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Step-Parents As a Social Context Questionnaire: a validation study with stepmothers

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**STEP-PARENTS AS A SOCIAL CONTEXT QUESTIONNAIRE: A VALIDATION
STUDY WITH STEPMOTHERS**

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Resumo

A investigação sobre famílias de recasamento tem evoluído ao longo das décadas (Ganong & Coleman, 2017), contudo, a validação de instrumentos para esta população continua a ser muito limitada. No presente estudo, é apresentada a validação do Step-Parents As a Social Context Questionnaire (S-PASCQ) recorrendo a uma amostra de madrastas portuguesas heterossexuais, baseada no Parents As a Social Context Questionnaire (Skinner et al., 2005). Foi conduzida uma Análise Fatorial Exploratória e uma Análise Fatorial Confirmatória para avaliar qual a estrutura fatorial mais apropriada, assim como testar a adequação das escalas *Total Score*, *Positive Stepmothering* e *Negative Stepmothering*. Também foi testada a fidelidade, a fidelidade teste-reteste, a validade convergente e a validade discriminante das escalas e dimensões do S-PASCQ. As análises fatoriais sugeriram que um modelo de 7 fatores era o mais adequado para a presente amostra e que é possível utilizar as dimensões *Warmth*, *Structure*, *Autonomy Support*, *Rejection-affection*, *Rejection-time*, *Chaos* e *Coercion* e as escalas *Positive Stepmothering* e *Negative Stepmothering* como medidas independentes. A análise da fidelidade revelou uma consistência interna satisfatória para todas as escalas e dimensões testadas, enquanto a fidelidade teste-reteste foi observada para as escalas *Positive Stepmothering* e *Negative Stepmothering* e para as dimensões *Autonomy Support* e *Rejection-affection*. Tanto a validade convergente como a validade discriminante foram observadas. Investigações futuras devem-se focar em construir instrumentos que acedam às experiências das famílias de recasamento. No âmbito do S-PASCQ, devem ser realizadas novas análises com amostras de padrastos e enteados e com uma amostra maior de madrastas.

Palavras-chave: validação, S-PASCQ, madrasta, família, recasamento

Abstract

Research on stepfamilies has been evolving through the decades (Ganong & Coleman, 2017), however the validation of instruments for this population is still very limited. In the present study, we present a validation of the Step-Parents As a Social Context Questionnaire (S-PASCQ) with a sample of heterosexual Portuguese stepmothers, based on Parents As a Social Context Questionnaire (Skinner et al., 2005). We conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis and a Confirmatory Factor Analysis to assess the most suitable factor structure and the adequacy of the total score, Positive Stepmothering, and Negative Stepmothering scales. We also tested S-PASCQ's scales and dimensions reliability, test-retest reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Factor analysis suggested that a 7-factor model was the most adequate for our sample and that it was possible to use the dimensions Warmth, Structure, Autonomy Support, Rejection-affection, Rejection-time, Chaos, and Coercion and the scales Positive Stepmothering and Negative Stepmothering as independent measures. Reliability analysis indicated satisfactory internal consistencies for all tested scales and dimensions, while test-retest reliability was observed for Positive Stepmothering, Negative Stepmothering, Autonomy Support, and Rejection-affection. Both convergent and discriminant validity were observed. Future research should focus on building instruments to access stepfamilies' experiences. Regarding S-PASCQ, further analysis should be performed with a sample of stepfathers, stepchildren, and with a larger sample of stepmothers.

Keywords: validation, S-PASCQ, stepmother, stepfamily, remarriage

1. Introduction

1.1. Stepfamilies and stepmothers: historical evolution and prevalence

After decades of consistent rising, divorce rates appear to have peaked and since then either plateaued or declined, maintaining, however, a high level (Cherlin, 2017). This pattern is visible across many countries of the European Union, e.g., registered divorces in Portugal appear to have peaked on 2011 with 74.2 registered divorces per 100 marriages (PORDATA, 2011), since then, they have been decreasing, and by 2018, there were only 58.7 registered divorces per 100 marriages (INE, 2018). The United States of America have also been going through this same pattern (Raley & Sweeney, 2020). Consequently, remarriage numbers have been following a similar pattern, that may be compensated by re-cohabitations (Cherlin, 2017), i.e., since the decrease in registered divorces may not equate a decrease in separations, the decrease in remarriages may not equate a decrease in repartnerings. Therefore, research should still be focusing on the experiences of remarried couples, who remain an understudied group (Raley & Sweeney, 2020).

Remarried couples constitute stepfamilies, when “at least one of the adults has a child (or children) from a previous relationship” (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). Stepfamilies are always created after a loss of a significant relationship(s). Thus, the stepfamily is not only complex due to its structure, but also due to the losses suffered prior to its formation, the adaptations it requires at both the individual and the familiar level, and the new roles and relationships that must be attended to (Costa, 1994).

The way stepfamilies are studied by psychological research has accompanied demographic changes and societal views. According to Ganong & Coleman (2017), remarriage was more common amongst widows prior to the 1970's, with stepparents coming in as replacements of the deceased partner, guaranteeing the family's economic survival. It was not until the rates of remarriage after a divorce surpassed the rates of remarriage after the death of a spouse that research started paying attention to this family structure. These authors also argue

that since both biological parents now remained in the picture, stepparents were no longer seen as substitutes. The first decades of stepfamily studies focused on comparing these families to first-marriage families, reporting the negative effects of being part of a stepfamily. Nowadays the emphasis has been shifted to the analysis of the stepfamily's structure and relational processes on their own and not by comparison, approximating research to the reality of stepfamilies (Ganong & Coleman, 2017).

Stepmothers, in particular, were not a relevant research focus until the late twentieth century, when studies on gendered scripts began to appear (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). This remains an important field of study to the present date (e.g., Miller et al., 2017). In fact, stepmothers still face stronger gendered expectations regarding their role than stepfathers (Coleman et al., 2008; Weaver & Coleman, 2005), which incite them to be nurturing and to rapidly develop emotionally and physically close connections with their stepchildren, which relates to the "instant love" stereotype (Coleman et al., 2008), i.e., the expectation that stepmothers should instantly love their stepchildren. Despite this, they also face the "wicked stepmother" stereotype (Coleman et al., 2008), since their role is considered inferior to the biological mother's (Sanner & Coleman, 2017). This stereotype seems to intensify when stepmothers experience negative feelings towards their role (Miller et al., 2017). This highly affects stepmothers' well-being, who have been reported as the group who experiences most stress and depressive symptoms on the stepfamily constellation (Shapiro, 2014; Shapiro & Stewart, 2011). Therefore, research should still be addressing these issues and looking for ways to improve the quality of stepmothers' experiences.

