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Beliefs scale about children's rights to participation for professionals: An exploratory study

Beatriz Sofia Mendes Oliveira

Master's in Community Psychology, Children and Youth at Risk

Advisor: Joana Celeste Dias Alexandre, Assistant Professor, Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

Co-advisor: Dinis Marques Francisco Lopes, Associate Professor (with habilitation), Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

September, 2025



CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS  
E HUMANAS

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Department of Social and Organizational Psychology

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*“Recognizing that the child, for the harmonious development of their personality, should grow up in a family environment, in a climate of happiness, love, and understanding”*

(Organização das Nações Unidas [ONU], 2019, p.16)



## **Dedictory**

To all children and their families, who are the core of our work and should always be protected, respected and supported.



## Acknowledgements

Throughout my academic journey, many people have been involved in providing the support I have always needed.

Thank you to my supervisors, who accompanied me throughout this process until the final moment of submission. Without your feedback, sharing of ideas, and help, the process would have been more complicated.

To Bea, for being by my side since we were 14, making us as close as we can be. For always being present and available to listen to my ramblings and for giving me opinions and advice on various matters. Thank you for everything you have done and continue to do to this day.

To Rui, who adopted me alongside Bea, and has supported me whenever possible (including with dissertation related matters). Count on me to always be at your house and bring you a sweet treat.

To Duarte, thank you for your humor and kindness, which have always been present. For always listening whenever I needed it and for getting frustrated with me.

To Jael, my childhood friend, who has remained a constant in my life and is always ready to support me and go out together, even when the conversations become repetitive. Thank you for being here and for making me feel that I can always count on you.

To Luana, who has been with me since our undergraduate days, and despite choosing different specializations, we have maintained our connection for any and all kinds of support. For sharing the same humor as I do and for us judging each other. For sharing similar interests and exchanging our thoughts.

To NIJ Oeiras, who welcomed me with open arms from day one, giving me an incredible space to learn, make mistakes, ask questions, and experiment. For accompanying me during this phase of my life and for always doing so with care and readiness. For making my internship colorful and turning it into a space where I was happy to be. You allowed me to grow in many ways.

To my pets: Daisy, a beautiful brown Labrador with one less neuron but overflowing with love and joy; Cléo, a Siamese cat, whom I call my son, and who could be considered to have a master's degree in psychology for being by my side since the beginning, always giving me love (and sudden bites); and Mika, an orange cat who definitely has fewer neurons than Daisy and came to disrupt the household order but brings joy and love wherever she goes. Also, to Pérola, a cat who left too soon but was with me from childhood until she was 14, giving me

so much love (especially with her extended bites on my eyebrow and the comfort of her snout on my neck).

To Tomás, my younger brother, who was spoiled by me and now I suffer the consequences. He has always had a protective instinct towards me and trusted me when he needed to. For the random laughs we share over things that probably weren't even that funny. I believe you have a bright future ahead, so keep working towards it.

Finally, but most importantly, to my parents. You have always been present in every stage of my life. Thank you for listening to me talk about things that don't interest you at all but pretend that you do. For supporting my drastic decisions to seek life experiences that fulfill me. For loving me unconditionally and for simply being there. Thank you.

## **Abstract**

Within the framework of an approach that must ensure the child's right to participation, it is important to analyze the professionals' perspective on this matter, considering that their beliefs may shape the decision-making regarding the child hearing. Although instruments already exist to access these beliefs, the main goal of the current study is to validate scales that captures professionals' beliefs about child participation fitting the Portuguese context, starting from literature review about existing instruments, followed by individual interviews (phase 1: N = 5) with professionals from the Portuguese child protection system with whom items were discussed, in order to capture content validity. In a second phase a quantitative study was conducted, and scales were administered to 99 professionals (e.g., judges, case manager technicians, psychologists, social educators, psychology interns, and social workers). Overall, the results indicate some ambivalence in terms of perceptions: on one hand, there is agreement on the need for skills to hear children (in judicial and non-judicial settings) and on the development of a culture of participation. On the other hand, there seems to be no agreement that children should always be heard (with reservations about their inclusion or not in the process) and that their opinion does not influence the decision to be made.

This study contributed to a greater understanding about the beliefs that professionals in the Portuguese promotion and protection system hold about the child's participation right, based on scales revised by experts, which allows for some considerations for professional practice.

**Keywords:** Participation, Promotion and Protection System, Children, Beliefs

### **Categories and classification codes of APA:**

**2956** Childrearing and Child Care

**3373** Community and Social Services



## **Resumo**

No âmbito de uma abordagem que deve garantir o direito da criança à participação, é importante analisar a perspectiva dos profissionais sobre esta matéria, considerando que as suas crenças podem moldar a tomada de decisão relativamente à audição da criança. Embora já existam instrumentos para aceder a estas crenças, o principal objetivo do presente estudo é validar escalas que capturem as crenças dos profissionais sobre a participação da criança, adaptadas ao contexto português, partindo de uma revisão da literatura sobre instrumentos existentes, seguida de entrevistas individuais (fase 1: N = 5) com profissionais do sistema português de proteção de crianças com quem os itens foram discutidos, de modo a captar a validade de conteúdo. Numa segunda fase, foi realizado um estudo quantitativo, e as escalas foram aplicadas a 99 profissionais (por exemplo, juízes, técnicos de caso, psicólogos, educadores sociais, estagiários de psicologia e assistentes sociais). No geral, os resultados indicam alguma ambivalência em termos de perceções: por um lado, há concordância sobre a necessidade de competências para ouvir as crianças (em contextos judiciais e não judiciais) e sobre o desenvolvimento de uma cultura de participação. Por outro lado, parece não haver concordância de que as crianças devam ser sempre ouvidas (com reservas sobre a sua inclusão ou não no processo) e de que a sua opinião não influencia a decisão a ser tomada.

Este estudo contribuiu para uma maior compreensão sobre as crenças que os profissionais do sistema português de promoção e proteção detêm sobre o direito de participação da criança, com base em escalas revistas por peritos, o que permite algumas considerações para a prática profissional.

***Palavras-chave:*** Participação, Sistema de Promoção e Proteção, Crianças, Crenças

### **Categorias e códigos de classificação APA:**

**2956** Educação e Cuidados Infantis

**3373** Serviços Comunitários e Sociais



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## Introduction

The promotion and protection system is a system that operates according to a signaling-investigation method (Keddell, 2022). Under Portuguese law (Law no. 147/99, of 1 September — Law for the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger), children are granted the right to be heard and to participate in both judicial and non-judicial proceedings that affect them, in accordance with their age and maturity. Yet, despite being enshrined in law, the effective participation of children is not always considered by professionals in the promotion and protection System. Professionals' beliefs about child participation can influence this decision hindering the fulfillment of this right (Seim & Slettebø, 2017).

Their right to participation is often sidelined to ensure their protection and to reduce the likelihood of secondary victimization or exposure to stressful situations (Kosher and Ben-Arieh, 2019).

Regarding the principle of the best interests of the child, some authors argue that “principle in most legislation prioritizes adult views of children’s interests over their own perspectives” (Archard & Skivenes, 2009 as cited in Keddell, 2023, p.2). However, it is important to mention that the Portuguese law of child protection shows a different perspective, with the child necessities being the main core of the intervention (Art. 4º, Child and Youth Protection Act, 1999). But how do professionals perceive child participation?

Recently Magalhães et al. (2024) in a study with 87 professionals from residential care analyzed their perceptions about children’s right to participation in that context. They found three types of professionals: the ones that state that children should have a *full participation* (e.g., in all their activities), the ones (the majority) who argue in favor of a *Participation in the Case Plan*; and finally the ones (in a lower number) who have an ambiguous view about how children’s participation might work.

This study aims to understand the beliefs of professionals working in the child protection system regarding children’s participation.

Regarding the structure, the present dissertation is organized into four chapters. The first chapter comprehends a legal contextualization of child participation, its theoretical framework, the consequences of children not being heard and the impact of professionals’ beliefs in children participation. The second chapter details a qualitative study while the third chapter details a quantitative one. Chapter four provides a discussion of the results from both studies, limitations and recommendations for future studies.



## **Chapter 1: Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Legal framework and guidelines**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was developed in 1989, brought to light several concepts about the child and family, such as dignity, freedom, equal rights, justice, human value, social progress and protection and assistance, since family is the core where children grow up safe, learn and take a place in society. With these topics arising, the protection of the family and the child became even more important, since “the child, due to his or her lack of physical and intellectual maturity, has a need for special protection and care, in particular adequate legal protection, both before and after birth” (UNICEF, 2019b, p.6).

It is also important to mention that the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union brought the first detailed provisions on children's rights at the constitutional level within the European Union, solidifying the need to protect and care for them (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union: In Simplified Language, 2012).

Later, within the Council of Europe, several principles in favor of children were defined, such as the legal status of children born outside of marriage, the emergence of a convention on adoption matters, personal relationships, the exercise of children's rights and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (Lanzarote Convention, 2007).

The Istanbul Convention also emerged, which is the first legally binding instrument for the prevention and combat of domestic violence and other types of violence against women (including children) (Istanbul Convention, 2011), as well as the Brussels II-A Regulation regarding cross-border disputes, addressing jurisdiction, recognition, and enforcement of decisions in marital matters and Regulation of Parental Responsibility (Council Regulation No. 2201/2003 of November 27, 2003, concerning jurisdiction, recognition, and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and matters of parental responsibility, and repealing Council Regulation No. 1347/2000, 2003), including international child abduction (Regulation (EU) 2019/1111 of the Council of June 25, 2019, concerning jurisdiction, recognition, and enforcement of decisions in matrimonial matters and matters of parental responsibility, and international child abduction, 2003) and maintenance obligations (Council Regulation No. 4/2009 of December 18, 2008, concerning jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition and enforcement of decisions, and cooperation in matters of maintenance obligations, 2009).

