


Children's Participation in Household Tasks: Caregiver Importance and Satisfaction

OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health
2019, Vol. 39(3) 151–158
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DOI: 10.1177/1539449218812711
journals.sagepub.com/home/otj



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Abstract

Attribution of importance and satisfaction with performance are key dimensions contributing to engagement in occupations. This study explored caregiver satisfaction with and importance attributed to the participation of their children and adolescents in household tasks. Participants included 109 caregivers of children and adolescents of both sexes, aged 6 to 14 years, from various socioeconomic levels. They were interviewed with two questions of the Children Helping Out: Responsibilities, Expectations and Supports (CHORES), with ratings of importance and satisfaction on Likert-type scales, and asked to explain their ratings. We examined the association between the two dimensions. Results showed no correlation between caregivers' ratings of satisfaction and importance ($r_s = .04$; $p = .699$). The majority of caregivers evaluated their children's participation in domestic care as very important, explaining in terms of the need for children's autonomy in adulthood. Caregivers' satisfaction was attributed to children's attitudes. The expressed ideal of children's future autonomy by caregivers is not converted to current engagement in household task.

Keywords

adolescents, caregivers, children, everyday occupations

Household chores help structure and are part of the routine of home environment (Aplin, Chien, & Gustafsson, 2016). The increased value placed on the academic performance of children in Western and industrial societies has been accompanied by a parallel reduction in the housework they are required to perform (Blair, 1992; Larson & Verma, 1999; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981; Zelizer, 2005). In the last decades, however, parents have begun to pay attention to the benefits of having their children engage in chores as means to foster their development (Aplin, Thornton, & Gustafsson, 2018; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). The acquisition of responsibility, independence, and the spirit of cooperation are some of the main reasons why parents believe it is important for children to participate in household chores (Dunn, Coster, Cohn, & Orsmond, 2009; Goodnow & Delaney, 1989; Law et al., 2013; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). In addition, another consideration refers to the division of housework, which thus makes it possible to avoid overloading the adults, in terms of time and labor, and to strengthen the child's sense of belonging to the family (Goodnow & Delaney, 1989; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981).

The importance parents assign to participation of their children in the home daily routine may lead them to devote time, provide help and resources, creating mechanisms to ensure that the children accomplish short-, medium-, and long-term goals. In the case of cooking, for example, parents

might devote time coaching their younger children so that they can follow the step-by-step sequencing of actions or begin performing the less complex and safer steps. Medium-term goal might be the independence of the future adolescent in the preparation of a full meal for the entire family. For that purpose, parents might provide some resources such as equipment and objects to facilitate the child's involvement in and task performance. Thus, attribution of importance to the performance of a specific dimension such as household chores may help identify means to initiate, structure, and foster engagement.

The relationship between functional performance, in general, and satisfaction with such performance has been investigated in various context (Abdullah, Badr, & Manee, 2018; Dunn, 2004; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Tomori et al., 2013). So far, the nature and direction of this relationship has not yet been consolidated. That is, if one examines

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these constructs based on the premise that attitudes carry with them behavioral implications, a directional or causal effect of satisfaction on performance is argued (Judge et al., 2001). Alternatively, theoretical propositions of motivation may argue that satisfaction emerges from the rewards of performance, leading to the performance–satisfaction relationship.

Parents' satisfaction with their children's participation in daily tasks is related to the way in which both parties experience or deal with the performance of such tasks. For example, parents tend to express satisfaction when their children demonstrate availability to perform household chores, in response to parental requests (Goodnow & Delaney, 1989; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). Also, children's proactive behavior to address household needs often increases parents' satisfaction (Goodnow & Delaney, 1989; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). But when parents and children experience stressful events regarding household chores, a dissatisfaction cycle is established. That is, dissatisfaction manifests as the mother's feelings of being unappreciated by or taken advantage by her child, which may lead to her being overloaded with chores, neglecting the care of the home, and/or having to repeatedly ask the child to do his or her chores, which might eventually trigger family conflicts (Goodnow & Delaney, 1989; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981).