As we can observe, research on the field of stepfamilies has been growing rapidly, however instruments validated specifically for this population are still scarce (Beaudry et al., 2001). This should be properly addressed since we have long moved to a research paradigm that recognizes stepfamilies' experiences as unique and different from first-marriage families' experiences (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). Therefore, it may be expected that instruments' focus and structures should need adaptations to better describe stepfamily living, specifically stepparenting.

1.2. (Step)parenting and (step)mothering

The transition to the parenting role is a complex one, as a new field of interaction is established between the couple (Bogavac, 2014, as cited in Dukié & Bogavac, 2017). This is especially complex among remarried couples constituted by at least one stepparent who, unlike a parent from a traditional first marriage family, faces this transition without a set of cultural scripts (Shapiro, 2014), i.e., without knowing what is expected of them. This contributes to unrealistic expectations concerning family functioning and parenting roles (DeLongis & Zwicker, 2017) and to relationships that are more diverse than the ones established between biological parents and their children (Jensen, 2017).

The single parent period after a divorce tends to be associated with lax parenting, that may spill over to the stepfamily context if the parent remarries, leaving the disciplinarian role to be filled by the stepparent (Nicholson et al., 2008). Therefore, it is common for resident parents to adopt a permissive type and for stepparents to assume an authoritarian type (Papernow, 2013). Frequently, resident parents report that stepparents are too strict, while stepparents report that resident parents are too tolerant (Ganong & Coleman, 2017) and indulgent (Nicholson et al., 2008), which may lead to increased conflicts between the couple (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). Other complexifying factors are (a) the simultaneity between the formation of the stepparent relationship and the remarried couple's marital relationship, (b) the loss and change that predates the stepfamily formation, (c) the diversity of individual, marital and family contexts coming together, e.g., the stepparent might have never had children before, and (d) the limited autonomy caused by the existence of non-resident parents (DeLongis & Zwicker, 2017), e.g., the stepparents' authority should not exceed that of the parents (Gold, 2016).

1.3. Self-determination theory and (step)parenting types

Literature suggests that the parenting types – authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and rejecting-neglecting (Baumrind, 2013), are obtained from the combination of multiple parenting dimensions. Warmth, control, and structure are bipolar dimensions highly used in research mostly focused on parent-child interaction and discipline. However, as research called for more specific parenting aspects, models were complexified and bigger groups of unipolar dimensions were suggested, allowing for more comprehensive descriptions (Power, 2013).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) explains human motivation stating that all individuals have the innate need to feel related, competent, and autonomous. This need's fulfilment allows people to have an optimal development and good psychological health (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Joussemet et al., 2008). The way this psychological need is attended to is affected by both intrinsic processes and social context. Skinner and collaborators (2005) adopted SDT to build Parents as a Social Context Questionnaire (PASCQ), highlighting that parents serve as a social context, influencing their children's development through parenting style (Joussemet et al., 2008). The authors proposed six unipolar dimensions of parenting based on this theory – Warmth, Rejection, Structure, Chaos, Autonomy Support, and Coercion.

A group of unipolar dimensions, as opposed to bipolar dimensions, makes it possible for each dimension to be scored independently, allowing for a more comprehensive description (Power, 2013) which encompasses the thousands of interactions that take place between parents and their children (Skinner et al., 2005). As defined by Skinner et al. (2005) Warmth refers to the “expression of love, caring, and affection”; Rejection to “active dislike, aversion, and hostility”; Autonomy Support to allowing “freedom of expression and action”; Coercion to a “restrictive overcontrolling intrusive autocratic style” that forces obedience; Structure to the “provision of information about pathways to reach desired outcomes” in an organized and predictable environment; and Chaos to interfering with “the pathways from means to ends” due to a lack of contingency. PASCQ aims to get both the parents' and their adolescent children's perspectives regarding the level in which these dimensions are present on the parenting style.

According to Skinner et al. (2005), the dimensions of PASCQ could be merged into two different types of parenting – (a) “positive or high-quality parenting”, characterized by high levels of Warmth, Structure, and Autonomy Support; and (b) “negative or harsh parenting”, associated with high levels of Rejection, Chaos, and Coercion. These dimensions can also be studied independently (Egeli et al., 2015).

Positive parenting dimensions, which can also be described as level of involvement, positive reinforcement, and praise (Li & Lee, 2012), are expected to facilitate children's socialization process, self-regulation, and integrity, promoting their well-being (Grolnick & Farkas, 2002). On the other hand, negative parenting dimensions can lead to conflicting parent-child relationships, resulting in children with a higher risk of developing emotional and behavioural problems (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Moreover, literature has shown that harsh criticism, corporal punishment, inconsistent discipline, and observed negativity are also dimensions of negative parenting style (Li & Lee, 2012). Egeli and collaborators (2015) tested PASCQ's capacity to measure these types of parenting, combining the six parenting dimensions as proposed by Skinner et al. (2005). Their results indicated that it could measure the extent to which the overall parenting style would be fit to respond to the child's psychological needs, but not of assessing the two types independently.

PASCQ has been translated to Portuguese by Lemos & Cadima (2014), but this translation has never been published nor the questionnaire validated, as of the date of the present study. The translation suffered alterations such as the removal of an item present on the original scale and changes due to sociocultural differences, and it is presented with a 4-point Lickert Scale. Accordingly, this measure has not previously been validated to the context of stepfamilies. Thus, it is worth experimenting with structures such as the "positive parenting" and "negative parenting", to see how they behave as measures of positive or negative stepparenting, specifically in stepmothering context.

1.4. Study's aims

As Beaudry et al. (2001) stated, both clinicians and researchers face a lack in instruments built to address the experiences of couples in stepfamilies. Twenty years later, this statement is still true, as only one instrument, which is itself a revision of Beaudry et al.'s (2001), has been published since then and as of the date of this study (Schramm & Higginbotham, 2009). Therefore, the aim of our study is to validate the Parents as a Social Context Questionnaire (PASCQ) for Portuguese stepmothers (Step-Parents as a Social Context Questionnaire; S-PASCQ), by determining the most adequate factor structure and by assessing

the resulting scale's reliability, including test-retest reliability, and construct validity, i.e., convergent validity and discriminant validity. Thus, intending to provide a validated measure apt for research with Portuguese stepmothers and add to the very few measures specific to this population available to date worldwide.

