



Perception of homework in families: analysis of benefits, skills, changes, and discomfort according to sociodemographic variables

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

Homework continues to generate debate due to both the questionable pedagogical value attributed to it and its impact on family dynamics. This descriptive-inferential, cross-sectional, and quantitative study aims to analyze how parents' age, nationality, employment status, and educational level influence their perceptions of homework, specifically regarding its perceived benefits, associated anxiety and stress, children's competence to complete tasks, and the changes observed after the COVID-19 lockdown. To this end, 1,787 families across Spain with children enrolled in early childhood, primary, and secondary education completed a 43-item questionnaire using a four-point Likert scale. The results indicate that foreign families report more benefits and more changes after the pandemic, whereas Spanish families report higher levels of stress. Older parents perceive greater competence in their children and report less emotional strain, with these patterns being more consistent among mothers. Regarding educational level, fathers with lower levels of education experience higher stress, while among mothers, differences emerge across benefits, changes, and emotional distress, with higher stress levels among those with less formal education. Finally, employment status does not generate significant differences among fathers, but it does among mothers, as those who are unemployed or working part-time report higher stress and more perceived changes. These findings underscore the need for teachers to develop support strategies that are sensitive to sociodemographic differences.

Percepción de las tareas escolares en las familias: análisis de beneficios, competencias, cambios y malestar según variables sociodemográficas

PALABRAS CLAVE

Contexto
Familia
Parentalidad
Relación padres e hijos
Tareas escolares

RESUMEN

Las tareas escolares continúan generando controversia por la cuestionabilidad de su utilidad pedagógica y por la repercusión que tiene en la dinámica familiar. El presente estudio descriptivo-inferencial, transversal y cuantitativo tiene el propósito principal de analizar cómo influyen la edad, la nacionalidad, la situación laboral y el nivel de estudios de los progenitores en su percepción de las tareas escolares, concretamente en los beneficios, ansiedad y estrés, competencias del menor para afrontar las tareas y los cambios que perciben tras el confinamiento por COVID-19. Para ello, 1,787 familias del territorio español con menores escolarizados en las etapas de educación infantil, primaria y secundaria cumplimentaron un cuestionario de 41 ítems con una escala tipo Likert de uno a cuatro. Los resultados mostraron que las familias extranjeras destacaron más beneficios y cambios tras la pandemia, mientras que las españolas reportaron mayor estrés, y que los progenitores de mayor edad perciben más competencias y menos desgaste emocional, siendo más consistentes en las madres. Según el nivel de estudios, los padres con menor formación manifiestan más estrés, mientras que en las madres se observaron diferencias en beneficios, cambios y malestar, con mayores niveles de estrés entre quienes tienen menor formación. Por último, la situación laboral no generó diferencias significativas en los padres, pero sí en las madres, donde las desempleadas o con jornada parcial mostraron mayor estrés y más cambios percibidos. Estos hallazgos refuerzan la necesidad de que el profesorado articule estrategias de acompañamiento sensibles a las diferencias sociodemográficas.

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Positive and ethical parenting is often taken for granted, grounded in the child's best interests and characterised by the provision of present, shared, and caring time (Andreucci-Annunziata et al., 2021). However, its desirability does not guarantee its actual implementation, nor does it negate the difficulties inherent in its practice. The parental educational function is bidirectional and multidimensional, polyhedral in nature, shared with other institutions such as schools, and applicable across multiple contexts (formal, non-formal, and informal), which renders it particularly complex (Hernández-Prados, 2022).

Positive parenting encompasses emotional, social and relational skills that are essential for effective collaboration between families and educational institutions (Del Prado et al., 2021). These skills foster a motivational climate based on affection, communication and resilience. Nevertheless, this climate may at times be disrupted by stress, anxiety, and insecurity arising from the volume, difficulty, and time demands associated with school homework (Bailén & Polo, 2016; Hodgson & Ramaekers, 2022).

Homework refers to tasks assigned by teachers to be completed outside school hours, with the aim of reinforcing learning, promoting meaningful learning processes and enhancing educational quality (Muñoz-Moreno & Lluch-Molins, 2020). Homework gained particular prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period in which family involvement increased, educational inequalities became more visible, and new forms of academic support emerged (Muñoz-Moreno & Lluch-Molins, 2020; Spinelli et al., 2020). Although the pandemic has been recognised as a factor influencing families' experiences of homework, further clarification is still required regarding how specific sociodemographic characteristics –such as parents' nationality, age, educational attainment, and employment status– influence parental perceptions of homework.