Importance and satisfaction with one's performance are key attributes to help understand individuals' engagements in daily tasks and activities. They are examined using the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (Law et al., 2005). Other measures have incorporated questions of importance and satisfaction regarding specific types of occupational performance. One example is the Children Helping Out: Responsibilities, Expectations, and Supports (CHORES) questionnaire (Dunn, 2004). It evaluates the participation of children and adolescents in 34 domestic tasks. Part 2 of this instrument documents caregivers' values and beliefs regarding their children's participation in household tasks. It includes ratings of importance caregivers attribute to their children's engagement in household tasks, as well as their satisfaction with children's household participation. As a caregiver reported instrument, it provides means to examine parent–child relationship and expectations regarding children's household participation.

Evidence from the importance–household participation and from satisfaction–participation relationships regarding parent–child transactions in daily routine has led to the expectation of caregiver importance–satisfaction relation (Aplin et al., 2018; Bowes, Flanagan, & Taylor, 2001; Drummond, Gomes, Coster, & Mancini, 2015; Dunn et al., 2009; Dunn, Coster, Orsmond, & Cohn, 2009; Gager, Sanchez, & Demaris, 2009; Goodnow & Delaney, 1989; Klein, Graesch, & Izquierdo, 2009; Law et al., 2013; Taylor, Olds, Boshoff, & Lane, 2010; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). Caregiver's attribution of importance helps structure children's household participation and caregiver's satisfaction with children's engagement in daily tasks relates to how they

orchestrate chores performance. However, this information does not provide support for the caregiver importance–caregiver satisfaction relationship regarding children's active engagement in the daily routine. The untested relationship between caregiver importance and satisfaction limits our understanding of the influence of attributes of children's social environment on their active participation in daily tasks. Investigation of the relationship between the importance attributed by caregivers and their satisfaction with the participation of children and adolescents in housework is needed to elucidate how parents' stated ideals are (or not) converted into their children's actual involvement.

The aim of the present study was to investigate the association between the importance that caregivers attribute to their child's participation in household chores, and caregiver's satisfaction with their child's participation. We further examined whether children's characteristics (age group, sex, family's socioeconomic status [SES]) impacted on this association. The research question of the present study was as follows:

Research Question 1: Are caregivers who attribute more importance to the participation of their children in household chores more satisfied (or less) with the latter's actual involvement?

In addition, caregivers' explanations of their importance attribution as well as their satisfaction with children's chores engagement helped elucidate the relation between these two constructs.

Method

This was a cross-sectional exploratory study. The institution's research ethics committee approved the study and its informed consent forms.

Participants and Sampling

This research is part of a larger project on participation of children and adolescents in household chores. The first study from the project investigated the predictive factors of participation of children and adolescents in household chores (Drummond et al., 2015). Based on documented effect size $f = 0.97$ (Amaral, Paula, Drummond, Dunn, & Mancini, 2012) and expected 80% power, a sample of 96 participants was estimated for this study.

Participants were 109 primary caregivers (mothers, grandmothers, fathers, aunts, and older sisters) of children and adolescents of both sexes, aged 6 to 14 years, from families of various socioeconomic levels, residing in *Belo Horizonte, Brazil*. The participants were selected by convenience based on contacts provided by public and private schools, religious organizations, nongovernmental organizations, neighborhood communities in *Belo Horizonte*, and the

investigators' personal contacts. They were further allocated into four groups: male children aged 6 to 10 years ($n = 26$), female children aged 6 to 10 years ($n = 24$), male adolescents aged 11 to 14 years ($n = 27$), and female adolescents aged 11 to 14 years ($n = 32$). We strove to have equivalence on the distribution of family's socioeconomic level across the age and sex groups. Families' SES was described based on scores attributed to the number and type of home appliances available in households and the educational level of the head of the family (Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Pesquisa - *Brazilian criteria for economic classification from the Brazilian Association of Research Companies [ABEP]*, 2012). The final score was stratified in decreasing levels, ranging from A to E, where A corresponds to high SES and E to low SES; the intermediate levels represent other SES categories (medium-high, medium, and medium-low). Over half of the sample (52,3%) was from families of high to medium-high SES (Level A = 24; Level B = 33). Levels C ($n = 28$), D ($n = 20$), and E ($n = 4$) composed the other part (47.7%) of the sample.