Dated October 21<sup>st</sup> 1990, marking the ratification of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Portugal, this document established that entities

are “legally responsible for ensuring the realization of children’s rights and for all actions taken concerning children” (Albuquerque, 2000, cited in Tarouca and Pires, 2019, p.1; Ministério Público, n.d). This shift in the legal framework transformed the perspective on children from one of minority status to one recognizing them as bearers of rights. Minority status, therefore, came to be considered as referring to those who are incapable of exercising their rights independently, requiring a third party to act on their behalf and in their interest (Civil Code, 2019). The convention thus enabled the development of four fundamental pillars: “non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, survival and development, and the child’s opinion” (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2017). In parallel, International Labour Organization Convention No. 138 defined a minimum age for employability to prevent child labor (Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho [DGERT], 2024).

These changes reinforced the need for children to grow up in an environment that provides them with the care and conditions necessary for their normal physical and psychological development, which will have an impact on the adult they will become (Tarouca and Pires, 2019).

It is also important to mention that the Child and Youth Protection Act in Portugal follows all the international normatives and acts, adapting them whenever they are needed (Child and Youth Protection Act, 1999).

In Portugal, there are numerous organizations focused on raising awareness about children's rights, especially the right to participation, creating accessible tools for both children and parents or professionals, while also providing all necessary information. Some of these examples include the Child and Youth Protection Commission (The Rights of Children - National Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Children and Youth, n.d.), International Amnesty (Children's Rights - They Must Be Protected, 2023), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2019), and the Public Prosecutor's Office.

Still within the scope of tools to promote children’s right to participation, there is Project 12 developed in Portugal by National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Adolescents<sup>1</sup>, which provides resources and information for children and youths aged 3 to 14 years, as well as for professionals. The goal is to inform children and youths in an accessible and age-appropriate way through videos and texts that

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<sup>1</sup> In partnership with ISCTE-IUL – Lisbon University Institute of Lisbon and Logframe - Consulting and training. This project was co-funded by the European Commission and in the scope of the program Rights, Equality and Citizenship, that has the goal of contributing to an accessible and adequate justice for children.

explain the entire process, the people who may be involved, and their rights. For professionals, it offers resources on how to facilitate activities with children and youths, highlights the importance of listening, outlines necessary precautions, and presents the legal framework (“CNPDPJ [Comissão Nacional de Proteção dos Direitos e Proteção das Crianças e Jovens], n.d; “Projeto 12 - Justiça para Crianças”, 2022).

Also, it is important to mention Article 12, that highlights the right of children and young people to participate, stating that

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (UNICEF, 2019, p.13).

This goes in accordance with UNICEF, that states that the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting them, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law (UNICEF, 2019, p.12).

It is also important to mention that there are some European child-friendly justice guidelines developed in 2010 that reinforce the stance that adapting the justice system is necessary in order for children to be able to understand what is happening and also, to adapt justice in accordance with their needs (Council of Europe, n.d).

The guidelines promote the principles of the best interests of the child, care and respect, participation, equal treatment and the rule of law. They also encourage the development of multidisciplinary approaches and training and require states to provide safeguards at all stages of proceedings (Council of Europe, n.d).

These guidelines state that children should be considered in all matters that concern them, giving them the opportunity to participate, while also giving importance to their opinion, having their human rights such as respect and equal treatment always respected, professionals should choose approaches that are adequate to the children's needs and characteristics and, in court, multidisciplinary approaches should be taken in order to assess children's situation (Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Child-Friendly Justice, 2024).

It is also stated that children should not suffer from discrimination of any kind (e.g. Ethnicity, social status, gender), and that assistance should be provided if the child is in a vulnerable situation (e.g. refugee, homeless, living in a residential institution) (Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Child-Friendly Justice, 2024).

Lastly, as it is for adults, children should also have the right to be presumed innocent, to have legal advice and a fair trial, as well as access to complaints mechanisms (Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Child-Friendly Justice, 2024).

## **2.2. Theoretical approaches about children participation**

In the 1970s, Roger Hart presented a perspective on the participation of children, aiming to illustrate the various forms of participation by using a metaphor for a participation ladder. However, this should not be understood as a gradual increase in involvement but rather different types of child-adult interaction (Hart, 2005 as cited in Hart 2008; Hart, 2008), as well as the different ways in which adults and institutions can foster participation (Hart, 2004).

The idea of the ladder helps to illustrate the different levels of involvement for children, from the least involved (the base of the ladder) to the most involved (the top of the ladder), as they do not have the same level of involvement throughout the participation process, nor do they experience the same degree of permission and support in their participation. The idea is to inform children that there are various types of involvement, so they can choose the level they feel most comfortable with, based on their skills and self-confidence throughout the phases of the process (Hart, 2008). “It is not appropriate that some children feel that they must always only follow the initiative of others any more than it is good for any child to feel that they should always be a leader” (Hart, 2008, p. 7).

Hart (2008) suggests that gradually, adults allow children, as they grow, to have more space to participate. However, he mentions that this phenomenon is less visible in minority countries, so differences in socialization and how children are taught about this right must be considered.

It is important to note that, according to Hart (1979, 2000) and Corsaro (2003), informal participation between peers of the same age or with adults should also be considered, as it impacts how children behave in formal participation contexts. It is in these informal settings where children develop their skills.

Furthermore, it is equally important to determine how adults provide space for children to participate, as this action is influenced by the cultural context in which they are situated and the adults with whom they interact (Hart, 1992). This has a theoretical anchor in developmental psychology, through learning via interaction (Vygotsky 1978; Rogoff 1990 cited in Hart, 2008; Valsiner 2000, cited in Hart, 2008).

The context to which children belong, therefore, influences the degree of opportunity for participation. According to Hart (2004), in more urban contexts, children have their lives more planned by adults, leaving little room for them to take the initiative in participating in the various activities they may be involved in.

Ryan and Deci (2000) also brought the Self-Determination Theory, that states that the social condition where humans are inserted influences their role in terms of passivity, proactivity and alienation, and that humans have three needs: autonomy, competency and belonging (others relatedness). According to this theory, social-contextual conditions influence psychological development, motivation, regulation and well-being. When the context is favorable/positive when it comes to promoting autonomy and competence, motivation and the ability to internalize and integrate information is stimulated as well as emotion/behavior regulation. Whereas, in the opposite environment, it diminishes its' appearance and the ability to feel that needs are fulfilled (Ryan and Deci, 2000). This goes in accordance with Hart's stance, that children's participation and their role in this process is determined by the context they are raised in and how adults facilitate (or not) this participation (Hart, 2008).

In this way, child participation can be understood as a series of steps that range from problem definition to making a decision aimed at addressing the problem (Vis et al., 2010). These steps include the need to inform the child about the details and planning of the process that involves them, as well as how it will affect their life (1) in a suitable environment for this purpose (2), enabling the child to express their opinion (3), so that this opinion can be considered during the decision-making process (4), and subsequently communicating the decision made back to the child (Strandbu, 2004; Sinclair & Boushel, 1998).

The process is further reinforced by Middel et al. (2021), who highlight that, regardless of their age, children should receive as much information as possible to form an opinion. Additionally, it is essential that this opinion carries weight in the decision-making process by the services and that they receive feedback on the progression of their case.

Regarding the conceptualization of the process itself, some perspectives mentioned in van Bijleveld et al. (2013) study include viewing it as an opportunity for children to express their views on the situation, a moment when the child can indeed share their opinion (although it may not be considered), or simply as an act of seeing the child.

The concept of participation was initially guided by a hierarchical perspective, which dictated how it should be carried out (Arnstein, 1969, as cited in Middel et al., 2021).

The order was determined according to the importance of the actions, with this being: “informing, consulting, and delegating power to the people” (Middel et al., 2021, pp.3-4).

This hierarchy has undergone updates, with the participation of the child becoming increasingly important within the framework order of the model. Ultimately, it has been concluded that the process of child participation should not be organized based on levels of greater or lesser importance, as all forms of participation are equally significant (Charles & Haines, 2014, as cited in Middel et al., 2021).

According to Lundy’s (2007) model, children’s participation must include four factors, such as space, voice, audience and influence, being space and voice the opportunity to express their views and audience and influence being the right to have their views given due weight. The author also correlates this model with article 2 (non-discrimination), article 3 (best interests), article 5 (right to guidance from adults), article 9 (right to be safe) and article 13 (right to information), since article 12 cannot be interpreted by its own, meaning that it should be read alongside with rights protected in the Convention.

### **2.3. Data about children’s participation**

In another study conducted in the Adoption Proceedings Court in 1996, 50% of children’s opinions were considered, and very vague expressions/quotations from the children were used (Selwyn, 1996, as cited in Sinclair and Boushel, 1998). Two years later, a study conducted by the National Children’s Bureau revealed that the participation of children varied significantly by age, with greater involvement among children over the age of 8 and very little involvement of those under this age (Sinclair & Boushel, 1998).

These beliefs are not limited to child protection services but also extend to other contexts, such as the criminal justice system. In another study conducted by Thomas and O’Kane (1999), it was observed that the percentage of children under the age of 10 who are heard on criminal proceedings involving them is very low. Some factors that reduce children’s participation include the complexity of the case and the existence of conflict between the child’s family and the authorities. However, these authors highlighted that some progress was being made, with professionals aiming to empower children: certain organizations are demonstrating a commitment to reducing the lack of participation, and some law enforcement agencies are beginning to promote the right to participation and legal representation.

