

## Cultural values, parenting and child adjustment in Italy

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The present study examined the association of mothers’ and fathers’ individualism, collectivism and conformity values with parenting behaviours and child adjustment during middle childhood in an Italian sample. Children ( $n = 194$ ; 95 from Naples and 99 from Rome; 49% girls) were 10.93 years old ( $SD = .61$ ) at the time of data collection. Their mothers ( $n = 194$ ) and fathers ( $n = 152$ ) also participated. Mother and father reports were collected about parental individualism and collectivism, conformity values, warmth, family obligations expectations and their children’s internalising and externalising problems. Child reports were collected about their parents’ warmth, psychological control, rules/limit-setting, family obligations expectations and their own internalising and externalising behaviours. Multiple regressions predicted each of the parenting and child adjustment variables from the value variables, controlling for child gender and parent education. Results showed that maternal collectivism was associated with high psychological control, parental collectivism was associated with high expectations regarding children’s family obligations and fathers’ conformity values were associated with more child internalising behaviours. Overall, the present study shed light on how parents’ cultural values are related to some parenting practices and children’s internalising problems in Italy.

**Keywords:** Cultural values; Parenting; Child adjustment.

Individualism and collectivism are the most widespread macro-dimensions to classify cultural differences among countries. Individualistic cultures assume that people are independent of one another and tend to stress achievement, autonomy and the pursuit of personal goals, whereas collectivistic cultures emphasise social interdependence, duty towards one’s community, conformity and mutual deference (Hofstede, 2011; Oyserman et al., 2002). Individualism and collectivism are conceptualised in Hofstede’s (2011) model as bipolar dimensions and each country falls along a continuum ranging from individualistic to collectivistic.

Italy is considered an individualistic country with a score of 76 on Hofstede’s (2023) scale, higher than other European countries (such as Germany or Sweden) and lower only than a few countries such as the United

Kingdom, Australia and United States. High levels of individualism in Italy were also found in studies using different measures such as the Auckland Individualism and Collectivism Scale (Shulruf et al., 2011). However, current approaches highlight that individualistic and collectivistic beliefs can coexist within each culture (Schwartz et al., 2001; Singelis et al., 1995) with high levels of interindividual and intraindividual variability within countries (Lansford, Zietz, et al., 2021).

In addressing relations among values, parenting and child adjustment in two Italian cultural groups, Rome (central regions) and Naples (south regions), we note that Italy became a unified country only in 1860, and regional differences are still highly relevant. The economic unbalance across regions affects family functioning, with the central and northern regions of Italy

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mainly characterised by dual breadwinners and the South by male breadwinners (Istituto Italiano di Statistica [ISTAT], 2019). Southern Italy is more economically disadvantaged, resulting in being less individualistic than the northern regions (Hofstede, 2023) and characterised by a Mediterranean family-oriented collectivism compared to central and north Italy (Caprara et al., 2011). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, very few studies have analysed the association of cultural values (individualism, collectivism and conformity values) with parenting and child adjustment in the Italian context.

### Cultural values in Italy

Cultural values are often used to interpret research findings in comparative studies, but some multi-country studies of cultural values involving Italian samples (e.g., Matsumoto et al., 2008) classify Italy a priori as individualistic based on Hofstede's (2023) index. However, additional insights emerge when cultural values are investigated at the individual level. Using Triandis's (1995) conceptualisation, Germani et al. (2020) found that for an Italian sample aged 14–26, higher levels of vertical individualism (i.e., the individual tendency to frequently engage in competitions with other people in an effort to rise to differentiation and higher status compared with others) characterised Italian adolescents and males more than adults and females, whereas horizontal collectivism (i.e., perceiving the self as a part of the collective, but seeing all members of the collective as the same) was higher in emerging adults than in adolescents. Moreover, among emerging adults from Italy, United Kingdom, Russia and China, a higher collectivist orientation is associated with higher life satisfaction (Germani et al., 2021).

Regarding conformity values (i.e., concerning restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses to violate social expectations or norms; Schwartz et al., 2001), many studies have been conducted in Italy using Schwartz's 10 value model. Conformity values examined longitudinally during early adolescence (10–12 years), middle adolescence (13–17 years) and young adulthood (20–28 years) showed moderate stability from early to middle adolescence (Bacchini et al., 2023; Vecchione et al., 2020) and linear growth from moderate to high endorsement during young adulthood (Vecchione et al., 2016).

