9 Families' Discourse in Polarized Societies When Talking about Violence with Their Children in Catalonia

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The articulation of people and communities while respecting their differences is one of the most compelling challenges in global societies where diversity is the quintessential constituent. Lately, the movement toward social and political polarization is a disquieting trend everywhere, especially when the central space of encounter and understanding disappears to make way for prejudices and violence that reject and exclude "the other" (Aín & Logioco, 2021; Bradsma, 2017; Diamond, 2015).

In Catalonia, an autonomous region within the Kingdom of Spain, the process toward political self-determination has, since the last months of 2017, cracked open the whole social system making it difficult to peacefully address controversial issues (Barbet, 2020; Barceló, 2018; Cetrà et al., 2018; Turp et al., 2017). Certainly, a long tradition of peace and truce legislation dating back to the Middle Ages inspires, nowadays, the quest to preserve order and stability in the region (Mateu, 2017), but the sentiment of intensification of violence, not only within the political arena but also puts the citizens in permanent tension. As Balcells et al. (2021, p. 15) state, "the policy of secession, once pursued, can create a form of identity that has social spillovers in terms of affect and stereotyping". In such a context, both the menace of severe polarization and violence flare-up become plausible, bringing along an invaluable opportunity for peacebuilding. In this sense, despite an evident risk of violence scalation persistently fueled in the political arena, most researchers report a social trend toward pacification that makes the Catalan case worthy to analyze (Balcells et al., 2021; Della Porta et al., 2019).

Regarding child violence in Catalonia, studies predominantly consider discrimination toward Roma children that forces them to permanent mobility (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2018; Vrăbiescu, 2017); bullying, a major plague in

schools (Sidera et al., 2020, 2021; Zafra et al., 2021); sexism and gender violence, which is surrounded by social laxity (Enguix, 2021; Gelis & Abril, 2020; Montserrat et al., 2022); the constant arrival of unaccompanied migrant children that collapses social services (Baños et al., 2021; Galguera, 2020); domestic violence and its repercussion in child victimization (Aguilar & Pereda, 2022; Seinfeld et al., 2022); poverty increase due to the current economic crises (Ferret et al., 2020; Narciso et al., 2022); jihadist violence after the perpetration of a massive attack in 2017 in Barcelona by young Muslims educated in Catalan schools (Antúnez et al., 2019; Ferret, 2022; Membrives & Alonso, 2022); mental health disorders and infant and adolescent suicide before and after the pandemics of COVID-19 (Casañas et al., 2018; Suárez, 2020); and subjective well-being related to the accomplishment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Corominas et al., 2020; Llosada et al., 2017). This variety of literature offers quite a "normal" picture of the spread of violence in most European countries and its impact on the youngest. In this line, the annual reports launched by the Catalan ombudsman for childhood grievances represent a major and actualized source of data (Defensor d'Infants i Adolescents, 2021).

In this context, the educational system struggles to offer protection to schooled children by prescribing all sorts of procedures that teachers must follow. In 2021, the central government passed a law (Ley Orgánica, 8/2021) to foster integral safeguard though the creation, in all the schools, of a new figure responsible for the prevention and intervention of all kinds of child abuse. Nevertheless, this brand-new coordinator of well-being and protection presumably will be a teacher without any specific preparation or skills to address violence. All in all, a multiapproach response to violence is still needed, and the involvement of more educational agents cannot be delayed anymore.

Thus, this study seeks to contribute to violence de-escalation and peaceful conflict resolution by focusing on families due to their socializing and educational potential. The impact of the "home curriculum" in the school curriculum is undeniable and has been well established by most sociologists that claim bidirectionality in the relationships between family and school (Epstein, 2019). As a result, international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reckon that one of the clues for rethinking curriculum is the realignment of roles and responsibilities between school and family: "education can no longer be reduced to teaching, learning, and assessing in an in-person setting. It also encompasses a growing range of opportunities for schools and families to strengthen each other and collaborate in the pursuit of shared goals" (Opertti, 2021).

According to Elder and Greene (2012), parenthood is political. These authors ponder that families "perceive their job of raising children to be

harder than ever and more important than ever, and they are deeply concerned about providing for and protecting their children" (Elder and Greene, 2012, p. 5). Initially at home, children and young people forge the attitudes and skills to understand the world and to interact with it (Capano & Ubach, 2013; Jiménez & Hidalgo, 2016; Nardone et al., 2003; Torío, 2006). In this process of appropriation, family discourses play a paramount role, particularly when dealing with controversial issues that lead to positions that oscillate from prejudiced to open dialogue (Crespo, 2011; Hinojosa & Vázquez, 2018). The study specifically considers four typologies of violence that sooner than later most families must tackle: gender, cultural origin, disability, and bullying.

Therefore, bearing in mind that in a polarized social context it is more plausible that the response to these four manifestations of violence places families at opposite extremes—violence, intolerance, and rejection vs. peace, respect, and inclusion—the interest resides in analyzing the elements that support their discourse and the family dynamics in front of peace education (Morales, 2020).

