

Stepparent role strain and psychological distress

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In the last few decades, Spain has witnessed a slow but progressive change in predominant family models. The purpose of this work is to advance in our knowledge of stepfamilies through the perspectives and experiences of two of their members, the stepfather and the stepmother. The theoretical model examined in this investigation proposes that stepparents' role strain could have negative effects on their psychological wellbeing. It also proposes that a satisfactory couple relation could mediate in the relation between role strain and psychological wellbeing. In this study, participants were 116 stepparents who had been living for at least one year with their partner. The most relevant results showed the adequacy of the proposed model and the higher vulnerability of stepmothers in these family structures.

La tensión de rol de los padrastros y las madrastras y su malestar psicológico. España está asistiendo a un lento pero progresivo cambio de los modelos familiares predominantes en las últimas décadas. El objetivo de este trabajo es avanzar en el conocimiento de las familias reconstituidas a través de las perspectivas y vivencias experimentadas por uno de sus miembros, el padrastro y la madrastra. El modelo teórico que se examina en esta investigación considera que la tensión de rol de los padrastros y las madrastras podría repercutir negativamente sobre su bienestar psicológico. Además, estima que una relación de pareja satisfactoria podría mediar en la relación que mantienen ambas variables. La muestra que participó en este trabajo fueron 116 padrastros y madrastras que llevaban al menos un año de convivencia con su pareja. Los resultados más relevantes mostraron la adecuación del modelo propuesto y una mayor vulnerabilidad de las madrastras en estas estructuras familiares.

The terms that best reflect the current situation of the family in Spain refer to change or transformation. These changes have been very quick and profound, modifying both family structure and relations, processes, and functions that are carried out within the family (Campo & Rodríguez-Brioso, 2002). Although the nuclear family, made up of a man and a woman united in marriage and sharing the same home with their children, has been the predominant family structure since the decade of the 50s, as of the 80s, multiple ways of cohabitation have slowly but progressively emerged, which reflect not only the current situation but also the foreseeable near future.

This increase in the separation and/or divorce rates has promoted the appearance of monoparent families, generally headed by a woman, although the duration of this kind of family is sometimes limited, as shown by the rates of remarriages or cohabitation of separated or divorced people. In these remarriages, if one or both members have a child from prior relations, this constitutes a stepfamily. Data from the Statistical Yearbook of the National Institute of Statistics (Anuario Estadístico del Instituto Nacional de Estadística-I.N.E., 2001) show that, whereas in 1993, only 5.03% of separated or divorced men and 3.82% of the women

remarried, in the year 2000, this rate rose to 5.73% for the men and 4.90% for the women. In 2004, the same source mentioned above shows that from the total number of Spanish households (14.187.169), 232.863 are stepfamilies.

Most of these remarriages are formed in the first 4 or 5 years after the breakup, with the mean duration being 4.1 years for the men and 4.5 years for the women (Ruiz Becerril, 1999), with cohabitation predominating over legalization of the relationship, both for men and women. Although the census in Spain does not provide data about the stability of couples in remarriages, the studies carried out in other countries coincide in underlining higher instability of these couples in comparison with first-marriage couples. Some recent statistics show that remarried couples separate sooner, and in a higher proportion, than first-marriage couples (Berger, 2000; Booth & Edwards, 1992; Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000).

The investigations carried out in Spain with stepfamilies are almost inexistent and the increasing incidence of new family structures establishes the need for research that promotes these families' wellbeing and adjustment. Therefore, the goal of this work is to examine these families in depth, through the perspectives and experiences of one of their members. Stepparents are especially relevant in these family structures, as many works have indicated that their integration is one of the most complex, but necessary, factors to guarantee both stability and individual, couple, and family adjustment (Bray, Berger, & Boethel, 1994). Stepparents' satisfaction with various aspects of the family functioning could be an indicator of their degree of integration as well as of optimum family adjustment.

