





# Parental stress and life satisfaction: A comparative study of social services users and nonusers from a gender perspective

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## Abstract

The psychometric properties of the Spanish version of the Parental Stress Scale (PSS) scale have not been verified on the Spanish population. Similarly, the literature on gender differences and parental stress is inconclusive, and there is little evidence of their relationship with life satisfaction. To analyze the psychometric properties of the Spanish version of the PSS scale, (2) to examine possible gender differences, and (3) to study the relationship between parental stress (PS) and parental rewards (PR) and satisfaction with life (SWL) attending to the possible moderating effect of gender. These objectives were examined in samples comprising Social Services Users (SSU) ( $N = 525$ ; 78.3% female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 38.3$ ) and non-SSU users ( $N = 421$ ; 41.1% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.08$ ). A CFA corroborated a two-factor structure: PS and PR. In the SSU sample, mothers showed higher PS and lower PR. However, PR was also higher in mothers from the non-SSU sample compared to fathers. PR and PS were directly related to SWL in the SSU sample. However, gender moderated the relationship between PR and SWL in the non-SSU sample in the case of mothers.

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The results are discussed considering gender roles and the characteristics of both samples.

**KEYWORDS**

feelings, parenthood, rewards, stress, wellbeing

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Parental stress (PS) is a psychological reaction that triggers the use of every available resource to satisfactorily exercise the parental role. Specifically, it arises when parents perceive that the demands linked to the fulfillment of their parental role exceed the resources available to satisfy them (Abidin, 1992; Deater-Deckard, 2004). However, parenting can also be extremely rewarding and satisfying (Deater-Deckard, 2004; Oyarzún-Farías et al., 2021). Parental satisfaction or rewards is the opposite of PS and relates to the positive feelings that arise from parenting (Oronoz et al., 2007) such as affection, closeness, and happiness (Nærde & Hukkelberg, 2020). Although both dimensions, parental satisfaction, and PS, are often inversely related, they are complementary and both are measured when analyzing PS (Abidin, 1995; Berry & Jones, 1995).

PS has been primarily studied in families deemed “at-risk” as they are at a higher risk of suffering from stress due to their socioeconomic status, psychological adjustment problems, or problems with the development or behavior of their children (Pérez-Padilla, 2014; Raikes & Thompson, 2005). However, it has been shown that all parents, regardless of their mental health and socioeconomic status, experience stress to a greater or lesser extent, and in some way, they can feel satisfaction in the exercise of their parental role (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Deater-Deckard, 2004), what suggests that parental stress and satisfaction are universal products of socialization. To go in-depth in the study of these emotional processes is, hence, important, not only for their universality but also for their implications for family life. In this sense, although parental stress can be an adaptative process, high levels are associated with poor life satisfaction and reduced parental efficacy (Crnic & Ross, 2017). It also impacts children, increasing their risk to suffer behavioral and emotional problems (Deater-Deckard, 2004). Furthermore, there are very few studies that examine the differences between clinical or social services users (SSU) and non-users (non-SSU) regarding parental stress and satisfaction/rewards. As a result, this study aims to establish a comparison between both groups of parents in all the objectives presented.

One of the most widely used tools for measuring PS is the Parental Stress Scale (PSS; Berry & Jones, 1995). This scale focuses on parents' subjective perceptions of parenting and what it means to them in terms of negative (stress and loss of control) and positive (rewards and parental satisfaction) feelings. Berry and Jones (1995) original scale comprises 18 Likert-type items. The factor analyses of the study gave rise to a four-factor structure: parental rewards, parental stressors, lack of control, and parental satisfaction. The scale has been validated for use in several countries including Denmark (Nielsen et al., 2020; Pontoppidan et al., 2018), Norway (Nærde & Hukkelberg, 2020), Portugal (Algarvio et al., 2018), Brazil (Brito & Faro, 2017), and China (Cheung, 2000). However, the results of the studies show significant differences in the number of factors used that range from one (Cho et al., 2021; Darlington et al., 2012), two (Algarvio et al., 2018; Brito & Faro, 2017; Cheung, 2000; Nærde & Hukkelberg, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020; Pontoppidan et al., 2018) to four (Berry & Jones, 1995). Notwithstanding, most advocate a two-factor structure, but the total number of items and their distribution across factors varies from study to study (Nærde & Hukkelberg, 2020). Similar to other constructs in psychology, such as academic engagement (Chen et al., 2020; Veiga et al., 2021), parenting stress is usually identified as a multidimensional construct based on different but related dimensions (Berry & Jones, 1995; Nærde & Hukkelberg, 2021), and showed, hence, an oblique nature. By contrast, other parenting constructs, such as the main parenting dimensions (i.e., warmth and strictness), are

theoretically orthogonal dimensions because they are not significantly related (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Martínez-Escudero et al., 2020).

