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## ABSTRACT

This study examined factors contributing to parental satisfaction during the transition to parenthood, and considered gender differences in the type of social support received and role satisfaction. Ninety-five subjects (55 mothers and 40 fathers) were selected to include both primiparous and multiparous parents, employed and nonemployed mothers, urban and rural residence, and various levels of education. They were interviewed separately before and after becoming parents. Results suggested that fathers were more satisfied with their wives' role as mothers than they were with themselves as fathers, and that mothers were more satisfied with themselves as mothers than they were with their husbands as fathers. Mothers reported having more conversations with others on raising children than did fathers. Significant gender differences were also reported in the importance given to support received from various sources; mothers found health care providers and reading more important than did fathers, and fathers found their spouse more important than did mothers. Parents who perceived more social support were more satisfied with their parental role and their spouse's role than were parents who perceived less social support. Further, there was a positive relationship between marital and parental satisfaction. The quality of the marital relationship, the use of friends as a support source, and presence of child-rearing conversations explained 55 percent of the variance in perceived social support. (KDFB)

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# **SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PARENT'S SATISFACTION DURING THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented in the XIVth Biennial ISSBD Conference. Québec City, August 12-16 1996.

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## **ABSTRACT**

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In the framework of a longitudinal study, 95 subjects (55 mothers and 40 fathers) were studied during their transition to parenthood. The families were chosen according to distinct socio-demographic variables. Fathers and mothers were interviewed separately before and after becoming parents using a long interview tapping into various contents related to their transitions to parenthood.

Data used in this poster explores two important dimensions of the parenthood: the parents' satisfaction and their social support during the process of becoming parents, and the relationship both together.

The results obtained show important gender differences on the parents' satisfaction as soon as in the social support. The social support received during the transition to parenthood is closely related to the satisfaction perceived as parent.

## **AIMS**

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- To study the process of becoming parents and the explore the key aspects in order to achieve a more or less satisfactory result in this important transition.
- To analyze the gender differences in the transition to parenthood, specially the differences between fathers and mothers about their types of resource sources and their parent's satisfaction.
- To explore the role of Social Support facing the process of becoming parents.

# METHOD

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## SUBJECTS

95 subjects (55 mothers and 40 fathers) were studied longitudinally from the beginning of the mother's pregnancy until their children were 10-12 months old. The parents differed according to different socio-demographic variables: previous experience as parents (primiparous and non-primiparous), level of education (high, medium and low), mothers' laboral status (working and non-working mothers) and habitat of residence (urban and rural).

## INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURE

The subjects were recruited in the sanitary centers where the women went to receive medical assistance once the pregnancy was confirmed. Although the longitudinal study is broader, with interview before and after becoming parents, the data presented in this poster refer to the second interview.

At this phase of the longitudinal study, families were visited at their homes at the end of the first year of the children's lives. Mothers and fathers were interviewed separately, using the Interview at the First Year. This instrument was designed to approach different contents related to the transition to parenthood process: social network and social support, marital relationships, labour division at home, father's involvement on childrearing, work situation, resource sources and support for facing parenthood, satisfaction with the parenthood, parent's educational-developmental ideas, etc. These interviews are composed, in part, of materials used by other authors who have approached this matter (for ex., Belsky, 1984) and also by questions we designed ourselves.

# RESULTS

As we can see in figure 1, we found important differences between fathers and mothers in terms of the degree of satisfaction they experience. Thus, whereas fathers are more satisfied with their wives as mothers, women feel more satisfied with their own performance than with their husbands.

## Parental satisfaction (Gender differences)



Figure 1 (\*\*p<.01 \*\*\* p<.005)

Likewise, the data showed significant differences between fathers and mothers in several aspects related to their support sources. Specifically, the most significant differences were found in the amount of conversations on raising children, and in the importance both parents give to the support received from various sources, such as, health care providers, specific readings and the spouse (see table 1).

