Parenting in Colombia: Relevance and research updates

Crianza en Colombia: Relevancia y avances de investigación

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Abstract

Parenting is a valuable research topic due to its implications in comprehensive education, mental health, and violence prevention. Considerations about it include educational institutions, society and government. This article aims to identify the research trends on the phenomenon of parenting in Colombia during the decade 2004 – 2014. Conceptualization, scope, related variables, approaches, results, methodologies, and limitations of published studies were analyzed. Results indicate the need for deepening the comprehensive definition and for using methodologies that allow an explanatory and / or comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, as well as a higher awareness in urban and rural populations. These results may help to promote new research and the creation of national intervention programs that use parenting as a tool to prevent mental health issues among children and adolescents.
Keywords: Parenting; family educational practices; parenting styles; Colombia.

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Resumen

La crianza es un tema de investigación valioso por sus implicaciones en la educación integral, la salud mental y la prevención de la violencia. Su reflexión compromete a las instituciones educativas, la sociedad y el estado. El presente artículo pretende identificar las tendencias investigativas sobre el fenómeno de la crianza en Colombia durante la década 2004 – 2014. Se analizaron variables relacionadas, conceptualizaciones, enfoques, metodologías, resultados, alcances y limitaciones de investigaciones publicadas. También, se ha identificado una necesidad por profundizar en la definición integral y por utilizar metodologías que permitan un análisis explicativo y/o comprensivo del fenómeno, así como también ampliar el conocimiento tanto en la población urbana como la rural. Los resultados aportan a la investigación y generación de programas en el país que utilicen la crianza como herramienta para la prevención de una baja salud mental en niños y adolescentes.

Palabras clave: Crianza; prácticas educativas familiares; estilos de crianza; Colombia.

INTRODUCTION

Colombia is a diverse Spanish-speaking country; it owns the rights of a pluralistic and free nation with a popularly elected legislature. It has 32 departments, one capital territory, and 47 million inhabitants; 75% of this population is urban while 25% is rural. 95.4% practices Catholicism (Population Fund of United Nations UNFPA Colombia, 2013). According to the latest National Survey of Mental Health in 2003, 41.1% of the Colombian population has suffered at least one of the 23 disorders studied (mood, anxiety, behavior, and substance abuse), 16.0% presented them in the last 12 months and 7.4% in the last 30 days (Posada, Gómez & Gómez, 2003).

As for violence statistics in this country, it was reported 14,294 murders and 68,320 cases of domestic violence; of which 44,743 (65.58%) corresponded to intimate partner violence,

9,708 (14.23%) to violence against children and adolescents, and 12,415 (18.20%) to other family violence cases (National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences, 2013).

This high prevalence of mental disorders and high levels of violence impacts physical and mental health of the population, out of which 30% is under age. This raises a question about what is being done in terms of prevention and promotion of health in Colombia. This article focuses on the analysis of infant and adolescent rearing in Colombia, which has been considered from the results of investigations about mental health as one of the most relevant predictive risk factors for the occurrence of diseases. It has been assessed from different approaches to psychology as one of the factors of fundamental protection for the education of future productive agents of the society. There is evidence on the importance of the relationship between parents and children during early childhood

and on the high influence on the emotional, intellectual and social development of the lattes (Cortés & Avilés, 2011; Cuervo, 2010; Martínez & García, 2011; Mora & Rojas, 2005; Orozco Sanchez & Cerchiaro, 2012; Pichardo, Justicia & Fernandez-Cabezas, 2009; Solís & Díaz, 2002).

The family environment is the first modulator that establishes educational practices, which allow children to successfully socialize, to develop emotional competences, to use management strategies of prosocial behaviors, and others (Henao & García, 2009). The family, as primary social modulator, prepares children as social agents, a necessity for their physical and psychosocial health. This conception about family as a protective and introduction environment to the cultural context suggests the need for policies to protect this entity. Policies that support families must provide the suitable resources so that children grow up in an environment of stability and security (Arranz, 2004).