PSS has been translated and adapted into Spanish by Oronoz et al. (2007). The data used in the original study gave rise to an optimum scale of 12 items structured into two factors: parental stressors ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ) and (what the authors called) baby's rewards ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ). Both factors explained 33.5% of the total variance of the construct (10.1% and 23.4%, respectively). The present study shares some aims with that developed by Oronoz et al. (2007): (i) the examination of factor analysis of PSS (ii), the analysis of sex-related differences in parental stress and rewards (iii) and the study of the criterion-related validity of PSS analyzing its relationship with depression and anxiety. But the study of the manuscript also extends the evidence about the validity of the Spanish version of PSS showing some important differences with the study of Oronoz et al. (2007). Specifically, this last study was focused on parents who had babies between 3 and 8 months, who composed a nonclinical sample, and used a clinical criterion as depression and anxiety to test its relationship with parental stress and rewards. However, the present study used as sample parents of children in preschool and school years, a clinical and nonclinical sample and a nonclinical criterion such as satisfaction with life to test its relationship with parental stress and rewards. As a result, the first objective of our study is to test the psychometric properties of the Spanish version of the PSS questionnaire. (H1) It is assumed that the Spanish version of the PSS scale (Ornoz et al., 2007) will present adequate psychometric properties reflecting two factors: parental stress (PS) and parental rewards (PR).

Gender differences have been extensively studied in relation to some family constructs, such as parenting practices and attitudes (Martínez et al., 2019; Ridao et al., 2021). Likewise, fathers and mothers also seem to differ in their levels of PS and PR although the results of previous evidence are not entirely homogeneous. In this sense, there is a large number of studies that highlight the level of PS in mothers (Deater-Deckard, 1998; Hildingsson & Thomas, 2014; Insa et al., 2018; Ostberg & Hagekull, 2000; Roxburgh, 2005; Scott & Alwin, 1989; Skreden et al., 2012), but others report hardly any differences in stress levels between both parents (Crnic & Booth, 1991; Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996; Deater-Deckard et al., 1998; Ponnet et al., 2013). The number of studies that analyze PR is even smaller and, again, there is little consensus on the impact of gender. In turn, while some studies indicate higher stress levels in mothers (Oyarzún-Farías et al., 2021; Salonen et al., 2010), others reflect that experiencing parenthood seems to contribute more to the wellbeing and happiness of men than to women (Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019; Renk et al., 2003).

When referring to gender differences in the study, we are obliged to refer to the so-called traditional roles established for women and men and mothers and fathers. Even today, the ideal of intensive motherhood is still extremely prevalent. This encourages mothers to invest heavily, both emotionally and in time, in educating and caring for their child(ren) to ensure their wellbeing by satisfying their needs, while relegating their own needs to second place (Hays, 1996). In this regard, the results from the study by Scott and Alwin (1989) highlight that gender differences in PS are attributed to gender roles and the beliefs and expectations attributed to them. Whereas men have been socialized to focus on the development of goals outside the family environment, women have been socialized to focus on care and parenting issues. This leads women to perceive more demands on them in terms of parenting, which, in turn, leads them to perceive more stress.

The incorporation of women into the labor market has led to social change resulting in greater gender equality. This has had an impact on the distribution of domestic and family duties within the household. Consequently, although studies on the Spanish population continue to highlight that mothers dedicate more time to household chores and childcare than fathers, regardless of their employment status (Fernández et al., 2016), this imbalance becomes even more apparent when female participation in the labor market declines (Bianchi et al., 2012; Gracia & Esping-Andersen, 2015). Other factors such as level of education and socioeconomic status also have an impact. It has been found that men's participation in household and family duties increases in more educated households and more economically developed regions (Altuzarra Artola et al., 2018; Gracia & Ghysels, 2017). Responsibility overload exacerbates PS levels in mothers (Ostberg & Hagekull, 2000), while co-responsibility in the household seems to mitigate stress (Nomaguchi et al., 2017; Roxburgh, 1997). However, when referring to co-responsibility, as

well as the time devoted by both partners to domestic and family duties, other factors must also be taken into account. Renk et al. (2003) found that more than time, it is the level of responsibility that mothers assume in the various activities they perform with their children (schooling, discipline, care, etc.) that seems to affect their parental satisfaction the most. Moreover, they found that their level of responsibility was higher than that assumed by fathers, especially when mothers do not work outside the home, which explained their lower parental satisfaction.