Building Bridges in Polarized Societies

Following McCoy et al. (2018), we understand polarization as a process where the normal multiplicity of differences in society is increasingly aligned around a unique dimension, the contrast of differences becomes reinforcing, and people increasingly understand and describe the society in terms of "us" versus "them". It is not, as can be seen, an expression of disagreement, something completely natural and healthy in democratic societies, but of "tribalism", a type of grouping that exacerbates competition against each other for political, cultural, economic, religious, gender, or generational reasons, among many other. Additionally, we share with Lozada (2014) a social view of polarization (not just political polarization) that extends to the family, school, parish, and neighborhood the dynamics of confrontation and rigidity through the constraint of the perceptual field (dichotomy), a strong emotional charge (loss of nuances), personal involvement, and exclusion and intolerance.

Among the reasons that stress the worthiness of stopping antagonisms between the extremes and building bridges, Jilani and Smith (2019) envision segregation inside own community, disapproval and hatred of opponents, and pressure to not accept diversity. According to the authors, these attitudes translate into less cooperation, deception, reaffirmation, and attack resulting in weakening of families, more stress, frustration, and negative impact on health. Finally, a culture of destruction and attack takes place where obstructionism, loss of confidence in institutions, and difficulty to reach consensus and resolve common problems ensues economic costs,

instigates hostility, and incites violence. Even though these reasons seem more than enough to try to avoid polarization in our societies, here we defend that the problem is neither in the difference nor in the discrepancy, but rather in how we peacefully coexist within confrontation.

Thus, taking a step forward, along with Stitzlein (2012), we maintain a proactive view on polarization that considers that individuals and groups have the right to dissent, and that discordance is not only legitimate but stimulating. As Mouffe (2009) argues, the objective does not consist of eliminating discrepancies and passions, but of acknowledging "the enemy" as the legitimate opponent to join in the pursuit of democracy. That is why more and more voices advocate that a healthy democracy appreciates controversy provided tools and strategies to disagree in peace are available (Bradsma, 2017; Caireta & Barbeito, 2018; Gholami, 2018; Hess, 2009; Huddleston & Kerr, 2017).

Families' Share in Confronting Social Violence

In the document entitled "Strategy for the rights of the child 2016–2021", the Council of Europe (2016, p. 8) states that "the family, whatever its form, is the fundamental unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of children. Children enormously value relationships with their parents and siblings". This implies that despite the archetype changes, the family, as a vital reference, remains (Perez-Brena et al., 2018; Trivette et al., 2010). Moreover, considering an interactive model of family (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), it is necessary to highlight how children themselves influence the parenting practices and acknowledge their role in parent–child construction (Cummings et al., 2014; Perez-Brena et al., 2018). In this way, the family (all its members) plays a key mediating role between individuals and society.

As it has already been stated, today's communities are constantly faced with the dilemma of following the path of violence, domination, exploitation, and individual gain or the path of peace, respect for life, social justice, and altruism. Agreeing with Harris (2013) and McCoy (2019), preventing the intensification of division and mistrust in our societies is the responsibility of both political leaders and the citizenry. Thus, the family, as the first agent of socialization and cornerstone of society, must take, and certainly takes, a position on this dilemma that portrays their children's present and determines their future (Ismailbekova & Megoran, 2020).

Children and adolescents, exposed as they are to all kinds of violence, can easily fall into a superficial and stereotyped analysis of human diversity leading to simple, expeditious, exclusionary, and violent solutions toward different people or groups categorized as "enemies to defeat". Then, intentionally, or not, they take a stand that may contribute to what Garcès (2020)

labels as "crises of shared futures". Consequently, if we are to live in peace, it would be essential for families to embrace a more regenerative than punitive discourse and put into play tools and strategies for reconciliation and reconstruction of the social fabric. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2020), the health emergency has altered lives all over the world and, among the keys to addressing the situation, this organization recommends talking to children—regardless of their age—with freedom and honesty, listening openly and attentively, asking questions while recognizing that we do not have all the answers, using a positive and empathetic language, keeping calm and controlling stress, redirecting negative behaviors in the right direction, encouraging, and offering support and consolation. At its core, it is all about emphasizing the social responsibility of the family and its commitment toward active peacebuilding because "it makes eminent sense to situate peacekeeping efforts in family settings, working alongside children's caregivers to improve the often-violent circumstances in which they live their daily lives" (Taylor, 2019).

Conversations at Home Related to Violence Associated with Gender, Cultural Origin, Disability, and Bullying

As established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Article 3 of Resolution A/RES/53/243 (UNESCO, 1999), the development of a culture of peace is linked, among other elements, to "the possibility for all people at all levels to develop skills for dialogue, negotiation, consensus-building and the peaceful settlement of disputes". In the present social scenario, the new generations need skills to manage diverse, even opposing, sensitivities and points of view since they are bound to face global challenges that require them to make decisions in plural environments (Oxfam, 2018). Now, the challenge for families is to stimulate the capacity to maintain difficult conversations in peace as the basis for building fair relationships at home, in school, and in the world.

