

Adolescence and Solo Child-Mother Relationship: Perception of teenage children in female single parenthood

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the perspective of adolescent children on their current stage of development, as well as on their relationship with their solo mothers. Ten adolescents who were sons or daughters of female single-parent families, simple or extended, from a municipality in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul participated in the study. The research was characterized as descriptive-exploratory and qualitative in nature. Regarding the instruments, a sociodemographic data sheet and an interview about being a teenage child in a solo mother family were used, which was analyzed using Content Analysis. The results found demonstrated that the adolescents in the study had a somewhat adultized view of themselves, possibly because they had preparatory experiences for the developmental tasks of the adult world. In general, they maintained a positive relationship with their mothers, with good communication. It was noted that some adolescents found it difficult to move away from the mother figure, to make new investments related to adolescence. Even though some complications were noticed, the child-solo mother relationship was considered to be of good quality and family health characteristics were present. Such findings can contribute to the development of professional practices and public policies that are non-stigmatizing and supportive of adolescent children and single mothers in our country.

Keywords: adolescence, solo mother, single-parent family, parenthood, life cycle

ADOLESCÊNCIA E RELAÇÃO FILHO(A)-MÃE SOLO: PERCEÇÃO DE FILHOS(AS) ADOLESCENTES NA MONOPARENTALIDADE FEMININA

Resumo

Este estudo teve por objetivo compreender a perspectiva dos(as) filhos(as) adolescentes sobre a sua atual fase do desenvolvimento, assim como sobre a relação com suas mães solo. Participaram do estudo 10 adolescentes que eram filhos e/ou filhas de famílias monoparentais femininas, simples ou extensa de um município no interior do Rio Grande do Sul. A pesquisa foi caracterizada como descritivo-exploratório e de cunho qualitativo. Em relação aos instrumentos, utilizou-se uma ficha de dados sociodemográficos e uma entrevista sobre ser filho(a) adolescente em uma família de mãe solo, a qual foi analisada a partir da análise de conteúdo. Os resultados encontrados demonstraram que os(as) adolescentes do estudo possuíam uma visão adulta de si mesmos, possivelmente por terem experiências preparatórias para as tarefas do mundo adulto. De modo geral, mantinham uma relação positiva com suas mães, com boa comunicação. Constatou-se a dificuldade de alguns adolescentes em se afastarem da figura materna, para realizar novos investimentos concernentes à adolescência. Mesmo que algumas intercorrências tenham sido percebidas, a relação filho(a)-mãe solo foi considerada de qualidade e características de saúde familiar estiveram presentes. Tais achados podem contribuir para o desenvolvimento de práticas profissionais e políticas públicas não estigmatizantes e de apoio aos filhos adolescentes e às mães solo no nosso país.

Palavras-chave: adolescência, mãe solo, família monoparental, parentalidade, ciclo vital

ADOLESCENCIA Y RELACIÓN MADRE-HIJO SOLA: PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS HIJOS ADOLESCENTES EN LA MATERNIDAD MONOPARENTAL FEMININA

Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo comprender la perspectiva de los niños adolescentes sobre su etapa actual de desarrollo, así como sobre su relación con sus madres solteras. Participaron del estudio diez adolescentes hijos o hijas de familias monoparentales femininas, simples o extendidas, de un municipio del interior de Rio Grande do Sul. La investigación se caracterizó por ser de naturaleza descriptiva-exploratoria y cualitativa. En cuanto a los instrumentos, se utilizó una ficha de datos sociodemográficos y una entrevista sobre ser hijo adolescente en una familia monoparental, la cual se analizó mediante Análisis de Contenido. Los resultados encontrados demostraron que los adolescentes del estudio tenían una visión adulta de sí mismos, posiblemente porque tuvieron experiencias preparatorias para las tareas de desarrollo del mundo

adulto. En general, mantuvieron una relación positiva con sus madres, con buena comunicación. Se observó que a algunos adolescentes les resultó difícil alejarse de la figura materna para realizar nuevas inversiones relacionadas con la adolescencia. Aunque se observaron algunas complicaciones, la relación hijo-madre sola se consideró de buena calidad y estaban presentes características de salud familiar. Estos hallazgos pueden contribuir al desarrollo de prácticas profesionales y políticas públicas no estigmatizantes y solidarias con los niños adolescentes y las madres solteras en nuestro país.