Fifteen years later, in 2014, Bucknall conducted a study in which he found that even though children are being heard, they still feel that their opinion is not being considered,

which results in feelings of their voices not making a difference in their life decisions, meaning that the role of children still have some constraints (Costa & Sani, 2024).

Also van Bijleveld et al. (2013), like Thomas and O’Kane (1999), also mentioned that the case content influenced children’s participation in terms of its complexity. But, even though 14 years after this is still a criterion, professionals are adapting their stance, with them considering that, even though the case topic might be sensitive, children must participate, while having their protection in mind by adjusting their data collection methods (Bennouna et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, in 2024, the European Union states that the data about participation is still unclear, since there is no clear evidence that children are participating (European Union, 2024). Additionally, there are studies that show that children feel that their needs are not being fulfilled, since their opinion is not being considered (Diaz et al., 2019), with children in foster care feeling like they must accept whichever decision adults make (Muench et al., 2017). This means that there is still a gap in terms of compliance with the right to participate.

### **2.3. The concept of childhood, professionals’ beliefs and their consequences to child participation**

The perspective on the concept of childhood is a factor that influences child participation (Sanders & Mace, 2006; Wyness, 2006). These different perspectives are influenced by beliefs held by professionals regarding the inclusion of children in the process, thereby impacting their methodologies of practice (Ariès, 1996, as cited in Vis et al., 2010; Lee, 2001, as cited in Vis et al., 2010).

Beliefs are a “psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour” (Alexander et al., 2022, p.2). Unlike attitudes, beliefs are developed according to each individual's subjective experience and are conscious (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007 cited in Alexander et al., 2022).

Vis et al. (2010) observed that some obstacles like “difficulties associated with establishing communication with children in order to elicit and interpret their true feelings, (2) protectionism putting emphasis on protecting rather than empowering children and (3) the degree to which the social worker was advocating the participation principle” (p. 10) influenced how professionals included children in their hearing process.

Lee (2001, as cited in Vis et al., 2010) mentions that these beliefs can be divided into two categories: children as agents of change *versus* as objects of change. This means

that childhood can be seen in two main lenses: the *liberalist position*, where the child is seen as capable of making decisions independently, and the *paternalist position*, where adults are viewed as the only agents capable of making decisions on their behalf (Opdal, 2008, as cited in Vis et al., 2010; Middel et al., 2021).

These differing beliefs influence how professionals approach their cases, often creating a pendulum between including or excluding children in matters that may be considered adult issues. This is partly motivated by a desire to protect the children (Vis et al., 2010; Shemmings, 2000, as cited in Vis et al., 2010; Davidson et al., 2017, as cited in Middel et al., 2021) or by recognizing these matters as areas where they have the capacity to contribute to their own well-being (Vis et al., 2010).

In the study of Križ and Roundtree-Swain (2017), it was shown that children felt that their opinion was taken more seriously as they got older (with 14 years old being the point in which children had access to their case information and, therefore, participate) and that children had a higher chance of being heard if professionals saw them as deserving of support, as well as when they showed respect for them and improvement in their behavior. Children also stated that, once they were labeled as bad kids, they did not have many chances (or none) to participate. Another aspect that influenced their participation was the degree in which they had the ability to self-advocate, with those with a higher ability being more heard.

This information reinforces the idea that different beliefs may impact the methodology used in child protection processes, as well as the lens in which children are seen by professionals, with the intervention design being affected, once it may not be the most suitable to the needs of the child (Vis et al., 2011, as cited in Middel et al., 2021), and there may be failures in the intervention (Middel et al., 2021) since children are not being heard or, in the other hand, their opinion is not being considered.

#### **2.4. Consequences of children being heard or not**

In the study by van Bijleveld et al. (2013), which interviewed children about their participation, it was concluded that few children reported being heard on only a few occasions or not having had the opportunity to be heard, leading to them not knowing what would happen with their lives. This resulted in a sense that their personal well-being and opinions were not taken into account, a lack of power, frustration that led to resistance behaviors, and a subsequent decrease in self-esteem. These feelings of powerlessness stem from children not knowing what will happen to their lives (Cossar et al., 2016, as cited in

Middel et al., 2021) since there was no explanation or preparation before being heard (Faria, 2024), which also leads to mistrust toward professionals (Bouma, 2019, as cited in Middel et al., 2021) and feelings of fear (Križ & Roundtree-Swain, 2017)

Regarding children who reported being heard, they feel there is a more positive relationship with the case manager (van Bijleveld et al., 2013), especially if they were accompanied by a professional they considered trustworthy, leading to them feeling more calm (Faria, 2024); a more positive view of the protection system and decisions made (Melo & Sani, 2017); in cases of residential placement, the relationship was more positive, and even if the decisions did not align with the child's opinion, their behavior was more positive because they had the opportunity to express themselves regarding their life (van Bijleveld et al., 2013). In cases of family reunification, this was more stable and positive, and participation increased the overall well-being of the children, fostering the development of their role as active members of the community (Dedding et al., 2013, as cited in Middel et al., 2021; Loyd & Emerson, 2017).

However, it is not always possible to prioritize the relationship between the professional and the child due to issues such as deadlines, bureaucracy, matters within the process that require more attention, case volume, stress management, and also the management of opinions from higher authorities (e.g., supervisors) or the media when the methodology adopted for a particular case does not align with expectations, making the child's hearing a secondary criterion (Van Bijleveld et al., 2013).

Still, it is still important to increase the focus on hearing the child, primarily related to building a relationship that allows the process to proceed as quickly as possible and to minimize secondary victimization, as the child's perspective on their participation will have long-term effects, even into adulthood (Van Bijleveld et al., 2013).

Having these consequences in mind, the study of Correia et al. (2024) highlights the importance of child participation, having found that children's socio-emotional development is linked to participation practices (e.g. ensuring child participation, freedom and choice autonomy), with children's perceptions having a mediating role in this relation in the educational context. This means that promoting a safe space for children to express themselves and having opportunities to do so, increases their self-concept development and the perception of having a role in their environment. This can also be projected into the child protection services, since children play an important role in their process.

In accordance with Correia et al. (2024), in a scope review made by Skauge et al. (2021), they found that child participation contributes to child's development in terms of

their well-being and confidence, with these results showing up in 23 countries. Additionally, it contributes to developing children's resilience (Van Bijleveld et al. 2014), autonomy (Križ & Roundtree-Swain, 2017), health, possible abuse prevention abuse (Vis et al., 2012; Cossar et al., 2014) and their own responsibility, resulting in better choices as adults and future preparation (Mitchell et al., 2010; Van Bijleveld et al., 2014).

Child participation is also important for intervention planning because they are going to be designed in accordance with children's needs (Archard & Skivenes, 2009), resulting in them feeling more connected to the decisions made (Woolfson et al., 2010) and better acceptance of them (Van Bijleveld et al., 2014).

In Portugal, Melo and Sani (2015) conducted a study about child participation in their judicial processes and found that children find important that professionals hear them, since it is a way for them to tell their stories, to get to know them and to understand them better. Professionals also shared the same stance about the importance of their participation, saying that they are the core piece of their own life and story, hence the importance of aligning ideas and future decisions. However, there is still some children that shared their lack of hope in sharing their opinion, since they feel that professionals think that children do not have a voice or power. The authors also believe that those children who did not accept the court decision may have not had their right to participate.

## **2.5. Child Participation in the Portuguese Context**

In the Portuguese context, Castro (2010) demonstrates that the implementation of children's right to participation is still not being properly followed in the judicial context due to issues such as (1) non-standardized procedures, (2) professionals adopting paternalistic and condescending behaviors towards children and (3) not including children due to protectionist views related to age/maturity. The author adds that these settings are thus a reproducer(s) of prejudices, perpetuator(s) of an endemic culture of non-participation. By not ensuring compliance with children's rights, they contribute to their repeated violation – whenever they do not listen to, hear or consider the contributions made by all children, who are integral parts of their legal proceedings.

In Carvalho's (2024) study, it is possible to observe that, in the context of the Child and Youth Protection Commission, professionals report gaining experience in listening to children throughout their professional practice. Additionally, 31.9% of participants report conducting interviews when they consider it necessary or relevant to the issue at hand, taking age and maturity into account as decision-making criteria (although this was a

question with unclear answers). This reveals that the training of professionals is still an area with shortcomings, meaning that the practice of listening to children may be compromised due to a lack of adequate tools, and it also suggests that other factors may influence the decision-making process.

Moreover, participants in the study identify physical and material conditions as barriers, as well as the need for specialized training in this area to prepare professionals for listening to children of different ages and developmental stages, something that is considered essential for this practice and is widely supported by the theoretical framework presented earlier (Council of Europe, 2013; Carvalho, 2024).

As also mentioned in Carvalho's (2024) study, factors such as protectionism and procedural volume may hinder the fulfillment of this right, which calls for further investigation into this aspect.