It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss the four types of violence selected—gender, cultural origin, disability, and bullying—but what is clear is that they are a scourge in most communities. Its relevance can be easily explained because children experience this sort of marginalization at a personal level, in face-to-face relationships or through social networks, as well as at the societal level, on the local and global affairs.

Since families are highly permeable to the environment, these situations fuel conversations at home and serve to set the directions to be followed by its members. Dualistic logic, as remarked by Martínez-Hincapié (2019), leads to polarization that ignores the paradoxes of life and seeks to exclude differences. In the name of "good", all kinds of atrocities are justified,

imaginaries of domination are legitimized, and violence within each person is ignored and even excused. As a result, direct and frank communication stops and all contact with the other, the enemy, who is stereotyped and homogenized and to whom all kinds of bad intentions are attributed (identity fraud), is avoided.

Therefore, a balanced dialogue is essential for social cohesion in democratic societies and the point is to see how skilled families are, in general, to maintain difficult conversations at home. Of course, this means not always reaching an agreement, but trying to cope with discrepancies (Caireta & Barbeito, 2018). Hence, it is necessary to advance from the elitist dissemination of truths—which responds to a hierarchical perspective of communication—to the bidirectional and respectful exchange of knowledge through a dialectic process (Servaes, 2000), although this transition may generate discursive lines that transgress the dominant ideologies.

Any peace education curriculum or instructional strategies applied in the school either collide or align with the values and skills present at home, which implies that it is necessary to consider the family as a paramount agent in peacebuilding. Being so, Taylor (2019) affirms that family literacy programs are most effective and that:

> Every effort should be given to sharing this family literacy peace work, with the intent of creating new frameworks for sustaining peace in human societies, whilst becoming more proactive in our responses to the destructive impacts on human societies caused by the ravages of war.

> (p. 6)

Objectives and Method

The main goals of this study are (1) to find out how families address violence with their children in polarized societies; (2) to identify possible deficiencies in their communication skills; and (3) to provide some guidelines for an empathetic and nonviolent discourse at home.

From a mixed model, where both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies are combined, firstly, we approach the reality through a non-experimental post-hoc study to provide a context and to contrast the results obtained attending some variables (sex, age, educational level, number of people at home, type of school attended by children, and children's age). Secondly, we delve into the participant's perceptions to grasp how they, as active agents, understand and act within this intersubjective and holistic reality.

Prior to data collection, the Ethical Committee at Ramon Llull University thoroughly examined and approved the research project. Hence, during the

whole process the ethical principles for social research, as well as the standards for responsible investigation and innovation provided by the *Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and Commission*, and the World Medical Association standards (WMA, 2013) were preserved ensuring beneficence, respect for human dignity, justice, transparency, anonymity, and data protection.

Sample

The participants in the study are 1,480 Catalan families with sons and daughters schooled in infant, primary, and secondary education (3–16-year-olds). The sample is constituted of families contacted via school family associations and school principals who accepted to take part in the research. The respondents to the questionnaire were mainly women (82%), aged between 30 and 50 (83%), born in Catalonia (85%), university graduates (64%), employees (87%), and married or with a partner (77%). Most of the families lived in cities bigger than 100,000 inhabitants (40%), and only 16.5% resided in municipalities under 4,000 inhabitants. Households with four people predominated (55%), followed by those with three people (24.5%), five people (12.5%), two people (6.5%), and more than five people (1.5%). 59% of families had two children, 27% had a single child, 11% had three, and the rest (4%) had four or more children. Concerning the family composition, parents with sons and daughters represented 88%, parents, children, and other people amounted 6.5%, and diverse configurations characterized the remaining 5.5%. The annual income corresponded to well-off families (27.5%), families with medium-high income (42%), medium-low revenue (21.5%), and low-salary (9%). Children were schooled whether in state schools (63%) or in subsidized charter schools (32.5%), while some families had children in both types of schools (4.5%).

Instrument

Data collection was conducted through an instrument that combined Likert-scale items and open-ended questions around four assumptions dealing with violence.

The sections that make up the questionnaire are:

a. Profile of the respondent
b. Experience regarding violence associated with gender, cultural origins, disability, and bullying
c. Family involvement in community
d. Family views on current society
e. Communication at home

Then, the discourse around the four assumptions is analyzed identifying:

 f. Communication patterns and topics
 g. Controversial issues that families address with their sons and daughters
 h. Optional free comments

Design

The research approach is interpretative, delving into the subjects' perceptions, and supported by both quantitative and qualitative data. Prior to data collection, the instrument was revised by nine experts obtaining an optimal Kendall's coefficient of concordance. It was also tested in a sample of 221 families (Cronbach's alpha = 0.824). As a result, some items were reformulated, but none had to be eliminated. The final questionnaire was distributed online through databases from both schools and family associations.

