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## Toward a Possible Reassessment of Causes and Protecting Strategies Underlying the Dynamic of Parental Burnout in Costa Rica

Acerca de una posible reevaluación de las causas y estrategias de protección subyacentes a la dinámica del desgaste parental en Costa Rica

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Received: April 21, 2020. Accepted: November 2, 2022

**Abstract.** *Objective.* This study aims to reach an initial understanding of some specific cultural characteristics of parental burnout in Costa Rica. The findings stem from analyzing specific family configurations of parental burnout during parenting. *Method.* An intentional sample of 146 mothers and 102 fathers ( $n = 248$ , mean age 37) was selected. They completed a questionnaire regarding socio-demographics, Parental burnout assessment, Gender roles, Independent-interdependent Self, Involvement in parental function and duties, and the Parental goals and values. *Results.* there is a low prevalence of parental burnout and an average level of individualism in parenting. Although the study failed to identify high degrees of parental burnout in the Costa Rican sampled parents, which tend to be rather moderate or low in comparison with other countries, there seems to be an initial tendency of some type of family toward increasing burnout as well as noteworthy traits of familial dynamics that might function as mitigating or even protective factors against parental burnout.

**Keywords.** IIPB, Parental Burnout, PBA, Gender, Costa Rica

**Resumen.** *Objetivo.* Avanzar en la comprensión de las características culturales específicas del agotamiento parental en Costa Rica al analizar configuraciones familiares específicas del agotamiento parental durante la crianza. *Método.* Se seleccionó una muestra intencional de 146 madres y 102 padres con una media de edad de 37 años. Los participantes completaron un cuestionario que indagó en variables sociodemográficas y las medidas parental burnout assessment, Gender Roles, Independent-interdependent Self, Involvement in parental Function and Duties y Parental Goals and Values. *Resultados.* Una baja prevalencia de agotamiento parental y un rol importante del individualismo moderado en la crianza. Se concluye que, aunque no se logró detectar un alto grado de agotamiento parental en la muestra de padres y madres, quienes mostraron moderados y bajos niveles de agotamiento en comparación con otros países. Se halló una tendencia inicial hacia un aumento del agotamiento en algunos tipos de familia, además de dinámicas familiares que parecen funcionar como factores atenuantes e incluso protectores contra al agotamiento parental.

**Palabras clave.** IIPB, agotamiento parental, PBA, género, Costa Rica



## Introduction

The way parents deal with the daily challenge of raising their offspring is seen by most researchers as the needed equilibrium between the childrearing - burden and the level of satisfaction while being in this role on an everyday basis. As a matter of basic conceptual framework that enables psychology to compare diverse cultural determinants of this contemporary phenomenon in the globalizing world nowadays, the model of the balance between risks and resources has been proposed by [Mikolajczak and Roskam \(2018\)](#). The authors posit that a bent toward one end of this basal structure will determine the degree of success or failure in confronting the psychological demands involved hereto.

While extensive research has been conducted on job burnout (more than 23,000 studies to date), parental burnout has only very recently become the focus of scientific interest (see [Pelsma et al., 1989](#), as the sole exception before 2007). Therefore, there is still a dearth of empirical evidence about how parenting stress leads eventually to parental burnout ([Glasberg et al., 2007](#); [Lindström et al., 2010](#); [Norberg et al., 2014](#)).

The main subject to be discussed is how routine parenting asks can psychologically overwhelm parents to the extent that the quality of the familial relationship system decreases, and the stress level grows out of control at least to a certain point. Under these circumstances, each member of the family, as well as the entire familial psychological atmosphere, suffers the consequences of living in a negative emotional overloaded relationship, compromising mostly the psychological development of growing children thereafter. Parents' most frequent reactions toward children tend to oscillate between neglect and violence, whereas the couple faces increasing conflicts ([Mikolajczak et al., 2019](#)).

An additional aspect that should be considered is the valence of the factors involved in the process. Presence or absence of certain traits in the psychological dynamic within the family or of the so-

cioeconomic/psychosocial scaffold supporting the family, and even those resources supplied by the socio-environment, do not necessary represent risk of protection on their own. It is not the absence or presence of factors that ensues in stressful conditions, but the likely shift of each factor from low to high scores and vice versa, as well as the entanglement of all the factors in the familial relationship - system as in the individual measures accounted for. To integrate such a perspective, the measures of the risk/protection factors should underscore size and weight of each factor to determine different grades of balance or imbalance, i. e., if measures of protection compensate, equal, or outnumber risk or the other way around. Thus, parental burnout will be the result of interlocking risk and protection, as proposed by [Mikolajczak and Roskam \(2018\)](#), whose findings suggest operationalizing parental burnout as a linear function of the balance between risks and resources.

However, for a full comprehension of parental burnout the model should include culturally sensitive risk/resource factors in each social context to be researched.

On the other hand, parental burnout could be harmful to parent's well-being and parental practices alike, therefore affecting parent-child interaction and child development when the stressors last or even become chronic by weakening the psychological resources to cope with the burden of child-rearing and family life ([Mikolajczak et al., 2018](#)). The three dimensions those authors conceive to conceptualize parental burnout comprise, first, overwhelming exhaustion since parents experience their role as too demanding and tiring in everyday life. Second, arousal of emotional distancing from their children that diminishes the quality of interactions. Third, a sense of ineffectiveness that undermines parental skills to cope with daily parenting challenges.

The main component that ensues the fundamental dimension of parental burnout is the condition of being exhausted, which is a feeling of lacking physical or emotional resources to assimilate

late the burden of parenting (Roskam et al., 2017). Parental burnout is a unique and context-specific syndrome resulting from a chronic imbalance of risks over resources in the parenting domain (Manrique-Millones, et al., 2022).

More specifically, the three dimensions of parental burnout comprise, first, overwhelming exhaustion related to one's parental role: parents feel that being a parent requires too much involvement; they feel tired when getting up in the morning and having to face another day with their children; they feel emotionally drained by the parental role to the extent that thinking about their role as parents makes them feel they have reached the end of their tether. Second, an emotional distancing from their children: exhausted parents become less and less involved in the upbringing of and relationship with their children; they do the bare minimum for their children but no more; interactions are limited to functional/instrumental aspects at the expense of emotional aspects. Third, a sense of ineffectiveness in the parental role: parents feel that they cannot handle problems calmly and/or effectively. As shown recently by Roskam et al. (2017), parental burnout is a unique syndrome, empirically distinct from job burnout, parental stress, or depression. Research on parental burnout is still scarce, but studies up to date have shown that it can be reliably measured (Roskam et al., 2017), that it concerns both mothers and fathers (Lindström et al., 2010; Roskam et al., 2017), that its prevalence (between 8% and 36% depending on the types of parents studied; Lindström et al., 2010; Roskam et al., 2017) warrants further investigation, that it is related to sociodemographic, situational, personal, parental, and marital factors (Le Vigouroux et al., 2017; Mikolajczak et al., 2018), and that it has specific consequences in terms of child-related outcomes, i.e., neglect and violence, and in terms of escapist and suicidal thoughts (Mikolajczak et al., 2018; Roskam et al., 2021).