It is also important to study the judicial aspect, since, according to Gonçalves' (2018) study, judicial auditors seem to rely on heuristics of availability, representativeness, and anchoring-adjustment when making decisions regarding the characteristics of a process, even when they believe they do not have all the materials/resources necessary to form a reasoned decision. This can be justified by the need to find an underlying logic for the situation, leading them to use prior knowledge (e.g., similar cases) to form their opinion. In this way, the information becomes consistent and true or false, depending on the context (Pelisoli & Dell'Aglio, 2016; Pennington & Hastie, 1988). Although the study addresses the issue of sexual abuse, the conclusions drawn can be connected to the topic of children participation, as the author highlights the need for academic training focused on forensic interviewing, as well as addressing (implicit or explicit) beliefs about the issue, as these may introduce bias into decision-making and the development of tools to assist in decision-making (Gonçalves, 2018; Herman, 2005; Herman & Freitas, 2010).

As result of these changes, in Portugal, a study conducted by the National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Adolescents, reported that out of 100 children, mostly know that there are laws in the country that protect their right to participate and consider that these laws are important. In contrast, a small sample of children did not know the existence of these laws and an even small sample think that there are no laws to protect their right to participate. When questioned about this right importance, they stated that they are important because they allow them to give their point of view and to be comprehended. Children also state that the initiatives made in order to inform them about their rights are positive and allow them to know when their rights are

being violated or not (Comissão Nacional de Promoção dos Direitos e Proteção das Crianças e Jovens [CNPDPJC], 2021).

When it comes to instruments in Portugal, some examples are the FRA, (2018) checklist that aids professionals in checking which aspects of participation are being fulfilled (e.g. child information, how information can be given to child about their rights), Correia et al. (2024) interviews to school teachers in order to access their perspectives about child participation and the study of Soares, that highlight how child participation influences the decision in judicial processes (Sílabo, 2024).

## **2.6. Study goals**

Considering what has been outlined in the theoretical framework, although the existence of some instruments that assess child participation in the Portuguese context, there is still a lack of tools that help to map the beliefs of child protection professionals regarding child participation right. So, when taking this into consideration, the main goal of the current study is to validate scales that captures professionals' beliefs about child participation fitting the portuguese context, starting from literature review about existing instruments, followed by individual interviews with professionals from the Portuguese child protection system with whom itens were discussed, in order to capture content validity. A second goal is to map professionals' beliefs with the scales revised by the experts.

Considering the goals, a mixed-method approach was used. Chapter 2 will describe a qualitative study and Chapter 3 a quantitative study.

Before collecting data, the study was submitted to the Ethics Committee of Psychology from ISCTE, and it was approved (PSI\_69/2024-B) (see appendix A). The sample was recruited online by sharing the scale link via email or LinkedIn.

## Chapter 2: Qualitative study

### 4.1. Method

#### 4.1.1. Participants

The sample was composed of four men and one woman, with an age average of 52 years old (SD = 9, min = 39, max = 61), one psychologist, one social worker, two judges and one lawyer, with a career average length of 27.2 years (SD = 7.19, min = 18, max = 38).

Participants were chosen due to their professional experience (convenience sample): participants have experience in child hearing processes either in court advisory bodies, listening to records of child testimony, child protection services, foster homes, in clinical settings, criminal justice courts and in courts regulating parental responsibilities. The first three contexts were the most referred.

#### 4.1.2. Instruments

Considering that the goal was to validate scales that captures professionals' beliefs about child participation fitting the Portuguese context, a scale with a total of 35 items that combines international instruments and items from different scales, checklists and toolkits was produced.

Concretely, the full *Vis et al. (2010)* scale (11 items) was used, and the decision was mainly because it includes three factors that are important in child participation: communication, participation advocacy and protectionism. The authors found that children's participation has less likelihood of occurring when there are communication difficulties (e.g. difficulty talking with the child), when professionals do not believe that child participation is necessary and that it is better to protect children from any harm that could come from it. Analyzing these aspects are important, since professionals' stance about child participation influences the degree in which they fulfill the child's right to participate.

The four itens selected from the Child-friendly justice – Checklist for professionals (FRA, 2017) – (1) “Information adapted to the child’s age, maturity, level of understanding, and communication difficulties”, (2) “The support person should check that the child feels appropriately informed about their rights”, (3) “If one hearing is not sufficient, professionals should be aware, that during further hearings: A trusting relationship with professional is even more important and the hearing should be done by the same professional” and (4) “Providing feedback and information to the child about next steps” – point to respecting child characteristics, informing the child and methodological

procedures in child hearing, which are in accordance with the literature that stressed to the necessity of informing the child about the decisions taken in their process (e.g. Sinclair and Boushel, 1998; Stradbu, 2004), as well as that children need to know as much as possible in order to form an opinion (e.g. Middel et al., 2021). Additionally, it is also found that the relationship between the child and the professional is important since it helps children feeling more calm during their hearings (e.g. Faria, 2024).

Five items were selected from the TUSLA Child and Youth Participation Toolkit (Keenaghan & Redmond, 2016): (1) “Particular efforts should be made to enable participation of children and young people with fewer opportunities or seldom heard children”; (2) “In order to be able to participate meaningfully and genuinely, children and young people should be provided with all relevant information and offered adequate support for self-advocacy appropriate to their age and circumstances”; (3) “In order to be able to participate meaningfully and genuinely, children and young people should be provided with all relevant information and offered adequate support for self-advocacy appropriate to their age and circumstances”, (4) “If participation is to be effective, meaningful and sustainable, it needs to be understood as a process and not a one-off event and requires ongoing commitment in terms of time and resources” and (5) “Children and young people should always be fully informed of the scope of their participation”. Since these items cover aspects of children’s inclusiveness and child information, they were chosen because they complement the previous items by adding the self-advocacy aspect.

From the Kennan et al. (2017) questionnaire, the following 12 items were selected: (1) “Provides children and young people with appropriate information they need to be involved”; (2) “Actively seeks the views of children and young people”; (3) “Ensures children and young people's views are listened to by those with the power to effect change”; (4) “Ensures that children and young people's views are taken seriously”; (5) “Provides feedback to children and young people to let them know if changes occur as a result of their participation”; (6) “Did the child or young person's views influence the decisions taken regarding their personal welfare, protection or care?”; (7) “I don't have the required skills or confidence to effectively communicate with children and young”; (8) “It is not always appropriate for children and young people to be asked their views”; (9) “Provides an inclusive space for children and young people to express their views”; (10) “Adults (practitioners, managers, parents/carers) believe they know best”, (11) “Children and young people have difficulty communicating their views” and (12) “It is not always appropriate for children and young people to be involved”. These items were selected

because they cover the importance of giving a role and voice to children, which is an important aspect to consider, as Lundy's model explains; also, fomenting a safe space is essential for children to form and give their opinion and to feel safe in doing so, being important to assess if professionals consider this an important aspect.

With reference to the *Scale for the Attitude Towards Children's Rights Education* (Ozturk & Doganay, 2017), the following three items were selected: (1) "I believe in the necessity of making arrangements for ensuring that students participate in decision making processes at schools", (2) "I believe that a children's rights based culture should be developed in schools" and (3) "I believe that children's rights education is necessary for preventing children's rights violations". These items were selected because the instrument presented good psychometric qualities in regard to its factors (Factor 1:  $\alpha = .90$ , Factor 2:  $\alpha = .93$ , Factor 3:  $\alpha = .88$ ) as well as the scale as a whole ( $\alpha = .91$ ) (George & Mallery, 2003 as cited in Saidi & Siew, 2019). All items correspond to factor 2 (Attitude Towards Children's Rights Education Applications), because they best fit the study goal and they refer directly to beliefs about child participation culture and education, complementing all previous items with a not mentioned topic.

#### **4.1.3. Procedure**

The scales validation comprised four phases: (1) contacting the original authors via email to ask for use permission, explaining the goal for its use, (2) item scales translations and (3) interviews with experts in order to get their feedback.

Regarding item translation, they were first translated from English to Portuguese and then from Portuguese to English (translation-back-translation) to make sure that all items still transmitted the idea they want to transmit. The translation from English back to Portuguese was made by a fluent English speaker, who was someone outside the research area in order to achieve blindness and objectivity (Ohrbach et al., 2013).

Additionally, the advisor and co-advisor had the role to review the translation and back-translation in order to monitor if the translation was semantically correct and if they were culturally adapted to the Portuguese culture since they are experts in the area (Ohrbach et al., 2013). Some items needed some adjustments in order to be in accordance with the study goal, target population and cultural setting (e.g. "I believe in the necessity of making arrangements for ensuring that students participate in decision making processes at schools" – original item, was adapted to "I believe in the need to find ways to ensure that children/young people participate in decision-making in the context of judicial or non-

judicial hearings” (Ozturk & Doganay, 2017) and the response scales were transformed to a 7-point scales (1 = Totally agree to 7 = Totally disagree).

The choice to modify the response scale was based on the fact that it allows participants greater freedom in their answers. With more points available, the response can be closer to the actual opinion rather than an approximate choice (Dawes, 2008).

Additionally, compared to the 5-point scale, the 7-point scale helps reduce the tendency of responses clustering around points 3 and 4, as there are no intermediate points, thereby creating greater variability in responses and reducing ambiguity (Finstad, 2010; Lobsy & Wetmore, 2014 as cited in Dawes, 2008; Pearse, 2011; Komorita & Graham, 1965).

Once all items were translated and adapted, individual online interviews were conducted with experts from psychology, social services and law involved in children’ participation in order to get feedback about the translated items, exclusion or inclusion of items, if the scale was really measuring the construct it was meant to measure (content validity) and if it was culturally adapted. In this phase, participants were recruited by directly contacting known experts.

It was first thought of conducting a focus group but, due to time constraints and as these experts have varying availabilities, it was not possible. However, individual interviews are known for their benefits, such as allowing to have in depth perspectives from the participants compared to focus groups, as well as it allows to schedule individually with the participants a time slot, they are available to participate. Another benefit is that it allows the participants to clarify their responses/insight about the interview subject (Williamson & Johanson, 2018).