Homework in relation to parental nationality

Parental nationality as a determining factor in the perception and completion of homework has been widely examined in the literature (Gomariz-Vicente et al., 2019; Hernández-Prados et al., 2023). It has been associated with contexts of socioeconomic vulnerability, linguistic and cultural barriers that hinder understanding of the school curriculum and communication with schools, a more limited capacity to provide academic support, and an increased risk of early school leaving (Andreucci-Annunziata et al., 2021; Rojas et al., 2011). During periods of confinement, structural vulnerability, precarious living conditions, and the digital divide hindered educational continuity for migrant children (Pavez et al., 2020), whereas native families demonstrated more effective time management, higher academic achievement, and better quality of work (Chen et al., 2023; Valle et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, from a micro-analytical perspective, differentiated family patterns emerge. In East Asian families, discipline, responsibility, and a strong valuing of learning tend to predominate (Chen et al., 2023). European families show greater dedication to academic tasks, which increases their chil-

dren's interest and effort (Rojas et al., 2011). In Moroccan families, direct support with homework frequently falls on fathers or older siblings in order to compensate for mothers' linguistic barriers, while mothers tend to manage the organisation of time (Bernad-Cavero & Llevot-Calvet, 2025). Finally, in Latin American and German families, homework support is feminised and communication is highly valued (Dettemers et al., 2019; Murillo-Torrecilla & Hernández-Castilla, 2020). From a cultural perspective, Catholic families have also been found to adopt a more active role within school culture and to display a greater willingness to support their children with homework (Barrientos & Arranz, 2019).

Parental age in educational support

Parental involvement in educational support is neither uniform nor constant; rather, it varies according to parental age, among other factors. Sánchez-Oñate et al. (2016) argue that high educational expectations foster participation and communication with schools, as well as support for homework, and that these patterns are more frequently associated with older parents, women, and families with higher socioeconomic status. Similarly, Hernández-Prados and Gil-Noguera (2022) indicate that parental age influences the amount of time children devote to homework, as students tend to spend more hours on this responsibility when their parents are over the age of 40. However, this variable does not appear to affect the quality or type of support provided.

Nevertheless, empirical evidence remains inconclusive. Some studies have found no significant relationship between parental age and attitudes towards homework (Yavich & Davidovitch, 2020), nor between parental age and the quality or type of guidance and support offered for learning at home (Harpaz et al., 2024). These findings suggest that age alone does not constitute a decisive predictor of educational support, highlighting the need to consider other variables jointly, such as educational beliefs, parental expectations, and socioeconomic context.

Educational support for homework according to parents' level of education

Differences in parental support for homework have been identified according to parents' level of education (Zubillaga & Gortázar, 2020), with students from more highly educated families perceiving greater regulation of time use and organisational habits (Valle et al., 2016). Families with higher education levels tend to promote academic stimulation, hold higher academic expectations, and place greater importance on their children's academic success (Bailén & Polo, 2016). Moreover, they often enjoy more favourable employment profiles, higher economic status, and easier access to educational resources, which facilitates a less demanding engagement with homework tasks (Hernández-Prados & Gil-Noguera, 2022). During periods of confinement, families with higher educational attainment devoted more time to supporting homework than those with lower educational levels (Muñoz-Moreno & Lluch-Molins, 2020).

Furthermore, parental involvement in homework increases when parents possess the educational background that enables them to provide effective assistance (Fernández-Freire et al., 2019), thereby reinforcing their confidence and reducing stress and anxiety levels (Spinelli et al., 2020). By contrast, when faced with academic uncertainty, many parents refrain from intervening, overlooking the fact that emotional support is often more relevant than technical explanations. This difficulty is exacerbated in low-income households, where limited educational attainment, labour inflexibility, or linguistic barriers hinder engagement with homework (Bailén & Polo, 2016). These inequalities contribute to what has been termed the cultural gap (Martín-Criado & Gómez-Bueno, 2017). Nevertheless, during the pandemic, mothers with secondary education –who valued the educational potential of homework and sought to prevent their children from replicating patterns of academic failure –increased the time devoted to support (Bazán-Ramírez et al., 2022). However, longer working hours constrained many families' availability, illustrating how educational and labour conditions jointly shape parental involvement in homework (Maroñas-Bermúdez et al., 2018).