Instruments

The data were collected through interviews with the caregivers using the version of the CHORES questionnaire translated and adapted to the *Brazilian* language (Amaral et al., 2012). The CHORES assesses the participation of children and adolescents aged 6 to 14 years in household chores from the perspective of their caregivers. The present study used two questions from the second part of the CHORES, which inquired about the caregivers' values with regard to the involvement of their children in housework: "Place a check under the category that best describes how important your child's participation in household tasks is to you" and "Place a check under the category that best describes how satisfied you are with your child's participation in household tasks." Attributed importance and satisfaction questions are rated on 6-point Likert-type scales (*very important, important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, unimportant, very unimportant*) and (*very satisfied, satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied*), respectively. Also, respondents answered open-ended questions explaining the reasons that led them choose the rating (Dunn, 2004). That is, if the caregiver rated child's chores participation as "very important," he or she was asked to explain why. Usually, parents responded with a few phrases. Testing of the CHORES' psychometric properties shows strong reliability (Amaral et al., 2012; Dunn, 2004) and validity (Dunn, 2004; Dunn et al., 2009) evidence.

The *Brazilian Economic Classification Criteria* (Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Pesquisa - *Brazilian criteria for economic classification from the Brazilian Association of Research Companies - ABEP*) (2012) described the SES of families.

Procedures

The caregivers were informed of the study aims and signed a consent form, agreeing to voluntary participation. A single investigator asked caregivers the questions from the CHORES' second part. After indicating the ratings, caregivers were asked to explain the reasons that led to choose each importance and satisfaction rating.

Data Analysis

We tested the association between the ordinal-level ratings of importance attributed by caregivers and their ratings of satisfaction with the participation of children/adolescents in household chores in both the total sample and each grouping (by age, sex, and family's SES) with Spearman's rho correlation. Also, we tested the association between children's sex categories and age groups (6-10 and 11-14 years) with the ratings of importance and satisfaction, using chi-square test.

Caregivers' responses to the CHORES open-ended questions about why they perceived participation in household tasks as important (or unimportant) for their children and reasons for their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with their children's performance provided subjective information to assist with understanding caregivers' perspectives and values. These explanatory responses were analyzed by frequency of similar responses. Examples of most frequent responses are presented as illustrations in the results section, followed by information on child's sex (male—M, or female—F), age and family SES level (A, B, C, D, or E).

Results

Table 1 shows the frequency of ratings of importance and of satisfaction, provided by the caregivers.

Most caregivers of children aged 6 to 10 years of either sexes (boys: 25/26, 96%; girls: 22/24, 92%) and from the various SES levels rated the children's participation in household chores as *very important* or *important*. The same was true for the caregivers of adolescents aged 11 to 14 years (boys: 85%; girls: 88%). Explanations provided by caregivers on their ratings of importance regarding their children's household engagement are summarized below.

Importance of Children's and Adolescents' Participation: Autonomy in Adulthood

The attributed importance was primarily related to the caregivers' expectations with regard to the children's autonomy in adulthood: "For him to develop autonomy, not to depend on anyone in the future" (caregiver of a 12-year-old boy, SES A); "I believe it's important for her future and not so much right now" (caregiver of a 7-year-old girl, SES B); "She'll need to know how to do this kind of stuff in the future,

Table 1. Frequency of Ratings of Importance and of Satisfaction, Provided by the Caregivers ($N = 109$) to the CHORES Questionnaire.