Palabras-clave: adolescencia, madre solitaria, familia monoparental, paternidad, ciclo vital

The family corresponds to the place where, in general, the individual maintains their first relationships with important people (Romanelli, 1997). It is considered that the emotional exchanges that occur in the family are necessary for the development of all members, as well as for the achievement of physical and mental conditions for the other stages of the family life cycle. It is possible to understand that, even in the face of all the changes in family configurations, this remains an important part of the constitution of its members. In this way, the quality of the bonds and exchanges carried out influence the development of individuals as a person, as well as the relationships with other social groups (Penso & Costa, 2008).

According to Dias (2011), the definition of family has been expanded in view of the new family models, as well as their recognition and legitimation. With changes in the lifestyle of families, they experience new values, beliefs and social practices. In this regard, the single-parent family stands out, which, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2012), is characterized as the family in which there is only the presence of a person responsible for the domestic unit, male or female, with the presence of at least one child or another child, or an adolescent under their custody. Also, there may or may not be another adult, relative or not, residing in the home. Regarding female single parenthood or “solo motherhood”, as will be addressed in this study, in 2015, this corresponded to 26.8% of family arrangements in Brazil (Ibge, 2016).

With the emergence of studies and work with women’s groups from the 70s onwards, it was possible to observe the expansion of feminist psychology and, consequently, of feminist therapies. In this sense, feminist family therapy, a branch of family therapy, proposes the inclusion of discussions about gender and power differences in the family system as necessary to the practice of family therapy (Nogueira, 2001; Rampage & Avis, 1998). It also keeps in mind the questioning of traditional conceptions of family and proposes visibility and legitimacy for other configurations that do not fit the heteronormative standard (Canevacci, 1987; Figueira, 1987). For single mothers, there is still a social opinion that argues about the lack of a father, and that considers this mother as a figure often criticized (Goodrich et al., 1990). However, according to Goodrich et al. (1990), female single-parent families operate based on consensual organization. These families do not work from a hierarchical structure, but from a participatory democracy, aiming to satisfy the needs of each member. In this sense, they may experience fewer interpersonal conflicts as the mother figure feels more capable of managing resources and routine activities, even when resources are scarcer.

The expression “solo mother”, which emerged in the debates developed by women mainly on social networks, began to be inserted in the academic field in the second decade of the twenty-first century, replacing the consecrated pejorative denomination “single mother”. The new linguistic use is in line with social changes by disassociating motherhood from the marital status of women (Galvão, 2020), advocating the characteristic that this woman is the one who cohabits, cares, raises, and educates her child mostly alone (Câmara & Almeida, 2021). According to Finamori and Bastista (2022), in addition to problematizing the relationship between

motherhood and conjugality, the term is associated with the claim for legitimacy and the positivity of the experiences of those who make such family arrangements. For the present study, emphasis will be given to families composed of single mothers and their adolescent child(ren).

Regarding adolescence, according to Cerqueira-Santos et al. (2014), it is not characterized as a transition from childhood to adulthood but it is loaded with peculiarities in terms of subjective experiences, in addition to being influenced by different life contexts. Adolescence occurs differently for each subject and is in constant influence of the culture in which each one is inserted. With this, one can think of adolescence as a cultural, individual and historical phenomenon. Silva et al. (2021), suggest considering it as part of a process of maturation and intense life learning.