The current study adds to the purpose of the International Investigation of Parental Burnout (IIPB),

which is to test the conceptual validity, prevalence, and intercultural variation of parental burnout in different cultures around the world. Henceforth, an international consortium has been initiated by Professors Isabelle Roskam and Moira Mikolajczak in collaboration with Maday Valdes Pacheco (see the main study: Roskam et al., 2021).

Although parental burnout appears to be a psychosocial concern in developing countries like Costa Rica that assimilates much of the emerging practices of raising children in a modern society style and widening unexpected challenges hereto could be present unannounced, the study has been presented to the participating parents under the title "Factors in parental satisfaction and exhaustion around the world". The term "parental burnout" has not been used to avoid sampling and social desirability biases.

The international project aims at reaching conceptual validity and at testing intercultural variability of the parental burnout construct in different contexts around the world.

Therefore, the main objective of the current study is to gather data about parental burnout amid families from the Costa Rican Central Valley. Middle class families were interviewed which with at least one child under one roof were interviewed. Thereby, the study strives to highlight the culturally specific characteristics of the parental burnout. Specific familial configurations of parental burnout, extreme fatigue, emotional detachment, and lack of efficacy are brought to bear. Of particular interest are the likely variations of parental burnout within families, i.e., intracultural dissimilarity. According to Rosabal-Coto et al. (2017), the most common world-wide child-rearing model establishes that the burden and responsibility of this task lies on intensive mothering, which demands that mothers to put their own life on hold to devote themselves to a child-centering parenting. This statement leads us to assume that the parental burnout tends to appear more frequently in the maternal rearing role and not in the father's participation.

In this sense, [Suárez et al. \(2022\)](#) have recently questioned the general approach of the PBA ever since the results of the international study came out (see [Bornstein, 2020](#)). The study centers on the concern regarding the cultural sensitivity of the PBA. The most important issue [Suárez et al. \(2022\)](#) are questioning refers to what they call “a variable centered approach”, whose validity lies on the four factors’ direct scores (p. 3). In their review of the international results, they suggest switching to a “person-centered approach (that) can provide an ecological and realistic perspective” (p. 3). Hence, they apply a Latent Profile Analysis to address the data from this perspective to contrast with [Roskam et al. \(2017\)](#) analysis.

Our first hypothesis claims that parental burnout rates arise among the mothers of the sample but not among fathers. A second hypothesis points toward parental burnout as a socioemotional risk factor for mothers, but not necessarily for fathers. Our rationale underlying these two hypothesis is based on the maternal child-centered parenting as the most common rearing practice. A third hypothesis stresses the role of differentiated cultural practices that may function either as a protective or a risk factor to parental burnout, being individualism a risk factor versus collectivism a protective one, since individualism exerts a greater burden on parents, whereas traditional practices such as wider familial involvement may relate to a stronger support strategy.

## Method

This is a correlational study based on Likert Scales measures for the most part.

## Participants

The participants consisted of 248 parents among which 146 are mothers and 102 fathers. The mean age for fathers is 41 and for mothers is 35, with a total mean age of 37 years old. The selection criteria consisted in recruiting mothers and fathers with a male or female child residing under one single

roof. Sample’s education level is high since average of formal education is 16 years hence university level. They reside mostly in the Great Metropolitan Area of San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, but also in the San Ramón County, in the northern province of Alajuela, as well as in mid-country. Besides, some participants are from the provinces of Alajuela, Cartago and Heredia, also mid-country with high urbanization standards and basic social services.

Participants were recruited in education centers for children and in mental health centers for adults. Some other participants were recruited in police departments and two were private entrepreneurs by word of mouth. Besides, researchers and assistants were recruited through personal Facebook pages and one from a political party. The research project was submitted to and approved by the Ethical Scientific Committee of the University of Costa Rica (IRB, session number 93, record VI-1071-2018).

Considering the type of family, it was found that 74.8% correspond to two-parent families, 6.9% to single-parent families, 7.7% to stepfamilies, 7.3% to multigenerational families and 3.2% to other types of family structures. Families represented by a single participant of the sample were excluded from subsequent analyses.

## Instruments

Participants completed either a paper-pencil version of the instruments (10 participants) or an online version in Lime survey. The online version generated 1384 incomplete surveys from March 6 to June 25, 2018. 248 individual questionnaires were collected altogether.

**Sociodemographic factors.** The 18-item survey explores diverse sociodemographic factors. It was created *ex profeso* for this research project by Isabelle Roskam and coworkers and comprises the following aspects: age, education level in years, type of family, number of biological children, number of children living under one single roof, age of the oldest child, age of the youngest child, number of women living in the household who look after children

daily, number of men living in the household who look after children daily, ethnicity of the participant, whether the participant was born in the current country of residence; type of neighborhood, type of paid job, whether children stay with their mother or father during paid job hours and the number of hours parents spent with their children.

**Parental Burnout Assessment PBA** (Roskam et al., 2018; Roskam et al., 2017; 22 items). This scale evaluates the grade of parental burnout in four dimensions: emotional exhaustion in parental role (9 items, e. g., "I feel completely run down by my role as a parent"); contrast in parental self (6 items, e. g., "I'm no longer proud of myself as a parent"); feelings of being fed up (5 items, e. g., "I can't stand my role as father/mother anymore"); and emotional distancing from one's children (3 items, e. g., "I do what I'm supposed to do for my child(ren), but nothing more"). Items are rated on 7-point Likert scales: never (0), a few times a year or less (1), once a month or less (2), a few times a month (3), once a week (4), a few times a week (5), every day (6). In the current study, the Cronbach's Alpha reaches .93 for emotional exhaustion in parental role; .77 for emotional distancing from one's children; .91 for feelings of being fed up.

**Gender roles GR** (Constantin & Voicu, 2015; 12 items). The GR Scale measures beliefs regarding appropriate male and female roles. Three main attitudes toward gender roles are to be considered: traditionalism (4 items; e. g., "In general men are best political leaders than women"), according to which women are different but inferior to men; specialist (4 items; e. g., "A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children"), referring to women and men as equal but with different socialization tasks; androgenism (4 items; e. g., "Men ought to do a larger share of household work than they do now"), which rejects women's inferiority as well as the specialized roles. It is a 7-point Likert scale from "total disagree" to "total agree". In this study, Cronbach's Alpha reaches traditionalism: .68; specialist: .66; androgenism: .44.