However, men are not altogether free from PS. Although some studies may show that the level of stress in fathers is lower than in mothers, it is not negligible and its impact on personal development and psychological adjustment can be significant (Deater-Deckard, 1998). In recent decades, the social changes that have taken place have led to a gradual replacement of the male stereotype as "head of the family" with a new model of masculinity characterized by active involvement in domestic and family duties (Alberdi & Escario, 2007), which also encourages men to develop their parental feelings (Hildingsson & Thomas, 2014; Roxburgh, 2005).

The review of the literature highlights the need for further research on gender differences in PS and PR. Therefore, the second objective of this study was to address the analysis of these possible differences. (H2) It is assumed that there will be gender differences between PS and PR with mothers reporting the highest levels of PS. These differences will be more pronounced in the SSU sample, taking into account the sample's lower level of education, economic status, and the higher proportion of women not in paid employment. This will reflect the lack of co-responsibility in their partners, and possibly their higher levels of PS and lower perception of PR. Moreover, the families in the SSU sample have significant difficulties in adequately attending to the needs of their children, which produces higher stress levels that can reach clinical extremes (Anderson, 2008; Pérez-Padilla & Menéndez, 2014).

Parental Stress has been associated with a number of consequences (Sandoval-Obando et al., 2022), including life satisfaction (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Oronoz et al., 2007). The impact of gender on the relationship between PS, PR, and satisfaction with life (SWL) has not been studied. However, it has recently been shown that gender moderates the relationship between other emotional processes, such as guilt linked to the family-work conflict and life satisfaction (Gómez-Ortiz & Roldán-Barríos, 2021). Other studies show different consequences of PS in mothers and fathers (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996; Kuo & Johnson, 2021). Furthermore, the evidence of the impact of gender roles and, above all, of co-responsibility in gender differences in PS and PR leads us to believe that the relationship between both processes and SWL should not necessarily be the same for mothers and fathers. The presence of co-responsibility in the home has been shown to act as a mediating variable capable of increasing marital satisfaction and the perception of quality in the couple's relationship in mothers (Durtschi et al., 2017). Roxburgh (2005) found that the consequences of parenting difficulties are similar for mothers and fathers in full-time employment, where greater co-responsibility is evident. However, this association is much stronger for mothers who work part-time or are housewives whose partners work full-time. Roxburgh highlights that the latter group of mothers has higher levels of PS than mothers and fathers in full-time employment.

Finally, in the analysis of consequences of parental stress and the possible moderator role of gender it is also necessary to have into account the context of the sample. In this sense, as it occurs with other parenting dimensions (García et al., 2020; Steinberg et al., 2006), there is evidence that parenting stress may affect families with problems differently compared with those without problems due to the different process involved in families and their members (Nærde & Hukkelberg, 2020; Sandoval-Obando et al., 2022).

Taking into account the results of the aforementioned studies, as a third objective, our study examines the relationship between PS, PR and SWL to determine the possible moderating effect of gender on these relationships: (H3) It is assumed that there will be a direct relationship between PR and SWL and an inverse relationship between PS and SWL (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Oronoz et al., 2007). The impact of gender on the relationship between PS, PR, and SWL will be greater in the SSU sample, but the same effect will also be observed in the non-SSU sample. In both cases it will be mothers who experience lower life satisfaction than fathers in the presence of higher levels of PS and lower levels of PR (Roxburgh, 2005).

## 2 | METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 | Participants

The SSU sample comprised 525 mothers and fathers with minors in their care from all eight Andalusian provinces (the largest Autonomous Region in southern Spain). At the time of the study, the families were receiving support from the Family Care Teams from the Regional Government of Andalucía's Child and Family Protection Services. Of the total, 78.3% were female. Ages ranged from 17 to 63 years ( $M = 38.3$ ;  $SD = 9.26$ ) and most (54.5%) had primary education (26.5% secondary education, 7.1% university education, and 11.9% no education). A total of 40.8% were unemployed (34.3% female and 6.5% male), 39.1% were in paid employment (28.2% female and 10.9% male) and 20.1% fell into the category of retired/housewife or not applying for work (15.7% female and 4.4% male). The average number of dependent children was two ( $SD = 1.01$ ; 34.4% of the sample had one; 41.4% two; 16% three; 5.7% four; 2.1% five to seven). The age of children ranged from 0 to 17 years ( $M = 9.80$ ;  $SD = 4.48$ ).