As a stage of the family life cycle, children's adolescence presents some specific tasks that involve all family members. This process is commonly characterized by the reorganization of roles, demands, and interests, as well as relationships inside and outside the family. It is necessary for the family to review the relational patterns and authorize greater flexibility in the boundaries established between the subsystems (Luisi & Cangelli Filho, 1997). According to Preto (1995), flexibility is a key characteristic for the quality of intergenerational relationships in families with adolescent children. Issues involving sexuality and its effects on adolescents and their fathers/mothers, as well as the issue of children's identity, become relevant, in a movement of greater autonomy and decision-making by children. In a profound way, the transformations of families during the children's adolescence are related to attachment, separation and loss and are necessary for the family to follow its course of life (Preto, 1995). However, as McGoldrick and Shibusawa (2016) point out, although children become more independent and autonomous in adolescence, they still need relationships of proximity, affection and care from their caregivers.

Thus, it can be thought that part of the role of fathers/mothers would be to enable a life context that favors the development of their children. A healthy family functioning would be characterized by constructs such as support, cohesion, and clear communication among members (Sprinthall & Collins, 2003). In view of the adolescent children in the families of single mothers, this study aimed to understand the perspective of adolescent children on their current stage of development, as well as on the relationship with their mothers.

Method

Participants

The study included 10 adolescents who were sons or daughters of single mothers, four men and six women. The participants were aged between 15 and 20 years and had not experienced any family configuration other than the female single parent. All adolescents participating in the research lived in a municipality in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul. Some maintained occasional and sporadic contact with their father. Regarding the race/ethnicity of the participants, 7 were considered white and 3 brown.

Regarding the age criterion, we opted for the one stipulated by the World Health Organization (1965), which characterizes an adolescent as one aged between 10 and 20 years old, and which refers to the second decade of the subject's life. All adolescents were 15 years of age or older, characterized as in their late adolescence (Outeiral, 1994). This delimitation was relevant for the participants to have time of family experience as an adolescent in their families.

Table 1 presents the characterization of the study participants, as well as their families. It is noteworthy that, in order to preserve identities, the participants will be identified from the letter A, for Adolescent, accompanied by the number in which the interviews took place.

Table 1

Characterization of the study participants.

Participants	Sex	Age	Schooling of the adolescent	Schooling of the Mother	Profession/ Occupation of the adolescent	Profession/ Occupation Mother's	Who do you live with (age)?	Household incomes
A1	F	18	Incomplete Higher Education	Complete High School	Student	Caregiver for the Elderly	Mother (47) Sister (20)	1 to 3
A2	F	17	Incomplete High School	Complete Higher Education	Student	Unattended	Mother (41) Aunts (50 and 55) Cousin (24)	1 to 3
A3	F	16	Incomplete High School	Complete Higher Education	Student	Nurse	Mother (42)	6 to 9
A4	F	19	Incomplete Higher Education	Complete High School	Student	Unattended	Mother (38)	1 to 3
A5	F	15	Incomplete High School	Complete Higher Education	Student	Nurse	Mother (44)	3 to 6
A6	M	20	Complete High School	Complete High School	Military	Nursing Technician	Mother (51)	3 to 6
A7	M	17	Incomplete High School	Incomplete Elementary School	Student	Domestic employee	Mother (59) Brother (19) Brother (20)	1 to 3
A8	M	20	Complete High School	Incomplete Elementary School	Military	Independent worker	Mother (59) Brother (17) Brother (19)	1 to 3
A9	M	19	Incomplete High School	Incomplete Elementary School	Military	Housewife	Mother (58) Brother (17) Brother (20)	1 to 3
A10	F	20	Nursing Technician	Complete High School	Nursing technician	Retired Domestic employee	Mother (54)	1 to 3

Source: Prepared by the author.

¹ In minimum wages referring only to maternal income.

Outline

Qualitative research is, for Minayo (2014), related to the understanding of human beings and their relationships, correlating with their meanings, experiences and values. It aims at categorizing, understanding and interpreting the studied phenomenon.

The research also had a descriptive exploratory character. As Gil (2010) argues, it is descriptive because it intended to analyze the description of characteristics, or of some phenomenon. Finally, its exploratory character is due to the intention of explaining the phenomenon in question and becoming familiar with it.