**Independent-interdependent Self IIS.** (Singelis, 1994; 30 items). The scale evaluates independent self-construal (individualism) and interdependent self-construal (collectivism), assuming that both tendencies are present simultaneously in people. According to the author, one of the cultural tendencies of the self will be predominant over the other, although evidence of the dual self can also be found. The scale contains items with a 7-point Likert response scale, where participants choose between "Totally Agree" and "Totally Disagree" response options. Examples of self-construal independent items are: "I can talk openly with a person I meet for the first time, even when this person is much older than I am" and "I do my own thing, regardless of what others think". Some interdependent self-construal items are: "I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in", and "I feel good when I cooperate with others".

**Involvement in parental function and duties PF** (Roskam, Valdes, Mikolajczak, 2019; 23 items). This scale has been developed within the framework of IIPB and it specifically refers to parental involvement from an instrumental, observable, and measurable behavioral point of view. The authors were based on the Levine's universal model of parental functions: (a) to ensure the health and survival of the child; (b) to stimulate the child to ensure his social and cognitive development adaptation; and (c) to transmit the values adapted to the child that allows them to interact adequately inside their ownership group (Levine, 1977; Roskam et al., 2015). In summary, the scale allows having an overview about to which extent mothers and fathers are involved in their parental tasks. According to the authors, the scale includes three principal factors: Basic needs, childrearing, and material subsistence.

**Parental goals and values GV** (Suizzo, 2007; 41 items). This scale measures the relevance parents give to 41 goals and values by signing their priority for their children's future life as adults. The GV scale covers 5 dimensions: tradition and conformity (10 item, e. g., "respect for those who are senior

to you"); power and achieve (7 item, e. g., "to be known: get public recognition for achievements"); relatedness (4 item, e.g. "To have close friends "); agency and self-direction (11 item, e.g., "to think for yourself: have your own views even if they differ from those of the others"); benevolence and prosocial (7 item, e.g., "forgiveness: able to forgive others"); separateness (2 item, e. g., "autonomy: not needing anyone's approval for your decisions"). A 7-point Likert scale reaches from "non-important" to "most important". Cronbach's alpha in the current study reaches tradition and conformity .85; power and achieve .79; separateness .73; agency and Self-direction .90; benevolence and prosocial .90; and Separateness .65.

## Procedures

We apply the paper / pencil version at the Wem Institute of Masculinity and Sexuality. In this institution 12 participants were recruited, 2 of which 2 withdrew. For the online version, a call poster was posted on Facebook pages such as: pages of friends and people known by the researcher and research assistants on Facebook; on Facebook pages from Coronado and Moravia district and community, in Northern San José; on the Facebook page from the "Coalición Costa Rica" political movement; in three Catholics private high schools and other similar educational centers; in the "Centro Infantil Gotitas de Sabiduría" nursery, in the Coronado district; in the National Police; in the "Centro Infantil Laboratorio" at the University of Costa Rica, Rodrigo Facio campus; in the "Centro Infantil Laboratorio" at the University of Costa Rica, Western campus; in the "General Cable" transnational company, in the Belén district, province of Heredia, Costa Rica; in the "Double Digit" transnational company, in the Tibas district, province of San José.

## Results

Table 1 shows the main descriptive results for each scale and subscale.

## Parental burnout prevalence

Regarding the prevalence of parental burnout, the following results were found: 3.04% ( $n = 5$ ) of mothers are in burnout, while 6.08% ( $n = 10$ ) are at risk condition; in addition, no fathers are in burnout, while 3.09% ( $n = 3$ ) is at risk condition. Considering the sample, there is only a 2% prevalence of parental burnout. Cut-off groups were established according to the criteria of the authors of the PBA (Roskam et al., 2018). On one hand, parents who reached 92 points or more in PBA were defined in parental burnout condition. They correspond to the participants displaying at least  $\frac{2}{3}$  (66%) of all the symptoms defined in the scale on a daily frequency. On the other hand, parents who displayed  $\frac{2}{3}$  of all the symptoms on a few times a week frequency, reached between 76 and 91 points and they were defined in risk condition.

These findings deploy the scores in strict comparison to the former studies of reference (specially Roskam's) from which the current research departed, and to the established statistics standards for the transnational project is a part of (also Roskam's). However, these same results could be viewed from a cultural perspective and so retreaded from an alternative perspective. Critical hereto is the cut-off point: maybe that which represents a heavier burden for parents in European countries has not necessarily an equal weight for Costa Rican mothers or fathers, thus the same issue could have been scored lower in the current study even though the intensity of the activity or task is quite similar in both contexts. In other words, parenting could be objectively equally exhausting but perceived subjectively different in its relevance among distinctive contexts.

Bearing in mind this likely explanation, let us consider the Kurtosis of the PBA, which is 3.338 with a Standard Error of .309. This positive value means heavy tails (i. e., a lot of data in both tails). Such heaviness in the tails depicts the data as a flatter shape (compared to a normal distribution). The standard normal distribution has a kurtosis of 3, hence these values are nearly normal or mesokurtic. However,

**Table 1.** Descriptives of PBA, PF, GR, IIS, GV scales and subscales

Scale	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.
PBA Exhaustion	247	12.50	11.95	0	52
PBA Constrast	247	4.61	6.43	0	36
PBA Saturation	247	4.29	5.58	0	29
PBA Emotional distancing	247	2.50	3.28	0	18
PBA total score	247	23.91	24.89	0	133
PF Childrearing	247	2.22	0.53	0.36	4
PF Basic needs	247	2.18	0.61	1	4
PF Material subsistence	247	2.08	0.96	0	4
PF mean	247	2.16	0.46	1.03	3.71
GR Traditionalist	247	0.96	1.91	0	30
GR Specialist	247	7.32	5.55	0	30
GR Androgynist	247	19.23	3.90	4	24
IIS Individualism	247	67.21	9.09	38	90
IIS Collectivism	247	52.97	10.55	25	80
GV Tradition & Conformity	171	32.74	7.85	15	50
GV Power & Achievement	171	17.25	6.1	4	35
GV Relatedness	171	7.43	3.77	0	20
GV Agency & Self-direct	171	47.11	6.73	20	55
GV Benevolence & Prosocial	171	26.95	5.44	13	35
GV Separateness	171	7.54	2.03	1	10