The interviews were semi-structured, since it is a method that allows to maintain a thought structure but has space for the participants to give their opinions about the presented scales.

## **4.2. Data Analysis**

Once all interviews were conducted, a content analysis (qualitative method) was conducted.

This method of analysis allows for the examination of content in written or auditory (audio) format, for example (Cole, 1988 as cited in Elo & Kyngas, 2008), enabling the description or quantification of data in a more objective and systematic way (Krippendorff, 1980, as cited in Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992) through the organization

of information into various categories (Cavanagh, 1997). This procedure thus allows for the information to be organized in a simpler and more accessible manner, conveying the main ideas and structuring the data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Krippendorff, 1980).

Although this type of qualitative method has been criticized over the years for being considered simplistic (Morgan, 1993), its benefits should be considered in relation to the study being developed. This is because it can be a content-sensitive method (Krippendorff, 1980), flexible (Harwood & Garry, 2003), helpful in understanding the meaning of the data (Cavanagh, 1997), capable of identifying processes (Lederman, 1991), and useful in contextualizing the issue (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992).

Another advantage of content analysis is that it can be used with both qualitative and quantitative data, following either an inductive or deductive approach (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). When little is known about a topic, the most appropriate approach is the inductive one (Lauri & Kyngas, 2005 as cited in Elo & Kyngas, 2008), as it starts from specific information and moves toward more general insights, allowing the creation of a framework of ideas that can later be combined to arrive at a final structure (Chinn & Kramer, 1999 as cited in Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The deductive approach, on the other hand, is used when there is already knowledge about the categories and the topic, and the goal is to test theories (Kyngas & Vanhanen, 1999 as cited in Elo & Kyngas, 2008). In this case, one starts from a previously developed model and moves from the general to the specific (Burns & Grove, 2005 as cited in Elo and Kyngas, 2008).

For this specific study, the deductive approach was adopted since it had a base on existing theoretical models, and the goal was to gain more knowledge about the topic.

To this end, in analyzing the experts' interviews, the first step was to select parts that referred to suggested changes. Next, these were grouped according to the item to which they belonged and analyzed based on how many times that suggestion for change was mentioned. If 3 out of the 5 experts referred to the same topic, that change was considered. However, some changes were considered even without majority consensus, as they seemed to be important observations.

### **4.3. Results**

The content analysis of the interviews permitted to find two main categories: *sentence feedback* and *item relevance/content*. Sentence feedback regards to sentence construction and item relevance/content regards to if the items is related to participation and if it makes sense to the Portuguese context (see appendix B).

When it comes to *sentence feedback*, the experts highlighted some issues with how the sentence was constructed (e.g. "I don't know if "that hears them" here..." – Expert 1 - and "I rather say hearing" - Expert 5), items consistency in terms of concepts (e.g. "See? Here you have decisions" – Expert 1 - and "Instead of decision, I would put something like opinion" – Expert 2) and confusing items (e.g. "Seems like the same thing as item 3 (...) Maybe you could join them" – Expert 3 - and "There is some confusion here, maybe it's repeating a little" – Expert 3).

Regarding *item relevance/content*, experts highlighted conceptual aspects that needed to be reformulated (e.g. "It's not like that, I wouldn't say it. I would say that they may be more or less comfortable, which is normal (...). In my experience, they tell me that they don't have any problem in being heard, they even wish it (...). There may be some discomfort, but it doesn't seem effectively correct to say they don't like" – Expert 5 -; "Here is not the maximum possible, maybe some things (...). Normally you even know the minimal as possible" – Expert 1 and "It's more important to hear the children, than always decide in their favor" – Expert 4), doubts about the item meaning (e.g. "I don't understand the meaning of this question" – Expert 5 -; "During hearings...this one I don't understand" – Expert 1; "In what? Being involved in judicial processes?" – Expert 4), item relevance (e.g. "These ones, I don't find them interesting (...) there is none that adds anything" - Expert 1) and procedure mistakes (e.g. "This is a false question. I think that add children must be heard" – Expert 5 - and "This one is dangerous, because children won't decide" – Expert 1).

#### **4.3.1. Participation scale**

Based on participants' responses, the following changes were made.

Regarding the scale by Vis et al. (2010), three items were removed, namely item 7 ("It is not always necessary to ask children/young people what they think about decisions concerning them before they are made"), item 8 ("Children/young people should not be present during interviews"), and item 11 ("It is more important to listen to children/young people than to do things their way"). Item 7 was removed due to uncertainties regarding its meaning and grammatical structure; item 8 was removed because children have the right to be heard, and there were doubts about what interviews it referred to and finally, item 11, like item 7, raised questions from the experts regarding its meaning.

Additionally, items 2 ("Children/young people usually do not like to talk to the professional who listens to them"), 3 ("It is important to know as much as possible about

the child/young person before the first interview”), and 6 (“A relationship should not be established with children if it cannot be maintained”) were modified. Item 2 was changed due to grammatical concerns and because the experts noted that children might feel more or less comfortable, rather than simply disliking it. The revised item became: “Children do not like talking to the professional who listens to them because they are a stranger.”

Regarding item 3, the experts noted that the aim is not to know as much as possible about the child but rather to get to know the child and some aspects about them. Therefore, it was revised to: “It is important to get to know the child before the first hearing.”

Lastly, item 6 was revised to: “A communication-facilitating relationship should be established with children,” as the original phrasing raised questions regarding the nature of the relationship referred to.

In the case of the FRA (2017) scale, item 4 (“If one hearing is not enough, professionals must be aware that during the hearings, a trusting relationship with the professionals is even more important and the hearing should be carried out by the same professional”) was split into two items. This was due to doubts regarding its meaning, its length, and the fact that it conveyed two distinct ideas, making it unclear what professionals agreed or disagreed with. The new items are: “More important than the hearing itself is the trusting relationship established between the child and the professional” and “A child should always be heard by the same professional.”

As for the toolkit by Keenaghan and Redmond (2016), item 1 (“Efforts should be made to enable the participation of children and young people with fewer opportunities or those who are rarely heard”) was altered to clarify the target population. One expert also noted that this item might be a false issue, as all children have the right to be heard. Therefore, the item was changed to: “Regardless of their characteristics and limitations, it must be ensured that all children/young people are heard.”

Regarding the scale by Kennan and Brady (2017), item 1 (“It is important to provide the child/young person with the appropriate information they need to make a decision”) was removed. This idea is already covered in item 2 of the Keenaghan and Redmond (2016) toolkit, and it was criticized for not reflecting the principle that children should not carry the burden of decision-making. Experts also raised doubts about its meaning. Additionally, item 3 (“It is important to ensure that the views of children/young people are heard by those who have decision-making power”) was revised for clarity. It became: “Regardless of the circumstances, it is important to ensure that children are heard by those with decision-making power.”

Furthermore, item 5 (“It is important to provide feedback to children/young people to inform them of the decisions made”) and item 7 (“Skills and confidence are needed to communicate effectively with children/young people”) were removed. Item 5 repeated the idea already present in item 3 of the FRA (2017) scale, and item 7 repeated the idea from item 1 of the Vis et al. (2010) scale.

Item 9 (“It is necessary to create an appropriate space for children/young people to express their views”) was revised for better phrasing and became: “It is necessary to ensure an appropriate space for children to be heard.”

Similarly, item 10 (“Adults have more skills to make decisions”) was removed because adults are, in fact, the ones with the legal competence to make decisions, making the item no longer appropriate within the Portuguese legal context.

Item 11 (“Children/young people have difficulty expressing their views”) was reformulated as: “There is no need to hear children under 12, as they have difficulty expressing their views,” to make the item more explicit and directive.

Finally, item 12 (“It is not always appropriate for children/young people to be involved”) was changed to: “It is not always appropriate for children to be involved in the process beyond being heard,” as the original version raised questions about what they should not be involved in.

Finally, the items from Ozturk and Doganay scale (2017) were not modified since experts agreed with all of them.

After the revisions were carried out based on the interviews with the experts and the part-by-part review with the supervisors, the scale ended consisting of 29 items (see appendix C).

## Chapter 3: Quantitative study

### 5.1. Method

#### 5.1.1. Participants

The sample was initially composed of 104 participants, however, five had to be removed since they were not related to the child protection system or only studied about child participation, resulting in 99 participants. The inclusion criteria in the final sample were to be above 18 years old and be involved in child participation in judicial and/or non-judicial contexts.

From these 99 participants, 77 were women (77.8%). The age range was 21 to 64, with a mean age of 44 years old ( $M=43.58$ ,  $DP=12.69$ ). Only one participant did not say his/her age.

When it comes to experience, it ranged from 4 months to 42 years ( $M=142.09$ ,  $SD=117.54$ )<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding professional areas, 26.3% were psychologists, 24% had juridical functions, and 13.1% were social workers.