Procedures and Instruments

Having received a favorable opinion from the Research Ethics Committee (CEP), under CAAE number: 58459322.2.0000.5346, the participants were contacted through the social network WhatsApp, followed by the dissemination of the research on other social networks, such as Instagram and Facebook, or by referrals. Data collection took place virtually with seven participants and in person with three participants, according to the preference and availability of the adolescents in question. The virtual meetings took place through the Google Meet application, and the face-to-face meetings were held on the premises of the university to which the researcher is linked. Based on what was proposed in the theory of the mature minor (Cornock, 2007), it was possible to obtain exemption from the signature of the informed consent form by the mothers of the adolescents and the adolescents signed the Term of Assent, shared through the online platform Google Forms.

The instruments used to carry out the research were the Sociodemographic Data Sheet, with the characterization of the participants, as well as their family life context and their mothers. In addition, an Interview about the Experience of being an adolescent child in a single mother's family was used. This was organized and applied in a semi-structured way, with the purpose of understanding the constructions about their own adolescence, as well as about experiences related to the routine and relationship with their mothers. The interviews lasted about 1h30min and were recorded in audio and later transcribed for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical precepts established by Resolutions No. 466 of 2012 and No. 510 of 2016, which regulate research with human beings and, especially, in Social Sciences and Humanities (Brazil, 2016), in addition to the guidelines of the National Research Ethics Commission for studies in virtual environments (Ministry of Health, 2021), were contemplated. It is noteworthy that for the study participants, the confidentiality of the data was guaranteed, as well as their privacy and the possibility of withdrawing their participation in the research at any time. Finally, information on the risks and benefits of the research was also passed on.

Data analysis

For the analysis of the data obtained through the interviews, Bardin's (2011) content analysis was used. This methodology intends, through systematic procedures, to search for meanings and understandings common to the data obtained, and to define categories to be analyzed and discussed. From the transcribed interviews, we sought to identify units of meaning, with the aim of constituting the thematic categories, in order to have a better understanding and synthesis of the results. At the end of this analysis, the results were organized into the following categories: (1) Adolescence and self-perception and (2) Child-single mother relationship.

Results

Adolescence and self-perception

Regarding the experience of adolescence, some participants reported leaving their mother's house (due to entering university) or entering the labor market and the Brazilian army as important milestones of adolescence and approach to adulthood, associated with new demands and developmental tasks: "It was extremely difficult for me (to adapt to the new routine living without my mother). I had never needed it, and I went to a psychiatrist, because it was something that really took me off track completely. And all this changed at once, because I got in (at the university). So, at the end of March, beginning of April, there was class already and everything is different, everything new. So, it was very tiring mentally, physically too, because it's another routine. It's completely different" (A4). "For me, it's good (the responsibilities he assumes at home), because he teaches me, in adult life, practically. And it creates responsibility and discipline as well" (A7). "It was a new opportunity for me. As I didn't work with a formal contract and earned little money, going to the army was the best thing that happened to me" (A8). One participant indicated a perception of himself as entering adult life, or, at least, rehearsing himself for it from the association of responsibilities in the world of work: "This year, I'm stressing out a lot, because I had never worked. And at the army, things are going very fast. So, I'm just adapting, in terms of problems, these things in adult life. [...] It's just that I'm just starting my adult life, so I'm trying to avoid problems, inside and outside the army. My professionalism and those things" (A9). This view of the self is in line with the literature, which says that in the family with adolescent children, changes occur in structural terms and in the renegotiation of family roles, since adolescents seek greater autonomy and independence (Luisi & Cangelli Filho, 1997).

Yet, it can be conjectured that, because they were single mothers, the adolescents under discussion in the present study experienced the need to become more participative and responsible in activities that other children could be spared. The adolescents also reported a positive view of their participation and contribution to their families. They indicated a sense of belonging and importance and collaboration for their families, just as their mothers were perceived by them.