As for the analysis, concerning quantitative data, we used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 26.0 to examine the results. Regarding qualitative data, the coding process followed the steps indicated by Braun and Clarke (2006) and the peer debriefing technique (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The analysis was conducted by two independent researchers. Posteriorly, a randomized 30% of the discourse was examined by a third researcher with an index of agreement (Kennedy, 2005) ranging from 81.5%–98.5% depending on the item.

Although we considered several variables (respondent's role in the family, age, sex, birthplace, number of inhabitants of the city where they live, educational level, marital status, number of people living in the household, number of children, family composition, family income, type of school attended by children, and views on bullying, racism, disability, and sexism), here we will present the results globally, except for "communication at home", the principal dimension targeted in this chapter, where the influence of the most significant variables will be explored: sex, age, educational level, number of people at home, type of school attended by children, and children's age.

Results

We inquired about families' direct experience with violence associated with gender, cultural origin, disability, and bullying. The results revealed that someone in 27% of the families of the sample had suffered bullying, 22% underwent sexism, sexual harassment, sexual or gender discrimination, 6% suffered racism, and 4% were discriminated on grounds of disability.

Also, we wanted to know the families' involvement in community affairs (social responsibility) through their participation in the school and the

community, as well as their commitment toward more globalized problems. Related to participation in their children's school, we found out that only 28.5% of families had an active role whether as representatives in the school council, as members of the families' association, or organizing extracurricular activities. Similarly, families participating in the community represented 24%, contributing as policymakers, members of NGOs, neighborhood associations, social foundations, unions, and cultural, leisure, or sports clubs. When questioned about their feelings and attitudes regarding global problems, families declared being worried (35%), having the impression that they should do something (23%), experiencing impotency (15.5%), indignation (15%), or responsibility (11%), and only 0.5% acknowledged feeling hatred. Their predominant attitudes were giving financial support (40%), standing aside (29%), participating in demonstrations (19%), and being social activists (12%).

When inquired about their perception of current society, most families quite agreed or totally agreed with the statement "our society is violent" (73%). Then, they remarked that "our society is discriminatory" (86%), as well as "our society is racist" (80%), "in our society there is machoism" (86%), "our society is homophobic" (70%), "our society is more and more divided" (80%), and "our society is less supportive" (53%).

Regarding the prime dimension of the study—communication at home— we asked about how the conversations between adults and children were in general. According to the arithmetic mean attained, there are families that talk about what personally affects them ($\bar{x} = 2.41$), debate about current affairs ($\bar{x} = 2.37$), and deal with controversial subjects ($\bar{x} = 2.29$). However, they admit spending more time listening to music, watching videos, or playing computer games than talking to each other ($\bar{x} = 2.23$). There are families that believe that communication at home is satisfactory ($\bar{x} = 2.19$), while some state that their children do not consider their opinion as parents to make decisions ($\bar{x} = 2.13$) and even admit losing mutual respect, shouting, and getting aggressive ($\bar{x} = 2.12$). Moreover, half of the respondents confess not always paying attention to their sons' and daughters' opinions ($\bar{x} = 2.09$), think that their children tend to share their concerns with their friends ($\bar{x} = 2.04$), and recognize they find it difficult to put themselves in each other's shoes ($\bar{x} = 2.00$).

Hereinafter, we will examine these results with regards to the contrast variables: sex, age, educational level, number of people at home, type of school attended by children, and children's age. The tables with our data are shown in Appendix A.[1] Table 9.1 shows significant differences connected with sex in the item "At home, we do not talk about what affects us personally". To explore this difference, we present the means and the standard deviations in Table 9.2, where it can be observed that the men most agree with the fact of not talking at home about personal issues. Regarding the age

of the respondents, we found significant differences in six items (Table 9.3) that indicate, as can be seen in Table 9.4, that younger parents think more that conversations at home are not about personal issues ($\bar{x} = 1.92$) and find it difficult to show empathy. Also, the eldest group of parents responded above the rest that listening to music, playing video games, or watching series occupied more time than family conversations ($\bar{x} = 2.38$), that their sons and daughters confided more in their friends ($\bar{x} = 2.25$), and that parents–children communication was unsatisfactory. Finally, parents aged 30–50, which represent the vast majority, highlighted that their sons and daughters do not pay much attention to their opinions when making a decision ($\bar{x} = 1.85$).

The educational level significatively affected five items (Table 9.5). Uneducated families were a minority and reported, more than the families with primary, secondary, or university studies (Table 9.6), that they did not talk about personal issues ($\bar{x} = 2.60$) or discuss current affairs at home ($\bar{x} = 2.40$), that they tend to avoid controversial or polemic topics ($\bar{x} = 2.60$), and believe their children have no interest in their opinion ($\bar{x} = 2.20$). But it is the families with secondary education that declare devoting more time to listening to music, playing video games, or watching series than talking to each other ($\bar{x} = 2.36$). Considering the number of people living in the household, we did not find any significant differences (Table 9.7); however, the type of school attended by children (Tables 9.8 and 9.9) influenced the perception of families with sons and daughters in different schools (state, charter, and private) saying that their children entrusted their friends more than their parents when having to decide about something ($\bar{x} = 2.22$).