			Fem.	Mal.	Sig.
Social support		14.82	15.87	13.37	
Childrearing conversations		3.31	3.7	2.77	****
Resource Sources	Parent Education Program	3.56	4.34	42.12	****
	Health Care Poviders	3.4	3.74	2.92	**
	Specific Readings	3.49	3.9	2.92	***
	Wife's Mother	3.81	4.29	3.17	***
	Husband's Mother	3.24	3.31	3.15	
	Other relatives	3.4	3.55	3.18	
	Friends	2.86	3.03	2.61	
	Spouse	4.44	4.2	4.77	**
	Total	26.67	28.89	23.62	****
Spouse's support	Parenthood	19.02	18.24	20.07	
	General	20.08	19.98	20.22	
	Total	39.31	38.22	40.8	
Quality of marital relation		13.44	13.14	13.85	

**Table 1** (\* p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.005, \*\*\*\*p<.001)

The data analysis revealed a significant relationship between social support and satisfaction with parenthood (see table 2), but we did not find significant gender differences in this case. Both males and females that perceive more social support feel more satisfied with their own role as father/mother as well as with their spouses role.

	Social support	
	r	Sig.
Self-satisfaction	.205	.023
Partner-satisfaction	.196	.029

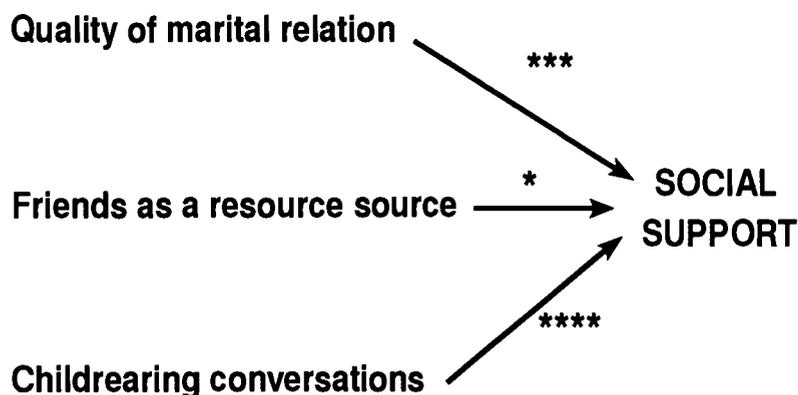
**Table 2**

As we can see in table 3, the correlations between social support and different variables were significant. Thus, perceiving a high degree of social support is related to holding conversations regarding parenthood, reading specific and specialized texts on these matters, having a good marital relationship, and, particularly, receiving support from the spouse.

		Social Support
Childrearing conversations		r=.702 ****
Resource Sources	Parent Education Program	r=.145
	Health Care Providers	r=.142
	Wife's mother	r=.015
	Husband's mother	r=-.065
	Other relatives	r=.138
	Friends	r=.263 ***
	Specifics Readings	r=.309 ****
	Spouse	r=.033
	Total	r=.259 **
Spouse's support	Parenthood	r=.327 ****
	General	r=.216 *
	Total	r=.303 ****
Conversaciones con la pareja		r=.255 **
Quality of marital relation		r=.25 **

**Table 3** (\* p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.005, \*\*\*\*p<.001)

In order to explore the previous relationships in greater depth, we introduced the indexes which were significantly associated with social support in a regression equation. The results of this analysis reflect how the previous variables can explain 55% of the variability of social support ( $F=10.99$ ,  $p=.000$ ), and also establish that the most important indexes to predict a high degree of social support (see figure 2) are the quality of the marital relationship, the conversations about parenthood, and being able to rely on friends as resource sources.



**Figure 2: Regression Analysis**  
(\* $p<.05$ , \*\*\* $p<.005$ , \*\*\*\* $p<.001$ )

## CONCLUSIONS

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Our longitudinal study shows a significant relationship between social support and satisfaction with parenthood. It seems obvious that to deal with parenthood successfully and in a competent way, males and females need social support. In this way, the availability and usefulness of the necessary help and support, specially through conversations on raising children and a satisfactory marital relationship, become key aspects in order to achieve a more or less satisfactory process of becoming parents.

Our study's results reveal important gender differences during the transition to parenthood. These differences refer both the support sources and the satisfaction with the parenthood. Whereas women are more satisfied with their own performance as mothers than with their husbands' performance, men are more satisfied with their wives as mothers than with their own performance as fathers. These differences are clearly related to the different involvement of fathers and mothers in everything regarding parenthood. The different socialization processes they experienced as well as the different demands placed on mothers and fathers by the social context, makes evident that instead of talking about the "transition to parenthood" in general, we should talk about the "transition to motherhood" and "transition to fatherhood" as two processes with distinctive characteristics.



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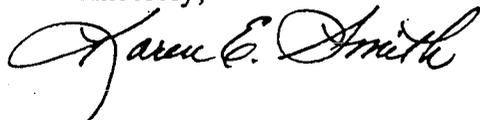
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