Parental work–family balance challenges in relation to homework

In relation to academic tasks, improvements in academic performance are closely linked to parents' availability to spend time with their children and to the quality of these interactions (Cladellas-Pros et al., 2017). However, parents are often overburdened by work-related obligations, which generate relational conflicts, undermine parental reflective capacity, hinder their caregiving role, and limit their ability to meet children's educational needs and provide support with homework, ultimately causing emotional distress (Andreucci-Annunziata et al., 2021; Bailén & Polo, 2016; Hodgson & Ramaekers, 2022; Spinelli et al., 2020).

Support from both parents in homework activities is constrained by time scarcity and work–family balance difficulties, which disproportionately affect mothers (Fernández-Freire et al., 2019). Unfortunately, deeply rooted gendered cultural stereotypes persist, associating childcare primarily with women and placing them in the dilemma of balancing dual roles as mothers and workers within an increasingly competitive and exclusionary labour market (Fernández-García et al., 2016). Recent research confirms a widespread feminisation of homework support, with one third of mothers holding higher education qualifications remaining economically inactive and devoting themselves exclusively to childcare (Hernández-Prados & Gil-Noguera, 2022).

In response to the emotional strain generated by homework, many families choose to delegate educational responsibility to third parties, despite the associated financial cost, arguing that they have forgotten academic content or lack the patience and/or pedagogical training required to provide effective support (Fernández et al., 2021, p. 475). However, this option is not accessible to economically disadvantaged families (Valle et al., 2017), who may instead rely on older siblings to resolve doubts and facilitate study processes (Álvarez et al., 2023).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in family and work dynamics, together with the increase in teleworking and homework demands, exposed achievement gaps among students in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability (Muñoz-Moreno & Lluch-Molins, 2020). Nevertheless, recent studies have shown that, despite these challenges, some families display strong determination and resilience, seeking hope and progress through collaboration with schools in ways that prevent socioeconomic conditions from fully constraining their educational engagement (Bazán-Ramírez et al., 2021).

The present study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the effect of parental sociodemographic variables –age, nationality, level of education, and employment status– on perceptions of homework, specifically in relation to perceived benefits, anxiety and stress, perceived changes following lockdown, and children's competencies. Based on this overarching aim, the study hypothesises that parental sociodemographic characteristics, such as age or employment status, influence the perceptions of parents or guardians, such that those who are younger, of foreign nationality, have lower educational attainment or experience greater employment instability are likely to perceive fewer benefits, greater difficulties, and higher levels of stress and anxiety. This hypothesis is grounded in previous research identifying parental age as a source of educational stress (Hernández-Prados & Gil-Noguera, 2022), migrant families as facing greater barriers to effective parental engagement in formal educational contexts (Pavez et al., 2020), and suggesting that parental educational level and employment conditions may affect both parents' capacities and availability to support their children (Fernández-Freire et al., 2019).

Method

Sample

According to statistical data from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MECD, 2021), the total number of students enrolled in early childhood, primary, and compulsory secondary education in Spain amounts to 6,041,987. Based on this figure, and considering a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%, a minimum sample size of 385 participants was established to ensure generalisability and representativeness. The inclusion criterion was being a parent or legal guardian of a child enrolled in early childhood, primary, or compulsory secondary education at a Spanish educational institution, regardless of school ownership. Participant selection followed a non-probabilistic convenience sampling strategy, as educational centres voluntarily distributed the questionnaire among families. Consequently, the sample cannot be considered strictly random.

After several rounds of questionnaire administration and data cleaning, the final sample comprised 1,787 families, substantially exceeding the minimum required for statistical repre-

sentativeness. The majority of questionnaires were completed solely by mothers (68%), followed by fathers (25%), while a smaller proportion were completed jointly (8%).

Regarding sociodemographic characteristics, families with parents born in Spain predominated (90% of fathers and 90.2% of mothers), whereas foreign nationality was less prevalent (10% and 9.8%, respectively). In terms of educational attainment, almost half of the fathers held a university degree or higher vocational training qualification (47.8%), compared with 65.5% of mothers. The remaining participants were distributed across secondary education, upper secondary education or intermediate vocational training (35.6% of fathers and 28.3% of mothers), and basic education or no formal education (16.6% and 6.3%, respectively). Parental age was largely concentrated in the 40-49 age range (59.4% of fathers and 58% of mothers), with lower representation of younger parents under the age of 29 (1.1% and 1.8%) and parents aged over 50 (21.7% of fathers and 12.1% of mothers).