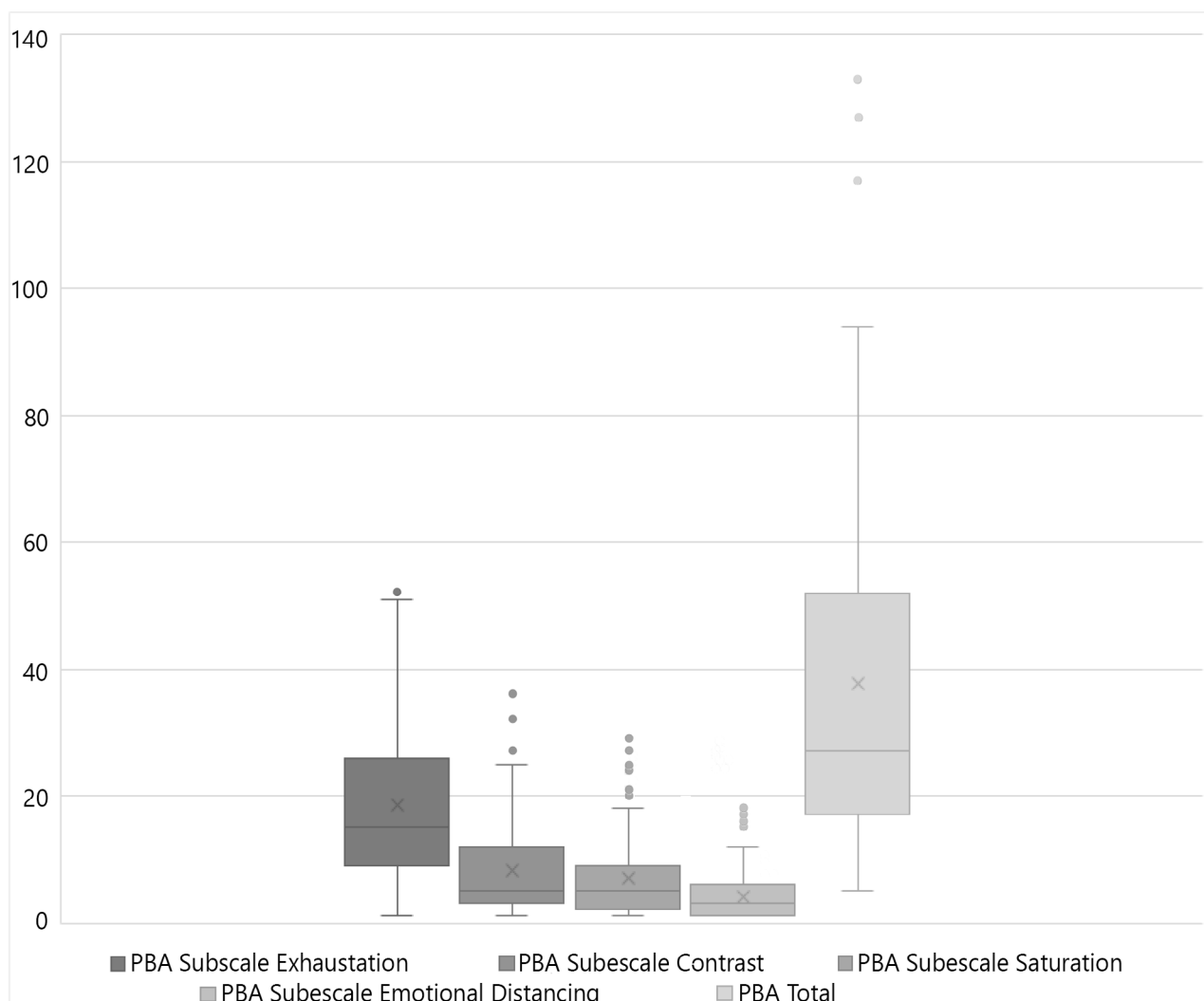
*Note.* PBA = Parental Burnout Assessment, PF = Parental Functions, GR = Gender Roles, IIS = Independent-Interdependent Self, GV = Parental Goals and Values.

since in a Standard Normal Distribution the Skewness should be 0, the fact of a Skewness of 1.774 with a Standard Error of .155 is relevant. The mean of the PBA in this study is 23 and the median is 17, therefore data are right skewed, which means that the data are negative asymmetrical, i. e., tend to heighten the media over the median. Hence, the sample barely tends to score over its own media. The media is only a point under the percentile 80 and the percentile 90

is 56. However, this panorama may reflect a likely cut-off point for this sample and may be considered as a referential depiction of how parental burnout looks like in this context and time for future studies.

When the sample size is reduced to those participants whose scores in each subscale of PBA is larger than 0, it is possible to better recognize how the parental burnout is experienced by the parents that report it up to some degree (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Boxplot of PAB subscales and total scores



The dots above the media (x) but especially those above the upper whiskers (outliers) point to the participants whose scores could be considered for further research as paradigmatic cases of how parental burnout might come about in the Costa Rican familial context.

Another way to estimate how the scores in PBA may reflect the inner participants' perception of parental burnout from a particular cultural point of view is to transform the score to Z-values (Figure 2).

It is useful to mention that the quartile 3 = .29, i. e., 25% of the sample, is at least .20 standard de-

viations above the media. On the other hand, percentile 90 = 1.63, i. e., at least 10% of the sample is 1.63 standard deviations from the media. Finally, the value of the upper whisker is 1.73 and it shows a noticeable number of participants that score above this last value.

A glance at the scores of each subscale of the PBA shows an also interesting panorama (Figure 3).

As expected, each subscale tends to score differently and to emphasize also distinctive aspects of how parental burnout came about in this particular context.