Even though PASCQ was originally presented as a six-dimension questionnaire, its factor structure was not analysed through an Exploratory Factor Analysis by its authors (Skinner et al., 2005). This analysis was later conducted by Egeli et al. (2015), having resulted in a 6-factor structure. A 6-factor structure was also obtained in the Swedish (Rebecka et al., 2020) and in the Korean (Jeong & Shin, 2011) validation of the questionnaire through a Confirmatory Factor Analysis. We, therefore, expect to find that a 6-factor structure is the most adequate.

We will also test the adequacy of the total score measure and the possibility of S-PASCQ's dimensions merging into two scales – Positive Stepmothering and Negative Stepmothering, equivalent to Skinner et al.'s (2005) positive parenting and negative parenting, respectively. This has already been tested by Egeli et al. (2015), who did not find this a viable option, having only been able to obtain one scale grouping all dimensions. However, this questionnaire may behave differently depending on the sample. In fact, the Polish validation of the parent's version of PASCQ resulted in a 3-factor structure containing a general factor the authors associated with Warmth and the Structure and Autonomy Support dimensions, i.e., the questionnaire only measured the positive parenting dimensions (Czyzkowska et al., 2019). In turn, the Swedish validation found a poor internal consistency for the total score (Rebecka et al., 2020).

Skinner et al. (2005) assessed PASCQ's dimensions' reliability. They found that, when the questionnaire was answered by mothers, Rejection, Chaos, and Coercion had reliabilities ranging from .73 to .82, while the remaining had reliabilities ranging from .61 to .66. On Egeli et al.'s (2015) revision, R-PASCQ's total score and dimensions' internal consistency ranged from .72 to .84. On the Swedish version, the internal consistency of the total score was $<.70$, suggesting it is not reliable on their sample (Rebecka et al., 2020). In turn, Matias & Recharte (2020) used the non-validated Portuguese translation, having reported internal consistencies ranging from .74 to .79, having only measured this value for Warmth, Autonomy Support, and Coercion. Therefore, we expect to observe Cronbach's alphas $>.70$ for each individual dimension and, consequently a satisfactory reliability. Regarding PASCQ'S test-retest

reliability, no other validation has tested it as of the date of this study. Therefore, we aim to conduct this analysis.

Associations between stepparenting and marital variables, such as marital satisfaction, have been observed across many studies (e.g., Jensen & Ganong, 2020). In fact, issues with stepparenting have been shown to lower when the couple perceives higher levels of satisfaction and stability within the marital relationship (Jensen et al., 2015). These data make it theoretically expected that marital adjustment and (step)parenting dimensions, such as identified by Skinner et al. (2005), are correlated. Hence, making measures of variables such as dyadic adjustment good indicators of convergent validity. Thus, we expect to find a significant correlation between S-PASCQ's scales and dimensions and dyadic adjustment, suggesting convergent validity.

Stepparents report higher levels of parenting stress than biological parents, with stepmothers being the group whose reported levels are the highest (Shapiro & Stewart, 2011; Shapiro, 2014). Stepmothers also report more depressive symptoms and have a larger tendency to perceive their stepchildren as holding the stepfamily in a low regard (Shapiro & Stewart, 2011). However, according to Johnson et al. (2008), stepchild care may not be significantly associated with stress. In fact, the authors suggest that variables such as role clarity, household chore disparity, and support network satisfaction play a bigger part. Additionally, PASCQ's dimensions seem to have a low magnitude correlation with well-being variables, specifically adolescents' self-assessed well-being (e.g., Matias & Recharte, 2020). This evidence leads us to expect measures of well-being, such as perceived stress, to present a non-significant correlation with S-PASCQ's scales and dimensions, suggesting discriminant validity.

2. Method

2.1. Procedure

Participants were recruited online (*LimeSurvey* software) between January 2019 and July 2020, through a web-based survey disseminated through public entities, the project's website and Facebook page, the newsletter of the University of Porto, the Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses (organization that represents all Portuguese psychologists) and through leaflet distribution. Informed consent was given prior to the questionnaire. The inclusion criteria were (1) to be in a heterosexual relationship for at least six months, in which (2) at least one of the partners was previously married or in a cohabiting union. For the current study, only the women who reported having at least one stepchild were considered. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of University of Porto.

2.2. Participants

The sample for this study included 563 heterosexual Portuguese women, 81 of which were stepmothers. For the current study, we only considered the 81 stepmothers. Participants had a mean age of 38.83 years ($SD = 7.85$). 70.4% of stepmothers were single before remarriage, and 29.6% were divorced. There were no reported widows.

Considering divorced stepmothers, the time between divorce and remarriage was, on average, 3.37 years ($SD = 5.54$), with 70.8% of the relationships starting before three years had passed since the end of the previous marriage. Considering all stepmothers, the length of remarriage had a mean of 4.51 years ($SD = 3.51$), with 60.5% of relationships being more than 3 years long.

Regarding satisfaction with their current economic situation, 39.5% of stepmothers reported feeling unsatisfied or very unsatisfied, while 38.5% felt very satisfied or satisfied. Regarding their current housing situation, approximately 51.9% of couples had one of its members move to the other's house, while 42.0% lived in a new house for both.

Approximately 64.2% of stepmothers had only one stepchild, and the remaining 35.8% had more than one stepchild. Of those who only had one stepchild, 25.9% had stepdaughters and 38.3% had stepsons. The stepchildren's mean age was 12.06 years ($SD = 5.77$), with 35.8%

being under thirteen. These stepmothers spent an average of 11.96 days per month ($SD = 9.88$) sharing a house with their stepchildren, with 35.8% spending ten days or less per month. About 6.2% of stepmothers had children from the current relationship and 11.1% had children from past relationships.