### Parenting in Italy

Investigating associations between cultural values and parenting in Italy is important given the central role of family bonds in Italian culture that play a long-lasting role in children's lives, even when they reach adulthood (Manzi et al., 2006). Until the 1950s, Italian family structure showed characteristics close to those of a collectivistic culture. The “enlarged family” was prevalent,

deeply rooted within the community, composed of a wide network of family ties, hierarchically structured and highly differentiated by gender roles. However, over the last decades, remarkable changes in family structure occurred: separations and divorces progressively increased, and the birth rate constantly decreased, reaching a rate of 8.3 (per 1000 inhabitants) in 2021, one of the lowest in the world (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2022).

### Parental warmth

Although Italian mothers and fathers tend to assign high importance to warmth in their relationships with their children (Claes, 1998), cross-cultural studies comparing the mean level of parental warmth of Italian parents and parents of other countries have shown inconsistent results. For example, no differences in adolescent perceptions of parental warmth were found compared to Chinese (Chung et al., 2008) or North American (Claes et al., 2011) peers. Nevertheless, Italian mothers rated themselves as less warm than North European mothers (Perris et al., 1985), but in contrast, Raudino et al. (2013) found Italian mothers to be warmer than UK mothers.

Within the framework of the Parenting Across Cultures (PAC) study, Deater-Deckard et al. (2011) and Putnick et al. (2012) found that cross-national comparisons of warmth perceived in the relationships between parents and children were dependent on the type of informants. Italian 10-year-old children from Rome and Naples perceived similar levels of parental warmth when compared to children from Colombia, Jordan, the Philippines, Sweden and the United States, but higher levels of warmth when compared to some countries such as China, Kenya and Thailand (Deater-Deckard et al., 2011). A different picture emerged when parent reports of parental warmth were examined. In general, Italian mothers did not report different rates of warmth compared to mothers of other countries, whereas Italian fathers reported lower warmth than other countries (Putnick et al., 2012).

### Rules/limit-setting

Some cross-national comparisons of parental rule/limit-setting and monitoring of children's activities outside the home found that Italian parents exert more control and monitoring than parents of other Western countries (Claes et al., 2011; Kiesner et al., 2010). However, recent studies evidenced that parent rules/limit-setting did not show differences between Italy and other individualistic and collectivistic countries (Lansford, Rothenberg, et al., 2021). In a study analysing the normative developmental trend of an aggregated measure of mother, father and child report of parent rules/limit-setting, both in Rome and Naples, results evidenced an increase from 10 to 12 years of age and then a

decrease until age 18 (Bacchini et al., 2021), confirming in the Italian context a high investment of parents in supervising their children during early adolescence.

### **Family obligations**

Family obligations refer to parents' expectations and requests of respect and assistance of their children towards family members. Parents with higher expectations regarding family obligations tend to assign great importance to the actions of their children in supporting their relatives, such as grandparents and siblings (Fulgini et al., 1999). Although previous cross-national comparisons showed that family obligations are enhanced by positive and supportive family contexts among both individualistic and collectivistic countries (Lansford et al., 2016), different pictures emerged in the developmental trend of family obligations across cultures (Pastorelli et al., 2021). Family obligations in Italy examined longitudinally from late childhood to mid-adolescence showed a difference between Rome and Naples. Roman parents remained stable over time, but expectations regarding family obligations declined over time in Naples (Pastorelli et al., 2021).