With respect to employment status, most fathers were employed full time (65.8%), followed by those affected by temporary employment regulation schemes (ERTE) (13.3%), those unemployed (13%), and those working part time (7.9%). Among mothers, although full-time employment also predominated (46.4%), higher proportions of unemployment (26.6%), and part-time employment (14%) were observed, in addition to 13% affected by ERTE. A total of 80.1% of children attended public schools, with the following distribution across educational stages: 15.1% in Early Childhood Education, 48.7% in Primary Education, and 36.2% in Compulsory Secondary Education. The nuclear family was the most common family structure (78.6%), followed by single-parent families (9.7%), extended families (7.6%), and blended families (4.1%).

Instruments

The validated questionnaire *Coping with Homework in the Family* (Gil-Noguera et al., 2023) was employed. It consists of 41 Likert-type items rated on a four-point scale ranging from 1 = *Not at all* to 4 = *A great deal*. The instrument comprises six dimensions; however, the present study focused on four of them, as these showed the greatest relevance to the sociodemographic variables under analysis. The selected dimensions were as follows: 1) Benefits, comprising six items, assesses the extent to which homework is perceived as beneficial for learning, autonomy, and responsibility. This dimension encompasses aspects related to learning and academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, study habits, attitudes towards school, curiosity and inquiry, and family relationships. 2) Anxiety and stress, defined by five items addressing tensions or conflicts associated with homework. It includes elements such as discomfort, exhaustion, perceived academic inability to provide support, family conflict and lack of time. 3) Changes following lockdown, consisting of six items, captures the magnitude of perceived changes in the volume, type, and organisation of homework in comparison with the COVID-19 period. This dimension considers diversification of the place where home-

work is carried out, increases in workload and time spent, differences in experiences of discomfort, and the intensification of family support and care measures. 4) Children's competencies, a dimension defined by eight items, measures children's skills and resources for coping with homework (organisation, self-regulation, and autonomy), including mastery of content, comprehension of instructions, use of technological tools, time management, assumption of responsibilities, effort, motivation, and emotional regulation.

Global scores were calculated by averaging item responses within each dimension: item scores (ranging from 1 to 4) were summed and then divided by the corresponding number of items.

From a psychometric perspective, reliability analyses of the dimensions included in this study yielded high values across all constructs: children's competencies ($\alpha = .89$; $\omega = .9$), benefits ($\alpha = .85$; $\omega = .90$), changes following the pandemic ($\alpha = .91$; $\omega = .95$), and anxiety and stress ($\alpha = .83$; $\omega = .87$).

Sociodemographic variables were categorical in nature. Nationality was dichotomised into Spanish and non-Spanish populations, a classification commonly used in socio-educational research as it enables the identification of differences associated with origin without undermining diversity or excessively fragmenting the sample. Parental age was grouped into four ranges (under 29 years, 30-39 years, 40-49 years, and 50-59 years), following criteria based on reports from the National Institute of Statistics, which adopt a similar distribution, and guided by a principle of equity whereby each category spans an equal number of years. Educational level was categorised according to key milestones in individuals' academic trajectories, distinguishing between basic, intermediate, and higher education. Finally, employment status was classified in relation to labour market attachment and job stability, including temporary employment regulation schemes (ERTE), given their relevance to family dynamics during the lockdown period.

Procedure

In the first phase, databases from educational institutions across the different autonomous communities were consulted in order to randomly select 50 institutional email addresses per region. Subsequently, these institutions were contacted via an email message that included a project overview, an informed consent form, and the ethical considerations of the study. Schools that agreed to participate were provided with a link to the online questionnaire, which they then distributed to families through their usual communication channels (educational platforms, email, or internal circulars).

Thus, although the initial selection of schools was conducted randomly, final family participation depended on the voluntary acceptance of both schools and families to complete the questionnaire. The entire process was carried out in accordance with the ethical standards outlined in APA Ethical Standard 8.2, as well as with Organic Law 3/2018 of 5 December on the Protection of Personal Data and the Guarantee of Digital Rights. This study forms part of a doctoral thesis that was reviewed by a uni-

versity ethics committee, which assessed the ethical appropriateness of the research in line with non-experimental research in the social sciences.