Conceptual model proposed

The term *role strain* is defined as the difficulties that a subject experiences when attempting to fulfill the demands, expectations, or obligations associated with a role (Goode, 1960; Pearlin, 1983). Some authors have indicated that stepparent role has several dimensions of strain that are not found in the traditional family (Whitsett & Land, 1992a). The presence of negative social expectations and stereotypes, the ambiguity associated with their role and the absence of normative models in Spain, favors very diverse beliefs among stepfamily members about the role of the stepparents and ultimately, this is translated into the emergence of role conflicts.

Research shows that stepmothers, in comparison to stepfathers, have more problems integrating into the family system, partly because they have more difficulties in fulfilling their roles (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1995; Johnson et al., 2008).

While the difficulties in fulfilling roles in stepfamilies have been frequently mentioned in the literature, there have been few empirical investigations focused on the phenomenon of stepparents' role strain. The first empirical contribution on stepparents' role strain and its measurement is from Whitsett and Land (1992a), who, starting out from Pearlin's (1983) theoretical framework, defined and delimited the concept and elaborated an assessment instrument. These authors consider role strain a response that reflects stepparents' difficulties fulfilling their family roles. However, they emphasized a limitation of their work because they did not include a psychopathological variable that would allow the study of the consequences of role strain on stepparents' psychological health.

Therefore, with regard to the variable role strain, the goal of this work is to study the possible relation between role strain and the stepparents' psychological health or wellbeing, thus overcoming one of the limitations of Whitsett and Land's (1992b) study. As shown in figure 1, the proposed theoretical model considers role strain a stressor or antecedent of a response that, in this case, is an indicator of mental health. To address this goal, we chose the response of burnout, as the relation among the components of role strain and burnout has been extensively revealed in diverse investigations and with various professional collectives (Del Valle, López, & Bravo, 2007; Miró, Solanes, Martínez, Sánchez, & Rodríguez, 2007; Osca, González-Camino, Bardera, & Peiró, 2003; Peiró, González-Romá, Tordera, & Mañas, 2001).

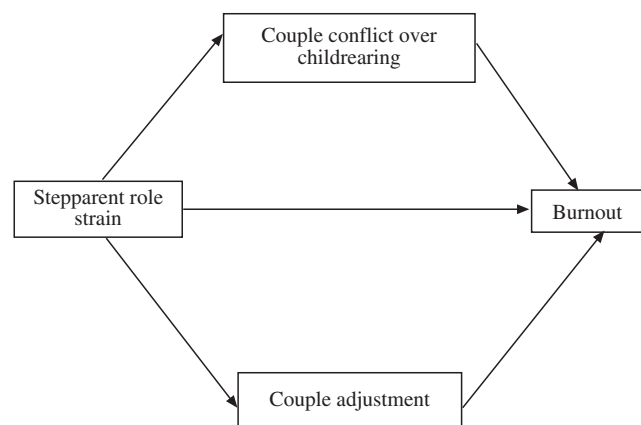


Figure 1. Conceptual model

However, the capacity of a stressor to produce an effect depends on a series of mediating factors (Crosbie-Burnett, 1989). As shown in figure 1, in our model, we consider that the problems that stepparents may encounter when fulfilling their various roles—as well as the consequences of this situation on their mental health— may be mitigated by finding couple satisfaction and partner's agreement in stepchildren rearing.