“Sometimes I make the right decisions, sometimes the wrong ones. I help in whatever way I can. If I have something left over, I help. I help with my knowledge, I help with something material, something I have. I’m a humble person, a present person, if you call me I’m there too. A person who helps practically within my family” (A7); “I think this is very important, even so as not to overload her (mother), because this also helps us to understand a little of people’s real lives. You’re already kind of getting used to it. Like, there was a time when I had to make food, because my mother would go on a trip and she would come back a little late, I would make lunch. Or, when she was there (at work), doing shifts, then I would come home and make the food. So, these are the few things that are already preparing me for adulthood. I already know how to cook, I already know how to wash the dishes, dry the clothes, sweep the house, which I see is not very common nowadays. I had a colleague of mine, who had never picked up a piece of clothing in his life. He never washed a dish. I was like, ‘My God, I’ve been doing this for as long as I can remember’” (A5).

According to Arnett (2000), the period up to the age of twenty, corresponding to the final years of adolescence, is significant and lived with profound changes. Many achieve the level of education and training required for working life. Before many young people make far-reaching life choices, at the age of 20, they will go through an intense period of experimentation. In this sense, Ponciano and Féres-Carneiro (2014), based on a study with fathers and mothers who had children between 15 and 26 years of age, highlight the relevance of the active presence of fathers/mothers in this period of transition to adult life, by promoting support for the growth and autonomy of their children.

Some participants also referred to conflicts and misunderstandings experienced in the relationship with their mother in view of the growing need for differentiation and autonomy experienced by them, and some of the conflicts were seen differently at the aforementioned moment: “It’s just that I think she cares a lot about me. I say that she is very owlish. She looks at my phone every day. She says that I don’t have the right to privacy, then looks at my conversations. Then if I go out, she knows, obviously, that not every mother has to talk to who she is going out with, where she is going, when she is coming back. I don’t like it very much; I say that I can’t have even a little privacy. And there are times that, for example, I have to delete a message, because it’s something from my friends who are crying and want to tell me something. And then they say: ‘Oh, don’t tell anyone’. Then, I have to go there and delete it. Then, afterwards, she curses me and argues with me” (A5). “In the beginning, when I was entering (adolescence), about fifteen, sixteen, I was getting a little rebellious. Then, my father was not with us, he thought that if he had him with us, he would change something. I blamed her (the mother). Then, I grew up and realized it was entirely different. Whatever she told me was right. It was more there in adolescence that it got a little complicated, but then it was better” (A8).

Concerning this issue, Segrin and Flora (2018) argue that the conflicting relationship between fathers/mothers and children can be considered normative in adolescence and can even promote adjustments for role renegotiations. Adolescents experience conflicting feelings towards

their parents, as they seek freedom and autonomy in various areas of their lives. It is a process marked by new discoveries that reside strongly in the exploration of identity constructions (Watari & Romanelli, 2005). For Branje et al. (2012), conflicts originating in adolescence help to strengthen affective bonds between fathers/mothers and children, both in the short and long term, while they can encourage communication about the relationship.

It is emphasized, however, that adolescence will not necessarily be characterized by conflict, as a troubled stage of development, varying according to society, culture and time. In a study carried out with 295 adolescents from the city of Porto Alegre (RS), Wagner, Falcke, Silveira and Mosmann (2002) found that the communication that adolescents established with their families was considered by them as good, contrary to the often-stereotyped view that associate's adolescence with family problems and conflicts. On the other hand, this does not mean disregarding a degree of suffering that goes beyond what is expected for the stage of development, associated with emotional disorders and deeper relational difficulties: "In my adolescence, I ended up developing depression, because of my mother, because she was treated as a second option. I isolated myself from the world in my room. There was a phase when I even cut myself, because my mother fought with me a lot, a lot, a lot. It was in my teenage years. I did things in secret, I wanted to go out, I wanted to drink, to try to find a point of escape. [...] Look, I believe that I learned to cope, because I think that I don't have to be dependent on my mother. Because before, anything she said, or spoke badly to me, I was already bad, I was already sad. I believe that these are phases that come and go, according to my relationship with my mother, with my father, in my life. But I never sought treatment" (A10).

