feel that my partner cares about me	3.49 (.70)	3.64 (.61)	.006	−.23
2. I am satisfied with the attention my partner pays to me	3.30 (.79)	3.42 (.73)	.036	−.16
3. I feel understood by my partner	3.00 (.78)	3.26 (.73)	.000	−.34
4. My partner shows me the affect I need	3.20 (.85)	3.53 (.68)	.000	−.43
5. I feel appreciated by my partner	3.31 (.83)	3.62 (64)	.000	−.42
6. My partner is available when I need her/him	3.35 (.77)	3.54 (.68)	.002	−.26
7. When I am sad or worried, my partner is interested in what is happening to me	3.41 (.79)	3.71 (.58)	.000	−.43
8. I feel that my partner loves me as much as I do	3.40 (.82)	3.57 (.70)	.008	−.22
9. My partner is interested about what I do daily	3.14 (.87)	3.45 (.71)	.000	−.39
10. I am excited with my couple relationship	3.30 (.82)	3.54 (.67)	.000	−.32
11. I am satisfied with my couple relationship	3.28 (.81)	3.51 (.68)	.009	−.31

procedure to maximize awareness of the relative contribution of each process, taking the 10 variables of factor "Satisfaction with the couple relationship" as predictor variables and carrying out again separate analysis for persons with children and without children. As a previous stage for the different regression analyses, Pearson correlation was calculated between all predictor variables aiming to verify that these bivariate correlations were lower than .70 and hence be able to exclude the existence of multicollinearity (Tabachnick and Fidell 1996). The analysis was carried out separately for men and women so that the study could determine whether the predictive model is the same in both genders. Furthermore, by implementing collinearity diagnosis for each model, the values obtained showed in any case the existence of multicollinearity problems given that VIF values > 2 and the condition index > 20 (Belsley 1991; Vega-Vilca and Guzmán 2011).

Results

The differences between persons with and without children among the variables considered in the factor "Satisfaction with the couple relationship" of this study, calculated by Student's t (Table 1), showed significant results in all cases. Although the obtained measures in both groups showed very positive results according to the satisfaction in the couple relationship, these results led us to reflect on the changes taking places in the couple before the children arrived, which pointed out the need for a preventive intervention before becoming parents, during pregnancy and after the birth of the children to minimize the decline of the satisfaction of the couple indicated by the data.

More specifically, those variables that showed greater differences had a medium effect size associated (between .20 < d < .50), except for one variable whose effect size

was small (.16). These variables were associated with the perception of feeling understood, feeling that partner shows affect and love, feeling appreciated, noticing that partner is interested in the moments of sadness and concern, as well as the daily routines, and being excited about the couple relationship.

The results showed that having or not children present differences in all the variables. Nonetheless, once the members of the couple become parents, the number of children seemed not to significantly influence in this regard. Differences according to satisfaction in the couple relationship among people having a child and people having two or more children were calculated, and any variable showed significant differences.

Given these numerous differences between persons with children and persons without children, it was interesting to know whether this variable affects men and women alike. Some relevant differences in all variables analyzed were observed when using a variance analysis with a single factor (Table 2), highlighting effect sizes significantly large—between 66% and 78% of variance explained for the variable "gender and children."

Post-hoc analyses showed a trend that suggested satisfaction decreases especially among women with children, who showed significant differences in 8 of the 11 variables analyzed compared to women without children (items 1 p = .022; 3 p = .002; 4, 5 and 7 p = .000; 9 p = .003; 10 p = .005; 11 p = .004), and 10 of 11 compared to men without children (items 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11 p = .000; 2 and 3 p = .001), including those variables that better explained the couple relationship—excitement and general satisfaction. Men with children also showed lower satisfaction than men without children but only in 4 variables (items 4 p = .017; 5 p = .043; 7 p = .009; 9 p = .004), all related to feeling lower affection, availability, concern, interest, and appreciation from their partners and not being

affected most general variables—excitement and general satisfaction. Furthermore, men with children only presented a variable with significant differences regarding women without children, feeling hence less appreciated than women ($p = .043$). However, after analyzing the differences between men and women without children, the results showed that there were not significant differences, whereas if the differences analyzed were those between men and women with children, only the variable "I feel that my partner cares about me" presented significant differences ($p = .045$), where the scores of women were markedly lower than the scores of men.

Lastly, the analysis of variance carried out with two factors—gender and children—through a univariate general linear model with fixed factors to see the potential influence of the interaction between both factors on the variables of satisfaction with the couple relationship did not result in any significant values in none of them ($p > .05$).