Couple satisfaction is an essential variable for any kind of family structure based on the couple. In fact, more than in any past time, this element currently plays a central role in couple relations and its absence is usually one of the main reasons for marital breakup. The relevance of one's partner in the stepfamily has been noted by some authors who have stated that families that achieve harmony in less time are usually characterized by finding a main source of support in the partner from the beginning (Papernow, 1998). In contrast, the presence of stepchildren and the problems they may cause in family life have been described as one of the main reasons why the couples in stepfamilies do not consolidate their relation (Giles-Sims, 1984; Hobart, 1991; O'Connor & Insabella, 1999). It is important for the couple to achieve agreements in this area because this favors the stepchildren's acceptance of the stepparent's (stepfather or stepmother) parental role (Hetherington, 1999). The relation between the stepmother and her stepchildren has been described in some investigations as more complex and conflictive than the relation between the stepfather and his stepchildren (Hobart, 1991). Thus, one could expect stepmothers to express more disagreements with their partners about rearing their stepchildren. Thus, stepparents' satisfaction with their partners, as well as optimum levels of couple agreement in the area of childrearing—especially complex for these families— could mean that the stepparent has achieved the necessary degree of integration to guarantee family stability and adjustment. Therefore, as additional goals, we propose to study these two couple variables (partner satisfaction and conflict over childrearing), from the stepparent's subjective perception, and to analyze their possible mediating effect on the relation with role strain and burnout.

Method

Participants

In this study, 49 stepfathers and 67 stepmothers participated. The mean age of the sample was 44.26 years (*SD*= 7.90); stepfathers' mean age was 47.39 years (*SD*= 8.45) and stepmothers', 41.97 years (*SD*= 6.66). The total sample had been cohabitating with their present partner for an average of almost 8 years (*M*= 7.97 years, *SD*= 5.19); stepfathers had cohabitated with their partners for an average of 7.20 years (*SD*= 4.85) and the stepmothers for 8.52 years (*SD*= 5.40). Concerning family structure, 46.55% of the individuals were in simple stepfamilies (only one member of the couple has a child from a previous relationship) and 53.44% belonged to complex stepfamilies (both partners have children from prior relations). However, whereas most of the stepfathers lived in complex stepfamilies (65.30%), simple stepfamilies predominate among the stepmothers (55.22%).

Instruments

Role strain. In this work, we used a version of Whitsett and Land's (1992a) Role Strain Index, adapted for this study (Espinar,

Carrasco, Muñoz, & Carrasco, 2008). The instrument is made up of 26 items with scores ranging between 0 and 104, with higher scores indicating higher levels of role strain. The instrument in our version obtained an internal consistency of $\alpha = .89$. Whitsett and Land (1992a) obtained an internal consistency of $\alpha = .91$.

Conflicts over rearing stepchildren. In order to measure conflicts over rearing the stepchildren, we adapted the items of the Conflict over Childrearing (CCR) subscale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI; Snyder, 1989). The CCR subscale is made up of 19 items with a true/false response format, with a minimum score of 0 and a maximum of 19, with higher scores indicating more conflict over childrearing. Snyder (1989) obtained reliability of $\alpha = .84$. The subscale of conflicts over childrearing stepchildren obtained in this work an internal consistency of $\alpha = .85$.

Marital adjustment. In order to measure marital adjustment, we used the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). This scale is made up of 32 items grouped into four subscales, with total scores ranging from 0 to 151, with higher scores indicating higher levels of adjustment. Spanier (1976) obtained satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .96$). Regarding the psychometric properties, we obtained a reliability index of $\alpha = .93$.

Burnout. The Couple Burnout Measure (CBM; Pines, 1996) assesses, by means of 21 items, an individual's level of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion with regard to the couple's relationship. The minimum score is 21 and the maximum 147, with higher scores corresponding to higher levels of burnout. Pines (1996) obtained a reliability of $\alpha = .91$. Regarding psychometric, we obtained a reliability of $\alpha = .94$. As the purpose of this investigation was to assess the family setting, we adapted the questionnaire to the interests of the study. Thus, when presenting this instrument, stepparents were asked to assess the frequency with which they experienced some of the feelings that reflect the degree of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion and fatigue concerning their family setting and relations.

Procedure

The individuals who participated in this study were mainly recruited by the snowball technique. We contacted various groups (associations of separated and divorced people, university students, and professors) who were asked to hand on the questionnaire to stepfathers and stepmothers with a pre-stamped, addressed envelope in which to return the completed questionnaire.