### **Psychological control**

Psychological control involves parents' intrusive and manipulative behaviours aimed to exert power by controlling children's thoughts and feelings (Barber, 1996). A study by Basili, Zuffianò, Pastorelli, Thartori, Lunetti, Favini, Di Giunta, et al. (2021), with a sample of Italian mothers and fathers, evidenced two nuances (i.e., stable and dynamic) of longitudinal associations between mothers' and fathers' psychological control during adolescence. First, this study showed a relatively stable bidirectional influence over time, in which higher levels of maternal psychological control were associated with higher levels of fathers' psychological control over 3 years. Moreover, a more dynamic path was evidenced: when mothers tend to use more than usual intrusive and manipulative behaviours towards their children at one time point, this also reflects a higher than usual level of fathers' psychological control 1 year later (and vice versa), highlighting a process through which Italian mothers and fathers continuously influence each other in their use of psychological control towards their children during adolescence. These mother–father processes also emerged in other cultural contexts such as Colombia and United States (Basili, Zuffianò, Pastorelli, Thartori, Lunetti, Favini, Cirimele, et al., 2021).

### **Child adjustment in Italy**

Despite child adjustment being the focus of many studies in Italy, few studies have examined its relation

with cultural values. One study involving 62 countries (including Italy), found that belonging to an individualistic country (evaluated by Hofstede's index) did not predict higher levels of youth self-reported aggression but predicted higher levels of youths' aggressive behaviour as rated by principals (Bergmüller, 2013). A study with a large sample of young adults from 14 countries, including Italy, during the COVID-19 pandemic found that collectivistic values contributed positively to prosocial behaviours and negatively to depression in all countries, whereas horizontal individualism protected all youth from depression problems but only through a high level of prosocial behaviour (Padilla-Walker et al., 2022). Conformity values protected against antisocial behaviour even when accounting for other personal values (Bacchini et al., 2015). Similarly, conservatism (including conformity values) is negatively associated with bullying behaviour among Italian children (Menesini et al., 2013).

### **The present study**

Our research question was whether mothers' and fathers' individualism, collectivism and conformity values are significantly related to parenting behaviours and child adjustment during middle childhood. Both individualism and collectivism place emphasis on the family, albeit with different accents. In light of the literature, we hypothesised that collectivistic values and conformity values, both in mothers and fathers, would show positive associations with parenting behaviours aimed at maintaining the social order (family obligations), the respect of hierarchies (rules/limit-setting), and, in general, to exert control on children's autonomy (i.e., psychological control). We expected that individualistic values, both in mothers and fathers, would show positive associations with parenting behaviours aimed at recognising the individual basic needs of the children (i.e., warmth). Regarding the association with child adjustment, the literature does not give clear support in advancing specific hypotheses.

Another specific aim of our contribution was to compare two Italian samples: Rome and Naples. Regional differences have great salience in Italy, and Rome and Naples have markedly different historical roots and economic development. We expected higher levels of collectivism in southern Italy, but we did not advance specific hypotheses concerning regional differences in specific associations between values and outcomes.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

Participants from the Italian subsample of the PAC study were recruited from Naples and Rome, Italy through letters sent home from schools. Children ( $n = 194$ ;

95 from Naples and 99 from Rome; 49% girls) were 10.93 years old ( $SD = .61$ ), on average, at the time of data collection. Their mothers ( $n = 194$ ) and fathers ( $n = 152$ ) also participated. Most parents were married (79%) or cohabitating (3%) and biological parents (99%); non-residential/non-biological parents also provided data. Participants were recruited to be socioeconomically representative of Naples and Rome. Thus, at the beginning of the project, families were sampled from schools belonging to those neighbourhoods that depicted socio-economic conditions reported by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2008).

## Procedure

Measures were administered in Italian following forward- and back-translation from English language originals and methodological validation to ensure the conceptual equivalence of the instruments (Erkut, 2010). Two-hour interviews were conducted after parent consent and child assent in participant-chosen locations. Parents chose whether to complete measures orally or in writing; children completed interviews orally with an interviewer who read the question aloud, showed the child a visual depiction of the rating scales, and recorded the child's responses.

## Measures

### Parent individualism and collectivism

Mothers and fathers completed a measure of individualism and collectivism adapted from Singelis et al. (1995), Tam et al. (2003) and Triandis (1995). Parents rated the importance of different values related to their autonomy from and belonging to a social group. Parents were asked whether they 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, or 4 = *strongly agree* with each of 16 statements, 8 reflecting individualism and 8 reflecting collectivism. Examples of individualist items included "I'd rather depend on myself than others" and "My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me." Examples of collectivist items included "It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want" and "To me, pleasure is spending time with others." Items were averaged to create an individualism scale ( $\alpha = .69$  and  $.71$  for mothers and fathers, respectively) and a collectivism scale ( $\alpha = .64$  and  $.68$  for mothers and fathers, respectively).