Table 1*Descriptive statistics for sociodemographic characteristics (n = 81)*

	N/M	%/SD
Age	38.83	7.85
Under 35	24	29.6
Between 35 and 45	41	50.6
Over 45	16	19.8
Secondary education	12	14.8
Higher education	69	85.1
Employment		
Unemployed	1	1.2
Employee	79	97.5
Student	1	1.2
Relationship Status Before Remarriage		
Single	57	70.4
Divorced/Separated	24	29.6
<i>Type of Divorce</i>		
Litigious	4	4.9
Mutual Agreement	20	83.3
Time (years) between divorce/separation and Remarriage	3.37	5.54
Under 3	17	70.8
3 or more	7	29.2
Length of Remarriage (years)	4.11	3.53
3 or less	46	56.8
Over 3	35	43.2
Economic Situation Satisfaction (range, 1-5)	3.11	1.07
Very satisfied or satisfied	31	38.2
Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	18	22.2
Unsatisfied or very unsatisfied	32	39.5
Current Housing Situation		
One partner moved to the other's house	42	51.9
The couple lives in a new house for both	34	42.0
The couple lives separately or in other conditions	5	6.2
Children		
Children from current relationship	5	6.2
Own Children from past relationships	9	11.1
Stepchildren	81	100
<i>One stepchild</i>	52	64.2
Female	21	25.9
Male	31	38.3
<i>More than one stepchild</i>	29	35.8
Stepchild's Age (years)	12.56	5.86
<i>Under 13</i>	28	34.6
<i>13 or more</i>	24	29.7
<i>More than one stepchild</i>	29	35.8
Time (days per month) stepchildren reside with their stepmother	11.96	9.89
10 or less	29	35.8
Over 10	23	28.4
More than one stepchild	29	35.8

2.3. Measures

Besides the sociodemographic questionnaire specifically designed for this study, the following self-report measures were assessed.

2.3.1. *Parents As a Social Context Questionnaire* (PASCQ; Skinner et al, 2005; Portuguese version, Lemos & Cadima, 2014)

PASCQ's original version has six dimensions – Warmth, Autonomy Support, Structure, Rejection, Coercion, and Chaos. Higher scores on each dimension indicate a higher level of the dimension's construct on the participant's stepparenting, e.g., higher scores on Coercion, suggest the presence of more coercive parenting behaviours. Participants answered a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (not true at all) to 4 (very true) according to their experiences with the stepchild who resided with them the longest time per month. In all items, the word “child” was replaced by the word “stepchild” to adjust to the respondents of the study.

2.3.2. *Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale* (DAS-R, Busby et al, 1995; Portuguese version, Pereira et al., 2017)

This scale's total score measures dyadic adjustment, with higher scores indicating a higher adjustment. Participants answered a 6-point Likert Scale ranging from “Always in agreement” to “Always in disagreement”. We used this scale's total score, obtained from the sum of its 14 items' scores. The internal consistency for this scale's total score was of .90 on its original version by Busby et al. (1995) and of .82 on the Portuguese version. Through the present study's sample, we obtained an internal consistency of .71.

2.3.3. *Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS; Cohen et al., 1994; Portuguese version, Ribeiro & Marques, 2009)

Using the ten-item version, we obtained participant's perceived stress levels through the response to a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from "Never" to "Many times". Higher scores indicate a greater level of perceived stress. Cohen et al. (1994) obtained an internal consistency of .78 for the 10-item PSS, while Ribeiro and Marques (2009) obtained an internal consistency of .87 on the Portuguese version of the same scale. On our sample, the 10-item version of PSS presented an internal consistency of .63.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

The descriptive analysis served the purpose of accessing the distribution of the sample's sociodemographic characteristics. Adaptation periods to both divorce and stepfamily living have been suggested, but not extensively studied. An adaptation period of two or three years to the divorce and an extra period of three or four years to the stepfamily has been proposed (Baham et al., 2008). This oriented the cutting points for variables that measured time spent between divorce or separation and remarriage and length of remarriage. Regarding the days stepchildren spent per month residing with their stepmother, the cutting point meant to distinguish between stepmothers who only spent weekends with their stepchildren (non-residing stepmothers) from those who spent a larger amount of time (residing stepmothers). Due to the reduced number of stepchildren over nineteen, we did not include a cutting point at that age, the end of adolescence. Descriptive statistics for the S-PASCQ'S items were also obtained and analysed.

An EFA was used to identify the factor structure for the 30 items grouped by Lemos and Cadima (2014) that was most adequate for our sample, using an extraction method of Principal Components Analysis and a varimax rotation method with Kaiser's normalization. A CFA was used to further assess the factor structure reached and the possible need for adjustments, checking the chi-square ratio ($\chi^2/d.f$; values below two indicate a good fit), the comparative fit index (CFI; values ranging from .95 to 1.00 suggest a good fit, while values from .90 to .95 an acceptable fit), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; values under .08 indicate an acceptable fit), following Schweizer's (2010) criteria.

Cronbach's alpha was tested to assess the scale's reliability, considering values $\geq .70$ as acceptable (Bland & Altman, 1997). In turn, test-retest reliability was measured through Pearson's correlations between the first assessment's results and the second's, with significant correlations suggesting test-retest reliability.

Regarding construct validity, we assessed both convergent and discriminant validity through Pearson's correlations. A questionnaire presents convergent validity if significant correlations are found between it and measures theoretically similar or correlated (Campbell, 1960). Therefore, we measured the correlations between S-PASCQ's scales and dimensions and R-DAS' total score, considering significant correlations as an indicator of convergent validity. To prove discriminant validity, it must be shown that a questionnaire does not correlate with measures theoretically not correlated with it (Campbell, 1960). Hence, we measured the correlations between S-PASCQ's scales and dimensions and PSS's total score, considering non-significant correlations as an indicator of discriminant validity.

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary analyses

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for S-PASCQ's items. All values of skewness (<3) and kurtosis (<7) are under the acceptable roof, as indicated by Marôco (2014).