Despite handing out a considerable number of questionnaires, only 121 questionnaires were returned, of which we had to eliminate 5 because of missing values in some items. Therefore, we performed the statistical analyses with 116 subjects.

Measures with no existing Spanish translations were forward and back translated into Spanish by separate bilingual, native Spanish speakers with inconsistencies resolved by a panel of experts.

Data analysis

In order to study the fit of the proposed model, two main statistical analyses were carried out. First, a stepwise regression was performed in order to obtain a multiple regression model to predict stepparent burnout. An additional regression analysis was performed using the score on the six factors that make up the Role

Strain Index, instead of the total score, with the aim of studying which factor better predicts burnout.

Secondly, mediational analysis allows us to determine whether couple conflicts over childrearing and partner adjustment mediate the relation between role strain and burnout.

The statistical analyses were realized with SPSS 13.

Results

In table 1 are displayed the descriptive statistics and the mean differences calculated to test our hypotheses. As expected, stepmothers scored higher in role strain than did stepfathers and the differences were statistically significant ($M = 37$ vs 30.52 , $t(114) = -2.05$, $p = .04$, $d = .38$). With regard to the dimensions of the Role Strain Index in this work we only obtained statistically significant differences in dimension II—role overload—(examples: «Sometimes I wish I could escape from all the demands I am asked to meet», «I feel that I am constantly juggling my different roles (e.g. spouse, job, parent) to meet all the different demands of those roles», «At times I feel that my own needs get lost trying to meet everyone else's»). Stepmothers obtained higher scores than stepfathers ($M = 8.64$ vs 5.17 , $t(114) = -4.44$). As indicated by the effect size ($d = .83$), the magnitude of this difference is large. This result supports Hypotheses 1 referring to higher levels of role strain for stepmothers.

In table 1, it can also be seen that stepmothers scored significantly higher in burnout than stepfathers and the effect size

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and mean differences of the sample (N= 116)

Variable	Step-	Step-	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>1-β</i>
	mothers <i>n</i> = 67	fathers <i>n</i> = 49			
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)				
Role strain ($\alpha = .89$)	37.00 (16.59)	30.52 (17.02)	-2.05*	0.38	0.53
Factor I - Role ambiguity ($\alpha = .91$)	6.36 (4.59)	5.73 (4.88)	-.70	0.13	0.10
Factor II - Role overload ($\alpha = .82$)	8.64 (4.22)	5.17 (4.03)	-4.44**	0.83	0.99
Factor III - Paternal-filial displacement ($\alpha = .77$)	7.18 (4.94)	6.40 (4.66)	-.85	0.16	0.13
Factor IV - Affective ambivalence ($\alpha = .81$)	4.91 (4.14)	5.29 (4.04)	.49	0.09	0.07
Factor V - Normative discordance ($\alpha = .73$)	5.63 (4.21)	4.57 (3.40)	-1.45	0.27	0.30
Factor VI - Ex-spouse interference ($\alpha = .58$)	4.26 (3.37)	3.33 (2.82)	-1.56	0.29	0.34
Burnout ($\alpha = .94$)	60.78 (20.81)	50.22 (17.29)	-2.89**	0.54	0.81
Couple adjustment ($\alpha = .93$)	115.35 (19.68)	122.66 (14.72)	2.18*	0.41	0.38
Childrearing conflict ($\alpha = .85$)	6.45 (4.54)	5.08 (3.97)	-1.68	0.31	0.58

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

was medium ($M= 60.78$ vs. 50.22 , for stepmothers and stepfathers, respectively), $t(114) = -2.89, p = .00, d = .54$. Therefore, these results also support Hypotheses 2 referring to higher levels of burnout for stepmothers.