The non-SSU sample comprised parents with at least one children in the first and second cycle of pre-school education (0–5 years) in the provinces of Córdoba and Badajoz, Spain. Convenience sampling was used to select the sample and the final group comprised 421 parents (41.1% male). The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 57 years ( $M = 37.08$ ;  $SD = 4.87$ ). A total of 27.3% were not in paid employment (23.5% female and 3.8% male) while 72.7% were in paid employment (35.5% female and 37.2% male). And a total of 37.3% of the participants had one child, 56.1% had two children, 6.2% had three children, and 0.4% had four to five children. The age of children ranged from 0 to 19 years ( $M = 4.66$ ;  $SD = 2.56$ ).

### 2.2 | Tools

The Spanish version (Oronoz et al., 2007) of the PSS (Berry & Jones, 1995) comprises 12 items that are structured into two factors: PR (e.g., I feel happy in my role as a parent) and PS (e.g., I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent). The items are presented on a Likert-type response scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). The psychometric properties are shown in the results section.

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985; Moyano-Díaz et al., 2014) has previously been validated with the Spanish population. The scale comprises five items that measure a single dimension: life satisfaction (e.g., In most ways my life is close to my ideal). The items are presented on a Likert-type response scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree) and reflects adequate internal consistency in this study in both the non-SSU sample ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) and the SSU sample ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ).

### 2.3 | Procedure

To collect data from the non-SSU sample, permission was sought from schools to select children's parents as potential participants. The schools gave the questionnaires and consent forms to the families to fill in at home, and explained that their participation was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. This study project was approved by the Bioethics and Biosafety Committee of the University of Córdoba and complies with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki.

The participants in the SSU sample were interviewed by experts from the research team for approximately one and a half hours. Before the interview, each participant was informed about the objectives of the research, the confidential and anonymous nature of the data and that they could leave the study at any time. All families participated in the study on a voluntary basis after signing an informed consent form in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

## 2.4 | Data analysis

A preliminary analysis was performed using descriptive statistics. The sample was randomly divided into two parts to validate the questionnaire. To determine the dimensionality of the PSS and select the final items, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed using Factor (9.3) statistical software. A unweighted least-squares (ULS) estimation method was used based on a polychoric correlation matrix, which is recommended when working with non-normal distribution samples and ordinal items (Bryant & Satorra, 2012). The Promin rotation method was used. The number of factors retained was decided using the Hull method and the aforementioned theoretical considerations (Lorenzo-Seva et al., 2011).

To determine validity based on the internal structure of the questionnaire and whether the original factor structure could be replicated, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was also performed. Considering the ordinal nature of the questionnaire variables, the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method with robust correction was used (Bryant & Satorra, 2012). Model fit was assessed using the comparative fit index (CFI), the non-normed fit index (NNFI) ( $\geq 0.95$ ) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ( $\leq 0.08$ ) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). A CFA was performed using the EQS (6.2) program (Bentler, 2005).

The reliability of the scale and subscales was calculated using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha > 0.70$ ). An independent samples *t*-test was performed to determine potential gender differences between the PSS scale factors. All the analyses, as well as the descriptive statistics, were performed using SPSS (23.0) software (IBM Corp. Released, 2011).

Pearson's correlation was performed to analyze the relationship between parental stress, parental rewards and life satisfaction. Furthermore, to test the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between PS, PR and SWL, the PROCESS macro for SPSS was used (Hayes, 2018). The significance of the conditional direct effects was estimated using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CI) derived from 5000 bootstrap resamples. Based on the gender values, the Johnson-Neyman technique was used to determine whether the association between PS, PR and SWL was significant. The significance level adopted for all the analyses was 0.05.

## 3 | RESULTS

### 3.1 | Descriptive analysis

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis indices for each of the PSS items. The highest mean was 4.6 (Item 4) for the SSU group and 4.8 (Item 4) for the non-SSU group. The lowest mean was 1.8 (Item 10) and 1.6 (Item 10), respectively.