Children's age had a significant effect on six items (Table 9.10). To better analyze these differences, we present the means and the standard deviations in Table 9.11, where it can be perceived that families with children under 12 years old try more than the rest to avoid talking about controversial or problematic topics ($\bar{x} = 1.79$). When children are aged 12 or more, families declare that they would rather share their worries with friends than with parents ($\bar{x} = 2.26$) and that their daughters and sons do not pay much attention to their opinion when making decisions ($\bar{x} = 1.94$). Finally, families with both younger and older than 12-years-old children reach higher punctuation in three items: passing more time listening to music, playing video games, and watching series than talking to each other ($\bar{x} = 2.38$), losing mutual respect, yelling, and getting aggressive when arguing ($\bar{x} = 1.96$), and recognizing that communication at home is not as satisfactory as it should be ($\bar{x} = 1.90$).

To complement the questionnaire, parents had to give their views regarding four difficult situations at school dealing with racism, gender identity, rights of disabled people, and bullying. After reading each scenario, they had to position themselves for or against the victim's claims for equal treatment, give some reasons for their decision, and explain how they would

approach these situations with their children. Lastly, if wished, they could add further observations or commentaries. To begin with, we found 406 comments admitting not talking at home about controversial topics such as those in the given examples. In this category, 53.4% simply answered "no", 34.2% considered their children were "too young", and 12.4% said that the topic "never come up". For example:

- No, we don't (N° 7).
- My twins are only six years old, there are too young to talk about such issues (N° 196).
- No, we never had the occasion (N° 110).

Families having conversations related to controversial matters (646 comments), said, firstly, that they wanted to promote open communication at home (55.9%), secondly, that they had to cope with a real situation (28.5%), and, thirdly, that they faced a home-based discussion (15.6%). For instance:

- We often talk to our children about controversial topics so that they can avoid stereotypes or generalized opinions. We want them to be free to decide, always respecting themselves and other people (N° 66).
- My son is adopted, and it's hard for him to talk about his origins. When I talk to him, he usually shuts down and tells me he doesn't want to talk to me. We don't argue. I respect his rhythm, although I take advantage of any occasion to bring up the subject. He is angry with his biological parents, and I try not to make him feel guilty. Besides, he has an Asperger's disorder. We always value and comment on the difficulties or opportunities that are presented to him because of his condition (N° 580).
- I am a divorced mother. I have raised my child almost alone. With my own resources. The taboo subject at home is to talk about my son's relationship with his father. When I try to talk to him there is bad talk… (N° 130).

As for the trigger that gave rise to the conversation (241 responses), 45.2% were based on a personal experience, 30.7% were related to something that happened at school, and 24.1% came from the social context. For example:

- We talk about his grandfather's suicide. It opens the debate of whether it is right or not to have the choice to end your own life (N° 80).
- We talk about a boy that suffers bullying at school. My son always helps him by telling the teacher, and now his classmates nickname him "the snitch" (N° 179).

- We usually talk about current issues because my eldest son (15 years old) follows the news and has many concerns (N° 197).

The topics of conversation (2,273 mentions) were arranged around 26 categories grouped into three blocks. In the first block (frequency > 100), we found: sex and gender (37.8%), politics (18.6%), cultural origin and ethnicity (9.7%), bullying (8.1%), and social injustice (4.6%). In the second block (frequency 10 > 100), we identified: addictions (3.4%), ICTs and social networks (2.6%), disability (2.4%), death (1.9%), values (1.8%), religion (1.7%), authority (1.5%), COVID19 (1.3%), relationships (1.1%), sustainability and climate change (0.9%), and economy (0.5%). Finally, the third block (frequency < 10) was represented by: health and illness (0.3%), old people (0.3%), education (0.3%), animals (0.2%), consumerism (0.2%), physical image (0.2%), leisure time (0.2%), adoption (0.1%), time limits (0.08), and language (0.04%).

Despite completing all the sections of the questionnaire would take one hour or more, 25.6% of families decided to add something else (530 comments). Once analyzed, free contributions expressed families' thoughts in two principal directions (46.6%): consciousness for commitment toward community issues and reflections on current society. For instance:

- Today society disregards many topics that are considered controversial or taboo, and nothing is done about them. We should focus on these issues to promote a good coexistence both at school, in the neighborhoods, and in all public and professional spaces, with all the diversity of the population (N° 36).

Also, families remarked on the difficulty of positioning themselves (39.1%). For example:

- To decide the answer within the 4 categories without an explanation has been difficult, I have a son and a daughter and sometimes I would have answered differently if I thought of one or the other (N° 81).