With regard to couple variables, Table 1 shows that there were no statistically significant differences in levels of couple conflict over childrearing between stepfathers and stepmothers but there were statistically significant differences in their levels of couple satisfaction. Again, stepmothers obtained poorer scores, as their levels of couple adjustment were significantly lower than that of the stepfathers ($M= 115.35$ vs. 122.66 , for stepmothers and stepfathers, respectively), $t(114) = 2.18, p = .03, d = .41$. Thus, Hypothesis 4 (poorer partner adjustment in stepmothers) is confirmed but not Hypothesis 3 (more conflict over childrearing in stepmothers).

In table 2, are displayed the correlations among the variables of the proposed model. The correlation between role strain and burnout is positive, high, and statistically significant ($r = .60, p = .01$), which indicates that the more difficulties experienced by the stepparents in fulfilling their role, the higher their level of dissatisfaction. The correlation between couple adjustment and marital conflicts over childrearing is negative and statistically significant ($r = -.42, p = .01$), suggesting that the more arguments between the stepparents over childrearing, the lower will be their level of couple adjustment. The relations of role strain and burnout with the couple variables (conflict and adjustment) were also statistically significant (table 2).

Regression analyses and mediational analyses

The results obtained in the stepwise regression analysis show that role strain is the first predictor of stepparents' burnout, accounting for 35% of the total variance. Couple adjustment was the next best predictor, and the equation with these two variables taken together accounted for 44% of the total variance (table 3).

Table 2
Correlations between the variables employed in this study

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Role strain	1			
2. Burnout	.60**	1		
3. Childrearing conflict	.65**	.55**	1	
4. Couple adjustment	-.45**	-.34**	-.42**	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3
Regressions of prediction of burnout by stepparent role strain and couple adjustment

Model	R ²	R ² _{adj}	β	p
Step 1				
Role strain	.360	.354	.600	.000
Step 2				
Role strain				.000
Couple adjustment	.450	.441	-.339	.000

Thus, the regression analysis indicates that stepparents' burnout is mostly accounted for by the difficulties encountered in fulfilling their roles (role strain) and their couple satisfaction. Table 4 shows the results in a second regression analysis where Role Strain Index factors were considered instead the total score. As can be seen, the second factor (Role Overload) accounted for 41% of the total variance of burnout.

Therefore, from the first two analyses, it can be concluded that the experience of maladjustment as a result of role strain is the best predictor of the stepparents' burnout (the total score of the Role Strain Index accounts for 35% of the total variance, versus 41% explained by just the second factor, Role Overload).

The results show that stepmothers, in contrast to stepfathers, have a higher tendency to experience burnout, as they obtained poorer results in all the variables that predict it (role strain, couple adjustment, and role overload).

With respect to mediational analyses we hypothesized that couple conflict over childrearing would mediate the effect of stepparent role strain on burnout. Baron and Kenny (1986) described four steps to determine whether mediation occurs. Step 1 is to show a significant correlation between predictor and outcome (here, between stepparent role strain and burnout). Step 2 is to show a significant correlation between predictor and mediator (here, between stepparent role strain and couple conflict over childrearing). Table 2 shows that these two steps are met.

Step 3 and 4 are accomplished with one regression analysis, with the outcome as dependent variable (here, burnout) and with the mediator and predictor entered simultaneously as independent variables (here, couple conflict over childrearing and stepparent role strain, respectively). Step 3 is that the mediator affects the outcome when the predictor is controlled for. Consistent with Step 3, figure 2 shows that couple conflict over childrearing were not associated with burnout when controlled for stepparent role strain ($\beta = -.20$), $t(114) = -.45, p > .05, ns$. So, while couple conflict over childrearing doesn't mediate in the relation between role strain and burnout, data seems to indicate that role strain forms part of the relation between couple conflict over childrearing and burnout.