In accordance with the foregoing, and providing a response to this social, political and legal responsibility, legislation was enacted in 2006, by the Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Social Protection, which issued Acw 1098, od the code of childhood and adolescence, which "aims to ensure the full and harmonious development of children and adolescents so that they grow up in the bosom of the family and the community surrounded by an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" (Colombia, Congress of the Republic, 2006). Similarly, Acw 1295 of 2009, which regulates the comprehensive care in early childhood of social-economic sectors classified as 1, 2 and 3 by SISBEN, also aims to grant adequate nutrition, early education, and comprehensive health care, which are basic aspects of parenting (Colombia, Congress of the Republic, 2009)

Various strategies were implemented according to these laws that take care of the rights of childhood in Colombia; one of them is called "cero a siempre", which includes programs and actions to promote and to ensure early childhood development through a unified and cross-sectorial work, in which the rights of children are respected (Presidency of the Republic, 2013). Another strategy that is set in motion in a regional level is "Buen Comienzo", which was created to fully look after children and their families during their first five years of life as a form of comprehensive, diverse, inclusive, and autonomous development (Mayor of Medellín, 2012). This legal and strategic deployment during the past decade in Colombia, regarding rights of children during early childhood, is a tangible proof of the need to focus on a population that requires protection in order to foster a better future for the country and the world. In this sense, parenting is a valuable research topic, given its implication in integrated education and its importance in the promotion of mental health and violence prevention. It is important to raise awareness about this issue, to support new health policies and the management of suitable action plans for the population and its problems.

Given the above, it is necessary to establish research trends on the phenomenon of parenting, taking the context of the 2004-2014 decade in Colombia. This could provide an overview of the research results during this time in their conceptualization, related variables, achievements, approaches, and implemented methodologies. Results are expected to guide future research projects that allow insight into the phenomenon.

METHOD

It was conducted a study of state of the art, which is defined as the research based on texts already accumulated that are products of social science research (Jiménez & Torres, 2006). The sources of information were scientific publications from research in Colombia from the databases Apa Psycnet, EBSCO, Hinari, Sci Verse, virtual library Colombian psychology, Dialnet, DOAJ, Redalyc, Scielo, Latindex, Pubmed, Revicien, e-journals, e-Journal, Clacso, Pepsic, Juriscol and Medline Plus.

The collection technique was documentary analysis and the recording technique was the tab. Data were organized according to the following criteria: bibliographic reference, research place, topic related to parenting, methodology used to select the sample, design from which it was carried out, instruments used, results obtained from the research, discussion and conclusions, weaknesses, and questions posed in the study. The analysis technique was coding of records in categorical matrices and selection of evidence that highlights the trends of scientific production on parenting in Colombia during the past decade (2004-2014). As ethical guidelines, preventing negative effects of the researcher, the social return of information, and respect for intellectual property and copyright were considered.

The search terms used in spanish were: crianza, prácticas educativas familiares, estilos de interacción familiar, estilos de crianza y paternidad. The aforementioned concepts were selected according to the diversity of terms commonly used in Spanish to address this issue. English terms were also used, such a: family educational practices and parenting styles. Fifty one research papers were found in databases that met the inclusion criteria in this research. Thus, they tackle parenting in the decade 2004 – 2014 and were conducted in a Colombian population or were related to a Colombian case if it was a review article.

RESULTS

Firstly, results are described through the conceptual elements on parenting in whichcresearch studies are supported and through the expression of the topics of interest related to parenting. Later, the places of origin of the research studies, analytical scope achieved in them, and the possibility to generalize the results are mentioned. Finally, it is carried out an analysis of the relationship between parenting practices and different negative consequences on the wellbeing of children and adolescents raised in the findings of the research studies.

In the course of this review, various definitions related to parenting were found. However, most of them do not express explicitly this concept. Only 39% of the reviewed articles clarify the concept of parenting used for these investigations. The terms related te parenting employed in these studies were breeding, rearing patterns,gbreeding styles and parenting styles.