Data analysis

Data were entered into SPSS Statistics version 25. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for each of the analysed dimensions. Subsequently, in line with the study objectives, statistical comparisons were conducted between the outcome variables and the grouping variables (parental age, employment status, educational level, and nationality). Prior to inferential analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p < .001$) and Levene's test ($p < .005$) were applied, indicating violations of the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance. Accordingly, non-parametric analyses were employed.

Given that the variables of parental age, employment status and educational level comprised more than two categories (i.e. were non-dichotomous), the Kruskal-Wallis H test was used. For nationality, which was dichotomous (Spanish vs. foreign), the Mann-Whitney U test was applied. In both cases, the level of statistical significance was set at .05. Throughout the analysis, the global scores of the four dimensions examined were selected as the dependent variables.

Results

Table 1 presents the statistically significant differences in parental perceptions according to nationality. Differences were observed for both fathers and mothers in perceived changes following lockdown and in the perceived benefits of homework, with higher levels reported by parents of foreign nationality. By contrast, Spanish families reported higher levels of anxiety and stress related to homework.

Table 2 summarises the differences according to parental age. Statistically significant differences were found for mothers' age across all dimensions. Younger mothers perceived greater changes and benefits, whereas older mothers reported higher levels of children's competencies; stress was highest in the intermediate age group (30-50 years). Among fathers, no

differences were identified in perceived changes; however, significant differences emerged for perceived benefits, children's competencies, and anxiety and stress, following a pattern similar to that observed among mothers.

With regard to educational level (see Table 3), fathers with lower levels of education reported higher levels of anxiety and stress. Among mothers, in addition to differences in anxiety and stress, statistically significant differences were found in perceived benefits –rated more highly by those with intermediate education and less so by those with higher education—and in perceived changes following lockdown, which were also more strongly recognised by mothers with intermediate education compared with those with basic education.

With respect to employment status (see Table 4), no statistically significant differences were found among fathers. By contrast, among mothers, significant differences emerged both in perceived changes following lockdown –more strongly perceived by unemployed mothers—and in anxiety and stress levels, which were higher among those who were unemployed or working part time compared with those employed full time or affected by temporary employment regulation schemes (ERTE).

Discussion

The present study contributes to an understanding of how parental sociodemographic variables –age, nationality, level of education and employment status— influence perceptions of homework. Specifically, it examines perceived benefits, levels of anxiety and stress, changes resulting from lockdown, and children's competencies, offering a comprehensive overview of the differences and patterns that emerge according to these family characteristics.

Overall, parents' nationality, age, educational level and employment conditions were found to shape perceptions of homework. More specifically, with regard to nationality, foreign families reported greater perceived benefits and identified more substantial changes in homework assigned before and during lockdown. However, attributing benefits to homework does not necessarily guarantee the provision of effective support or positive involvement at home, which in this case appears to be higher among Spanish families (Gomariz-Vicente et al., 2019).

Table 1

Test statistics for differences in fathers' and mothers' nationality and the evaluation of homework

Categories	Variable Grouping	Fathers' nationality			Mothers' nationality		
		N	Mean Rank	p	N	Mean Rank	p
Changes in homework	Spanish	1,580	862.31	< .001	1,603	869.6	< .001
	Non-Spanish	176	1023.85		175	1071.75	
Perceived benefits of homework	Spanish	1,580	863.65	< .001	1,603	873.25	< .001
	Non-Spanish	176	1011.85		175	1038.33	
Children's homework-related competencies	Spanish	1,580	876.93	.698	1,603	889.51	.999
	Non-Spanish	176	892.56		175	889.43	
Homework-related anxiety and stress	Spanish	1,580	888.3	.015	1,603	898.92	.019
	Non-Spanish	176	790.51		175	803.21	

Table 2*Test statistics for differences in fathers' and mothers' age and the evaluation of homework*

Categories	Variable Grouping	N	Fathers' age		Mothers' age	
			Mean Rank	p	N	Mean Rank
Changes in homework	< 29 years	19	870.79	.099	32	933.75
	30 -39 years	299	916.48		494	956.43
	40- 49 years	999	847.51		1,021	865.66
	50-59 years	366	822.04		213	781.9
Perceived benefits of homework	< 29 years	19	989.55	< .001	32	1071.19
	30 -39 years	299	867.1		494	868.96
	40- 49 years	999	815.58		1,021	860.32
	50-59 years	366	925.56		213	983.53
Children's homework-related competencies	< 29 years	19	865.5	< .001	32	824.27
	30 -39 years	299	781.26		494	785.42
	40- 49 years	999	821.68		1,021	895.3
	50-59 years	366	983.98		213	1046.46
Homework-related anxiety and stress	< 29 years	19	685.95	< .001	32	815.95
	30 -39 years	299	846.13		494	906.26
	40- 49 years	999	895.44		1,021	899.78
	50-59 years	366	765.53		213	750.07