### 3.2 | Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis

In the SSU sample, the KMO test (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin) to measure sampling adequacy had a value of 0.86 and Bartlett's test of homoscedasticity was statistically significant [ $\chi^2(66) = 1587.4$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ]. Similarly, in the non-SSU sample, the KMO test gave a value of 0.88 and Bartlett's test was also statistically significant [ $\chi^2(66) = 1441.0$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ]. These results confirmed the importance of performing an EFA on both samples.

Two factors were selected for both samples using the Hull method. The percentage of the total variance explained using the two-factor model was 61.19% for the SSU sample and 66.70% for the non-SSU sample. The first factor, Parental Stressors, explained 45.99% of the variance in the SSU sample and 41.78% in the non-SSU sample. For both samples the factor comprised seven items (Items 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) that refer to the stress that parents feel as a result of performing the duties involved in raising and educating their children (e.g., Having a child

**TABLE 1** Items in English and Spanish on the PSS scale, descriptive statistics, communalities, EFA factor loadings, and CFA standardized factor loadings

	F1	F2	Co.	M	SD	S	K	R <sup>2</sup>
1. I am happy in my role as a parent (Me siento feliz en mi papel como padre/madre)	0.74/0.55	0.61/0.36	4.40/4.77	0.88/0.49	-1.54/-2.60	1.99/8.47	0.56/0.45	
3. I feel close to my child(ren) (Me siento muy cercano/a a mi hijo/a)	0.89/0.80	0.62/0.62	4.34/4.72	0.93/0.54	-1.41/-1.90	1.40/2.64	0.64/0.29	
4. I enjoy spending time with my child(ren) (Disfruto pasando tiempo con mi hijo/a)	0.78/0.83	0.59/0.71	4.61/4.87	0.71/0.33	-2.18/-2.23	5.45/3.01	0.50/0.30	
11. I am satisfied as a parent (Me siento satisfecho/a como padre/madre)	0.75/0.61	0.66/0.55	4.38/4.72	0.87/0.59	-1.44/-2.95	1.56/12.18	0.70/0.68	
12. I find my child(ren) enjoyable (Disfruto de mi hijo/a)	0.89/1.00	0.77/1.00	4.59/4.86	0.80/0.48	-2.47/-5.20	-6.49/33.67	0.68/0.92	
2. Caring for my child(ren) sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give (Atender a mi hijo/a, a veces me quita más tiempo y energía de la que tengo)	0.77/0.74	0.45/0.51	3.24/3.72	1.45/1.33	-0.33/-0.84	-1.26/-0.40	0.19/0.28	
5. The major source of stress in my life is my child(ren) (La mayor fuente de estrés en mi vida es mi hijo/a)	0.72/0.69	0.46/0.51	2.71/2.36	1.62/1.28	0.27/0.48	-1.53/-0.84	0.17/0.50	
6. Having children leaves little time and flexibility in my life (Tener un hijo/a deja poco tiempo y flexibilidad en mi vida)	0.86/0.82	0.52/0.62	2.53/3.09	1.39/1.30	0.37/-0.24	-1.14/-0.98	0.37/0.44	
7. Having children has been a financial burden (Tener un hijo/a ha supuesto una carga financiera)	0.61/0.83	0.35/0.67	2.61/2.77	1.51/1.23	0.29/0.03	-1.41/-0.95	0.23/0.31	
8. It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my child(ren) (Me resulta difícil equilibrar diferentes responsabilidades debido a mi hijo/a)	0.59/0.77	0.38/0.60	2.34/2.55	1.31/1.25	0.51/0.14	-0.99/-1.17	0.43/0.37	

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	F1	F2	Co.	M	SD	S	K	R <sup>2</sup>
9. The behavior of my child(ren) is often embarrassing or stressful to me (El comportamiento de mi hijo/a a menudo me resulta incómodo o estresante)	0.47/0.72		0.51/0.58	2.82/2.55	0.01/1.23	-1.44/0.13	-1.37/-1.16	0.52/0.34
10. I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent (Me siento abrumado/a por la responsabilidad de ser padre/madre)	0.51/0.67		0.47/0.50	1.89/1.67	1.15/1.08	-2.47/1.47	0.11/1.08	0.66/0.30

Note: F1 = factor 1; F2 = factor 2; Co. = communalities; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; S = skewness; K = kurtosis; R<sup>2</sup> = standardized factor loadings. The first figure corresponds to the SSU sample and the second to the non-SSU sample.