The parenting concept was used by Aguirre (2010), Di Giunta, Uribe and Araque (2011) and 4 other articles in which Uribe participated as a Colombian researcher between 2010 and 2014; the term "parenting" was also used by authors such ae Botero, Salazar and Torres (2009), Cuervo (2010), Grajales, Pemberty and Brazier (2012), Izzedin and Pachajoa (2009), Otálvaro (2011) Triana, Avila and Malagón (2010) and Vásquez (2010). The concept of rearing prac-

tices was used by Cuervo (2010), González and Estupiñán (2010), Grajales, Pemberty and Brazier (2012) and Triana, Avila and Malagón (2010). The concept of parenting guidelines was raised by Agudelo (2005); Grajales, Pemberty and Brazier (2012). The concept of rearing style was approached by Solis, Diaz, Medina and Barranco (2008). Finally, the concept of parental styles was used by Henao and García (2009) and Isaza and Henao (2010). As it was noted by the authors quoted in several articles, different terms are used as if they were equivalent. Thus, it is highlighted the need to define it in a clear, deep, and wide way in regards to the complex theoretical construct in several articles.

Triana, Avila and Malagón (2010) went back to Aguirre and Durán (2000) proposing a differentiation of parenting as a social process that involves three processes: a) The practices conceived as actions to ensure the survival of the infant, to promote growth and psychosocial development, and to facilitate learning and knowledge that allows the child to recognize and interpret the surrounding environment; b) The standards related to the expected actions taken by children in a direct link to their own cultural determinations of the reference group; c) beliefs understood as the explanations given by parents about how to guide the actions of their children, these represene a set basic knowledge of group members in regard to how they should raise children and underlie the parenting process.

In order to supplement this social process, Triana, Avila and Malagón (2010) took the definition

proposed by the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare, in which it is understood as the

> "Cultural, human and interpersonal process in which parents and other socializing agents ensure the survival; health care; physical growth; and the psychosocial, cognitive, and spiritual development of children and adolescents. This allows them to have a suitable development as persons, to be integrated into their social environment, and to contribute to the construction and change of the society they belong to."

Izzedin and Pachajoa (2009) assumed a definition that integrates the possible caregivers; biological, psychological and social factors; and the influence of parenting on the future behavior of children as fundamental components of this concept. They went back to Eraso, Bravo and Delgado (2006), who refer to parenting as the training and education provided by parents or their substitutes, including the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs that they take in regards to health, nutrition, physical and social environment, and learning opportunities at home. According to these authors, parenting builds much of the child's identity and the social being.

Some papers about parenting-related projects in different cultures (CAP) are based on the model of social interaction of reciprocal exchange raised by Patterson (2002), as well as on the importance of development contexts and individual variables that can shape different aspects of parenting and child and youth development. In this sense, there are cultural variations in regards to the beliefs about the upbringing and the assessment of activities of rearing like the warmth and control, as well as demonstrations of physical and psychological aggression.

Table 1. Type or strategy of research, issues related to parenting, origin of the samples, and publication year of the research studies published in Colombia during the years 2004 - 2014 in the selected database.

Type or strategy	Issue that was related to parenting	Origin of the sample	Year of publication
Exploratory	Reconstituted families	Bogota	2013
	Measurement invariance of discipline and parental warmth and control in different countries	Medellin	2011
Descriptive	Types families	Medellin	2005
	Coping strategies in children	Bogota	2009
	Culture in Colombia families	Medellin	2012
	Quality of life	Sincelejo, Sucre	2013
	Corporal punishment	Bogota	2014
	Foster homes	Medellin	2014
Correlational	Parental characteristics associated with aggressive behavior in children	Bogota	2012
	Evolutionary development	Cali	2005
	Moral and adjustment of children	Bogota	2006
	Attitudes and expectations of school rearing-achievement	Medellin	2008
	Prosocial behavior	Medellin	2010
	Emotional development in children	Medellin	2009
	Cognitive development	Cali, Santa Marta	2012
	Attributions and attitudes of mothers and fathers	Medellin	2011
Explanatory	Intervention program	Barranquilla, Cucuta, Manizales and Palmira	2014
	Moral conflict and adjustment of the children	Cundinamarca	2007
	Social context and aggressive behavior	Medellin	2014
	Sexual abuse	Costa Atlantica	2011
Retrospective	Coexistence and peace	Urrao(Antioquia)	2009
	Paternal function and psychological development in adolescents	Bogota	2008
Historical critical	Discursive practices	Manizales	2009
Comprehensive	Parenting Patterns	Boyaca	2010
	Teen mothers	Duitama (Boyaca)	2010
	Children with disabilities	Bogota, Medellin, Cartagena, Barrancabermeja	2012
	Homopaternity	Bogota	2013
Ethnographic	Labor occupation of the mother	Cundinamarca	2010
	Growth and development	Medellin	2011
	Adoption	Tolima	2014