Table 3*Test statistics for differences in fathers' and mothers' educational level and the evaluation of homework*

Categories	Variable Grouping	N	Fathers' educational level		Mothers' educational level	
			Mean Rank	p	N	Mean Rank
Changes in homework	No formal education / Primary education	289	833.14	.137	111	840.43
	Secondary education / Intermediate vocational training or upper secondary education	619	899.37		501	945.56
	University education / Higher vocational training	831	860.94		1,161	866.18
Perceived benefits of homework	No formal education / Primary education	289	860.93	.387	111	929.21
	Secondary education / Intermediate vocational training or upper secondary education	619	892.17		501	957.88
	University education / Higher vocational training	831	856.64		1,161	852.38
Children's homework-related competencies	No formal education / Primary education	289	825.96	.261	111	821.23
	Secondary education / Intermediate vocational training or upper secondary education	619	877.11		501	922.95
	University education / Higher vocational training	831	880.03		1,161	877.78
Homework-related anxiety and stress	No formal education / Primary education	289	941.22	.004	111	1048.93
	Secondary education / Intermediate vocational training or upper secondary education	619	886.05		501	934.44
	University education / Higher vocational training	831	833.28		1,161	851.05

Table 4*Test statistics for differences in fathers' and mothers' employment status and the evaluation of homework*

Categories	Variable Grouping	Fathers' employment status			Mothers' employment status		
		N	Mean Rank	p	N	Mean Rank	p
Changes in homework	Unemployed	223	872.43		468	937.64	
	Working part time	135	828.61		247	886.37	
	Working full time	1,130	861.99	.847	816	848.64	.026
	Subject to a temporary employment regulation scheme (ERTE)	229	849.11		229	870.93	
Perceived benefits of homework	Unemployed	223	912.32		468	912.29	
	Working part time	135	757.09		247	881.76	
	Working full time	1,130	862.12	.058	816	848.77	.075
	Subject to a temporary employment regulation scheme (ERTE)	229	851.77		229	927.22	
Children's homework-related competencies	Unemployed	223	851.66		468	888.59	
	Working part time	135	838.56		247	834.6	
	Working full time	1,130	860.51	.936	816	887.08	.501
	Subject to a temporary employment regulation scheme (ERTE)	229	870.76		229	890.03	
Homework-related anxiety and stress	Unemployed	223	850.56		468	928.18	
	Working part time	135	780.57		247	947.25	
	Working full time	1,130	875.42	.145	816	840.25	< .001
	Subject to a temporary employment regulation scheme (ERTE)	229	832.45		229	854.5	

This greater involvement may entail a considerable emotional and energetic burden, resulting in increased stress and anxiety (Spinelli et al., 2020). Finally, and in line with Pavéz et al. (2020), the challenges associated with the virtualisation of education during the pandemic led immigrant families to perceive more pronounced changes in homework practices before and during lockdown.

Parental age also influenced parental involvement in supporting homework. In the present study, parents under the age of 39 perceived changes in homework following the onset of the pandemic; however, this effect was only statistically significant among mothers, who also experienced higher levels of anxiety and stress. These findings are consistent with those reported by Bjørknes et al. (2022), who observed that during lockdown, being male, aged between 40 and 49, and having relatively high income levels were associated with lower parental stress compared with younger parents aged 18-29.

Furthermore, parental age, together with children's school grade, influenced both the amount of homework assigned and children's levels of autonomy, which in turn affected the demand for parental support and family stress levels (Bailén & Polo, 2016). In this regard, it is unsurprising that parents aged between 30 and 49 reported higher levels of anxiety and stress when supporting their children with homework compared with

younger parents or those over the age of 50. Previous studies have shown that the volume of homework decreases as children grow older and their autonomy increases, requiring less parental supervision (Valle et al., 2016), which in turn contributes to lower levels of anxiety.