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<sup>2</sup> Since participant responses were written with numbers and other with words, situations like “less than one year” and “this is the first year” were discarded and “more than 20 years” was coded as 20 years. Additionally, experience was converted into months (e.g. 1 year = 12 months, 23 years = 276 months). This resulted in a N=86

**Table 1** *Sociodemographic Characterization*

	<i>N=99</i>
<b>Gender</b>	
Feminine	77 (77.8%)
Masculine	22 (22.2%)
<b>Profession</b>	
Judge	9 (9.1%)
Legal consultant	1 (1%)
Jurist	1 (1%)
Social Worker (court advisory team, technical support, case manager and Family Meeting Point technician)	13 (13.1%)
Coordination/management in social services, IPSS or socio-educational projects	9 (9.1%)
Psychology (includes clinical, junior, Child Protection Services and Family Support and Parental Counseling Center)	26 (26.3%)
Family Mediator	4 (4%)
Other unique roles (e.g., Social Educator, interns, chief inspector – police -, supervision, accounting)	9 (9.1%)
Undefined (superior technician)	1 (1%)
	<i>M (SD)</i>
Age	43.58 (12.69)
Experience	142.09 (117.54)

**5.1.2. Instrument**

Recalling what has already been mentioned, the instrument was composed of 29 items. The response scale was a Likert-type scale varying from 1 (“Totally agree”) to 7 (“Totally disagree”).

### 5.1.3. Procedure

The items were transferred to the Qualtrics XM platform, since it is the most adjusted method for online studies and it is the method that allows collecting the most sample possible.

The dissemination of information was made by email to entities involved in children's participation, as well as by direct contact with professionals with the goal of helping spread the study, as well as it was shared on LinkedIn.

After participants had access to the study link, it was presented the study goals and an informed consent where it explained participation voluntariness, confidentiality and the possibility to withdraw at any time. If they agreed to carry on with the participation, the scale items were presented.

At the end, the debriefing was presented, contact information from the authors of the study in case participants wanted to ask a question or wanted to have more information about audition/participation of children, as well as support centers phone numbers and emails in case the study caused some type of discomfort/distress.

The link that allowed access to the scale was kept active in the Qualtrics XM platform until it was possible to achieve as many participants as possible and in accordance with the time available for this study.

As in methodological terms, a criterion of five participants per item is one of the most appropriate since it does not affect factor stability and allows to analyse smaller samples (Barrett & Kline, 1981), all the efforts were made to reach the maximum number of responses, ideally a minimum of 145 participants, since the scale is composed of 29 items.

The data analysis was performed using SPSS (version 29), conducting the following analyses: exploratory factor analysis (using the Principal Axis Factoring method) with a Promax rotation (with Kaiser normalization), in order to understand the organization of each of the scales comprising the instrument in terms of factors. The decision to retain items was based on loadings exceeding .40. After determining the scale's structure, inter-item correlations were performed to assess whether the items form a coherent and consistent factor. Independent samples t-tests were also conducted.

## 5.2. Results

### 5.2.1. Análise Vis et al. (2010) scale analysis

#### 5.2.1.1. Item distribution

Regarding the distribution of responses to the items, it is possible to observe that, in terms of skewness, items 2, 7, and 8 had a symmetric distribution, while items 3 and 4 had an asymmetric distribution. Items 1, 5, and 6 had a non-normal distribution, with the possibility of a ceiling effect (considering a criterion of  $Z > 3.29$  for the ratio between kurtosis and its standard errors) (Freedman et al., 2007; Kim, 2013). Furthermore, items 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 had a leptokurtic distribution, while items 2, 7, and 8 had a platykurtic distribution.

**Table 2** *Descriptive analysis*

Items	Descriptive						
	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	S	SE S	K	SE K
1) Specific skills are needed in order to talk to children about how they feel	99	6.57	.74	-2.88	.24	13.49	.48
2) Children do not like to talk to the professional who listens to them because he/she is a stranger	99	4.17	1.68	-.12	.24	-1.11	.48
3) It is important to know the child before the first audition	99	5.75	1.49	-1.39	.24	1.10	.48
4) It is easier for children to say what they really want if they know the professional who listens to them	99	5.56	1.31	-1.18	.24	1.27	.48
5) Care should be taken when asking children	99	6.57	.63	-1.40	.24	2.07	.48

	Descriptive						
	N	M	SD	S	SE S	K	SE K
about any difficult experiences they may have had							
6) A relationship that facilitates communication with children must be established	99	6.66	.69	-2.70	.24	9.34	.48
7) It is not always in the child's best interests for them to give their opinion before decisions are made	99	3.48	2.01	.24	.24	-1.53	.48
8) Talking about their problems is an additional burden for children	99	3.41	1.70	.20	.24	-1.39	.48

**5.2.1.2. Inter-item correlation**

Regarding inter-item correlations, it was possible to observe that there were correlations which, although significant, showed a low effect size, and also correlations with a medium and high effect size (Cohen, 1992). Table 3 shows the correlation values in detail.

**Table 3** *Item Correlation*

Item	Correlations						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1) Specific skills are needed in order to talk to children about how they feel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2) Children do not like to talk to the professional who listens to them because he/she is a stranger	.09	-	-	-	-	-	-
3) It is important to know the child before the first audition	.08	.16	-	-	-	-	-
4) It is easier for children to say what they really want if they know the professional who listens to them	.04	.31**	.43**	-	-	-	-
5) Care should be taken when asking children about any difficult experiences they may have had	.20*	-.13	.09	-.001	-	-	-
6) A relationship that facilitates communication with children must be established	.20*	-.33**	-.05	-.16	.69**	-	-
7) It is not always in the child's best interests for them to give their opinion before decisions are made	.001	.28**	.11	.17	-.17	-.38**	-
8) Talking about their problems is an additional burden for children	.007	.35**	-.02	.18	-.34**	-.38**	.49**

\*p&lt;.05

\*\*p&lt;.01

**5.2.1.2. Factor Analysis**

When performing the factor analysis, it showed an initial three-factor structure explaining 32.05% of the total variance (KMO=.63). Upon analyzing the pattern matrix, it was observed that item 2 had to be removed, as it showed a loading below .40 on all factors, and the analysis was performed again. The second analysis maintained the presence of three factors, now explaining 33.28% of the total variance (KMO =.59).

Table 4 shows the loadings of each item per factor, the eigenvalue values, as well as the Cronbach's alphas of the final factors and the mean of the factors with only two items.

**Table 4** *Factor Analysis*

Items	<i>M (SD)</i>	Factor loading			Corrected Item- Total Correlations
		1	2	3	
1) Specific skills are needed in order to talk to children about how they feel	6.57 (.74)	<b>.35</b>	.16	.06	.22
3) It is important to know the child before the first audition	5.75 (1.49)	.04	-.10	<b>.76</b>	.43
4) It is easier for children to say what they really want if they know the professional who listens to them	5.56 (1.21)	.04	.13	<b>.57</b>	.43
5) Care should be taken when asking children about any difficult experiences they may have had	6.57 (.63)	<b>.81</b>	.01	.09	.57
6) A relationship that facilitates communication with children must be established	6.66 (.69)	<b>.82</b>	-.11	-.11	.55
7) It is not always in the child's best interests for them to give their opinion before decisions are made	3.44 (2.01)	.07	<b>.65</b>	.08	.49
8) Talking about their problems is an additional burden for children	3.41 (1.70)	.07	<b>.83</b>	-.07	.49
Eigenvalue	-	2.33	1.51	1.06	-
Alpha de Cronbach	-	.62	-	-	-
Mean	-	6.59	3.43	5.65	-

*Note.* The values in bold represent the item's highest loading for each factor in which it was included. Cronbach's alpha values were not reported for factors two and three, as they are composed of only two items.

New variables were then created by calculating the mean of the items belonging to each of the factors, in order to analyze the inter-factor correlation. The factors were named as follows: Factor 1: Skills, Factor 2: Protectionism, and Factor 3: Communication.

It was found that Factor 1 and Factor 2 correlated significantly, although with a low effect size (Cohen, 1999). Regarding Factor 3, it did not correlate significantly with the others, which may indicate that these items might be, to some extent, outside the main theme of the scale.

It is also possible to see that the responses for Factor 1 and Factor 3 indicated greater agreement with the items (higher mean), while the items in Factor 2 indicated greater disagreement (lower mean).

**Table 5** *Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Factor Correlations*

Factor	<i>M (SD)</i>	Correlations	
		1	2
1. Skills	6.59 (.52)	-	-
2. Protectionism	3.43 (1.60)	-.31**	-
3. Communication	5.65 (1.18)	.007	.15

\*\*p<.01

### 5.2.1.3. One sample T-test: comparison of factors with the midpoint of the scale

When comparing the factor scores to the scale's midpoint, both the Skills factor ( $M=6.60$ ) and the Communication factor ( $M=3.43$ ) showed values significantly above the scale's midpoint. In contrast, the Protectionism factor ( $M=5.65$ ) showed values significantly below the scale's midpoint.

**Table 6** *Factor-Midpoint Comparison (one-sample t-test)*

Factor	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	t	df	p	Cohen's d	95% CI
Skills	98	6.60	.52	49.89	98	<.001	5.01	[4.28, 5.74]
Protectionism	98	5.65	1.18	-3.56	98	<.001	-.36	[-.56, -.15]
Communication	98	3.43	1.60	13.89	98	<.001	1.40	[1.12, 1.67]

*Note.* Scale midpoint = 4

## 5.2.2. Keenaghan and Redmond (2016) scale analysis

### 5.2.2.1. Item distribution

Regarding the distribution of responses to the items, it was possible to observe that, in terms of skewness, item 1 had a symmetric distribution, while items 3 and 4 had an asymmetric distribution. Items 2 and 5 had a non-normal distribution, with the possibility of a floor effect for item 1 and a ceiling effect for item 5 (considering a criterion of  $Z > 3.29$  for the ratio between kurtosis and its standard errors) (Freedman et al., 2007; Kim, 2013). Furthermore, items 2, 3, 4, and 5 had a leptokurtic distribution, while item 1 had a platykurtic distribution.