Similar results were found in the study by Mesquita et al. (2011), conducted with 408 adolescents aged 15 to 22, in the north of Portugal. Although almost all adolescents reported the presence of some depressive symptom, self-mutilation or the desire to die, the relationship with their parents was associated with the way the participants reacted and the degree to which they presented such behaviors. For Baptista, Baptista and Dias (2001), the relevance of the quality of family functioning as a factor of influence on adolescent mental health should be considered. Dissatisfaction with the family environment and the lack of adequate conditions for development may be associated with the emergence of symptoms and psychopathologies in adolescence.

Child-single mother relationship

In the understanding of the adolescents participating in the research, in general, they maintained a positive relationship with their mothers. For some, the mothers played a central role in their lives and in their relationships, indicating a bond of great closeness and companionship: "It is inexplicable, so to speak, our company. We're always together. I think that specially because of this lack of paternal presence, we have created a much, much stronger bond. [...] The relationship I have with my mother is something incredible. Obviously, every now and then, there are some fights and such, some disagreements. But overall, it is very positive. Very positive. My mother and I have always been very close, since we were children" (A6); "For me it

is very important. I don't really know what I'd be without her, what person I'd be, you know. Like, if I were raised by my father, I believe that I would be a lost person like that, of studying, of wanting something with life, of having a goal. I believe that this is why she is very important to me" (A10).

According to Teperman et al. (2020), a harmonious relationship between fathers/mothers and children helps children grow up with confidence, security, and autonomy, as they develop the ability to respect others, as well as being more apt to recognize what is important for their lives. In this sense, Nolte and Harris (2005) argue that, when the family home represents a safe place for adolescents, the children are strengthened to deal with life's adversities. Still, for Camarano (2006), children only achieve independence and autonomy from a condition of dependence, which can bring them feelings of security and support, as they are able to express themselves and be who they truly are. It is believed that the dependence and independence of parents relate to each other and help individuals to develop and grow.

Some study participants also indicate open communication and a close mother-child relationship: "It's very good, actually. I'm very close to my mother. So, we do practically everything together when we have time. On weekends, we stay together. [...] Nowadays, the relationship is very open, we talk about everything, relationships, college, everything. I like that it's a very open relationship, and that I feel like I can tell her everything, and that she can also tell me everything. So, when she has a problem, she comes and talks to me, especially when it's a work problem, she comes and talks to me. And it's the same thing I do with her" (A1); "Usually, on weekends, I stay at home. So, we have greater contact. Now, lately, we haven't been watching movies, spending so much time together, but we do what we can, we go cook together, do something like that, and go out together. We go out together a lot. I'm like her partner and vice versa, she's my partner. So much so that, sometimes, we look at each other like this: 'Let's drink? Let's go.', like, then we go to the bar, go somewhere else. Pretty cool. It's more our company" (A6). "Her concern, she cares about what I... Sometimes, I get home, I say it wasn't a good day, then she gets worried" (A9).

In the study by Wagner et al. (2002), the mother was also mentioned as the person in the family with whom the adolescent children talked the most, followed by the father and then siblings. They also highlighted a good level of communication at home and classified it as very important. The study evidenced the traditional conception of the mother's role as responsible for the care and mediation of family relationships. The father, although he occupied a secondary position in the adolescent's life, was evaluated positively by the adolescents.

The dialogue between fathers/mothers and adolescent children is configured as an extra challenge to the relationship; However, it is through it that the family can redirect the social representations of parents and children, especially when it prioritizes the transmission of affection, through respect and care (Morgado et al., 2014). Good communication between parents and children has a positive impact on the health of adolescents, being associated with a higher quality of life and less presence of health symptoms in children (Tomé et al., 2012). Thus,

communication is an important dimension of family functioning. It would be linked to the development of positive self-esteem, an autonomous and independent identity. In these family contexts, adolescents tend to value the parents' concern for their well-being, stimulate the child's satisfaction with the family environment and, consequently, favor less involvement in risk behaviors (Riesch et al., 2006; Sprinthall & Collins, 2003; Yu et al., 2006).