Type or strategy	Issue that was related to parenting	Origin of the sample	Year of publication
Reflection documentary	Aggressive behavior in children		2010
	Prevention Program		2005
	History of paternity in Colombia		2007
	History of childhood: play and socialization		2008
	Orphans		2009
	Emotional development		2010
	Legislation		2009
	Family-school relationship		2009
	Parental investment		2010
	Stress in parents		2011
	Child worker		2011
	Transactional Model		2012
	Ethnic cultures of Colombia		2012

In table 1, the reader can see the topics of interest related to parenting in the analyzed research studies, as well as the origin of the sample and the design or research strategy used. There is diversity regarding the topics related to parenting; thus, they tackle subjects associated with family such as paternal function, family dynamics according to family type, marital conflicts, lack of parental care, age of the mothers (adolescents), and employment of mothers. On the other hand, there are topics regarding the minors selected once more, such as evolutionary development, emotional development, moral behavior, prosocial behavior, school achievements, strategies of confrontation of children, stress regulation, aggressive conducts of children, and the condition of the worker child.

However, there is no evidence of extensive effort that shows continuity in the topics of the research projects, excluding the publications of Uribe on the draft PAC. In each research article, concepts and insights are re-evaluated; the investigations that have been carried out are not being used to continue a line of work, but they propose a new theme or raise it from other postulates. This can be a problem for the theoretical consolidation of the matter; the words of Cesar Coll on research in educational psychology could be applied in parenting research in the country:

"We do not accumulate subjects, but we always rewrite them every time we approach them from terminology, vocabulary, concepts, the theories (...) that is a lack of awareness about how actually scientific knowledge has a propensity to great revolutions, but there is no revolution without accumulation and continuity "(Rigo, Barriga & Hernández, 2005, p. 10).

In this sense, in Colombia it is necessary that the investigation on parenting keeps studying in depth the topics already tackled by other authors. As a result, it would allow giving weight to every investigation and extending its validity

through different populations, instruments, methodological designs, and testing the conclusions stated. Thus, it would be possible to take every investigation topic at explanatory levels that face and nourish future intervention plans.

As for the methodological approaches of the studies, only one was predictive, those of comprehensive approach are few, and studies of explanatory scope were not found, according to the classification proposed by Dankhe (1996). They prioritize the descriptive and correctional data as well as the documentary reviews that constitute a third part of the studies. About these, it can be said that they allow recognition of the topic, without coming to a deep understanding of it.

All the studies are valuable and significant; choosing between one and another is given by the grade of development of knowledge regarding the topic of interest and the target objectives (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 1991). Nevertheless, it is necessary to go into the investigations that are published about upbringing in Colombia in depth, in order to generate a change in the sight and aspirations of the investigators. In the analyzed research articles, longitudinal studies were not found apart from the ones carried out by Uribe, which does not allow analyzing the importance of parenting in the stages of development that account the emergence of psychological maladjustment or adjustment traits, which was also brought to discussion in the articles written by Cabrera, Guevara and Currea (2006), Ripoll, Martínez and Giraldo (2013) and Velásquez, Barrera and Bukowski (2006).