CHORES Questions (second part):	Answer ^a	Frequency of responses (%)
How <i>important</i> is to you your child's household task participation?	Very important	69 (63.3)
	Important	30 (27.5)
	Somewhat important	6 (5.5)
	Somewhat unimportant	1 (0.9)
	Unimportant	2 (1.8)
How <i>satisfied</i> are you with your child's household task participation?	Very satisfied	25 (22.9)
	Satisfied	27 (24.8)
	Somewhat satisfied	22 (20.2)
	Somewhat unsatisfied	13 (11.9)
	Unsatisfied	20 (18.3)
	Very unsatisfied	2 (1.8)

Note. CHORES = Children Helping Out: Responsibilities, Expectations and Supports.

^aCHORE's ratings of importance: 6 = *very important*, 5 = *important*, 4 = *somewhat important*, 3 = *somewhat unimportant*, 2 = *unimportant*, 1 = *very unimportant*. CHORE's ratings of satisfaction: 6 = *very satisfied*, 5 = *satisfied*, 4 = *somewhat satisfied*, 3 = *somewhat dissatisfied*, 2 = *dissatisfied*, 1 = *very dissatisfied*.

otherwise life becomes more difficult" (caregiver of a 10-year-old girl, SES C); *"In the future, he'll have to do housework"* (caregiver of a 9-year-old boy, SES D). Although caregivers considered their children's participation in household tasks as important/very important for future autonomy in adult life, they do not always allow such participation: *"She doesn't do [that] because I don't let her. I believe small children should not touch anything in the kitchen or other dangerous things"* (caregiver of a 6-year-old girl, SES B); *"I know participation is important to develop autonomy, but I don't let them do [chores] because [in that case] I have to do them again and it ends up taking more of my time"* (caregiver of 9-year-old boy, SES C).

Other motives reported were related to the children's development: *"For the child to develop organization [skills] and discipline in small things"* (caregiver of a 7-year-old girl, SES C); *"For her to learn to take care [of things], to give value to things, and to collaborate [with others]"* (caregiver of a 6-year-old girl, SES C); *"For him to appreciate the work done by others based on the work he does"* (caregiver of a 13-year-old boy, SES B); *"For him to have the experience of belonging to the family"* (caregiver of a 10-year-old boy, SES A). Motives noted less frequently related to the division of work to prevent any family member from being overloaded and the possibility for the children to learn the task.

Higher ratings of satisfaction, that is, *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the children's participation in household tasks, were given by about half of the caregivers according to children's sex (50% and 58% of the caregivers of boys and girls).

Such ratings of satisfaction among caregivers of school-aged children approached similar percentages (47% of the caregivers of children from 6 to 10 years old) but was less frequent among caregivers of teenagers (37% of caregivers of children from 11 to 14 years old). Explanations provided by caregivers regarding the ratings of satisfaction with their children's household engagement are summarized below.

Satisfaction With the Children's Participation in Housework: A Matter of Attitude

The main reasons underlying the higher satisfaction ratings were the children's positive attitude and the lack of complaint about the tasks they are required to perform. Thus, caregivers proved to be satisfied when their children exhibited proactive behavior. Caregivers' dissatisfaction increased with children's lack of initiative, complaints, resentment, lack of constancy, and refusal to accepting doing their chores; these lower ratings were more frequent among caregivers of adolescents.

Some of the female caregivers reported having difficulty in rating and giving a rationale for their degree of satisfaction because they feel they are responsible for the poor participation or lack of participation of their children in housework and thus considered choosing the lower satisfaction scores to be unfair: *"It is difficult to define satisfaction because I want him to do [the chores] but I don't let him actually do them. I do them all by myself. I am the problem. I do everything for them"* (caregiver of a 10-year-old boy, SES C). Several caregivers seemed surprised with their own responses: *"I've never stopped to think about that!"* (caregiver of a 10-year-old boy, SES B); *"I wasn't aware my daughter doesn't do so many chores!"* (caregiver of a 12-year-old girl, SES C).