When considering mother-child proximity, a certain idealization of the relationship is identified by the adolescents in the study. In this regard, while mothers and fathers of adolescent children need to be available to the movements of approximation and distancing of their children, it is worth highlighting the care so that children do not assume a place of "partners" or "companions" of their mothers, and may feel free to make new relational investments outside the family group and even conflict with parental figures. It may be that the children of solo mother feel more called upon to provide social support for their mothers, facing greater difficulties in breaking or moving away from the maternal figure, even temporarily, due to the new investments of adolescence.

For some participants, the mother clearly indicated that she could not assume the role of friend alone, needing to preserve the maternal role in the relationship with the child: "Then you try to understand yourself, you have a friend. And sometimes all this together, it doesn't work very well. I tell her that I would just like her to be my friend, in that sense. Obviously, it's my mother. But she's a person, she says she can't be my friend. That, in principle, she is my mother" (A5).

Some of the adolescents also reported a certain affective distance or reserve in relation to their mothers. For them, their investment in the relationship existed, but was often not perceived as reciprocated by their mothers: "My relationship with my mother is not bad, it is good. She's a super open-minded person, she's a person who I know likes me a lot, who wants my best, but sometimes I feel that, now I don't feel so much anymore, but I felt that there was a barrier between us and that she didn't care much. (...) And I feel like I can say anything to her. But I end up not talking, many times. I don't know" (A2); "It's not 100% (the mother-child relationship). I get home, sometimes I say that I did this, that I stopped doing that, then there is cursing, these things, but I get used to it now" (A9); "I think we always try to understand each other. It turns out that one hour always gives in. Normally, it's me, but we try not to get into a fight. We usually fight a lot, but we try not to get angry. Usually, I get out of punishment. I don't know if I lack confidence, or in her, or if something else. Normally, I figure things out on my own, and she snoops around on things" (A5).

For Delgado and Jiménez (2004), once conflicts in the family are well addressed, they tend to have a positive influence on relationships, since they can act as catalysts, helping in the process of adjustment of family relationships. In this way, discussions and conflicts can serve to make parents realize that their children are developing, and that they need a different treatment from what they received in childhood. For some families, adolescence can be characterized as a difficult period for both children and parents, so that communication is also impaired at certain

times. The lack of communication between parents and children is linked to changes in interaction patterns, and therefore, the family will need to make these patterns more flexible when adapting to a new functioning, so that it can offer an environment that promotes the growth and development of its adolescent children (Barnes & Olson, 1985; Steinberg, 1981).

Adams and Laursen (2007), in their study with 469 adolescents in Florida (USA), found that the consequences of the conflict of adolescents with their mothers, fathers and best friends depended on the quality of the relationship. Moderate conflict was associated with favorable outcomes only in adolescents who had low levels of perceived negativity. Excessive conflict, on the other hand, was linked to social and academic difficulties, even for adolescents who had the best social relationships. In this way, the disagreement was not harmful in itself. However, its consequences depended on the frequency in which they occurred and with whom it is experienced. Finally, in the study by Peixoto (2004), with 265 adolescents from Lisbon (PT), the author identified that a better resolution of family conflicts was associated with the construction of a positive self-image of adolescents.

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the perspective of adolescent children on their current stage of development, as well as on the relationship with their mothers, in a sample of 10 adolescents from single-mother families. The difficulties and complications reported, in general, make up the variety of experiences in the adolescent development period. It was identified that the adolescent children demonstrated a somewhat adultized view of themselves. This behavior may be linked to some preparatory experiences for the developmental tasks of the adult world. Regarding the developmental stage of adolescence, many of the participants were already in late adolescence, considering that the vast majority already considered themselves entering the adult world, as they already helped financially at home due to their jobs.