On the other hand, a characteristic of Colombia is the multicultural population, which obviously influences upbringing in each region. This aspect has not yet been sufficiently addressed by

researchers; as it could be observed in table 1. It is remarkable the predominance of the studies from the cities of Bogota, Medellin, and some capital places, the results about the topic in other regions are unknown. Therefore, the variables of the phenomenon are not considered. This is a complex aspect since "different forms of parenting are subject to socio-cultural conditions and its actions to respond to the person supposed to be trained or educated" (Grajales, Pemberty & Blandon, 2012 p.3). We have excluded the knowledge created and produced within ethnic groups about this topic, forgetting that they are also part of the dogma of valid knowledge (Alvarez, Pemberty, Blandón & Grajales,2012).

In spite of the fact that there is a greater interest in publishing about the subject in the second half of the studied decade, especially during the last five years, there are important limitations: The results are not generalizable due to the delimitation about the population in regard to gender, stratum, educational level, occupation, profession or region of the country, lack of empirical evidence because of small samples, and absence of longitudinal research that allows to infer causal relationships between variables. It is also stated that the instruments used are not reliable enough (Botero, Salazar & Torres, 2009) Cabrera, Guevara & Currea, 2006; González & Estupiñán, 2010; Grajales, Pemberty & Blandon, 2012; Henao & García, 2009; Pachajoa & Izzedin, 2009; Ripoll, Martínez & Giraldo 2013; Triana & Malagón, 2010; Vásquez, 2010; Velásquez, Barrera & Bukowski, 2006).

Finally, the studies consider different aspects that make the understanding of the upbringing more meaningful for the mental health of children and adolescents. It is highlighted in a

general way the use of democratic parenting practices in favor of positive outcomes for children and adolescents, as well as the importance of validating the inclusion of family functioning as a protective factor that is relevant for policies and promotion practices in the country (Bailey, Brazil, Conrad-Hiebner, & Counts, 2015). It is stated too how these parenting practices can be affected by poverty in the neighborhood or by the aggressive behavior of adolescents (Caicedo, 2014).

The results also show the authoritarian and permissive rearing practices as a cause of negative consequences in general (Agudelo, 2005; Arvelo, 2003; Jiménez, 2008; Botero, Salazar & Torres, 2009; Velásquez, Barrera & Bukowski, 2006), especially regarding the aggressive behavior, (Alvarez, 2010; Cabrera & González, 2010; Ramírez, 2007) and negative consequences in the family dynamics (Muñoz, Pelaez, Maya, Aristizabal & Insuasty, 2009).

Other studies raise the importance of parenting as enablers of suitable social skills (Isaza & Henao, 2010; Mora & Rojas, 2005), coping strategies (Palacios-Espinosa, Pulido& Montaña, 2009; Richaud, 2005), stress regulation (Martínez & García, 2011), emotional development (Cuervo, 2010; Henao & García, 2009), academic performance (Tilano, Henao & Restrepo, 2009), cognitive development (Orozco, Sanchez & Cerchiaro, 2012), and the psychological adjustment (Cabrera, Guevara & Currea, 2006).

DISCUSSION

Parenting has been gaining importance throughout history to the point of becoming a State affair, which is consistent with Arranz (2004)

"the more complex and developed a society is, the more attention it devotes to children upbringing within the family environment" (p. 12). Nowadays, raising children and adolescents is not only a family responsibility since the State also has laws, policies, and control mechanisms which seek to ensure the well-being of children and adolescents to improve the future society (Otalvaro, 2011).

Colombia is a country permeated by a violent history; this social way to deal with others has been brought into parenting, which together with the political, economic, and social situation generates and maintains the problem (Palacios-Espinosa, Pulido & Montaña, 2009). It has been observed how parenting follows political, economic and social movements throughout history: in the 12th and 13th Centuries, the principles of religious and military organization originated the children of the Crusades, in the 17th and 18th the educational and scientific organization created the school child, the industrial revolution produced working children. Then, the family principles originated the child of family with all the activities at home under the guardianship of his parents. Finally, children of the State appeared, who are in hands of a qualified staff since early stages that takes care of them in kindergartens, as it happens currently (Bocanegra, 2007).