### Parent conformity values

Mothers and fathers each rated an item developed by Schwartz et al. (2001): "I believe that people should do what they're told. I think people should follow rules at all

times, even when no one is watching." Parents responded using a 6-point scale (1 = *not like me at all* to 6 = *very much like me*).

### Parent warmth

Mothers and fathers completed the Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire-Short Form, a measure with excellent established reliability, convergent and discriminant validity, and measurement invariance that has been used in over 60 cultures worldwide and has been used successfully with Italian families by our own and other research teams (Lansford et al., 2018; Rohner, 2005). Children also provided separate ratings about their mothers' and fathers' warmth. Eight items captured parental warmth (e.g., "parents say nice things to child"). Behaviour frequency was rated on a modified 4-point scale (1 = *almost never* to 4 = *every day*). We averaged mothers' and children's ratings of mothers' warmth and averaged fathers' and children's ratings of fathers' warmth to create composite measures of *mother warmth* ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and *father warmth* ( $\alpha = .76$ ).

### Parent psychological control

Children reported on their parents' psychological control (Barber, 1996; Barber et al., 1994). Children rated seven items (e.g., "My parents act cold and unfriendly if I do something they don't like") on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). Ratings were averaged to create a composite *psychological control* scale ( $\alpha = .66$ ), with higher numbers indicating more psychological control.

### Parent rules/limit-setting

Parent rules/limit-setting was assessed by a subscale of the parental monitoring scale derived from the work of Conger et al. (1994) and Steinberg et al. (1992). This measure has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties in past studies examining both the entire PAC sample and Italian families in particular (Lansford et al., 2018). Children answered five questions that captured the frequency with which parents impose limits on their child's activities (e.g., with whom the child spends time, how the child spends his/her free time, how the child spends his/her money, where the child goes right after school and the type of homework the child receives) on a 0 = *never* to 3 = *always* scale. Items were averaged to create a composite scale for parent *rules/limit-setting* ( $\alpha = .78$ ) with higher scores indicating more parental rules/limit-setting.

### Parent family obligation expectations

Mothers, fathers and children completed the respect for family and current assistance scales of the family

obligations measure developed by Fuligni et al. (1999). The measure includes seven items assessing views about the importance of respecting the authority of elders in the family, including parents, grandparents and older siblings (e.g., Please rate how important it is to you that your child treat you with great respect/Please rate how important it is to your parents that you treat them with great respect; 1 = *not important* to 5 = *very important*) and 11 items assessing parents' expectations and children's perceptions of their parents' expectations regarding how often children should help and spend time with the family on a daily basis (e.g., Please rate how often your child is expected to help out around the house/Please rate how often your parents expect you to help out around the house; 1 = *almost never* to 5 = *almost always*). These 18 items were averaged to create a composite scale for each reporter ( $\alpha = .82, .79$  and  $.83$  for child, mother and father reports, respectively).

### **Child internalising and externalising behaviours**

Parents and children, respectively, completed the Child Behaviour Checklist and Youth Self-Report (Achenbach, 1991). Parents and children indicated whether each behaviour was 0 = *not true*, 1 = *somewhat or sometimes true* or 2 = *very true or often true*. The Achenbach measures have been translated into at least 100 languages and have been used with at least 100 cultural groups (Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment, 2016). The *Internalising Behaviour* scale was generated by summing the responses from 31 items (for parents) or 29 items (for children) including behaviours and emotions such as loneliness, self-consciousness, nervousness, sadness, feeling worthless, anxiety, withdrawn behaviour and physical problems without medical causes. The *Externalising Behaviour* scale was created by summing responses from 33 items (for parents) or 30 items (for children) including behaviours such as lying, truancy, vandalism, bullying, disobedience, tantrums, sudden mood change and physical violence. We created cross-informant composites by averaging all available reporters' scores for *internalising* ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and *externalising* ( $\alpha = .87$ ) behaviours.

### **Covariates**

Child gender and parent education (number of years of education obtained by the mother and father) were included as covariates.