It can be conjectured that, because they were raised by single mothers, the adolescents experienced some responsibilities that other adolescents would not have to assume. The need to be more participative and involved in domestic activities, as well as to have a more dependent relationship with their mothers, serving as social support for them, are some of the characteristics described by the participants. It should be recognized that assuming these positions for adolescent children was associated with different experiences. These are related to the strengthening of affective bonds with the mother, with open and clear communication being described as the most important aspect of the relationship, which appears as a factor that favors the development of adolescent children. In addition, the sense of belonging and importance to their families is highlighted, perceived by the adolescents when they mentioned their importance to their family, as they were able to talk about themselves and their responsibilities at home. Nevertheless, it is necessary to refer to the difficulty of some adolescents in moving away from the maternal figure, so that they can make new investments concerning adolescence and transition to adult life.

It is worth noting that the conflicts that were presented, as well as the affective distance from the mothers in some cases, were not identified by the participants as something negative, or associated with a bad relationship with the mother. In addition, the adolescents had a good capacity for reflection on their stories and experiences. Support also proved to be fundamental in the daily lives of these families, especially adolescents, who had the opportunity to express their experiences as children and their experiences as young people.

Even though these aspects were perceived by the study participants, the mother-child relationship was considered to be of quality, in which family health characteristics were present. It is seen that the adolescents were able to perform the numerous activities they assumed, such as at work and at home. Therefore, it was possible to identify the recognition and predominance of a harmonious relationship in the various instances of life of the participants with their mothers. However, it is believed that a greater focus of investigation on this factor is needed, in order to pay attention to the socioeconomic difficulties, as well as the limitations in the support network for these families.

Thus, a conception of adolescence is reinforced as not natural or universal, but rather the result of a life history, of certain subjects in their social realities and historical moments, being influenced and influencing them continuously. As defended by Fonseca and Ozella (2010), regarding the non-pathologization or universalization of the adolescent experience, each subject will experience adolescence in their own way, depending on their social interactions, their interests, their needs, constituting their own history, within their objective and subjective possibilities.

When considering belonging to a single mother family, the adolescents did not report any feeling of regret regarding their family configuration, as well as none reported feeling the absence of their fathers within the home. This does not mean validating such absence or denying possible painful feelings associated with it, but the positivity of the experience and the need for it not to be considered from the perspective of lack or from a reference that takes the heteronormative nuclear family as an ideal is emphasized. In this regard, the importance of denaturalizing both the prejudice and social judgment that falls on women as single mothers, as well as the absence of fathers and gender inequalities in parental relationships and in the care and responsibility for children, is also highlighted.

It is also worth looking at the difficulties of subsistence and insertion and maintenance of women single mothers in the labor market, which impacts maternal overload, and the livelihood, education and quality of life provided to children (Borges, 2020). In the face of broader social inequalities, Finamori, Rocha, and Achilei (2021) point out as a central issue the problematization of the privatization of child and adolescent care, claiming a social sharing of care (reproductive process) that goes beyond the sphere of conjugality or extended family, but is considered as a broader political-social responsibility.

Finally, the study advanced scientific knowledge on the theme of adolescent children in female single-parent families, a theme that has been little invested in the Brazilian literature. It

is worth considering the caveat that this study portrays the reality of some adolescents from families predominantly of low socioeconomic level and from the culture of Rio Grande do Sul, not representing the reality of other adolescents in our country. In this sense, it is suggested that other studies involving the theme be carried out, addressing other realities, examining diversified samples, as well as from different regions, such as state capitals and interiors, in order to understand socioeconomic diversities. In addition, the relevance of collaborating in the development of non-stigmatizing professional practices and support for adolescent children and single mothers is considered.

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Vanessa Antunes Alves: Conducted all the research and wrote the article. Transcribed part of the interviews developed and analyzed the categories.

Andressa de Oliveira Barbosa: Assisted in transcribing the interviews and in the process of data analysis and research categories. Assisted in the article writing process.

Caroline Rubin Rossato Pereira: Research supervisor, supervised and assisted throughout the article development and research process.

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