Some families went further and made suggestions (7.7%), such as:

- I think that our society goes very fast, and we are short of time in general, which means that we do not have enough time to think and talk about certain issues with our children and that may worry them. The inputs that come through social networks, TV… do not help to create a more social and fair society. I think that we have also become malicious and with few disinterested personal relationships. I believe that

many lectures or audiovisual documents on these topics would be needed in schools, in the adolescent stage it is especially important that they become aware of them and have the tools to identify and deal with them (N° 194).

Then, families revealed the need to share some personal experiences (6.6%):

- To take care of children who suffer bulling (I suffered it) is fundamental, but as a mother having a child who bullies others is so sad… and I can only act from the heart. There is no sense in punishment… it's more complex than that, it's disappointment, it's desolation, it's falling to the ground…. it's to start again and to understand that we adults have also failed. Thank you (N° 66).
- The topic of disability is still a taboo, we have lost many friendships because not everyone is able to adapt to us… For example: not going to a crowded place, not being able to do an excursion, or simply not having to witness a sensory attack… in the end you are left with only unique and sincere friends (N° 96).

In Figure 9.1, we expose the categories that emerged concerning communication at home.

Discussion

To begin with, it is important to look back at the respondents' profiles. Although the questionnaire was widely distributed around the territory, participants were mostly women, middle-aged, born in Catalonia, holding a university degree, married (or with a partner), with two children schooled in state schools, forming a nuclear family, with medium to high income, and living in urban areas. Thus, we have a solid representation of the middle-upper class that portrays quite well the parents–children dialogue, but we still need to approach families from other nationalities and social backgrounds. It is striking to confirm how family matters are handled by women, even when they are well-educated and employed and could better claim for their rights (Giménez-Nadal et al., 2019). Similarly, in a case study on 25 couples around the world, it has been established that "women still do more childcare and housework than men in every country studied" (Deutsch & Gaunt, 2020, p. 3). Accordingly, the struggle for a more equalitarian society in terms of gender needs urgently a revolution within each household.

Families with socioeconomic well-being, like most of the sample, suffer violence too. Bullying affecting more of a quarter was their main concern, proving that children experience direct or indirect violence on a daily basis at school. Likewise, gender discrimination was denounced by nearly a
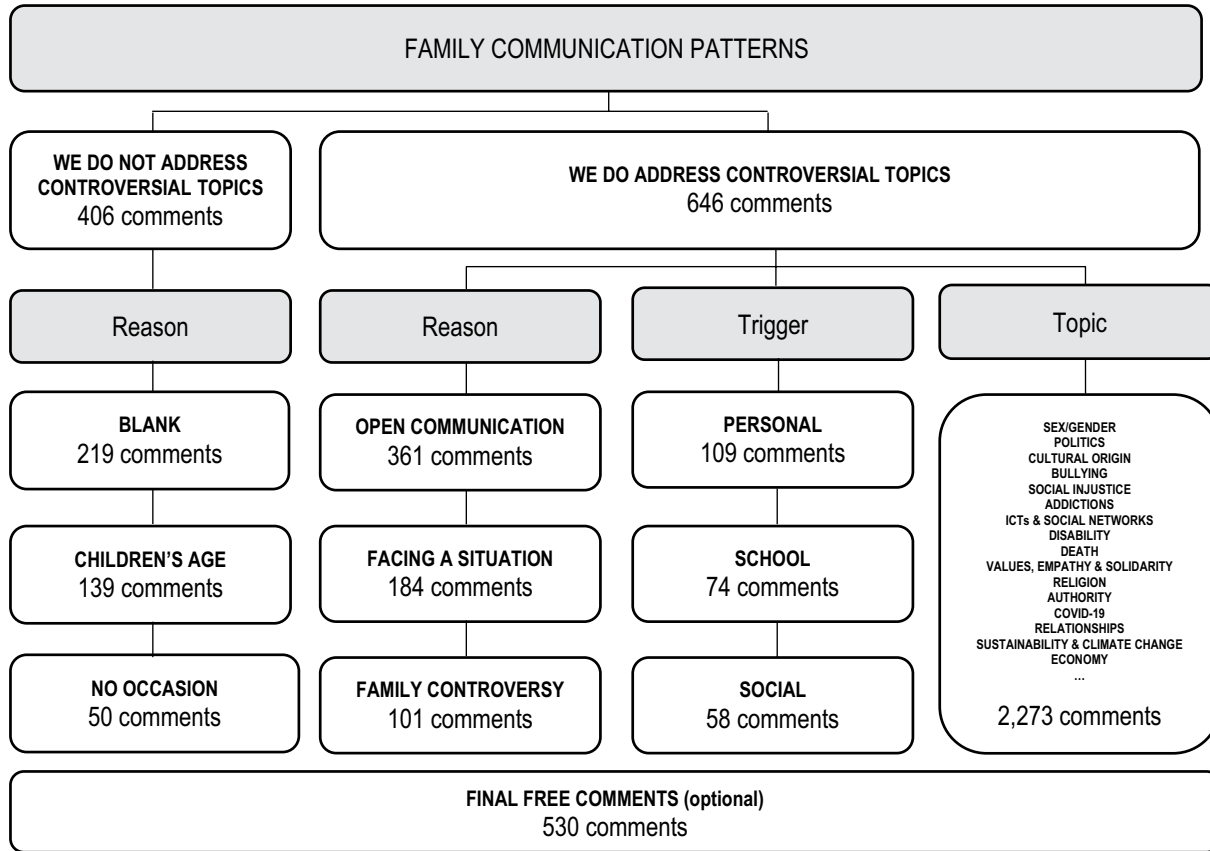
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FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