Table 2*Descriptive statistics for S-PASCQ's items*

S-PASCQ Items	Mean (SD)	Median	Min/Max	IQR	sk	ku
Item 1	2.78(.12)	3.00	1-4	2	-.47	-.93
Item 2	2.86(.12)	3.00	1-4	2	-.60	-.79
Item 3	3.32(.09)	3.00	1-4	1	-1.39	2.04
Item 4	3.35(.08)	3.00	1-4	1	-1.04	1.35
Item 5	3.41(.09)	4.00	1-4	1	-1.56	2.09
Item 6	1.98(.01)	2.00	1-4	2	.30	-.98
Item 7	1.68(.08)	2.00	1-3	2	.55	-.83
Item 8	1.96(.10)	2.00	1-4	2	.48	-.83
Item 9	1.31(.07)	1.00	1-3	2	1.76	2.09
Item 10	1.54(.08)	1.00	1-3	1	.89	-.40
Item 11	3.44(.09)	4.00	1-4	1	-1.60	2.45
Item 12	3.43(.09)	4.00	1-4	1	-1.43	1.84
Item 13	2.06(.11)	2.00	1-4	2	.50	-.72
Item 14	3.64(.07)	4.00	1-4	1	-2.17	5.24
Item 15	3.58(.08)	4.00	1-4	1	-2.02	4.29
Item 16	1.75(.09)	2.00	1-4	1	.77	-.22
Item 17	1.38(.07)	1.00	1-4	1	1.72	3.27
Item 18	1.79(.09)	2.00	1-4	1	.55	-.77
Item 19	2.12(.10)	2.00	1-4	2	-.04	-1.37
Item 20	1.52(.09)	1.00	1-4	1	1.25	.32
Item 21	3.02(.08)	3.00	1-4	2	-.55	-.33
Item 22	2.83(.10)	3.00	1-4	1	-.58	-.29
Item 23	2.91(.11)	3.00	1-4	2	-.72	-.27
Item 24	3.04(.09)	3.00	1-4	1	-.75	.30
Item 25	3.33(.09)	4.00	1-4	1	-1.23	.99
Item 26	2.05(.11)	2.00	1-4	2	.51	-.74
Item 27	1.74(.11)	1.00	1-4	2	-.45	2.14
Item 28	2.14(.11)	2.00	1-4	2	.30	-1.16
Item 29	2.02(.10)	2.00	1-4	2	.31	-.86
Item 30	1.98(.10)	2.00	1-4	2	.17	-1.37

3.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Through a Principal Components Analysis with varimax rotation, we studied the dimensionality of S-PASCQ's 30 items. No items were removed following Field's (2005) criterion as all thirty presented communalities values $\geq .50$. Items 8, 9, and 25 loaded on more than one factor with a difference $\leq .10$ but were not removed due to the implications on their respective dimensions' internal consistency and not presenting inadequate values on the CFA. The EFA resulted in a seven-factor solution accounting for a total of 70.37% of the scale's total variance, with KMO and Bartlett's Test of samples adequacy of .764, $\chi^2(435) = 1530.83$, $p < .001$. The first factor (Autonomy Support) accounted for 30.44%, the second factor (Coercion) accounted for 13.27%, the third factor (Rejection-affection) accounted for 7.47%, the fourth factor (Warmth) accounted for 6.14%, the fifth factor (Structure) accounted for 4.75%, the sixth factor (Chaos) accounted for 4.39%, and the seventh factor (Rejection-time) accounted for 3.92% of the scale's total variance. This solution presented a coherent distribution of the items. However, items loaded differently from Skinner et al.'s (2005) model. Rejection was split into two separate dimensions. The remaining dimensions presented in a more similar manner, but some items loaded on a different dimension, e.g., item 25 ("I show my stepchild I like him/her") was expected to load on Warmth but loaded on Autonomy Support instead.

We then attempted a six-factor solution, as it was obtained by both Skinner et al. (2005) and Egeli et al. (2015). However, item 9 did not load on any factor and the remaining items did not load on a coherent way. An analysis of the scree plot suggested a five-factor solution, which was also tried. But, again, the items did not load on a coherent manner. Therefore, the seven-factor solution was selected for further analysis. Table 3 shows the final structure, identifying the items in each dimension and respective factor loadings.

Table 3*Factor structure of S-PASCQ after EFA*

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
Autonomy Support							
12. I encourage my stepchild to express his/her opinions even when I don't agree with them.	.822						
14. I encourage my stepchild to be honest with himself/herself.	.813						
11. I encourage my stepchild to express his/her feeling even when they are hard to express.	.730						
15. I expect my stepchild to say what he/she really thinks.	.665						
25. I show my stepchild I like him/her.	.496						
Coercion							
19. I sometimes feel I have to push my stepchild to do things.		.755					
17. To get my stepchild to do something, I have to scream with him/her.		.717					
20. I find myself getting into power struggles with my stepchild.		.654					
16. My stepchild is always contradicting me.		.632					
26. I don't understand my stepchild very well.		.606					
18. I can't afford to let my stepchild decide on too many things on his/her own.		.568					
Rejection-affection							
27. Sometimes my stepchild is hard to like.			.678				
13. I trust my stepchild.			.654				
28. I sometimes feel my stepchild's demands are a burden.			.638				
Warmth							
21. I know a lot about what goes on for my stepchild.				.843			
22. I truly know how my stepchild feels.				.743			
23. I do special things with my stepchild.				.681			
24. I set aside time to speak with my stepchild about what is important to him/her.				.579			
Structure							
1. I make the consequences of not following the rules clear to my stepchild.					.801		
2. I make what I expect of my stepchild clear.					.735		
3. I want my stepchild to follow our family's rules.					.697		
4. When I tell my stepchild I will do something, I do it.					.590		

5. When my stepchild has a problem, I help him/her solve it.	.489	
Chaos		
7. When my stepchild messes up, my reaction is not very predictable.	.718	
10. I can be mad at my stepchild with no warning.	.704	
6. I allow my stepchild to do things I should not allow.	.619	
9. I change the rules of my household a lot.	.535	
8. My stepchild does not seem to know what I expect of him/her.	.526	
Rejection-time		
29. My child needs more than I have time to give him/her.		.825
30. Sometimes I feel like I cannot be there for my child when he/she needs me.		.824

Notes. Extraction Method: Principal Components Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser's Normalization^a. a. Rotation converged in 13 iterations.

