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**Family tourism perceptions: Are there differences between Portuguese fathers and mothers?**

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**Abstract:**

Research on family tourism indicates the existence of distinct perceptions between fathers and mothers regarding effects and motivations. While some studies suggest these differences, a comprehensive comparative and quantitative analysis is lacking in the current literature. Therefore, the present chapter aims to explore differences between mothers' and fathers' perspectives on family tourism motivations and effects (on individuals and on the family), using a comparative and broader perspective. A quantitative approach was taken, and a survey (N=816) was conducted with Portuguese families with children, in order to test whether differences exist between mothers and fathers regarding those aspects. Results reveal differences in family tourism motivations and the effects of family tourism on individuals and the family when considering mothers' or fathers' perspectives. Results also highlight the need to adapt the type of holiday to each family when the objective is to maximize the positive effects of family tourism.

**Keywords:** family tourism; mothers/fathers; tourism effects; tourism motivations

## **Introduction**

Family plays a crucial role in society as the most determining social unit, significantly contributing to individual personal and social development (Agate et al., 2007). Despite evolving societal norms and the emergence of diverse types of family structures, the significance of families in shaping society persists, and families remain dynamic entities characterized by unique life stories emerging from biological and/or emotional connections among members who coexist for a defined and prolonged period (Agate et al., 2007).

In the last ten years, a significant volume of research has been published on family tourism (e.g., Chen et al., 2022; Gram et al., 2018; Li et al., 2017; Lima et al., 2018, 2023), but several dimensions of this kind of holiday remain pathways for future research (Qiao et al., 2022). Qiao et al. (2022) and Miyakawa and Oguchi (2022) concluded that the research topic has changed over time, ranging from family travel decision-making, participation, and experience to, since 2012, new research topics such as family tourism destinations and different family tourism types, often associated with learning benefits for children. In the last five years, “motivation” and “benefit” appeared as emerging themes, as new attention was paid to the travel motivations and effects of family tourism on disadvantaged families as well as the broader significance of family travel (Qiao et al., 2022).

Indeed, family tourism offers an interruption from daily routines, creating space for enhanced family interaction and cohesion (Lehto et al., 2009). Consequently, most studies indicate positive effects of tourism on families’ quality of life, particularly in areas such as family interaction, relationship improvement, and relief from daily stressors (e.g., Chen et al., 2022; Gram, 2005; Letho et al., 2009; Lima et al., 2018, 2023). An interesting result from an existing study relates to the differences in the perspectives of mothers and fathers regarding family tourism motivations and the effects of family tourism on individuals and the family as a unit (Lima et al., 2023). Although previous research in tourism already recognizes these different perspectives (Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017), there are no studies, to our knowledge, that analyse in detail the differences between fathers and mothers in terms of motivations and the effects of family tourism. The present chapter aims to

explore these differences, using a comparative and broader perspective, with results from a survey (N=816) of Portuguese families with children.

The following sections aim to reflect on the literature on family tourism, its effects, and motivations, present the chosen methodology for collecting data from families with children, and analyse different perceptions from mothers and fathers regarding motivations, past tourist practices, and their perceived effects (on their individual lives and their families). Some implications that these findings may have in the future are also presented.

(...)

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Concerning the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the participants' families, most respondents are female, reflecting the predominance of women as those responsible for the education of children in Portugal. Also, the surveyed mothers tend to integrate more into the “divorced/separated” group and to be more concentrated in households with lower incomes than the surveyed fathers.

All the respondents indicated a high level of importance for all the presented motivations, with the motivations related to breaking the routine and relaxing and the emotional connection with family having the highest importance. Mothers tend to feel a higher level of intensity in all the motivations to go on a family holiday than fathers. Regarding the most important family tourism motivation, a difference stands out: Mothers refer, in the first place, to “strengthening family bonds/improving the relationship between family members.” In contrast, fathers refer, in the first place, to “regain strength.” These results align with the literature published on differences between mothers and fathers regarding preferences, experiences, and effects of tourism trips on families (Lima et al., 2023; Chevtaeva & Guillet, 2023).

Concerning the effects of tourism on the family, the one that respondents agree most strongly with relates to “Strengthening the family’s emotional bond,” which corroborates the results of other studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2022; Gram, 2005; Lehto et al., 2009). The effect that both parents recognized in the first place was that the last family holiday “gave us the opportunity to create good and/or fun memories,” with mothers feeling this effect

more intensely than fathers. Mothers also felt a greater intensity of “QoL Improvement & Increase in Socialisation” in the family than fathers.

Analysing the effects of family tourism on individuals, improving professional activity, and negative effects were the types of effects that respondents disagreed with as a result of their last family holiday. Respondents agree more strongly with the occurrence of effects in terms of relaxation and health (contrary to what was reported by Gram et al., 2018), learning about new situations, and changing attitudes/behaviours (as reported in studies for specific types of families, e.g., Minnaert et al., 2009, 2010). While the first type of effect confirms that the benefits sought have been achieved because they meet the most important motivations for the respondents (break from routine and relaxation), the second and third types of effect seem to confirm the importance of family tourism as an instrument for learning and changing behaviour, even when the motivation for the trip is not related to knowledge. Regarding the different perceptions between the two genders, “forget the family problems,” “contributed to starting new behaviours/habits, which I have maintained back home”, “allowed me to re-establish relationships with the people I care about,” and “stimulated my curiosity to learn new things” were felt with greater intensity by mothers than fathers. Fathers felt more than mothers the negative effect of “made me feel unable to solve problems.”

Interpreting the obtained results requires some caution, as it is important to recognize some limitations. These limitations are the pre-COVID-19 data collection, the study's limited regional scope, and the fact that the sample included more mothers than fathers. However, this study attempted to implement rigorous and original methodologies, namely the study of the effects of family tourism on individuals and families according to different perspectives. The results encourage future research to include more voices of fathers and single parents when studying family tourism, which aligns with the recommendation of Schänzel and Yeoman (2014) and Miyakawa and Oguchi (2022). These authors recognized that future research needs to consider different types of family compositions and family tourism, enabling a deeper knowledge of the benefits of family tourism.

The fact that data were collected in a pre-COVID-19 period is believed to have few implications on the interpretation of the results, as holidays have been altered in terms of, for example, the type of holidays desired and the potential fear associated with travelling. However, the one big difference, not related to the pandemics, is that single-parent

families (and other types of families different than the traditional ones) are increasing in society (Eurofound, 2019; Eurostat, 2021) and the role of fathers in the education/lives of children is becoming closer to the one traditionally assumed by mothers. The results from this study demonstrate the differences between fathers and mothers in terms of perceptions of family travel motivations and the effects of family tourism on individual members and the family as a unit. Future research will benefit from a longitudinal approach to clarify if those differences are disappearing due to the greater involvement of fathers in the children's lives. In this context, understanding families' past and current tourism behaviour may also help design future travel experiences that better suit families' and societies' future needs.

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