We also hypothesized that couple adjustment would mediate the effect of stepparent role strain on burnout. Step 1 is to show a significant correlation between predictor and outcome (here, between stepparent role strain and burnout). Step 2 is to show a significant correlation between predictor and mediator (here,

Table 4
Regressions of prediction of burnout by factors of stepparent role strain

Model	R ²	R ² _{adj}	β	p
Step 1				
Role overload (Factor II)	.418	.413	.646	.000
Step 2				
Role overload (Factor II)				
Couple adjustment	.501	.492	-.320	.000
Step 3				
Role overload (Factor II)				
Couple adjustment				
Affective ambivalence (Factor IV)	.534	.521	.187	.006

between stepparent role strain and couple adjustment). Table 2 shows that these two steps are met.

Step 3 and 4 are accomplished with one regression analysis, with the outcome as dependent variable (here, burnout) and with the mediator and predictor entered simultaneously as independent variables (here, couple adjustment and stepparent role strain, respectively). Step 3 is that the mediator affects the outcome when the predictor is controlled for. Consistent with Step 3, figure 3 shows that couple adjustment was associated with burnout when controlled for stepparent role strain ($\beta = -.37$), $t(114) = -4.32$, $p < .001$. Step 4 determines whether complete or partial mediation has occurred; complete mediation is indicated by the effect of the predictor (role strain) on the outcome (burnout) being completely removed when the mediator (couple adjustment) is controlled. If Steps 1-3 are satisfied but Step 4 is not, partial mediation is indicated. The data indicate partial mediation: role strain remains significant once controlled for the effect of couple adjustment ($\beta = .52$; $p < .001$).

Therefore, our results partially confirm Hypothesis 5 and indicate that stepparents' satisfaction with their couple relation is an important element in stepfamilies and should therefore receive special attention. As role strain may be a normative circumstance inherent to stepfamilies, and given its high association with stepparents' burnout, a satisfactory couple relation could buffer the effect of role strain on burnout or facilitate adequate coping with role strain.

Conclusions

We would like to point out that this study is a novelty in an area of growing interest such as the new family modalities, which are starting to play an important role in the Spanish society. This investigation is one of the first empirical works on stepfamilies carried out in Spain. The contribution of this study is important because we have adapted a pioneer instrument in the study of

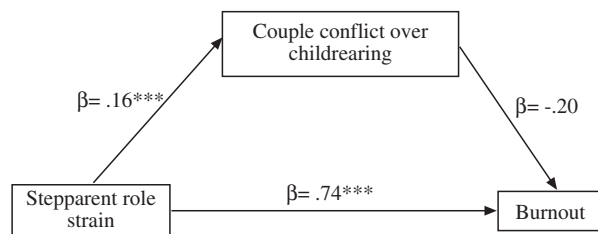


Figure 2. Beta coefficients for the pathways among stepparent role strain, couple conflict over childrearing and burnout. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

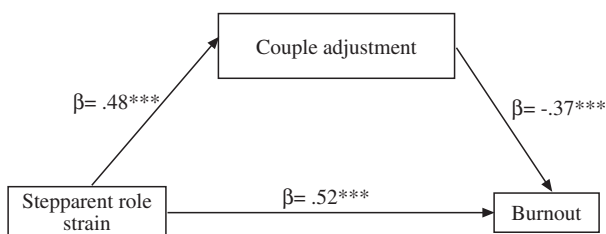


Figure 3. Beta coefficients for the pathways among stepparent role strain, couple adjustment and burnout. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

stepparents' role strain in a sample of Spanish stepparents. Moreover we have considered that role strain can be an antecedent or stressor that affects stepparent's health or wellbeing. In this sense, a limitation of Whitsett and Land (1992b) is overcome, as they mentioned in their work that they had not employed a complementary measure that would allow the study of the correspondence of role strain and an indicator of psychological distress. In order to study the effect of role strain on stepparents' psychological distress, this investigation adapted a model studied extensively in the organizational setting. As a high relation between stress or role tension and burnout has been found in diverse professional collectives, in this work, burnout was chosen as a response that reflects stepparents' distress over their setting and family relations. Burnout was chosen because it is a response that emerges after continued exposure to a stressor and, as mentioned, role strain may be a habitual aspect in family life.