3.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

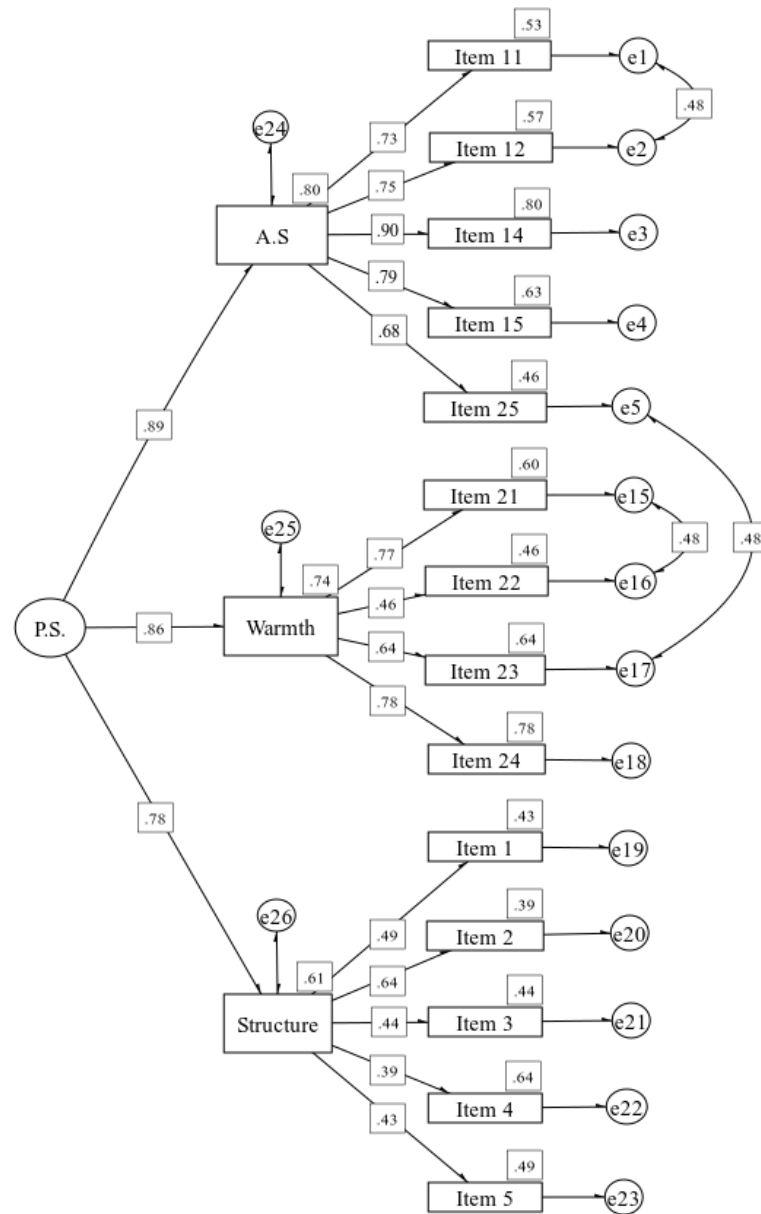
The seven-factor structure obtained through the EFA was further tested through a CFA, in which all dimensions were correlated. This did not prove to be a viable path, as the values for the CFI and RMSEA were not adequate, hence the thirty items cannot be grouped into a total score.

Skinner et al. (2005) suggested that the scale could be merged into two higher order factors, one grouping positive parenting characteristics and another grouping negative parenting characteristics. This led us to merge the dimensions Warmth, Structure, and Autonomy Support into a higher order factor (Positive Stepmothering; Figure 1) and the dimensions Coercion, Chaos, Rejection-affection, and Rejection-time into a separate higher order factor (Negative Stepmothering; Figure 2).

Positive Stepmothering presented values of $\chi^2 (71) = 134.46$; SRMR = .089; CFI = .908; RMSEA = .106 after adding paths of covariance suggested by modification indices between the errors of items 11 (“I encourage my stepchild to express his/her feelings even when they are hard to express”) and 12 (“I encourage my stepchild to express his/her opinions even when I don’t agree with them”), 21 (“I know a lot about what goes on for my stepchild”) and 22 (“I truly know how my stepchild feels”), and 23 (“I do special things with my stepchild”) and 25 (“I show my stepchild I like him/her”). The first pair was added as it was grammatically similar and both items related to the expression of a personal view. Both items of the second pair related to stepmothers’ perception of the knowledge they possess regarding their stepchildren, the first associated with knowledge of experiences and the second with knowledge of feelings. The third pair conveyed the idea of an affectionate relationship, either by shared experiences or by showing affection. The standardized factor loadings ranged from .62 to .90 and were all statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Figure 1

CFA of the Positive Stepmothering scale

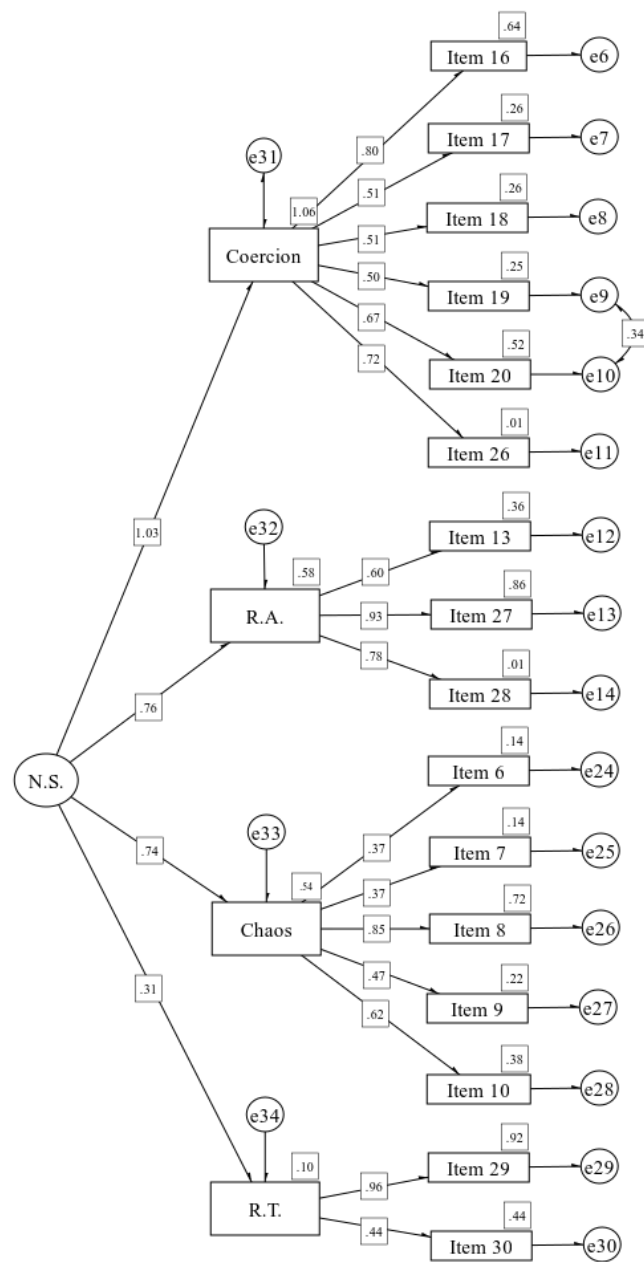


Note. P.S.=Positive Stepmothering, A.S.=Autonomy Support

Negative Stepmothering presented values of $\chi^2 (99) = 132.48$; SRMR = .084; CFI = .922; RMSEA = .065 after adding paths of covariance suggested by modification indices between the errors of items 19 (“I sometimes feel I have to push my stepchild to do things”) and 20 (“I find myself getting into power struggles with my stepchild”). Both these items suggest the presence of disputes between stepmother and stepchild, as well as a possible perception of lack of authority on the stepmother’s end. The standardized factor loadings ranged from .37 to .96 and were all statistically significant ($p=.014$). Items 6 and 7 presented a factor loading of .37, i.e., $<.40$, but were not removed since it would lower the internal consistency of Chaos.