The need to complete school assignments and do well at school, as well as in extracurricular activities, was the explanation that some caregivers provided for their ratings of satisfaction with the children's participation in household chores. Caregivers from various SES levels reported being satisfied with the children's involvement in housework, even when it was little, as a function of the latter's concentration of effort on school-related tasks: *"He participates very little in housework, but he likes to study, so we're satisfied"* (caregiver of a 9-year-old boy, SES D); *"She fulfills her school duties, so everything is all right. I don't ask for anything else from her. I'm satisfied with the few chores she does at home"* (caregiver of a 13-year-old girl, SES B). According to the caregivers, children's attendance of full-day schools reduced the time that they could devote to the home daily routine. These children and adolescents, upon returning home from school, found that all of the chores have already been done, which decreases their sense of responsibility with participation in these tasks: *"He's out all day long, and when he comes back home, there's nothing else for him to do, just to take a bath, have dinner, and go to bed"* (caregiver of a 10-year-old boy, SES D); *"Sometimes, she doesn't have any*

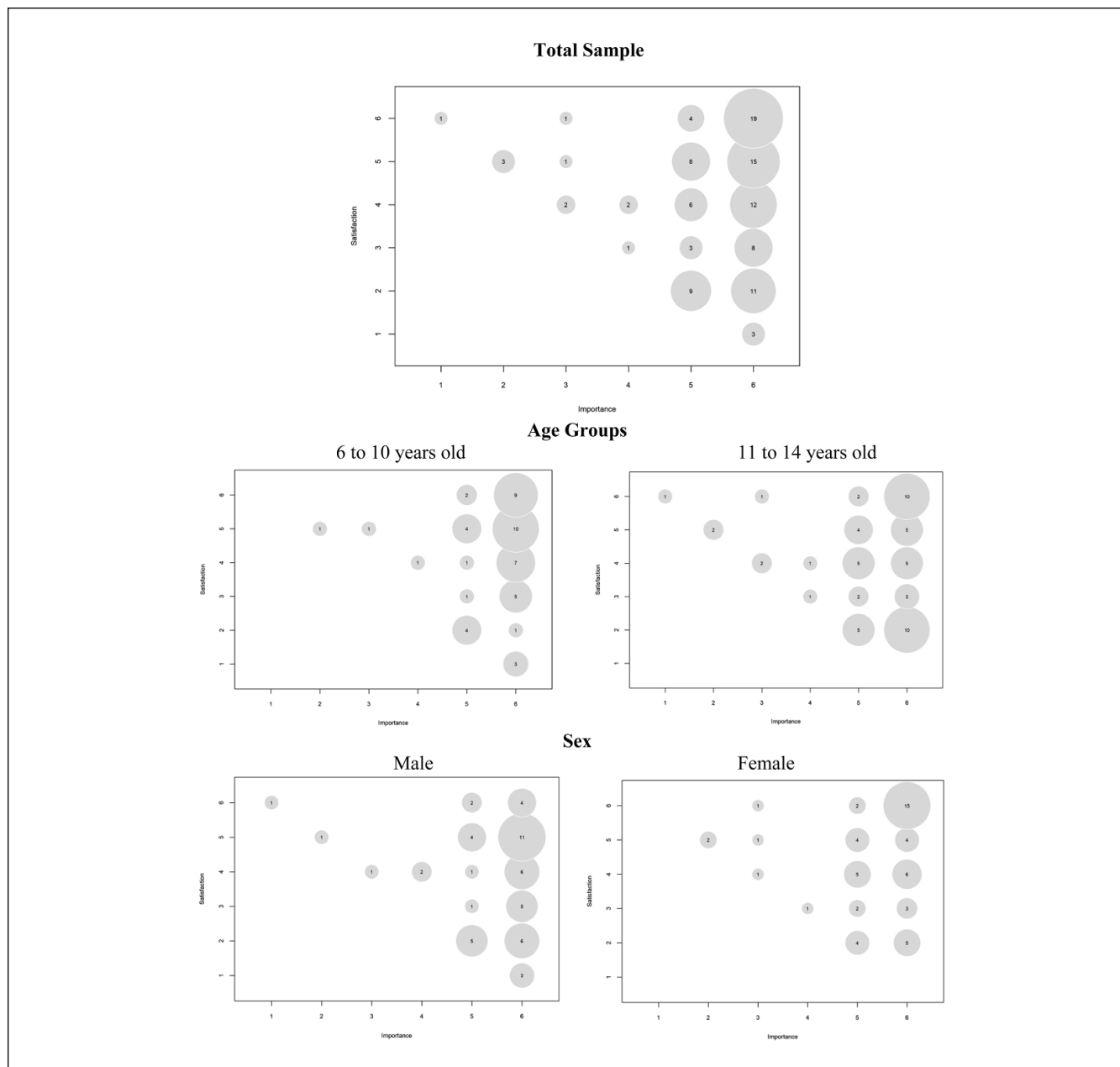