WE DO NOT ADDRESS CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS
406 comments

WE DO ADDRESS CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS
646 comments

Reason | Reason | Trigger | Topic

BLANK
219 comments

OPEN COMMUNICATION
361 comments

PERSONAL
109 comments

SEX/GENDER
POLITICS
CULTURAL ORIGIN
BULLYING
SOCIAL INJUSTICE
ADDICTIONS
ICTs & SOCIAL NETWORKS
DISABILITY
DEATH
VALUES, EMPATHY & SOLIDARITY
RELIGION
AUTHORITY
COVID-19
RELATIONSHIPS
SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE CHANGE
ECONOMY
...

2,273 comments

CHILDREN'S AGE
139 comments

FACING A SITUATION
184 comments

SCHOOL
74 comments

NO OCCASION
50 comments

FAMILY CONTROVERSY
101 comments

SOCIAL
58 comments

FINAL FREE COMMENTS (optional)
530 comments

Figure 9.1 Analysis of the communication patterns.

quarter of families, which could well be explained by the visibility that recent campaigns have given to sexual abuse and equal rights claim for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people (LGBTQI+), and of course, by the female bias of the sample. Then, racism is also voiced, but only by a small percentage matching the number of respondents from other cultures. And finally, violence associated with a disability is less represented, among other reasons because the violence they suffer has a paternalistic cover. As Labella and Masten (2018) state, there is a corpus of research supporting the idea that both risk and protective factors for the development of aggression and violence reside in the family system, and then, we wonder why there are not more studies and programs focused on peacebuilding at home.

Families' involvement in community affairs is minoritarian. About one-fourth of families participate in their children's school, and a few less contribute to the development of their neighborhoods. Such inhibition is sensed by children who grow up without proactive examples of social responsibility. At the global level, half of the families contribute by supporting several causes with money or by taking part in demonstrations. Only slightly more than 10% consider themselves activists. The rest, stand-aside. According to Esteban and Schneider (2008), Jilani and Smith (2019), and Lozada (2014), polarization diminishes the will to contribute to the common good, a fact that especially affects the most vulnerable.

If we hope to build peace from the grassroots, parents (anonymous people) will need to take a more active role, as Alesina and La Ferrara (2000) or Garcès (2020) remark. Certainly, it is not enough to show concern for what happens on the Planet, think that something should be done, or feel powerless or indignant, which is the case of nine out of ten families. This passive approach sharply contrasts with the families' pessimistic image (expressed by more than three-quarters) of a more violent, discriminatory, racist, macho, and divided society and the belief (indicated by half) that current society is less supportive than it used to be. According to (Tuna & Tan, 2020), the social structure is critical in the acceptance and legitimacy of violence. The social framework naturalizes violence and, at the same time, refrains individuals from acting, leading them to believe that there is nothing than one could do. Also, there's a wrong but shared myth supporting violence as a means for defending the common good. As a means of example, Akpuh (2021), opposing the culture of peace, even goes so far as to affirm that structural violence is necessary for the proper functioning and stability of human society and to prevent chaos.

Another part of the problem is the generalization of some kinds of violence and its prevalence from one generation to the next one. The comparative research on violence against women in Europe, for example, concluded that nearly 80% of women declared this kind of violence to be common in

their countries (Vázquez et al., 2021). Other studies attribute the resigned acceptance of violence to a deficient education (by parents and teachers) in values such as generosity, solidarity, or goodness and to the addiction to some substances that originate violent behavior (Gázquez et al., 2021). In addition, the negative effects—volatility, uncertainty, economic recession, and anxiety—caused by the pandemics, the Russo–Ukrainian war, the migrants' death at sea or at the borders, along with other major conflicts cannot be ignored in a complex and globalized world. In this line, Sorokowski et al. (2020) consider that the fear from social contact due to COVID-19 can increment prejudice against foreign nationalities. But despite everything, families wish a better world for their children; then, as Renzulli et al. (2021) claim, parents should encourage their children to orientate their skills toward common good and social trust. Maybe now, thanks to the Agenda 2030 (UNESCO, 2015) and similar initiatives, more and more families (and not the vulnerable ones) will be encouraged to take a crucial and agent role in the world (Taylor, 2019).