Figure 2

CFA of the Negative Stepmothering Scale



Note. N.S.=Negative Stepmothering, R.A.=Rejection-affection, R.T=Rejection-time

3.4. Reliability

Both the scales and dimensions' internal consistency were assessed using Cronbach's α . Both scales presented a good internal consistency, Positive Stepmothering with a Cronbach's α of .92 and Negative Stepmothering with a Cronbach's α of .86. Internal consistency was also good through all dimensions, ranging from Chaos' Cronbach's α of .70 to Warmth and Autonomy Support's Cronbach's alphas of .88. These analyses are presented on Table 4, as well as correlations among S-PASCQ's dimensions and scales and descriptive statistics for each scale and dimension.

Table 4

Reliability estimates, correlations between S-PASCQ's dimensions and scales, and descriptive statistics for S-PASCQ's dimensions and scales (n = 81)

	Chronbach's alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mean (SD)	Median	Min-Max	IR	Sk	Ku
1. Structure	.82											15.71 (.38)	16.00	5-20	3.50	-.93	.79
2. Chaos	.70	-,21										8.47 (.28)	8.00	5-16	3.00	.81	.18
3. Autonomy Support	.88	,58**	-,25*									17.43 (.35)	19.00	5-20	4.00	-1.68	3.42
4. Coercion	.81	-,12	,45**	-,28*								10.62 (.39)	11.00	6-24	5.50	.74	1.09
5. Rejection-affection	.88	-,25*	,41**	-,53**	,62**							11.80 (.34)	12.00	4-16	4.00	-.66	.12
6. Warmth	.80	,56**	-,27*	,71**	-,32**	-,55**						5.94(.28)	5.00	3-12	4.00	.54	-.81
7. Rejection-time	.77	-,03	,21	,08	,29**	,20	,06					4.00 (.17)	4.00	2-7	3.50	.16	-1.17
8. Positive Stepmothering	.92	-.84**	-.28*	.88**	-.27*	-.51**	.87**	.04				44.95 (.91)	47.00	14-56	10.50	-1.25	2.08
9. Negative Stepmothering	.86	-.21	.72**	-.37**	.87**	.79**	-.40**	.48**	-.38**			29.02 (.85)	27.00	16-50	11.50	.47	-.52
10. Dyadic Adjustment	.71	,23*	-,30**	,25*	-,21	-,25*	,34**	-,04	.31**	-.29**		35.73 (1.16)	33.00	18-63	15.50	.60	.49
11. Perceived Stress	.63	.05	-.08	-.04	.02	.002	.05	.11	.02	.004	-.12	20.53 (.52)	20.00	6-35	5.00	.10	2.28

** $p < .01$ (2 tailed); * $p < .05$ (2 tailed)

3.4.1. Test-retest reliability

Ten stepmothers answered the questionnaire six months after the first assessment, which allowed for an analysis of test-retest reliability. Positive Stepmothering had a test-retest reliability of .74 and Negative Stepmothering of .67. Regarding the dimensions, Structure presented a test-retest reliability of .42, Chaos of .58, Autonomy Support of .88, Coercion of .34, Warmth of .51, Rejection-affection of .92, and Rejection time of -.06.

Therefore, correlations were significant for Positive Stepmothering, Negative Stepmothering, Autonomy Support, and Rejection-affection, only suggesting test-retest reliability for these scales and dimensions, which were all positively correlated with their respective second assessments.

3.5. Construct Validity

3.5.1. Convergent validity

Table 4 shows the correlations between the dimensions and scales of S-PASCQ and dyadic adjustment. We found positive correlations when correlating dyadic adjustment with Positive Stepmothering and its dimensions and a negative correlation among dyadic adjustment and Negative Stepmothering and its dimensions. These were all significant, suggesting convergent validity, except when correlating dyadic adjustment with coercion or with rejection-time. However, all correlations presented with a low magnitude.

3.5.2. Discriminant validity

Correlations between the S-PASCQ's scales and dimensions and perceived stress were all positive, except when correlated with Chaos or Autonomy Support. However, all

were statistically non-significant and of very low magnitude, suggesting discriminant validity. These results are presented in Table 4.

4. Discussion

The present study intended to assess the psychometric properties of PASCQ's Portuguese version when applied to a sample of stepmothers, proposing the Step-Parents as a Social Context Questionnaire (stepmother's report; S-PASCQ). This work is relevant to the field of stepfamily studies because it adds to the very limited number of instruments validated for stepparents available to date. Additionally, it is the first published attempt at a validation of the Portuguese version of PASCQ, which has been used in previous studies.

Through an EFA we reached a seven-factor solution for the questionnaire, which was expected given that Egeli et al. (2015) reached the same number of factors, even though they decided on a six-factor solution. On Egeli et al.'s (2015) seven-factor model, Warmth was split into two dimensions; Autonomy Support and Structure loaded as suggested by Skinner et al. (2005); Chaos was measured by four items and Rejection by two; Coercion and the remaining items of Chaos and Rejection loaded as a single factor; two items did not load, and two items loaded on more than one factor. In turn, our analysis led to the division of Rejection into two separate dimensions, one of which being measured by two items and the other containing an item from Coercion; Structure and Chaos loaded as suggested by Skinner et al. (2005); Warmth and Coercion presented a very similar pattern to Skinner et al.'s (2005) suggestion, except for one item each, i.e., one item of Warmth loaded on Autonomy Support and one item of Rejection loaded on Coercion; Autonomy Support kept most of its original items, but one loaded on Coercion and an item of Warmth was added. Rejection's division was kept as it was conceptually coherent, leading to the dimensions Rejection-affection and Rejection-time. The first grouped items 13 ("I trust my stepchild"), 27 ("Sometimes my stepchild is hard to like"), and 28 ("I sometimes feel my stepchild's demands are a burden"), all surrounding obstacles to the feeling of affection towards the stepchild. The latter encompassed items 29 ("My child needs more than I have time to give him/her") and 30 ("Sometimes I feel like I cannot be there for my child when he/she needs me"), both referring to the perception of lack of time to invest in the stepchild's needs.