In spite of the fact that the Colombian history is similar in some aspects to other countries, taking theoretical models proposed for European and North American countries is a risk, which was observed in the majority of the articles. When a country with a particular reality has been using models, assumptions, and theories that come from contexts and populations with different characteristics, it is possible to save

time and investigative costs. Nevertheless, it decreases the likelihood of success and contributes to keep the problem unsolved. Many aspects of the everyday life of most Colombians are unique because of their context and depend on a particular evolution of political, social and economic factors associated with specific cultural, historical and geographical contexts (Chaux, 2005).

On the other hand, in order constitute a future and true tool of mental health prevention, it is essential to expand the knowledge about caregivers since they are children's priority models about how to react against the demands of the environment (Velásquez, Barrera & Bukowski, 2006). Besides, their parenting patterns and paternity types are relevant factors in the psychological development of children and adolescents that are going to be reflected during adulthood (Arvelo 2003; Jiménez, 2008). Childhood and adolescent experiences modulate the future agents of the society. In this sense, parenting is a communal process in which we learn what it means to be an individual (Botero, Salazar & Torres, 2009).

Taking into account the foregoing, it is important to carry out the interventions guided by the results of further research as preventive strategies and not only as remedial ones, which will reduce costs by preventing the emergence of problems and treatments when they are already reflected in negative indices of violence and mental health. This is only possible through a thorough analysis of parenting in Colombia that allows identifying specific patterns of care and its implications for health. Thus, it would be possible to promote actions in the healthy population to prevent children and adolescents from getting exposed to a risky factor, taking

universal prevention actions or promoting health (Gómez & González, 2004) , and it also allows modifying the actions of parental care that are not very effective for the promotion of health (Cortés, Romero & Flores, 2006).

Colombian legislation has sought strategies that promote the education of children from different training programs for parents, which were developed in accordance with the law 1404 of 2010 in preschool, school, and high school institutions of the country. However, this requires solid arguments that contribute to the prevention through a family-school alliance, in which each part carries out actions to educate students (Vélez, 2009). The results of the reviewed research studies leave questions about: expectations and ideals about upbringing in Colombia; roles of mothers, fathers and caregivers; demands on the mother, father, or caregiver; characteristics of the upbringing in relation to family composition; and symmetry or asymmetry of the relationships within the family. In addition, there were not found certain topics in the research studies that would be interesting to point out in subsequent inquiries, such as the characteristics of the caregivers in regard to their socio-economic status and cultural context, the upbringing in institutionalized contexts, and alternative interventions that generate skills and competencies in the parents or caregivers that contribute to the wellbeing of children and society. Finally, a country with a violent history needs to look inward for recognition of the characteristics that make it unique and for proposing options to solve this problem. Therefore, it would be suitable to direct research to the upbringing analysis in specific populations and to the inclusion of designs that can foster and analyze intensive comprehensive, structured, and rigorous

programs under the specific knowledge of the population, which makes possible to reduce the high social-economic costs caused by violence.

It was found a fragmentation and inconsistency in the concepts related to parenting. It is important to deepen in future research about parenting in Colombia as well as the various components that make part of a comprehensive definition such as: possible caregivers; the biological, psychological, and social aspects involved in parenting; and the influence of this concept in the child behavior in the long-term as a social being in the country.

Investigations in Colombia require greater methodological rigor and wider range, in both explanatory and comprehensive levels, in order to obtain reliable results that support effective strategies to solve problems related to parenting, which are predictors of mental health deterioration of the population.

Tackling the parenting problem in Colombia through a systemic and ecological view is fundamental. Besides, it should involve not only the family, but also the school, the government and the society, resulting in a team responsible for the training of prospective parents and for the protection of children and adolescent's rights.

Detailed and diligent research with the features mentioned in the previous paragraphs are required to improve the creation of public policies to grant the welfare of children, adolescents, and their families through national and regional intervention plans.

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