Abbreviations: CFA, confirmatory factor analysis; EFA, exploratory factor analysis; PSS, Parental Stress Scale.



leaves little time and flexibility in my life). The second factor, Parental Rewards, explained 15.19% of the variance in the SSU sample and 24.91% in the non-SSU sample. In both samples, the factor comprised five items (Items 1, 3, 4, 11 and 12) that refer to the satisfaction and positive feelings that mothers and fathers experience in their role as parents and in caring for and interacting with their child(ren). In the case of the SSU group, communalities ranged from 0.35 to 0.77 and standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.47 to 0.89, whereas, in the non-SSU sample, communalities ranged from 0.36 to 1.0 and standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.55 to 1.03.

The results of the CFA corroborated the two-factor structure (PS and PR) of the Spanish version of the PSS in both samples. In the SSU sample, the following fit indices were found:  $\chi^2$  S-B = 162.63 (53);  $p = 0.000$ ; NNFI = 0.92; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.08. In the non-SSU sample, the data also showed a good fit for the proposed model:  $\chi^2$  S-B = 86.58 (53);  $p = 0.001$ ; NNFI = 0.92; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.07. All factor loadings were significant and high in the SSU sample ( $0.46 \leq \lambda \leq 0.85$ ) and the non-SSU sample ( $0.53 \leq \lambda \leq 0.96$ ). Table 1 shows the values of the standardized factor loadings for each item.

As regards internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha value for the SSU sample was 0.77 for PS and 0.81 for PR. In the non-SSU sample, good internal consistency was also obtained (0.82 for PS and 0.75 for PR).

### 3.3 | Gender differences in parental stress and rewards and their relationships with life satisfaction

In the SSU sample, gender differences were found in both PS ( $t(518) = 2.63$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ;  $M_{females} = 2.69$ ;  $M_{males} = 2.44$ ) and PR ( $t(520) = -2.10$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ,  $M_{females} = 4.40$ ;  $M_{males} = 4.55$ ). However, in the non-SSU sample the results were different: gender differences were found for PR ( $t(237.3) = -2.20$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $M_{females} = 4.77$ ;  $M_{males} = 4.66$ ) but not for PS ( $t(369) = -0.61$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ;  $M_{females} = 2.65$ ;  $M_{males} = 2.59$ ).

Table 2 shows correlations between PR, PS, and SWL. As can be seen in the table, all the relationships were significant. In both samples it was found a direct relationship between PR and SWL and an inverse relationship between PS and SWL. Correlation coefficients were a little higher in non-SSU sample. The relationship between PR and PS was inverse but significant in both samples confirming the oblique nature of the PSS dimensions.

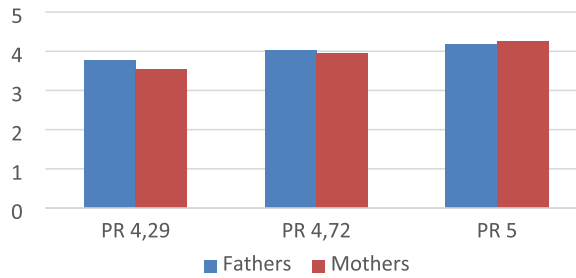
The results from the moderation analyses show that although no direct effect was found between PR and SWL ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) in the non-SSU sample, the effect of the PR variable on SWL was moderated by gender ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $SE = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The Johnson–Neyman technique showed that the positive relationship between PR and SWL was significant in both women and men, indicating that when PR is low, SWL is lower in women than in men. In turn, high PR was associated with higher levels of SWL in women than in men (see Figure 1).

**TABLE 2** Pearson's correlation between parental rewards, parental stress, and life satisfaction

		SWL	PR	PS
SSU sample	SWL	1	0.392**	-0.222**
	PR	0.392**	1	-0.380**
	PS	-0.222**	-0.380**	1
Non-SSU sample	SWL	1	0.458**	-0.251**
	PR	0.458**	1	-0.216**
	PS	-0.251**	-0.216**	1

Abbreviations: PR, parental rewards; PS, parental stress; SWL, satisfaction with life.

\*\* =  $p \leq 0.001$ .



**FIGURE 1** Moderating effect of gender on the relationship between satisfaction with life (SWL) (vertical axis - ordinate) and parental rewards (PR) in the non-Social Services Users (SSU) sample.