### **Analytic plan**

Analyses proceeded in three steps. First, we tested for mean differences in study variables for Naples compared

to Rome. Second, we examined bivariate correlations between the cultural value variables and the parenting and child adjustment variables. Third, we conducted multiple regression analyses predicting each parenting and child adjustment variable from the three cultural value variables (i.e., individualism, collectivism and conformity) separately for mothers and fathers, controlling for child gender and parent education (mother education in the models with mothers' cultural values and father education in the models with fathers' cultural values). In initial regression models, we centred the predictor variables and created interaction terms between each centred predictor and the city (Naples or Rome) to test whether associations between cultural values and parenting and child adjustment differed for Naples compared to Rome. Except when preliminary regressions showed a significant interaction with city, the regressions reported below reflect findings from the full Italian sample.

## **RESULTS**

Descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table 1.

### **Mean differences between Naples and Rome**

As shown in Table 1, *t* tests revealed significant mean differences between Naples and Rome on 10 of the 15 variables. Mothers in Naples reported higher individualism and collectivism than did mothers in Rome. Fathers in Naples reported higher individualism, collectivism and conformity values than did fathers in Rome. Mothers and fathers in Naples were higher in reported warmth. Mothers, fathers and children all perceived parents as having higher expectations for children's family obligations in Naples than Rome. There were not significant differences in mothers' conformity values, psychological control, rules/limit-setting or child internalising or externalising behaviours.

### **Mothers' cultural values**

Bivariate correlations are shown in Table 2. Mothers' individualism was positively correlated with mothers' and fathers' higher expectations regarding children's family obligations as well as more child internalising and externalising behaviour. Mothers' higher collectivism was correlated with more maternal warmth, more parental psychological control, and mothers' and fathers' higher expectations regarding children's family obligations. Mothers' higher conformity values were correlated with more child internalising behaviour.

Results from the regression analyses are shown in Table 3. Preliminary regressions showed no significant interactions between mothers' cultural values and city

**TABLE 1**  
Descriptive statistics and tests of mean differences between Naples and Rome

Study variable	Naples		Rome		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Mother Individualism	2.74	.44	2.56	.33	3.09**
Mother Collectivism	3.29	.32	3.17	.29	2.69*
Mother Conformity	4.11	1.31	3.91	1.33	1.03
Father Individualism	2.80	.45	2.62	.32	2.67**
Father Collectivism	3.28	.30	3.15	.32	2.62**
Father Conformity	4.48	1.09	3.97	1.25	2.70**
Mother Warmth	3.72	.23	3.64	.33	2.09*
Father Warmth	3.59	.37	3.47	.40	2.15*
Parent Psychological Control	2.51	.49	2.48	.51	.46
Rules/Limit-setting	1.72	.73	1.68	.72	.34
Mother Family Obligations	4.04	.48	3.89	.41	2.39*
Father Family Obligations	3.98	.50	3.71	.43	3.52***
Child Family Obligations	4.12	.49	3.95	.47	2.56*
Child Internalising	11.43	5.32	10.76	5.64	.85
Child Externalising	10.56	4.63	9.97	5.07	.83

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**TABLE 2**  
Bivariate correlations

Parenting or child adjustment variable	Mother			Father		
	Individualism	Collectivism	Conformity	Individualism	Collectivism	Conformity
Mother Warmth	.11	.16*	-.04	-.05	-.15	-.07
Father Warmth	.11	.05	.07	.12	.15	.06
Parent Psychological Control	.13	.18*	-.02	.01	.17*	.12
Rules/Limit-setting	.09	.13	-.09	.12	.02	.03
Mother Family Obligations	.16*	.40***	.13	.16*	.20*	.17*
Father Family Obligations	.19*	.40***	-.04	.29***	.51***	.22**
Child Family Obligations	.03	.11	-.02	.08	.11	-.03
Child Internalising	.16*	.12	.15*	-.06	-.05	.16*
Child Externalising	.14*	.05	.02	.10	.10	.13

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

(Naples vs. Rome) in the prediction of parenting and child adjustment, so the tabled results are for the full Italian sample. Mothers' individualism and conformity values were not associated with any of the parenting or child adjustment variables after taking into account the other cultural values, child gender, and mothers' education. Mothers' higher collectivism was associated with more psychological control and mothers' and fathers' higher expectations regarding children's family obligations, even after taking into account the other cultural values, child gender, and mothers' education. In significant regression models, maternal warmth was higher for girls than boys, and higher maternal education was associated with less parental psychological control, lower mother and father expectations regarding children's family obligations and less child internalising behaviour.