With respect to parents' educational level, the findings indicate that mothers with secondary education perceived greater changes in homework during lockdown and attributed more benefits to homework than those with higher education. This result complements the findings of Moè et al. (2018), who suggest that families with higher educational attainment tend to focus more strongly on fostering children's autonomy, which may involve less direct support and, consequently, a lower perception of immediate changes or benefits. By contrast, as noted by Bazán-Ramírez et al. (2021), families with no formal education or only primary education tend to emphasise the value of homework as a means of preventing their children from replicating patterns of limited educational attainment. In addition, both fathers and mothers with lower levels of education reported higher levels of stress and anxiety related to homework. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that lower parental educational attainment is associated with greater difficulty in providing homework support, thereby increasing stress and anxiety (Varela et al., 2021).

Finally, regarding parents' employment status, the results showed that unemployed families perceived a greater need for support and attention during the pandemic. This pattern is consistent with Spinelli et al. (2020), who reported that a lack of support and resources for managing homework increased family stress and intensified intrafamilial conflict. In the present study, employment status generated statistically significant differences among mothers, but not among fathers. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as direct comparisons between mothers and fathers were not conducted, limiting interpretation to within-group analyses.

Overall, parents express a strong desire to support their children with homework, despite experiencing frustration due to time constraints (Hodgson & Ramaekers, 2022). Notably, the data identified lack of time as a key obstacle for mothers who were unemployed or working part time. In this respect, Pozzoli et al. (2022) argue that in calm, organised, and supportive family environments where time for assistance is available, students encounter fewer difficulties in completing homework and regulate their emotions more effectively in stressful situations.

The present findings confirm that employment instability and time scarcity increase anxiety levels associated with homework, particularly among mothers, replicating patterns of overload observed during the pandemic (Spinelli et al., 2020). This suggests that stress is not solely dependent on the volume of homework (Bailén & Polo, 2016), but also on socioeconomic conditions that constrain the quality of parental support. Moreover, the perception of insufficient time may conceal lower levels of self-efficacy or confidence in providing academic support (Hernández-Prados & Gil-Noguera, 2022).

Limitations and practical implications

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, there was a gender imbalance among respondents, with a predominance of women, which may have biased the interpretation of the findings. Second, the absence of students and teachers as sources of information limited the diversity of perspectives, particularly given the educational focus of the study. Additionally, the exclusive use of a quantitative methodology imposed interpretative constraints; future research would benefit from adopting a mixed-methods approach to provide more nuanced insights. Another relevant limitation concerns the dichotomous categorisation of nationality (Spanish/non-Spanish), which did not take into account the timing of immigrant families' incorporation into the Spanish education system or their children's prior educational trajectories, thereby limiting the understanding of key cultural nuances.

Future research should further examine how employment conditions and family emotional climate shape parental involvement and the identification of the primary caregiver responsible for homework support (Álvarez-Muñoz et al., 2023; Hernández-Prados et al., 2023), as well as explore school-based and community interventions aimed at reducing homework-related stress among vulnerable families. Longitudinal studies would

also be valuable in clarifying the evolution of parental stress and its cumulative impact on students' wellbeing and autonomy.

The findings highlight a key practical implication: family support for homework should not be underestimated, as it is shaped by families' personal histories, educational expectations and beliefs, and is closely linked to their desire to improve their children's life opportunities (Bazán-Ramírez et al., 2021). Moreover, regular meetings between teachers and families are necessary to guide parents in providing effective support (Muriel-Torrecilla & Hernández-Castilla, 2020), as such involvement has been shown to enhance both academic achievement and school wellbeing (Dettmers et al., 2019). These spaces for dialogue not only help parents develop more effective support strategies, but also foster mutual trust and a shared sense of responsibility within the educational process.

Conclusions

The study demonstrates that parents' sociodemographic characteristics directly influence how homework is perceived. Families of foreign nationality tended to attribute greater benefits to homework and to perceive more pronounced changes during the lockdown period, whereas Spanish families showed higher levels of involvement but also greater emotional strain. Parental age emerged as a key factor: younger parents –particularly mothers– experienced higher levels of anxiety and stress, while older parents were more likely to recognise their children's autonomy. Educational level also marked clear differences: parents with lower educational attainment viewed homework as an opportunity for progress, albeit while experiencing greater difficulties and emotional discomfort, whereas those with higher education levels tended to promote autonomy-oriented strategies. Finally, employment status shaped time availability and the quality of support, with mothers facing greater job instability encountering more obstacles, which in turn affected family wellbeing and the overall relationship with homework.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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