**Figure 2.** Box and whisker plot of Z-values for PBA

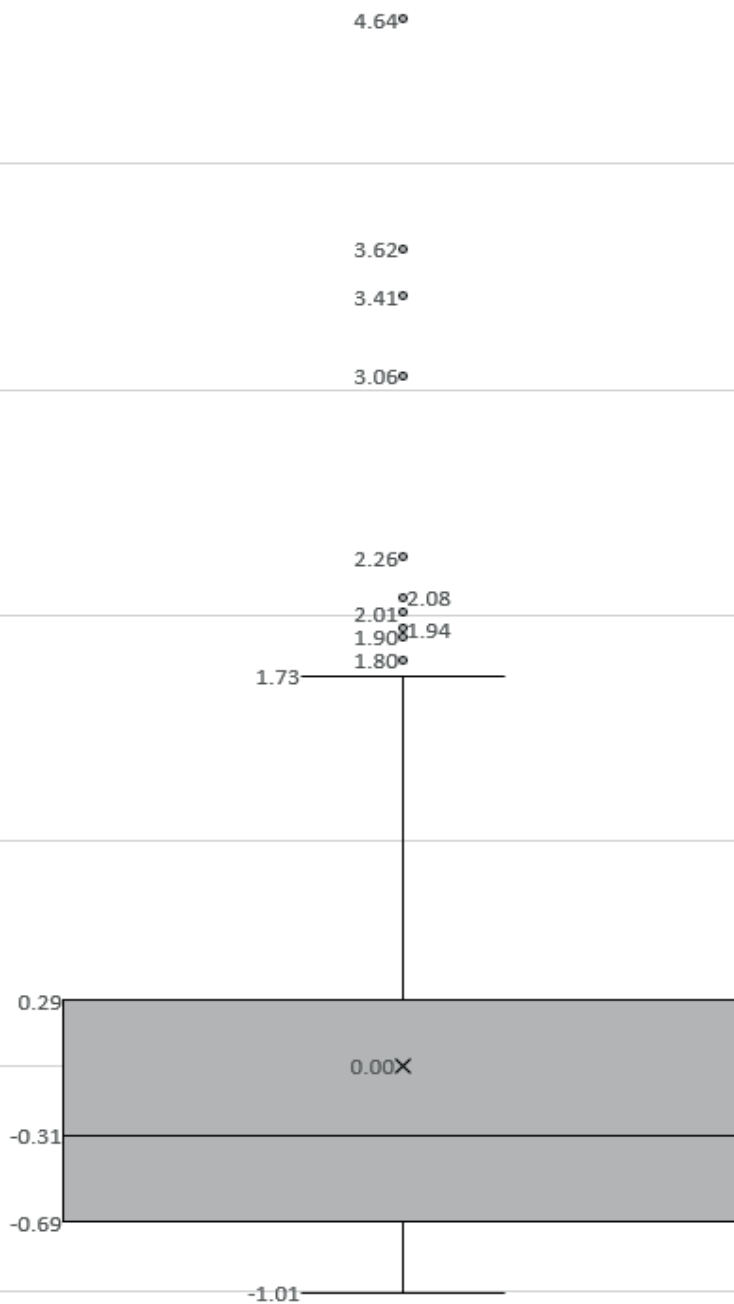
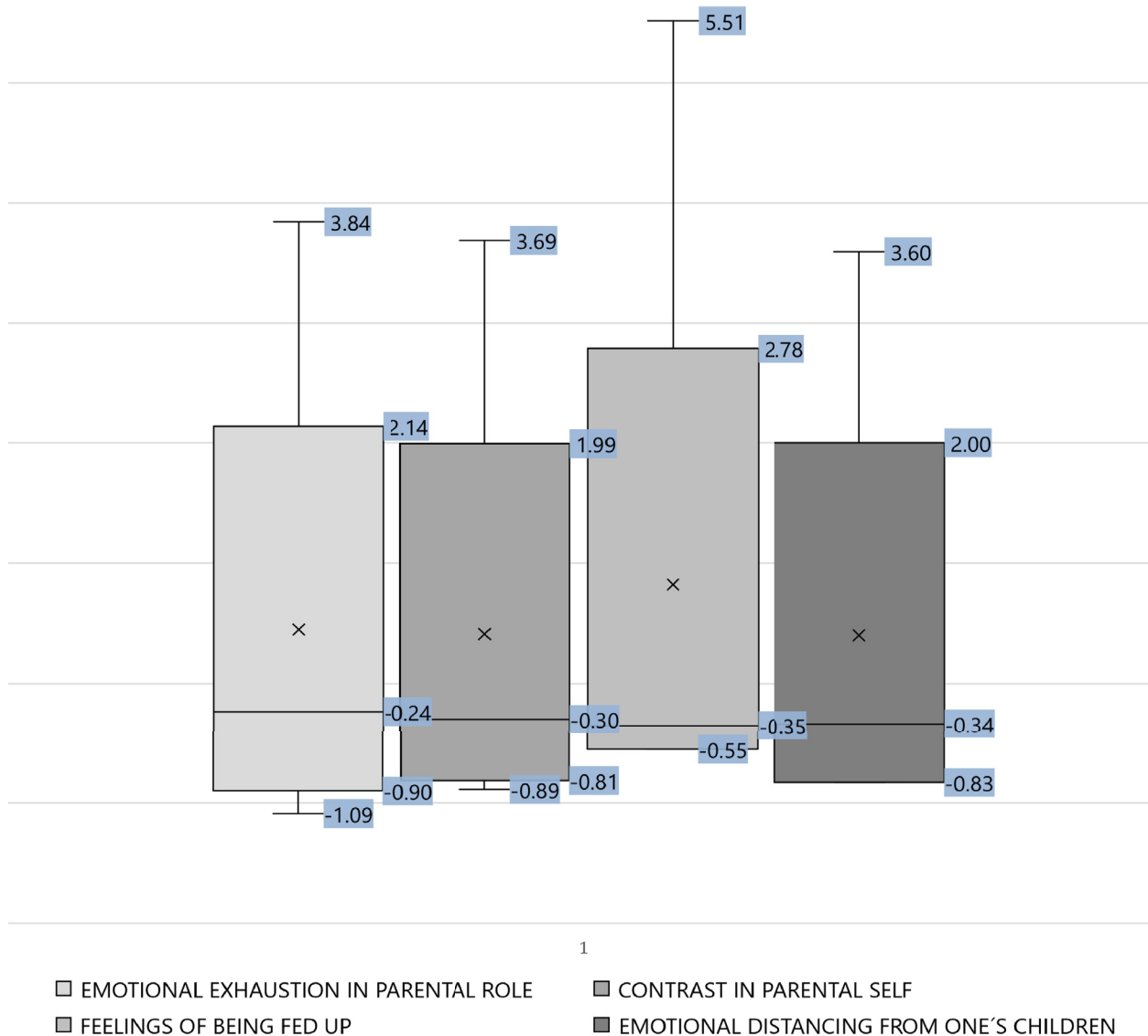


Figure 3. Box and whisker plot for the PBA subscales



### Parental burnout score and its relation to other variables

In a first stage, multiple regression analysis was carried out to discriminate which variables are relevant with respect to the dependent variable of parental burnout. The criterion of statistical significance as well as the exclusion of variables that presented problems of collinearity with the dependent variable were considered. From these, 6 main variables were highlighted to be considered within the model: (a) the individualism IIS subscale, (b) the gender of the participants, (c) the specialist GR

subscale, (d) the number of hours spent with the child, (e) the family type, and (f) the GV relatedness subscale.