**Table 7** *Descriptive Analysis*

Items	Descriptive						
	N	M	SD	S	SE S	K	SE K
1) Regardless of their characteristics and limitations, it must be ensured that all children are heard	98	4.16	.81	-.57	.25	-.48	.50
2) To be able to participate genuinely, children must be given all relevant information appropriate to their age and circumstances.	98	2.22	.47	2.01	.35	3.81	.69
3) To be able to participate genuinely, children must receive technical and legal support appropriate to their age and circumstances, and which guarantees their rights and interests	98	4.48	.68	-1.15	.24	.94	.48
4) For participation to be effective, meaningful and sustainable, it needs to be understood as a process and not as an isolated act, and requires	98	4.38	.78	-1.19	.25	.96	.49

	Descriptive						
	N	M	SD	S	SE S	K	SE K
an ongoing commitment in terms of time and resources							
5) Children should always be fully informed about the scope of their participation	98	4.55	.69	-2.04	.25	6.28	.49

### 5.2.2.2. Inter-item Correlation

Regarding the item correlations, it was possible to observe that the correlations, although significant, showed a low effect size (Cohen, 1992). It is also possible to see that, overall, participants tended to disagree with the items, as the means are on the lower side. Table 8 shows the correlation values in detail.

**Table 8** *Item Correlation*

Items	Correlations		
	1	2	3
1) Regardless of their characteristics and limitations, it must be ensured that all children are heard	-	-	-
2) To be able to participate genuinely, children must be given all relevant information appropriate to their age and circumstances.	-.03	-	-
3) To be able to participate genuinely, children must receive technical and legal support appropriate to their age and circumstances, and which guarantees their rights and interests	.38**	-.16	-
4) For participation to be effective, meaningful and sustainable, it needs to be understood as a process and not as an isolated act, and requires an ongoing commitment in terms of time and resources	.32**	.15	.39**
5) Children should always be fully informed about the scope of their participation	.09	-.14	.23*

\*p<.05

\*\*p<.01

### 5.2.2.2. Factor Analysis

When performing the factor analysis, it showed an initial two-factor structure explaining 38.46% of the total variance (KMO=.56). Upon analyzing the pattern matrix, the presence of one factor with four items and another factor with only one item was observed. Due to this, it was necessary to force a one-factor structure. In this second analysis, the structure accounts for the same total variance. However, item 2 proved to be problematic, as it loaded negatively on the factor, potentially suggesting it does not belong to the scale's thematic scope (see discussion), and was therefore removed.

Table 9 shows the loadings of each item, the eigenvalue values, as well as the Cronbach's alpha of the final factor.

**Table 9** *Factor Analysis*

Items	<i>M (SD)</i>	Factor	Corrected Item-Total Correlations
		1	
1) Regardless of their characteristics and limitations, it must be ensured that all children are heard	4.03 (.75)	.48	.34
3) To be able to participate genuinely, children must receive technical and legal support appropriate to their age and circumstances, and which guarantees their rights and interests	2.11 (.311)	.69	.46
4) For participation to be effective, meaningful and sustainable, it needs to be understood as a process and not as an isolated act, and requires an ongoing commitment in terms of time and resources	3.97 (.79)	-.05	.53
5) Children should always be fully informed about the scope of their participation	4.26 (.86)	.42	.28
Eigenvalue	-	1.92	-
Alpha de Cronbach	-	.62	-

*Note.* The values in bold represent the highest loading of the item for each factor in which it was included.

### 5.2.2.3. One sample T-test: comparison of factors with the midpoint of the scale

When comparing the factor score to the scale's midpoint, it can be observed that it was significantly above the scale's midpoint ( $M=4.38$ ).

**Table 10** *Factor-Midpoint Comparison (one-sample t-test)*

Factor	N	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d	95% CI
1	99	4.38	.53	7.07	98	<.001	.71	[.49, .93]

*Note.* Scale midpoint = 4

### 5.2.3. FRA (2017) scale analysis

#### 5.2.3.1. Item distribution

Regarding the distribution of responses to the items, it is possible to observe that, in terms of skewness, all items had an asymmetric distribution. Item 1 had a non-normal distribution, with the possibility of a floor effect for item 1 and a ceiling effect for item 5 (considering a criterion of  $Z > 3.29$  for the ratio between kurtosis and its standard errors) (Freedman et al., 2007; Kim, 2013). Furthermore, all items had a leptokurtic distribution.

**Table 11** *Descriptive Analysis*

Items	Descriptive							
	N	M	SD	S	SE S	K	SE K	
1) Information should be adapted to the child's age, maturity and level of understanding	99	6.61	.95	-3.12	.24	10.31	.48	
2) It should be verified whether the child feels properly informed about his or her rights	99	6.48	.79	-1.74	.24	3.56	.48	
3) The child must be informed about the next steps in the process in which he or she was heard	98	6.24	1.06	-1.96	.24	4.22	.48	

	Descriptive						
	N	M	SD	S	SE S	K	SE K
4) More important than the hearing itself is the relationship of trust that is established between the child and the professional	98	5.60	1.23	-1.08	.24	1.01	.48
5) Children should always be fully informed about the scope of their participation	99	5.45	1.41	-1.37	.24	1.27	.48

### 5.2.3.2. Inter-item Correlation

Regarding the item correlations, it was possible to observe that there were correlations which, although significant, showed a low effect size, but with one correlation approaching a medium effect (Cohen, 1992). Table 12 shows the correlation values in detail.

**Table 12** *Item Correlation*

Items	Correlations			
	1	2	3	4
1) Information should be adapted to the child's age, maturity and level of understanding	-	-	-	-
2) It should be verified whether the child feels properly informed about his or her rights	.45**	-	-	-
3) The child must be informed about the next steps in the process in which he or she was heard	.15	.35**	-	-
4) More important than the hearing itself is the relationship of trust that is established between the child and the professional	.06	.08	.25*	-
5) Children should always be heard by the same professional	.05	.08	.30**	.36**

\*\*p<.01

### 5.2.3.2. Factor Analysis

After performing the factor analysis, it showed an initial two-factor structure explaining 37.35% of the total variance (KMO=.59). Upon analyzing the pattern matrix, it was observed that item 3 had to be removed because it loaded on both factors with a difference of less than .20 between the loadings, and the analysis was performed again. The second analysis maintained the presence of two factors, now explaining 38.66% of the total variance (KMO=.51).

In Table 13, it is possible to observe the loadings of each item per factor, the eigenvalue values, as well as the Cronbach's alphas of the final factors.

**Table 13** *Factor Analysis*

Items	<i>M (SD)</i>	Factor loadings		Corrected Item- Total Correlations
		1	2	
1) Information should be adapted to the child's age, maturity and level of understanding	6.61 (.95)	<b>.67</b>	-.02	.45
2) It should be verified whether the child feels properly informed about his or her rights	6.48 (.79)	<b>.67</b>	.02	.45
4) More important than the hearing itself is the relationship of trust that is established between the child and the professional	5.60 (1.23)	-.005	<b>.60</b>	.36
5) Children should always be heard by the same professional	5.45 (1.41)	.004	<b>.59</b>	.36
Eigenvalue	-	1.55	1.27	-

*Note.* The values in bold represent the item's highest loading for each factor in which it was included. Cronbach's alpha values were not reported because the factors are composed of only two items.

New variables were then created by calculating the mean of the items belonging to each of the factors, in order to analyze the inter-factor correlation. The factors were named as follows: Factor 1: Informing and Factor 2: Methodology. It was found that the factors do not correlate with each other. It is also possible to see that participants tended to agree more with the items in both factors, as the means are between 5 and 6.

**Table 14** *Descriptive Statistics and Inter-factor Correlations*

Factors	Correlations	
	<i>M (SD)</i>	1
1.Inform	6.55 (.74)	-
2.Methodology	5.51 (1.13)	.08

**5.2.3.3. One sample T-test: comparação dos fatores com o ponto médio da escala**

When comparing the factor scores to the scale's midpoint, it can be observed that both Factor 1 ( $M=6.55$ ) and Factor 2 ( $M=5.51$ ) were significantly above the scale's midpoint.

**Table 15** *Factor-Midpoint Comparison (one-sample t-test)*

Factor	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	t	df	p	Cohen's d	95% CI
1.Inform	98	6.55	.74	34.26	98	<.001	3.44	[2.92, 3.96]
2.Methodology	98	5.51	1.13	13.33	95	<.001	1.34	[1.07, 1.61]

*Note.* Scale midpoint = 4

**5.2.4. Ozturk and Doganay (2017) scale analysis****5.2.4.1. Item distribution**

Regarding the distribution of responses to the items, it is possible to observe that, in terms of skewness, all items had an asymmetric distribution. Items 1 and 2 had a normal distribution and item 3 had a non-normal distribution (considering a criterion of  $Z > 3.29$  for the ratio between kurtosis and its standard errors) (Kim, 2013). Furthermore, item 1 had a mesokurtic distribution, item 2 had a platykurtic distribution, and item 3 had a leptokurtic distribution.

**Table 16** *Descriptive Analysis*

Items	Descriptive							
	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	S	SE S	K	SE K	
1) I believe in the need to find ways to ensure that children participate in decision-making in the context of a court hearing or otherwise	99	5.83	1.13	-.62	.24	.15	.48	
2) I believe it is necessary to establish a culture based on the	99	6.06	.99	-.38	.24	-1.38	.48	

	Descriptive						
	N	M	SD	S	SE S	K	SE K
child's right to participate in the context of judicial or non-judicial hearings							
3) I believe that education about children's rights is necessary to prevent the violation of these same rights	64	2.03	.18	5.52	.29	29.37	.59

#### 5.2.4.2. Inter-item Correlation

Regarding item correlations, it was possible to observe a significant correlation, showing a medium effect size (Cohen, 1992).