Egeli et al. (2005) assessed the possibility of R-PASCQ's six dimensions combining into two higher order factors measuring positive parenting and negative parenting. Instead, they found that the dimensions grouped into one higher order factor that measured the overall adequacy of the parenting style to the child's psychological needs. In the present study, we found that the seven dimensions of S-PASCQ adjust better to the model with two scales proposed by Skinner et al. (2005) than to a single higher order factor. Our findings suggest that a seven-factor model applied to stepmothers is capable of measuring both positive stepmothering and negative stepmothering. Unlike a total score, this division allows the identification of uninvolved stepmothers, i.e., those who have a low score on both scales, and of volatile stepmothers, i.e., those who have a high score on both scales, which is advantageous when compared with a single scale because it keeps these scores from falling in the mid-range and, therefore, from being indistinguishable (Skinner et al., 2005).

Reliability analysis showed a satisfactory internal consistency for both scales discussed above, as well as for all S-PASCQ's dimensions. Positive Stepmothering presented the best reliability score of all scales and dimensions measured, as well as the test-retest reliability with the biggest magnitude. Negative Stepmothering also presented a very high internal consistency and a good test-retest reliability, further supporting their adequacy as independent scales. S-PASCQ's stronger dimensions are Autonomy Support and Rejection-affection, since both have high internal consistencies and present the strongest test-retest reliability. The remaining dimensions – Chaos, Coercion, Warmth, and Rejection-time – all present Cronbach's alphas ranging from .70 to .81, i.e., satisfactory to good internal consistencies, but did not present test-retest reliability, suggesting an inconsistency on stepmothers' responses from the first to the second assessment. Overall, reliability analyses showed the scales and dimensions' functionality as unipolar and independent variables, which allows for a more comprehensive study of the multiple interactions that happen through the course of a stepmother-stepchild relationship. Nevertheless, it is worth questioning why only some dimensions have consistent results over time, thus future research should observe if this happens due to sample limitations of our study, i.e., results for test-retest reliability were obtained from only ten respondents, or if it happens due to changes in the stepmother-stepchild relationship related to its natural course.

Skinner et al. (2005) suggested that the combination of high scores on positive parenting dimensions would be an indicator of authoritative parenting, while the combination

of high scores on negative parenting dimensions would indicate a harsh or unsupportive parenting style, whose characteristics of high coercion, rejection and chaos also relate to the concept of authoritarian parenting. These types of parenting have been widely studied and it has been made clear by meta-analysis that an authoritative style is preferable for child outcomes such as self-esteem, internalizing and externalizing symptoms, and academic performance (Pinquart & Gerke, 2019; Pinquart, 2017; Pinquart, 2017a; Pinquart, 2018; Pinquart, 2016). These outcomes are also supported by SDT (Grolnick & Farkas, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

However, when it comes to the stepfamily experience there might be room to question whether the choice of one type over the others is as obvious or if the different circumstances and periods of stepfamily life might call for unintuitive approaches. Therefore, having access to an instrument which allows assessment of four stepparenting types, i.e., authoritative, authoritarian, volatile, and uninvolved, as well as of seven independent dimensions is very useful for research on this matter. Cartwright's (2014) exploratory study suggests that the parent-child relationship may benefit from the maintenance of a disciplinary role by the resident parent and a supportive stance by the stepparent. Thus, the combination of an authoritarian stepparent with a lax resident parent, which frequently happens, may not only lead to negative child outcomes, but also damage the relationships being formed within the stepfamily. Interestingly, even the considered optimal parenting style, i.e., the authoritative type, might not be ideal for stepparents to assume from the get-go, with authors suggesting that a lax stepparenting style could help with the establishment of the stepparent-stepchild relationship (Nicholson et al., 2008). The stepparent-stepchild relationship has long-term effects on the stepchild's outcomes, as has been shown by Lardier Jr. et al. (2017), who found that when individuals resided in a stepmother household during adolescence, the stepmother-stepchild relationship had a positive and direct influence on the adult child's marital quality, similar to the results found for the mother-child relationship.

Convergent validity analysis showed significant correlations between most stepmothering dimensions and dyadic adjustment. Positive dimensions and Positive Stepmothering presented a positive correlation with dyadic adjustment. In turn, Chaos, Rejection-affection and Negative Stepmothering had negative and significant correlations with dyadic adjustment. Coercion and Rejection-time's correlations with dyadic adjustment were of very low magnitude, but also negative. This suggests that S-PASCQ is capable of assessing the association between stepmothering variables and dyadic adjustment. Discriminant validity

analysis presented no significant correlations between perceived stress and S-PASCQ's scales and dimensions, suggesting that S-PASCQ is not significantly influenced by perceived stress. This was the expected outcome despite stepmothers reporting high levels of stress (Shapiro & Stewart, 2011), since this has not been associated with stepchild care. Therefore, both convergent and discriminant validity have been observed.

The guidelines for minimum respondent to item ratio are variable (Tsang et al., 2017), with the broadest suggestion being a 5:1 ratio (Gorusch, 1983, as cited in Tsang et al., 2017). Our sample did not meet this standard, and hence results should be used with caution and further analysis is recommended. However, since validations on this field of research are scarce, we still consider the present study to be an important contribution. Another relevant limitation is that S-PASCQ's items were adapted from the original parent-focused questionnaire only suffering language modifications, i.e., no items were added to this validation that could address situations specific to stepfamily living, such as coparenting and remarriage beliefs. Further explorations of this questionnaire could experiment with adding new and more specific items.

Future research on this field should focus on validating or building instruments to be used with stepparents. Regarding S-PASCQ, it would be relevant to conduct psychometric analysis on a sample of stepfathers and stepchildren, as well as on a larger sample of stepmothers. This would allow for more comprehensive studies on the experiences of stepfamilies, specifically regarding how the different stepparenting styles and dimensions influence stepchildren's outcomes, remarried couples' marital adjustment, and stepchild-stepparent relationship's quality.

This study also holds implications for psychological practice as it provides support for an instrument capable of aiding professionals to access stepmothers' perceptions on their style of stepparenting and of serving as an efficacy measure for intervention programs. It also provides further support to literature suggesting that marital quality is associated with stepparenting, highlighting the need to consider stepparenting experiences when dealing with remarried couples seeking counselling.

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