Analysis of variance was carried out to test model that includes the relevant variables. Variables that did not meet the criteria of significance, effect size as well as observed statistical power were excluded from the model. The final model included the following factors: (a) number of hours spent with the child, (b) the family type, (c) the individualism IIS, and (d) the gender of participants. This final model explained 44% of the variance. Significant differen-

ces between means according to family type were found in parental burnout total score ( $F(4) = 5.9, p < .001, \eta^2 p = .24, 1-\beta = .97$ ). Means are shown in Figure 4 and present the impact of family type, although not controlling for the other variables included in the model. Bonferroni's post-hoc tests confirmed mean differences between two-parent and multigenerational family types ( $p = .02$ ).

A significant effect of interaction between family type and individualism score was also found ( $p = .02, \eta^2 p = .31, 1-\beta = .93$ ). Thus, considering the parental burnout score as a whole, and influence of family type in interaction with individualism was found. Multigenerational families have shown much higher scores compared to the two-parent families. In this sense, it seems that individualism could play a moderating role in the relationship between family type and parental burnout score. Further analysis would be required to corroborate this possible moderating effect.

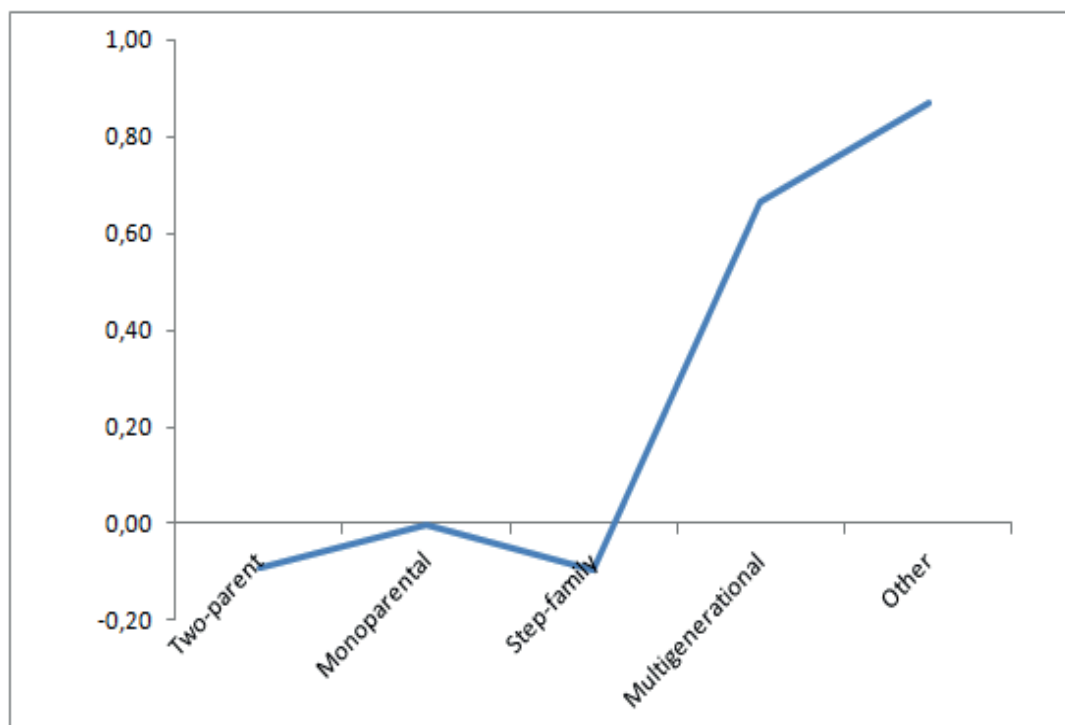
A nonparametric approach to the same set of data enables a different perspective as to how parental burnout could be analyzed in the context of the current research (Table 2).

The significant differences appear to be between being a mother or a father and age, that is, between being a mother or a father and the age of the older child, but most importantly between being a mother or a father and the score in PBA. Thus, gender roles emerge as possible stressors or predictive variables.

To clarify whether these differences are associated with gender roles, the Mann-Whitney U with Bonferroni correction (.025) provides more evidence as to where the differences show up (Table 3).

As it can be seen, differences remain between being a father or a mother, and the respective age, the age of the older child and the PBA total scores. However, when the grouping variable is the number of children in the household (1, 2, 3 or more), the differences remain but not in relation to the PBA Total Score.

Figure 4. Box and whisker plot of Z-values for PBA



**Table 2.** Kruskal Wallis Nonparametric Test on relevant sociodemographic variables

	$\chi^2$	df	Sig. asymptotic
How old are you?	21.764	1	.001
What kind of family do you belong to?	2.397	1	.122
How many biological children do you have?	0.831	1	.362
How many children live in your household? (Biological or not).	0.046	1	.830
How old is your older child? (If less than 1, write 0).	4.973	1	.026
How old is your younger child? (If less than 1, write 0).	1.421	1	.233
PBA TOTAL	44.548	1	.001

Note. Grouping variable: Are you: a father (1) or a mother (2)

**Table 3.** Mann-Whitney U for Sociodemographic Variables and PBA Total Score

	U de Mann-Whitney	W de Wilcoxon	Z	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)
How old are you?	4801	15532	-4.665	.001
What kind of family do you belong to?	6653.5	11703.5	-1.548	.122
How many biological children do you have?	6920.5	17651.5	-0.912	.362
How many children live in your household? (Biological or not).	7268.5	17999.5	-0.215	.830
How old is your older child? (If less than 1, write 0).	6144.5	16875.5	-2.230	.026
How old is your younger child? (If less than 1, write 0).	6719	17450	-1.192	.233
PBA TOTAL	3690	8841	-6.674	.001

Note. Grouping variable: Are you: a father (1) or a mother (2)

### Profiles of parents according to their parental burnout condition

As mentioned earlier, this sample does not tend to present high scores of parental burnout. Just a few families display the minimal scores to be considered as burnout ones. As a matter of fact, only 2% of the participants are in a condition of parental burnout. They're all mothers. Out of this small percentage, .8% corresponds to two-parent families,

.8% to multigenerational families and .4% to another type of family structure. Out of these mothers, in addition, .4% spend from 4 to 8 hours with their children, 1.2% from 9 to 16 hours and .4% from 17 to 24 hours. The percentage reported within the parental burnout condition is too low. Besides, no significant associations were found between the mentioned variables.

On the other hand, if the percentage of people who are not in parental burnout nor in risk conditions is considered, 74% belong to two-parent families while 6.5% belong to multigenerational families. Regarding the time they spend with their children, 7.8% go from 0 to 3 hours, 52.9% from 4 to 8 hours, 21.3% from 9 to 16 hours and 16% from 17 to 24 hours.