Figure 1. Dispersion Diagrams illustrating the correlation between caregivers' satisfaction and importance attributed to the participation of children and adolescents in household tasks, by age groups, by sex, and total sample (N = 109).

time even for herself. I can't ask her to do anything, so I'm satisfied with the little she does!" (caregiver of a 13-year-old girl, SES D).

Caregivers from the lower SES levels reported being afraid that their children would stay out on the neighborhood streets of greater violence, which influenced their rationale for the importance attributed to the children's participation in household chores as well as their satisfaction: "The streets are now a tough place. For her not to go out and stay on the streets, I give her everything, I don't ask her to do anything at home she doesn't like" (caregiver of an 11-year-old girl,

SES C); "He doesn't drink or use drugs. He's not on the streets looking for trouble; therefore, whatever he does at home is all right" (caregiver of a 12-year-old boy, SES D).

The associations between ratings of importance and satisfaction were not significant, either for the total sample ($r_s = .04$; $p = .657$) or for the children's groupings by sex (female: $r_s = .18$; $p = .177$; male: $r_s = .08$; $p = .586$), by age (6 to 10 years old: $r_s = .08$; $p = .573$; 11 to 14 years old: $r_s = -.02$; $p = .860$), or by family SES ($r_s = .09$ -.39; $p > .057$). The correlation indices along with the dispersion diagrams are illustrated in Figure 1.