No significant relationships were found between PS and SWL, either direct ( $\beta = -0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) or moderated by gender ( $\beta = 0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). In the SSU sample, a direct relationship between PR and SWL was observed ( $\beta = 0.71$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), but the relationship was not moderated by gender ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The same trend was found in the relationship between PS and SWL; a direct relationship ( $\beta = -0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) not moderated by gender ( $\beta = -0.21$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study was to verify the psychometric properties of the Spanish version of the PSS (Oronoz et al., 2007). Given that the psychometric properties of the scale were adequate both in the SSU and the non-SSU sample, the first hypothesis (H1) is accepted. The results revealed adequate internal validity of the scale and confirmed its bifactorial structure, as argued in the initial validation by Oronoz et al. (2007) and the majority of studies that have addressed the validation of the PSS scale (Algarvio et al., 2018; Brito & Farot, 2017; Cheung, 2000; Nærde & Hukkelberg, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020). Both factors, PS and PR, showed adequate internal consistency. Other previous studies suggested a different factorial structure of PSS in which not always were present the same items. These differences could be explained by the statistical analysis performed to test the internal validity of this questionnaire, the criteria followed to decide the inclusion of the final items and the sample. In this sense, it has been found four different statistic to analyse the factorial structure of PSS (EFA, CFA, Rasch modeling, and principal axis factor (Algarvio et al., 2018; Berry & Jones, 1995; Brito & Faro, 2017; Cheung, 2000; Nærde & Hukkelberg, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020; Oronoz et al., 2007; Pontoppidan et al., 2018).

The criteria to establish the dimensions of questionnaire also evolve as new studies focused on research methods and data analyses arise. Also, it is important to consider the influence of the sample of the study, examining not only its cultural background but also its sociodemographic characteristics and setting (ie., clinical vs. nonclinical), because the differences in these features could be changing the measurement structures of the questionnaires across the different studies (Curran et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the present study found the same structure in two different samples, extending the evidence to some previous studies limited only to nonclinical samples (Hukkelberg & Nærde, 2021; Oronoz et al., 2007).

The second objective was to determine the existence of gender differences in the factors on the PSS scale. The results highlighted gender differences in the SSU sample. Specifically, mothers reported higher levels of PS and lower levels of PR. In the non-SSU sample, mothers reported higher levels of PR than fathers. However, no significant differences in the level of PS were observed. These results partially support the second hypothesis (H2). Thus, in line with the hypothesis, gender differences were more pronounced in the SSU sample. These results are consistent with those of other studies that allude to a work overload in mothers due to a lack of co-responsibility in households, which explains the differences in PS and PR (Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019;

Nomaguchi et al., 2017; Ostberg & Hagekull, 2000; Renk et al., 2003; Roxburgh, 1997). The analysis of the participants' socio-demographic characteristics confirmed that those in the SSU sample had a lower level of education and, in the case of mothers, higher unemployment figures than those in the non-SSU sample. These data coincide with those found in other studies performed with samples of similar characteristics in the field of community social services, which largely present single-parent families with high levels of economic, educational, and employment precariousness (Menéndez et al., 2010; Subirats et al., 2004). This could exacerbate the imbalance in the sharing of household and family duties between mothers and fathers in the SSU sample (Altuzarra Artola et al., 2018; Fernández et al., 2016) and generate maternal over-involvement in family duties, which favors the development of PS and hinders the perception of PR in the exercise of parental functions (Nomaguchi et al., 2017; Renk et al., 2003; Roxburgh, 1997). In turn, the absence of significant differences in PS between mothers and fathers in the non-SSU sample suggests that the social change, which has led to greater involvement of men in family life, affects other sectors of the population more (Alberdi & Escario, 2007). This greater involvement takes stress off men's partners leading to lower stress levels in mothers, which effectively eliminates differences between the two parents (Hildingsson & Thomas, 2014; Roxburgh, 2005). Similarly, co-responsibility from fathers would make mothers feel that their parenting is more rewarding, as the parental stressors and demands for care and affection from children would be distributed between both parents. This would lead to a more positive perception of parenting and a less exhausting and/or stressful parenting experience (Nomaguchi et al., 2017).