### Fathers' cultural values

As shown in the correlations depicted in Table 2, fathers' individualism was positively correlated with mothers' and

fathers' higher expectations regarding children's family obligations. Fathers' higher collectivism was correlated with more parental psychological control and mothers' and fathers' higher expectations regarding children's family obligations. Fathers' higher conformity values were correlated with mothers' and fathers' higher expectations regarding children's family obligations and more child internalising behaviour.

Preliminary regressions showed three significant interactions between fathers' cultural values and city (Naples vs. Rome) in the prediction of parenting and child adjustment. These significant interactions are noted in Table 3, but with these three exceptions, the tabled results are for models without the interaction terms. As shown in Table 3, fathers' individualism was not associated with any of the parenting or child adjustment variables after taking into account collectivism, conformity values, child gender, and fathers' education, with the exception of being significantly associated with more father warmth in Rome but not in Naples. Fathers' higher collectivism

**TABLE 3**  
Regressions predicting parenting and child adjustment from parents' cultural values

Parenting or child adjustment variable	Mother cultural values				Father cultural values			
	Individualism	Collectivism	Conformity	F	Individualism	Collectivism	Conformity	F
Mother Warmth	.10 (.06)	.14 (.07)	-.09 (.02)	3.49**	-.01 (.06)	-.15 (.07)	-.05 (.12)	1.05
Father Warmth	.07 (.08)	.02 (.10)	.07 (.02)	1.05	.10 (.07)	.13 (.09)	.01 (.02)	2.09* <sup>a</sup>
Parent Psychological Control	.04 (.10)	.15* (.12)	-.03 (.03)	2.99*	-.10 (.11)	.14 (.14)	.10 (.04)	2.33*
Rules/Limit-setting	.05 (.15)	.13 (.18)	-.10 (.04)	1.69	.10 (.16)	-.02 (.20)	.01 (.05)	1.34
Mother Family Obligations	-.01 (.08)	.36*** (.10)	.08 (.02)	9.02***	.06 (.10)	.15 (.12)	.07 (.03)	3.02** <sup>b</sup>
Father Family Obligations	.04 (.10)	.36*** (.12)	-.04 (.03)	7.54***	.12 (.09)	.45*** (.11)	.06 (.03)	9.55*** <sup>c</sup>
Child Family Obligations	-.03 (.10)	.10 (.12)	-.03 (.03)	.88	.02 (.10)	.09 (.13)	-.09 (.03)	1.57
Child Internalising	.08 (1.08)	.06 (1.33)	.13 (.30)	3.23**	-.10 (.95)	-.07 (1.20)	.18* (.31)	1.35
Child Externalising	.09 (.97)	-.01 (1.19)	.02 (.27)	1.96	.06 (.90)	.06 (1.14)	.12 (.30)	1.35

Note: Values presented are standardised betas with standard errors in parentheses. Models control for child gender and parent education. <sup>a</sup>The model included a significant individualism  $\times$  city interaction ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ ). <sup>b</sup>The model included a significant collectivism  $\times$  city interaction ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ ). <sup>c</sup>The model included a significant collectivism  $\times$  city interaction ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ ). \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

was associated with mothers' higher expectations regarding children's family obligations (in Naples but not Rome) and fathers' higher expectations regarding children's family obligations (more strongly in Naples than Rome but significantly in both). Fathers' higher conformity values were associated with more child internalising behaviours after taking into account the other cultural values, child gender, and fathers' education. In significant regression models, mothers had lower expectations regarding sons' than daughters' family obligations, and fathers' higher education was associated with lower father expectations regarding children's family obligations.