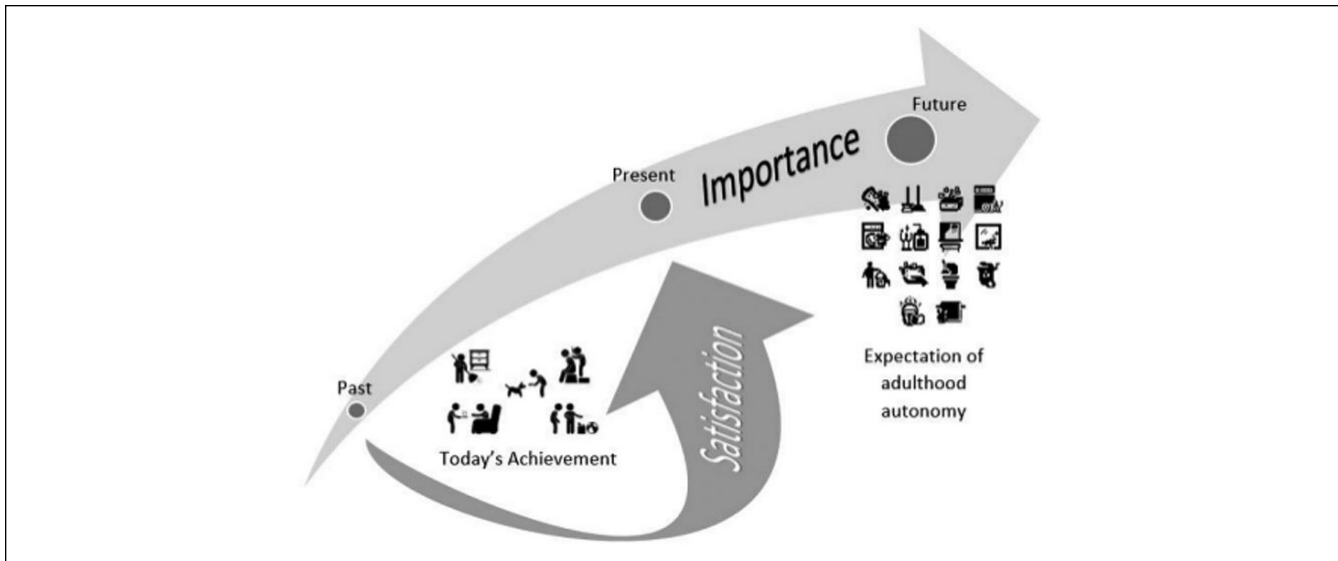


Figure 2. Temporal projections of the dimensions regarding caregivers' satisfaction and importance attributed to the participation of children and adolescents in household tasks.

There was no association between ratings of importance attributed by caregivers and children's sex categories ($\chi^2 = 0.428$; $p = .513$), as well as age group ($\chi^2 = 1.515$; $p = .218$). There also were no association between satisfaction of caregivers and children's sex categories ($\chi^2 = 1.498$; $p = .221$) or age group ($\chi^2 = 0.716$; $p = .398$).

Discussion

Results from the present study revealed no association between ratings of caregiver importance–caregiver satisfaction, as they refer to children's household task participation. Saying it differently, caregivers who attributed greater importance to their children's participation in household chores were not necessarily more (or less) satisfied with it. Why is that so?

The Temporal Projection of Importance and Satisfaction

The lack of association may refer to distinct but partially complementary temporal projections encompassed by these two dimensions. It is possible that caregivers' ratings of importance regarding housework engagement may comprise present actions along with expectations for their children's future. For caregivers' satisfaction with the children's participation in household chores, ratings may have been grounded on children's actions, that is, task performances that were accomplished (or not), and/or perceptions of past and present experiences. Based on caregivers' explanations of their ratings of importance and satisfaction, we argue that each of these dimensions relate somewhat differently with children's engagement and participation in household chores. Caregivers attributed importance according to their perceptions of what their children are doing in their daily routine

along with how they expect children's daily engagement to be in the future. However, satisfaction refers to how caregivers evaluate their children's past and present engagements with daily chores (Custer, Huebner, & Howell, 2015; Taylor et al., 2010). Figure 2 illustrates the relative temporal projections of each dimension.

The Expectation of Future Autonomy in Adult Life

The importance that caregivers attributed to the children's participation in housework was projected into the future autonomy in adulthood but not necessarily ascribed to the children's and adolescents' current stage in life. Although caregivers idealize expectations that their children should achieve autonomy in adulthood, such expectations are not spontaneously translated to family's daily routine, when they tend to reinforce children's experiences of dependence.

When should children's participation in housework begin to be stimulated, in order to promote the development of the ideal future autonomy, aspired by caregivers? According to caregivers' explanations, it was not clear when and how that process of learning is established. Hence, many of them expressed perplexity at the end of their responses, apprehending with their own narratives that their son or daughter had little or no participation in housework. It seems that only at the time of their explanations did they realize how removed their children were from any involvement with routine housework.

The inconsistency of the caregivers in assigning and monitoring children's carrying out chores contributes to reducing their responsibility for those tasks (Ochis & Izquierdo, 2009). Although caregivers ascribe much importance to them, for children to actually participate in household chores, they must have access to and be able to experience them as a part of their everyday lives. In the case of younger children, their

caregivers may deem them to be too young to be exposed to the risks associated with the handling of objects such as knives and appliances such as ovens and stoves, even when they consider the children to be fit to do some chores. Thus, while parents sometimes wish for their children to become independent in the future, they may delay the onset of the latter's exposure to experiences.