The third objective of this study was to determine the moderating role of gender on the relationship between PS, PR, and SWL. In the non-SSU sample, the data did not show a direct relationship between PR and SWL. However, the relationship was moderated by gender, showing that life satisfaction in mothers was more affected by the level of perceived PR. In turn, no direct relationship was found between PS and SWL or a moderating effect of gender. However, in the SSU sample, a direct relationship was found between PS, PR, and SWL, but no moderating effect of gender. These results seem to suggest that, in the SSU sample, both PS and PR are sufficiently important to have an impact on both women's and men's life satisfaction. Other studies also confirm the connection between the variables (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Oronoz et al., 2007). This highlights the importance of studying the development of emotional processes linked to the exercise of parenthood, such as PS, and the perception of PR, since they seem to condition how satisfied people feel with their own lives, with all that this entails. This result rejects the third hypothesis (H3), which predicted a direct relationship between these phenomena regardless of the origin of the participants, and a greater impact of gender in the SSU sample. The data obtained from the limited number of studies that have addressed the impact of gender on the consequences of PS are also not fully consistent. Some focus on the analysis of certain psychosocial factors that condition family organization, such as mothers' versus fathers' involvement or co-responsibility, which seem to condition the impact of PS on the possibility of developing mental health issues such as depression and general stress (Roxburgh, 2005) or other phenomena such as marital satisfaction (Durtschi et al., 2017). Other studies focus on gender as a determinant of the type of consequences of PS (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996; Kuo & Johnson, 2021). However, we have not found any evidence of studies that examine whether gender might moderate the relationship between PS and SWL in two samples with such different backgrounds. In this regard, the results seem to suggest that the background and personal circumstances of both groups are more important than gender or how gender affects employment and family life organization when it comes to coping with parenting. Furthermore, it was observed that the SSU families had been exposed to more risk factors throughout their lives and, in general, had fewer personal or active resources, such as coping strategies for stressful situations (Pérez-Padilla, 2014) than the non-SSU families. This leads them to perceive lower parental self-efficacy (Raikes & Thompson, 2005). This constant and steadfast accumulation of stressful circumstances has a huge emotional impact, which becomes even more exacerbated as more problems arise in their lives. This leads to increased emotional vulnerability (López-Verdugo et al., 2007). In addition, parents from at-risk backgrounds tend to have a very limited view of their parental competencies, a low perception of parental self-efficacy, and an external locus of control (Rodrigo

et al., 2008). This could explain why SWL is more compromised in the SSU sample by PS and the perception of lower PR.

The fact that the only moderating effect of gender appears in the relationship between PR and SWL and mothers in the non-SSU sample could be related to gender roles (Scott & Alwin, 1989). From this perspective, the idea of intensive motherhood is still very prevalent in those mothers who have high expectations of their maternal performance (Christopher, 2012). This could lead them to feel high levels of life satisfaction, even higher than their partners when they perceive their parental duties as appropriate and rewarding. Nevertheless, further research is needed to confirm the importance of parental competencies and gender roles in the impact of gender on the relationship between PS, PR, and SWL to determine possible differences between samples with diverse backgrounds.

One of the limitations of this study is the composition of both samples, which is not completely homogeneous with respect to gender distribution, especially in the SSU sample. One of the characteristics of this population is the higher percentage of women and single-parent households, which could favor an increase in gender differences with respect to the non-SSU sample. The use of self-reporting assessment tools, as well as the cross-sectional nature of the study, prevents the establishment of causal relationships. However, this study offers valuable results that could serve as a basis for the design of intervention initiatives aimed at preventing PS and its consequences. It can also be used for proposing policy measures aimed at combating gender inequalities or those created by socioeconomic status. Specifically, the PSS can be used as a valid and reliable measure for the assessment of PS as demonstrated in the SSU and non-SSU samples. The presence of gender differences is much more pronounced in the SSU sample, with mothers reporting higher levels of PS and lower PR. Similarly, this group perceived a stronger association between both emotional phenomena linked to parenting and life satisfaction. In the non-SSU sample, this association seems to be more moderated by the effect of gender, especially with regard to the PR experienced by mothers. Nevertheless, in both samples, there is evidence of the need to promote PS coping strategies and strengthen parental satisfaction, through the promotion of both parental competencies and personal dimensions (the feeling of self-efficacy or the locus of control, among others). As future lines of research, we propose the development of longitudinal studies to provide clearer evidence of the relationship between the constructs analyzed, as well as the possibility of testing the objectives proposed in larger samples to ensure the representativeness of the results.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

This study project was approved by the Bioethics and Biosafety Committee of the University of Córdoba and complies with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki. The participants were informed about the

objectives of the research, the confidential and anonymous nature of the data and that they could leave the study at any time. All families participated in the study on a voluntary basis after signing an informed consent form in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

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## PEER REVIEW

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