Finally, according to the mean as well as to the standard deviation, cut-off points were established to determine the low, medium, and high level of individualism. Considering the level of individualism of the parents, the following table shows the percentages according to their exhaustion/not exhaustion condition (Table 4).

As it can be seen in the table above, most parents have an average level of individualism. As mentioned previously, it is important to consider these scores in conjunction with the family type, and not as separate variables, since they showed an interaction effect on the parental burnout score. However, considering that most of the sample does not meet the parental burnout diagnostic condition, it is also relevant to interpret these results cautiously.

Finally, following Suárez et al. (2022) to some extent, a cluster analysis provides a clearer panorama of how the data better represent parental burnout in Costa Rica. Figure 5 shows the solution with four clusters to compare with the authors' person-centered approach.

The distribution of the sample suggests that the parental burnout cut-off could be moved downwards in the Costa Rican sample with respect to the original established by Roskam. Cluster 1 contains 60% of the sample (149 participants), Cluster 2 the 6% (14 participants), Cluster 3 the 8% (19 participants), and Cluster 4 the 26% (65 participants). If Cluster 2 and 3 are considered as those with a higher incidence of parental burnout, it sums up to 14% of the sample (33 participants). In Cluster 2, all the participants scored above 1.5 standard deviations up to 4.9 standard deviations in each subscale, whereas in Cluster 3 the picture looks quite similar but with few (4) participants scoring below 1 standard deviation in subscale 4: Emotional distancing from one's children (Figure 6).

A final interesting finding to support the assumptions for establishing a contextual cut-off point is that the Interclass Correlation Coefficient for all the four subscales of the PBA reaches for the average measures .846 (lower limit .813, upper limit .876), which is a good achievement at a level of significance of .001. By the same token, the correlation matrix showed the highest correlation between subscales number 1 "parental exhaustion" and 3 "feelings of being fed up" (.866) and the lowest correlation between the subscales number 4 "emotional distancing from one's children" and 3 "feelings of being fed up" (.621). Number 4 tends to achieve a similar correlation with the other subscales, except for number 2 "contrast

**Table 4.** Individualism level and burnout

Individualism level	Burnout <i>n</i> (%)	No burnout <i>n</i> (%)
Low individualism	1 (0.4%)	45 (18.2%)
Moderate individualism	4 (1.6%)	161 (65.2%)
High individualism	0 (0%)	36 (14.6%)
Total	5 (2%)	242 (98%)

Figure 5. Parental burnout latent profiles

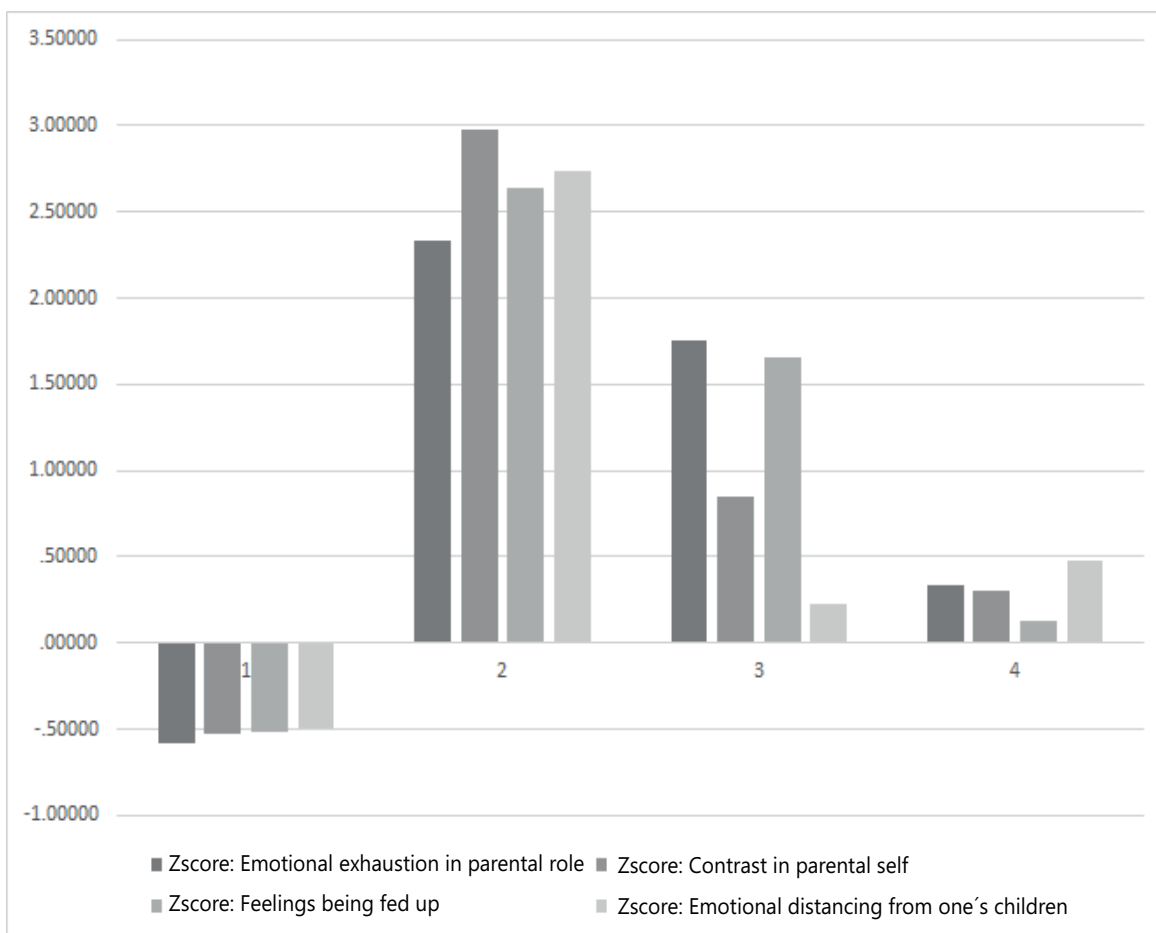
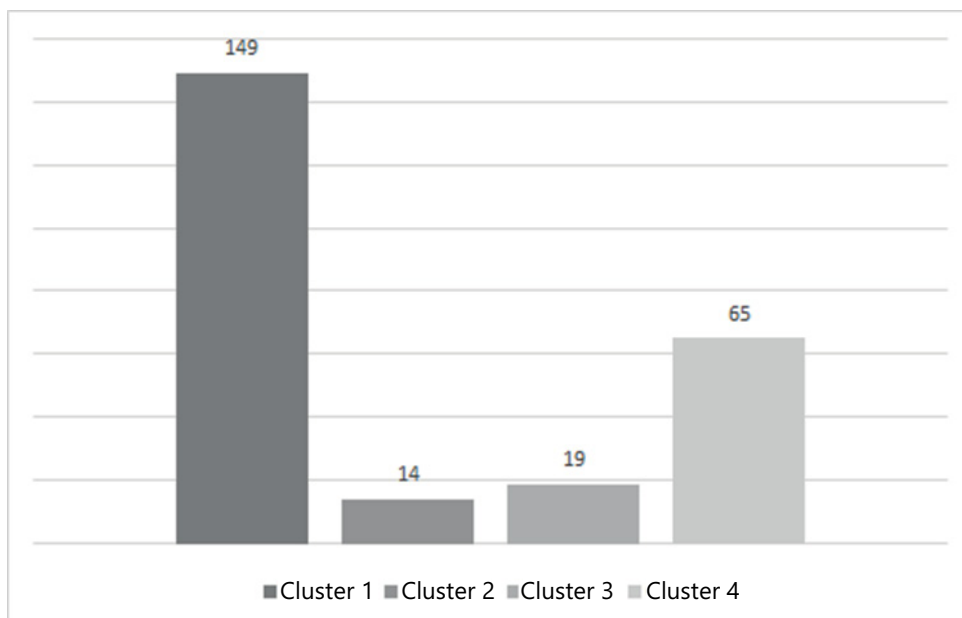