Results concerning communication are practically halved, with a slight tendency toward the bright side. This is not good news because it indicates that there is a significant number of families that simply do not talk about what affects them personally nor do they debate current issues or address controversial topics. Our apprehension is supported by some studies stating, for example, that adolescents suffering from cyber victimization report problematic family communication (Cañas et al., 2020), or that family communication patterns impact civic and political participation in adulthood (Graham et al., 2020). Much worse is to find that listening to music, gaming, or watching series occupies more time than family conversations. Or that they lack empathy and even lose mutual respect, shout, and get aggressive during family discussions. On the one hand, some of these factors have been identified as blockers of positive communication (mutual ignorance, not listening, and attacking each other), and on the other hand, empathy is at the basis of dialogue and understanding and brings something essential in polarized societies: human connectedness and compassion (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2017).

Supposedly, children prefer to share their concerns with their friends and trust them more than their parents. This lack of confidence could be more typical of adolescents, which is worrying enough. In turn, parents also admit that they do not always consider what their children think. However, children's right to participation is well established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and yet, it is not fully recognized by society, nonetheless by families and schools. Thus, communication at home is by no means considered satisfactory. Here, we see a sound opportunity to include communication skills in parenting programs aimed at being able to sustain an open dialogue about any topic.

Especially focusing on controversial issues, a significant number of comments (35%) indicate that families do not address problematic topics without further explanation or try to justify it because of the age of the children or lack of opportunity. As for the families that talk about any topics at home, we have seen that they believe in open communication and had to face real situation or a discussion. There are well-known strategies that foster positive communication between opposed views: deep democracy, Nansen dialogue, philosophy 3–18, the Soliya method, nonviolent communication, conflict mediation, restorative practices, and socio-scientific controversies (Caireta & Barbeito, 2018), among others. All these strategies could help to dismantle the discourses that claim violence and those that only consider social, economic, and political variables and disregard individual suffering. Using the terminology typical of the field of positive conflict management, it will be convenient to "destabilize" the fossilized narratives to introduce elements of complexity and resort to creative thinking as a source of new and acceptable solutions. Along with Martínez-Hincapié (2019), we believe that valuing individual efforts is resulting in a new concept of empowerment, which helps to overcome the idea that only great deeds transform reality.

The topics addressed cover a range of relevant social matters, with sex and gender—in part associated with adolescence and in part connected with the world's critique to the patriarchal society—politics, cultural origin—racism, migrations, diversity, identity—bullying and social injustice being the most significant. In short, together with Kilmurray (2019), the idea is to evolve from a numerical diversity to a relational diversity where people from different groups interact with each other as human beings.

Conclusion

To achieve the first objective of the study aimed at finding out how families deal with violence with their children in polarized societies, we needed to ascertain that families do, in fact, face different types of violence at home. It was also important to know their commitment to the community, as well as their views on today's society in general. After verifying that most families experience violence, we dare to emphasize that the family is quite an underestimated target for tackling violence and fostering peacebuilding in society, considering that they long for a more peaceful context to raise their children. According to Hinojosa and Vázquez (2018), the first step to generalizing the culture of peace consists of paying attention to family relationships and their influence on people's behavior. Families should play a mediator role between individuals and society in peacebuilding, mainly because they perceive a worse present in terms of violence, discrimination, racism, and solidarity. From a bidirectional concept of family, children are not mere

receptors but constructors; therefore, together with Comellas (2008), we defend that families involved with their context provide children with experiences of commitment that influence their attitudes. Consequently, in terms of school curriculum and instructional strategies for peace, we shall recommend taking into account children's family background.

To identify possible deficiencies in families' communication skills (second objective of the study), we focused on general patterns of communication, on their motives for discussing controversial issues, and on the topics they were worried about. The conclusion is clear and worrying: about 50% of families acknowledge having problems with communication. Thus, it would be advisable to instruct and empower families with strategies for nonviolent communication that should be included in parenting trainings promoted by schools.

Finally, our third objective was to provide some guidelines for an empathetic and nonviolent discourse at home. To advance in this direction, the research has produced a dossier on communication strategies for families and a glossary of terminology related to violence, social polarization, and culture of peace (see Appendix B). Communicative skills cover language and expressions that must be avoided; coherence between visual, vocal, and verbal language; assertive messages; empathy and interpersonal connection; reflecting feelings; paraphrasing the message; asking for clarification; reformulating to add nuances; the importance of the silence; appreciative inquiry; nonviolent communication; restorative circles and questions; mediation and conflict resolution strategies (including consensus building); and social and emotional skills. Here, our goal is to enrich the home curriculum resulting in a more peaceful family environment that contributes to peacebuilding education a school.

Finally, it is important to point out some of the most important limitations of the study, namely: biased sample in terms of gender (women respond), social class (upper-middle-class families), and cultural origin (Catalan). Therefore, in future research, it will be necessary to translate the instruments into more languages and use other qualitative methodologies, such as focus groups or interviews, which permit oral exchange.

Note

1 View the appendix for this chapter online at https://edpeace.peacecollege.org

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Appendix

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