The results show that caregivers' ratings of satisfaction appeared to be more related to their children and adolescents' attitudes concerning housework than to the manner in which they actually performed or to the amount of task engagement. In fact, children's promptness in responding to their caregivers' requests for and their positive attitude toward household chores engagement contribute to caregivers' satisfaction (Goodnow & Delaney, 1989).

The dichotomy underlying caregivers' perception of children and adolescents' either investment in school or in household tasks makes it difficult to rate and account for their satisfaction with the participation in housework. Ochis and Izquierdo (2009) discuss that the argument that school and extracurricular obligations could reasonably account for the lesser participation of children in housework is not sufficient, as some children are resistant to performing even simple tasks that consume little time. In addition, *Brazilian* caregivers from the higher SES levels often had the help of housemaids and nannies in the housework (Drummond et al., 2015), and therefore, at times, they found it difficult to rate their level of satisfaction.

Caregivers feared the streets because of the risk of their children's premature exposure to alcohol, drugs, sexual experiences, violence, and crime (Damatta, 1997; Sarriera, Tatim, Coelho, & Bücke, 2007). Some caregivers justified their satisfaction with the fact that their children stay home, even when they do not perform any housework. Thus, the involvement of children and adolescents in household chores does not seem to be a phenomenon that is isolated from their participation in other environments (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Gager et al., 2009; Kremer-Sadlik, Izquierdo, & Fatigante, 2010). There are transactions among the contexts in which people participate in, as much as people are participants in a social community (Dreier, 2008).

The explanations provided by caregivers for the importance that they attributed to and satisfaction with the participation of their children were influenced by children's participation in other environments. The participants' narratives showed that children's participation in environments that enable self-improvement (e.g., school and extracurricular activities) and in activities considered to be potentially pernicious (e.g., staying on the streets with its possible negative exposures) was a factor that contributed to assigning high scores to the satisfaction with the children's participation in household chores, even when the latter did not assume responsibility for many chores.

To summarize, the importance that caregivers attributed to the participation of their children in housework and their satisfaction with it were not related. The lack of such effect might be accounted for by the particular temporal projection

that is characteristic of each dimension (Figure 2). Future studies should investigate the importance attributed and the satisfaction of children and adolescents themselves with housework, using self-report measures. Limitations of the present study may be attributed to selection procedure and sample's characteristics. Convenience selection may have resulted in sample bias. The sample was composed by caregivers who are residents in a single urban center. The large size of *Brazil* and the existence of many urban centers with socioeconomic and cultural idiosyncrasies may limit generalizations. In addition, methods used to analyze the qualitative open-ended responses, which were used as examples to support quantitative results, were somewhat limited which might have restricted their interpretation.

Conclusion

This study investigated two constructs of great relevance to occupational therapy practice, as they are somehow implicated with the participation of individuals in the home environment. Our results showed that caregivers' attribution of importance to the participation of their children in household tasks does not imply caregivers' greater satisfaction. In fact, there may be multiple factors determining caregivers' satisfaction with children's chores performance, including safety concerning, children's involvement in other activities, length of day child stays home, as well as how much work the children doing chores is demanded by the caregiver. Considering the future temporal projection of importance attribution, it may help guide the development of adolescents' autonomy as well as their value for independence in adult life. The rationale provided by caregivers for their importance and satisfaction ratings help elucidate the specific motivations that guide their support (or not) for their children's participation in housework. Occupational therapists must go beyond the ratings provided by various instruments used in practice and seek to understand the rationale that follows the responses.

Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the Ethics Review Committee from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil. Approval: CAAE - 0657.0.203.000-11.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests


The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Financial support was granted by the following Brazilian agencies: National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq-Process: 306948/2014-1), the Research Support Foundation from the State of Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG- APQ- 00704-15), and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES- Finance Code 001). These funding agencies had no role in

the definition of the study design; in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; in the writing of the report; or in the decision to submit the article for publication.

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