The predictive model obtained to determine which variables explain the satisfaction with the couple relationship between persons with and without children (Table 3) consisted of three variables in both cases, explaining 62.1% of the variance in persons with children and 67.7% in persons without children. Both models created shared a variable with greater predictive power—"Feeling excited about the couple relationship"—, explaining almost 60% of the variance in both groups. The rest of variables making up the model differed in both groups. In persons with children, satisfaction with the couple relationship was explained by factors as feeling requited emotionally and understood—aspects related to affection and empathy—, and the predictive model was completed with questions like feeling appreciated and taken care of—aspects related to the self-esteem and personal recognition—in those persons without children.

When analyzing separately women and men, several differences regarding the general model proposed were observed. In the case of persons without children, the model barely differed both in men (the same pattern with a variance explained of 73.7%) and in women (the model was maintained switching the order of variables two and three with a variance explained of 64%). However, couples with children tended to show greater differences. For men, a model explaining 79.6% of the variance was generated, made up of three variables—1- to feel excited about the couple relationship, 2- to perceive that partner is interested in you when feeling sad or worried, and 3- to think that partner loves you as much as you do. Nevertheless, the model generated for women explained 47.7% of the variance, and it was made up of two variables—to feel excited about the couple relationship and to be understood.

Table 2 Differences in satisfaction with the relationship according to gender and whether they have or not children

Item	Gender/children	M	SD	p	D^2
1. I feel that my partner cares about me	W-C	3.39	.75	.001	.66
	W-NoC	3.59	.63		
	M-C	3.60	.64		
	M-NoC	3.71	.57		
2. I am satisfied with the attention my partner pays to me	W-C	3.19	.79	.002	.75
	W-NoC	3.35	.74		
	M-C	3.41	.77		
	M-NoC	3.53	.69		
3. I feel understood by my partner	W-C	2.96	.80	.000	.75
	W-NoC	3.25	.70		
	M-C	3.05	.75		
	M-NoC	3.29	.77		
4. My partner shows me the affect I need	W-C	3.11	.83	.000	.76
	W-NoC	3.50	.72		
	M-C	3.31	.86		
	M-NoC	3.58	.61		
5. I feel appreciated by my partner	W-C	3.24	.85	.000	.72
	W-NoC	3.61	.67		
	M-C	3.39	.80		
	M-NoC	3.63	.58		
6. My partner is available when I need her/him	W-C	3.29	.72	.001	.72
	W-NoC	3.47	.73		
	M-C	3.41	.81		
	M-NoC	3.65	.59		
7. When I am sad or worried, my partner is interested in what is happening to me	W-C	3.31	.79	.000	.68
	W-NoC	3.67	.64		
	M-C	3.52	.79		
	M-NoC	3.78	.48		
8. I feel that my partner loves me as much as I do	W-C	3.39	.82	.037	.76
	W-NoC	3.54	.72		
	M-C	3.41	.83		
	M-NoC	3.62	.66		
9. My partner is interested in what I do daily	W-C	3.11	.89	.000	.78
	W-NoC	3.40	.75		
	M-C	3.18	.86		
	M-NoC	3.52	.63		
10. I am excited about my couple relationship	W-C	3.23	.81	.000	.73
	W-NoC	3.50	.70		
	M-C	3.38	.83		
	M-NoC	3.61	.61		
11. I am satisfied with my couple relationship	W-C	3.20	.79	.000	.73
	W-NoC	3.47	.71		
	M-C	3.36	.82		
	M-NoC	3.57	.62		

Table 3 Predictive model of the variable: I am satisfied with my couple relationship

Model	With children			Without children		
	Adjusted R square	Beta	Sig. F change	Adjusted R square	Beta	Sig. F change
1	.575	.550	.000	.599	.585	.000
2	.604	.188	.000	.656	.192	.000
3	.621	.162	.001	.677	.188	.000

Predictor variables: (1) I am excited with my couple relationship; (2) I feel that my partner loves me as much as I do; (3) I feel understood by my partner

Predictor variables: (1) I am excited with my couple relationship; (2) I feel appreciated by my partner; (3) I am satisfied with the attention my partner pays to me

Discussion

This study was developed aiming to identify whether the satisfaction with the couple relationship varies according to whether having children or not, and whether the satisfaction with the couple relationship differs according to the gender. Results obtained showed significant rates of satisfaction with the relationship among the couples, although expectations of improvement regarding attention, interest perceived and provided, feeling understood, or affection were observed as well; this seemed to have an influence in the general satisfaction with the relationship. These aspects, along with all the aspects analyzed, appeared to be negatively affected by the arrival of the children, so it hence seems appropriate to provide support to couples with children to strengthen their couple relationship so that they could properly face the challenges of parenthood.