The study of the two marital variables (adaptation and conflict over childrearing) and their consideration as possible mediating elements in the relation between role strain and stepparent's burnout is also a novel contribution with regard to other works.

The results obtained support the adequacy of the variables selected and the relation established among them. First, we point out the notable correlation between role strain and burnout, which in fact reaches one of the highest values of all the correlations. Additionally, the regression analysis shows that the best predictor of stepparents' burnout is role strain, thus confirming the proposed model: stressor (role strain) - response (burnout). The role overload component is the best predictor of burnout. In accordance with the items, the role overload reflects the experience of maladjustment as a result of the different roles that one must attend and coordinate and the all too frequent prioritization of others' needs over one's own. Nonetheless, respecting this aspect of role performance, it should be pointed out that this factor is the only one that might not be specific to just the population of stepmothers in accordance with the items' contents. In fact, if we examine the four items that make up this dimension, we note that three of them could easily conform to the situation of many women who in the present day have to combine their professional careers with their tasks as mothers. Even in the case that the 'role overload' does not constitute a specific dimension of stepmothers, the repercussions on their psychological health can be greater than in the situations of mothers in conventional families. It is necessary to take into account that the time and energy a woman invests in the family setting can be valued very differently if it is a family that one has 'made' than if it is a family that, in a way, already existed. Therefore, the experience of a 'role overload' can be felt by stepmothers with greater intensity or as an important source of dissatisfaction since it incorporates, perhaps, an added value of something external or 'not one's own.' In fact, this situation is confirmed in this study since the role dimension that best predicts stepmothers' burnout is 'role overload.'

Despite the results obtained in the two instruments (role strain and marital adjustment) showing that this is the explanation of the stepmothers' higher distress, it seems that stepchildren are not the central or differential factor in the stepparents' situation. Firstly, with regard to role strain, role overload was the only dimension in which statistically significant differences between stepfathers and stepmothers were obtained. The items grouped under this dimension refer to the experience in which, in this case, the stepmother expresses more distress because she cannot respond to

all the demands she feels obliged to attend, but at no moment are the stepchildren and their possible role in the experience of overload explicitly mentioned. Secondly, the only measure in which no differences were observed between stepfathers and stepmothers is the level of marital conflict over childrearing.

So, in our sample, the difference between men and women was on a dimension in which the stepmothers expressed more distress because they felt it was impossible to respond to all the demands made of them and, additionally, these demands were often incompatible.

Lastly, with regard to the theoretical model, the mediational analysis shows that couple satisfaction acts as a buffer between role strain and stepparents' burnout.

The implications of the results obtained in this work are fairly conclusive with regard to the sex of the stepparent. In line with some authors' statements (Ambert, 1986; Dainton, 1993; Hobart, 1991; Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987), stepmothers are particularly vulnerable in these family structures. With regard to the hypothesis that proposed differences between stepfathers and stepmothers in the levels of role strain, our results coincide with those obtained by Whitsett and Land (1992a), who also found that

stepmothers scored higher than stepfathers. Not only do they experience more difficulties in fulfilling their roles and more dissatisfaction with their setting and family relations, but also their couple adjustment is poorer than that of the stepfathers. Moreover, the results show the need for stepfamilies, especially those with a stepmother, to attempt to strengthen and protect the marital relation, as this could be effective in dealing with the diverse difficulties that emerge in family life.

Lastly, although the scores obtained in the diverse measurements suggest that the group of stepparents who participated in this work is made up of individuals who are relatively satisfied with their family setting, the high correlations obtained among the variables, and in which the stepmothers are always in a more unfavorable situation, suggest that among the clinical stepfamilies or in stepfamilies with certain levels of dysfunction, the variables employed could play an important role and explain the causes of their family dysfunction. In order to respond to these two questions, future research should obtain larger samples that would allow generalization of the results obtained in this work and, on the other hand, it would be interesting to contrast the results obtained in clinical samples of stepparents.

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