Figure 6. Distribution of the sample by cluster



in parental self" (.786). This is a striking picture that may depict a cultural trait in which the "emotional distancing from one's children dimension" involves the dimension of parental self and not directly the perception of being burdened by the caring tasks.

## Discussion

In this study, data were gathered about parental burnout amid families from the Costa Rican Central Valley. Middle class families with at least one child under one roof were interviewed. Thereby, the study strives to highlight the culturally specific characteristics of the parental burnout. Specific familial configurations of parental burnout, extreme fatigue, emotional detachment, and lack of efficacy are brought to bear. Of particular interest are the likely variations of parental burnout within families, i. e., intracultural dissimilarity. Some of these aspects have been confirmed which will be discussed in contrast with the hypothesis.

The first hypothesis claimed that parental burnout rates arise among the mothers of the sample but not among fathers. This hypothesis has been partially confirmed. Although the 2% prevalence of parental burnout in the sample meets the lower rank-limit cited by [Roskam et al. \(2017\)](#), it has only been observed among mothers in the current study, but only a few parents report risk of parental burnout. Albeit it is true that more mothers than fathers qualify in such conditions, the bulk of both mothers and fathers still score way below the minimum to be classified as burned out. Beyond any doubt, data lead rather to the conclusion that the general trend in this sample of the Costa Rican Central Valley with high education level is to enforce parenting styles with low or very low grades of parental burnout. Theoretically, the trend to parental burnout, if any, is in a certain balance between risk factors and resources, so that parents do not feel overwhelmed by the parenting tasks ([Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2020](#); [Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018](#)).

Nevertheless, data could shed some light on a likely cultural trait that might enables parents to per-

ceive parenting as not exhausting or overwhelming since it is organized around the appropriate distribution of tasks among different family members. This kind of familial tasks-distribution is, for instance, also characteristic of black American families in which such a strategy enables younger mothers to assume work and responsibility more freely in childcare ([Stack & Burton, 2016](#)). On the other hand, in this context, multigenerational families seem to deal with a greater amount of parental burnout. It is also the case of the non-classical familial configurations, namely, not necessarily biparental ones. In other words, multigenerational and non-classical families are likely to experience a greater level of conflict and caring demands due most likely to multiple and concurring parenting styles.

It is noteworthy that parent-child interactions under the depicted circumstances in the Costa Rican Central Valley families seem to be based most likely on strong psychological resources to deal with rearing duties, so that neither exhaustion nor emotional distancing interfere meaningfully in familial life quality ([Mikolajczak et al., 2018](#)).

A second hypothesis pointed to parental burnout as a socioemotional risk factor for mothers, but not necessarily for fathers. Since the prevalence of parental burnout is rather low in this sample, statistically significant differences between mothers and fathers were not detected. Nevertheless, it could mean that the low rates in parental burnout are somehow related to the even lower rates in individualism, enabling parents to fair distributions of tasks, which was proposed in the third hypothesis. Therefore, according to the third hypothesis low individualism may represent a protective factor to parental burnout.

Anyway, as [Suizzo et al. \(2019\)](#) stated, increasing research suggests that collectivism, or, in the current study, low individualism, is not necessarily contrary to promote independence and agency; then these dimensions are not dichotomous, but orthogonal and multidimensional so that the link between individualism and other psychological traits and so-

cialization goals requires further research as to the specific dimensions that play a central role.

The lower the level of individualism, the lower the level of parental burnout, and so consequently, the better for mothers to take care of self-interests and to devoid themselves to parenting duties in a more appropriate way, as this sample shows.

The Cluster Analysis performed on the PBA moves the current data a step closer to a new estimation of the cut-off for Costa Rica, based on cultural traits, even though further analysis is required to reach accuracy in this point, maybe in the same way Suárez et al. (2022) have done.

It is important to highlight that the main limitation of this study was the sampling process, which consisted of a sample of participants from the Costa Rican Central Valley with high urbanization rates and high level of education. To some extent, people who were recruited belong to a similar middle-class social milieu of the Costa Rican society, with access to technology and technological media. This social group gather psychosocial strengths and usually have access to information about best parenting practices that enable them to apply a more accurate knowledge to their own parenting experience. In a certain way, these findings represent a restricted cluster of Costa Rican society, i. e., not necessarily representative of other social configurations.

To overcome such limitation, in future studies about parental burnout in Costa Rican society and culture, it would be mandatory to establish a first sampling process among social clusters of interest, evaluating the cultural characteristics in advance. It is even more important to randomly select the families. For instance, families could be selected from public schools in specific zones classified as high-risk due to poverty or social disadvantage to compare them with middle or high-class families of children attending private schools. From a methodological point of view, it is more likely to find mothers and even fathers with burnout. Variables such as gender role, individualism versus collectivism, level of education, parenting practices and the rele-

vance of values in child rearing practices would also be easier to differentiate. Without addressing such methodological concerns, becomes very difficult to establish specific cultural traits of the Costa Rican society attached to parental burnout.

## Note

This paper covers the findings of the Costa Rica branch of the "International Investigation of Parental Burnout" (IIPB) consortium, a 40-nation study aiming at comparing the prevalence of parental burnout across cultures, conducted by Isabelle Roskam and Moïra Mikolajczak, Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium. The Costa Rican study has been carried out in the Institute for Psychological Research at the University of Costa Rica.

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