Among the results obtained, it must be highlighted two main ideas. The first one is the effect that parenthood has on the reduction of satisfaction with the couple relationship. These results could also be found in several studies (Lawrence et al. 2007; Mora Torres et al. 2013; Shapiro et al. 2000). The second one is the influence that gender has on the intensity with which satisfaction with the couple relationship decreases. Studies of Medina et al. (2009), Rholes et al. (2001), and Twenge et al. (2003) also pointed out this trend in the face of the scarce studies stating that satisfaction is equally affected both in women and men (Doss et al. 2009).

Accordingly, it should be noteworthy the contributions made by Hidalgo García and Menéndez Álvarez-Dardet (2009) that indicated that those couples who showed positive dynamics before parenthood could suffer a slight decline, but they would continue having a satisfying relationship, whereas couples which already had problems before becoming parents would tend to have more problems when the children arrive. This perception contributes to highlighting the need of support to the couple to make them able to strengthen their relationship from the beginning and cope with the challenges of the parenthood, among others.

Along these lines of prevention and intervention, predictive analyses carried out in this study made it possible to identify certain aspects that may be reinforced in couples, taking into consideration the nuances between couples with children and couples without children. Results obtained indicated that feeling excited about the couple relationship seems to be the best predictor of satisfaction with the couple relationship. This fact encourages new studies to meet other aspects that may affect this specific satisfaction—e.g., the quality of the communication, or conflicts—as well as effective methods to reinforce the couple and the satisfaction with the couple relationship—specific intervention, prevention, or programs. An issue of interest according to this topic is the relation that may be established between the ability to resolve conflicts and satisfaction with the couple. Studies developed by Greeff and De Bruyne (2000) and Paleari et al. (2010) on this regard, related to gender, stated that quality perceived in the relationship in both men and women could be predicted from the negative responses to conflict—unforgiveness, attack, and avoidance. These responses, in turn, lead to establishing the appropriateness of working assertive communication skills with the couple.

When the conflict becomes a frequent and severe event in a couple relationship, both partners suffer the consequences; however, these effects are even more relevant when the couple has children since this situation would have a negative impact on these children. While dissatisfaction with the couple relationship could scarcely affect children, the conflict among the parents that may come from this dissatisfaction do seems to have an adverse impact on the children, especially if the conflicts occur too often, are intense, and last too long. Several studies stated in this regard that children who live a perpetual conflict between their parents are at greater risk than others to develop behavioral, aggressiveness, and disobedience problems, lack of self-control, criminal behavior, poor academic performance, and less integration in peers groups (Cantón et al. 2002; Crockenberg and Langrock 2001; Ghazarian and Buehler 2010; Musick and Meier 2010).

Also, the existence of destructive interparental conflict in the family tends to be related to less support and emotional

sensitivity in the children's upbringing by both parents, less cohesion and positive attitude in the family context, as well as problems in the emotional regulation process of the children (Fosco and Grych 2013). Therefore, even though conflicts are usually expected in a couple relationship, it is appropriate that couples knew the way to constructively face it given its impact on the emotional development, adjustment processes, and emotional regulation skills of their children (Butt et al. 2014; Schwarz et al. 2012; Turner and Kopiec 2006).

These studies reinforce the idea that a stable and satisfactory couple relationship has a positive impact on personal well-being and both personal and family happiness, while a damaged relationship has an adverse impact on the family dynamics, and on the mental health of the couple, family, and their social context (Capafons Bonet and Sosa Castilla 2009; Gambrel et al. 2016). Consequently, several investigations as those enumerated in this study could help to identify action areas on which to offer advice to couples to reduce the effect of those variables having a negative impact, and boost those variables encouraging the appropriate personal development and positive couple and family dynamics.

Among the limitations of this study, it is noteworthy that the sample was not selected randomly under a representative procedure of the Spanish couples, what limits the generalization of the results obtained. However, this limitation is hard to solve given that there are not any couple register which would allow their identification and selection under representative procedures. To partially address this constraint, the data was collected according to geographical areas with social, economic and cultural differences (northern and southern Spain). Another limitation arises with the possibility to contrast information, given that data collected came from the application of a single scale (SCR) (Urbano-Contreras et al. 2017). In futures studies, it would be convenient to expand the existing data by using different instruments such as Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier 1976), The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) (Funk and Rogge 2007) or similar.

Qualitative procedures should also be used in order to contrast information aiming to meet the experiences that couples have in regards to the quality of their relationship and the factors that determine it. As for the data analysis, future research should explore different methodological procedures, for instance, of repeated measurements or analysis of co-variances that would add new information for a better understanding of how the interaction of various factors could influence in the satisfaction with the couple relationship. Also, it would be interesting to extend the results taking into consideration other social and demographic variables that may influence the couple relationship, as the educational attainment of parents, the duration of the

relationship or the economic status, as well as leading new research in order to study the potential benefits to the couple relationship of becoming parents.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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