## DISCUSSION

We examined whether mothers' and fathers' reports of their individualism, collectivism and conformity values were significantly related to dimensions of parenting (i.e., warmth, psychological control, rules/limit-setting, family obligations) and child adjustment (i.e., internalising and externalising problems) during middle childhood in Italy. Based on the markedly different historical roots and socioeconomic development of Italian regions, we also compared two Italian sites on the abovementioned associations (Rome vs. Naples). Overall, results highlighted the role of cultural values in relation to some parenting dimensions and child adjustment, as well as a few differences between Rome and Naples.

Consistent with our hypothesis, we found that mothers' collectivism was associated with child-reported parental psychological control. Thus, the more mothers assign importance to collectivistic norms, the more they exercise control over their children by encouraging them to give precedence to others' thoughts, needs and feelings and inhibiting their own. This pattern is consistent with previous studies conducted with markedly collectivistic societies (e.g., Rudy & Halgunseth, 2005), evidencing

that the use of psychological control could be an adaptive strategy for socialising children with values such as loyalty, reliance on others, and integration with the larger group (i.e., collectivism).

Moreover, in our Italian sample, parents' collectivistic values appear to fuel parental endorsement of family values. In fact, in line with our hypothesis, both mothers' and fathers' collectivist values were positively associated with expectations regarding family obligations. These results reflect previous findings that parents' collectivistic orientation drives through a strong concern for family members, valuing safeguarding of the household and prioritising the needs and duties of the family over individuals' own needs (e.g., Kâğıtçıbaşı, 1990). Likewise, Fuligni et al. (1999) evidenced the transmission of parents' values to their children, as the family could be considered the most relevant domain for conveying collectivistic values.

We found a few differences between Rome and Naples: (a) fathers' individualism was related to more warmth only in Rome and (b) fathers' collectivism was related to mothers' higher expectations regarding children's family obligations only in Naples. These results were consistent with Italian regional differences. Although mean differences between Naples and Rome showed higher levels of all cultural values among Neapolitan parents compared to Romans, previous studies on cultural values that label Italy as an individualistic culture also highlighted less individualistic tendencies in southern Italy (Hofstede, 2023). In the South, people tend to give greater attention to family networks and the group they belong to, which is visible in several social situations that remain traditional milestones of the southern culture (e.g., Sunday lunch with extended family). Our results also indicated that higher levels of Roman fathers' individualism were related to more paternal warmth. Previous research likewise found that warmth followed a different trend from middle childhood to adolescence in Roman

and Neapolitan parents (Bacchini et al., 2021), as did trajectories of family obligations (Pastorelli et al., 2021).

Lastly, our results showed that only fathers' conformity values were related to more child internalising problems, beyond the co-occurrence of other values and family contextual variables (e.g., parental education). Although Italian families are in a transition phase to modernity, in which fathers are gradually assuming more responsibility in childrearing domains, our result still reflects fathers' traditional role within Italian families. Fathers are still seen as a "distant" authority (Crespi et al., 2016) who teaches children strictness and demands obedience to family and societal norms. Thus, fathers characterised by greater conformity values may impose stricter norms and rules and leave little room for children's expression of opinions and feelings (Sillars et al., 2014), ultimately contributing to children's withdrawal from social situations, feelings of insecurity, and anxiety.

Despite the strengths of including data from children, mothers and fathers from two cultural groups within Italy, the present study has some limitations that should be considered. First, although our sample is from two different regions of Italy, we did not consider samples from markedly individualistic Northern regions of Italy. Moreover, although we recruited families from different socioeconomic levels of both Naples and Rome, our convenience sample is not nationally representative. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the present study did not allow us to interpret long-term or causal effects. Because many theories posit that more distal factors, such as cultural values, mildly influence behaviours and attitudes over a short-term period, we encourage future studies to explore this topic from a longitudinal perspective.

Despite these limitations, our results have several implications. We highlighted the coexistence of individualism, collectivism and conformity values at the individual level among Italians. Moreover, we suggest focusing more on the nuances of cultural values within countries. Finally, we highlight relations of parental values with parenting and children's adjustment, stressing the importance of studying in depth the role of parents' cultural values in relation to family functioning in Italy.

## COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

All procedures performed involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee at Rome University "La Sapienza" and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

## INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all individual adult participants included in the study; assent was obtained from children.

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