**Table 17** *Item Correlation*

Items	Correlations	
	1	2
1) I believe in the need to find ways to ensure that children participate in decision-making in the context of a court hearing or otherwise	-	-
2) I believe it is necessary to establish a culture based on the child's right to participate in the context of judicial or non-judicial hearings	.59**	-
3) I believe that education about children's rights is necessary to prevent the violation of these same rights	-.04	-.21

\*\*p<.01

#### 5.2.4.2. Factor Analysis

Regarding the factor analysis, it showed an initial one-factor structure explaining 54.47% of the total variance (KMO=.48). Upon analyzing the pattern matrix, it was observed that item 3 had to be removed because it loaded below the cut-off point of .40, and the analysis was performed again. The second analysis maintained a one-factor structure, now

explaining 79.39% of the total variance ( $KMO=.59$ ). Furthermore, it was observed that participants tended to agree with the items.

Table 18 shows the loadings of each item per factor, the eigenvalue values, as well as the Cronbach's alphas of the final factors.

**Table 18** *Factor Analysis*

Items	<i>M (SD)</i>	Factor loading	Corrected Item-Total Correlations
		1	
1) I believe in the need to find ways to ensure that children participate in decision-making in the context of a court hearing or otherwise	5.53 (1.13)	.77	.59
2) I believe it is necessary to establish a culture based on the child's right to participate in the context of judicial or non-judicial hearings	6.07 (.99)	.77	.59
Eigenvalue	-	1.59	-
Mean	-	5.94	-

*Note.* Cronbach's alpha values were not reported as they are composed of only two items.

#### 5.2.4.3. One sample T-test: comparison of factors with the midpoint of the scale

When comparing the factor score ( $M=5.64$ ) to the scale's midpoint, it can be observed that it was significantly above the scale's midpoint.

**Table 19** *Factor-Midpoint Comparison (one-sample t-test)*

Factor	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	t	df	p	Cohen's d	95% CI
1	98	5.94	.94	20.54	98	<.001	2.06	[1.71, 2.41]

*Note.* Scale midpoint = 4

#### 5.2.5. Keenan and Brady (2017) scale analysis

##### 5.2.5.1. Item distribution

Regarding the distribution of responses to the items, it is possible to observe that, in terms of skewness, items 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8 had a symmetric distribution, while items 6 and 7 had an asymmetric distribution. Items 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8 had a normal distribution, and item 1 had a non-normal distribution, with the possibility of a ceiling effect (considering a criterion of  $Z > 3.29$  for the ratio between kurtosis and its standard errors) (Freedman et al., 2007; Kim,

2013). Furthermore, item 4 had a mesokurtic distribution, items 3, 5, and 8 had a platykurtic distribution, and items 1, 2, 6, and 7 had a leptokurtic distribution.

**Table 20** *Descriptive Analysis*

Items	Descriptive						
	N	M	SD	S	SE S	K	SE K
1) It is important to access children's points of view	94	4.54	.67	-1.38	.25	.15	.49
2) Regardless of the circumstances, it is important to ensure that children are heard by those who have the power to make decisions	91	4.09	.82	-.69	.25	-1.38	.50
3) It is important that children's opinions are taken into account	98	4.24	.80	-.72	.24	29.37	.48
4) A child's views influence decisions made regarding their personal well-being, protection or care.	95	3.79	.89	-.51	.25		.49
5) It is not always appropriate to ask children their opinions on matters that concern them	63	5.13	1.36	.28	.30		.59
6) It is necessary to ensure an appropriate space for children to be heard	99	4.62	.62	.62	.24		.48
7) There is no need to listen to children under 12 years old, as they have difficulty expressing their opinions	99	5.78	1.63	1.63	.24		.48
8) It is not always appropriate for children to be involved in the process, beyond their hearing	47	4.34	1.95	.39	.35		.68

### 5.2.5.2. Inter-item Correlation

Regarding the inter-item correlations, it was possible to observe that the correlations, although significant, some showed a low effect size. However, most showed medium effect sizes, with one of them showing a high effect size (Cohen, 1992). Table 21 shows the correlation values in detail.

**Table 21** *Item Correlation*

Item	Correlation						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1) It is important to access children's points of view	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2) Regardless of the circumstances, it is important to ensure that children are heard by those who have the power to make decisions	.19	-	-	-	-	-	-
3) It is important that children's opinions are taken into account	.42**	.24*	-	-	-	-	-
4) A child's views influence decisions made regarding their personal well-being, protection or care.	.11	.26*	.45**	-	-	-	-
5) It is not always appropriate to ask children their opinions on matters that concern them	-.38**	-.42**	-.34**	-.07	-	-	-
6) It is necessary to ensure an appropriate space for children to be heard	.31**	.09	.32**	.008	-.45**	-	-
7) There is no need to listen to children under 12 years old, as they have difficulty expressing their opinions	.46**	.11	.39**	-.02	-.53**	.42**	-
8) It is not always appropriate for children to be involved in the process, beyond their hearing	-.27	-.35*	-.16	-.03	.73**	-.29**	-.45**

\*p<.05

\*\*p<.01

### 5.2.5.2. Factor Analysis

As for the factor analysis, it showed an initial three-factor structure explaining 40.08% of the total variance (KMO=.73). Upon analyzing the pattern matrix, it was observed that items 2 and 3 had to be removed because they loaded on two factors, and the analysis was performed again. The second analysis presented a two-factor structure, now explaining 45.82% of the total variance (KMO=.73). In this new analysis, it was necessary to remove item 4, as it did not load on any factor. This subsequent analysis resulted in a one-factor structure, which explains 54.89% of the total variance (KMO=.74); however, it was necessary to reverse-score items 5 and 8, as they loaded negatively. In this final analysis, the structure maintained one factor, with the same total variance and KMO as the previous analysis.

Table 22 shows the loadings of each item, the eigenvalue values, as well as the Cronbach's alphas of the final factors.

**Table 22** *Factor Analysis*

Items	<i>M (SD)</i>	Factor loading	Corrected Item-Total Correlations
		1	
1) It is important to access children's points of view	4.59 (.75)	.88	.41
5) It is not always appropriate to ask children their opinions on matters that concern them	5.56 (1.42)	.70	.73
6) It is necessary to ensure an appropriate space for children to be heard	4.51 (.20)	.69	.59
7) There is no need to listen to children under 12 years old, as they have difficulty expressing their opinions	5.93 (1.62)	.53	.64
8) It is not always appropriate for children to be involved in the process, beyond their hearing	4.07 (2.02)	.49	.61
Eigenvalue	-	2.75	-
Alpha de Cronbach	-	.78	-

*Note.* The values in bold represent the highest loading value of the item for each of the factors in which it was included. Cronbach's alpha values were not reported for factors two and three, as they are composed of only two items.

It is also important to note that the scale shows a tendency towards disagreement with the items ( $M=4.94$ ,  $SD=.85$ ).

### 5.2.5.3. One sample T-test: comparison of factors with the midpoint of the scale

When comparing the factor scores ( $M=4.94$ ) to the scale's midpoint, it can be observed that they were significantly above the scale's midpoint.

**Table 23** *Factor-Midpoint Comparison (one-sample t-test)*

Factor	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	t	df	p	Cohen's d	95% CI
1	98	4.94	.85	11.08	98	<.001	1.11	[.86, 1.36]

*Note.* Scale midpoint = 4



## Chapter four: Discussion

The aim of the present study was to validate scales that capture the beliefs of professionals in the promotion and protection system regarding child participation in the Portuguese context.

Interviews with experts (Study 1) allowed for the construction of a scale with higher content validity concerning the concept of participation. As Haynes et al. (1995) and Polit and Beck (2006) mention, this phase is considered important as it enables the development of a scale with representative and relevant items. This phase not only provided more detailed feedback on the construction of the items in terms of their appropriateness, structure, and relevance but also opened the door to gaining insight into the key concept and their perspectives on the various themes discussed, allowing a better adaptation of the items for study two. In addition to feedback on the items, important observations emerged regarding child participation, like the ambiguity of including children based on their age, procedural issues such as the support for the child during hearings and the need to standardize the space where they are heard, and the decision to consider the child's opinion, paving the way for future further exploration of the topic.

Considering the results of phase 2, it is noteworthy that it is possible to perceive that the structures of the scales present some vulnerabilities, which can be partly explained by their content. That is, the items may be referring to themes that depend on how professionals conceptually view child participation and their practices. One example is the scale by Keenaghan and Redmond (2016), which, despite demonstrating factorial consistency, has a low alpha value, potentially being subject to inter-individual variations such as professional training; the perspective on what is presented in the items may not be consensual or may generate ambiguity, or, alternatively, issues such as training and experience may be factors.

Contrary to what is found in the literature on protectionist beliefs (Križ & Roundtree-Swain, 2017), professionals seem not to let this affect the inclusion of the child in their process, hence there is lower agreement with the items in factor 2 of the Vis et al. (2010) scale, which directly address this issue (“It is not always in the child's best interests for them to give their opinion before decisions are made” and “Talking about their problems is an additional burden for children”). However, in the Keenan and Brady (2017) scale, it was possible to verify that the data aligned more closely with what is seen in the literature, as professionals demonstrated disagreement that the child's opinion should carry

weight in the decision, or that it is important to access their viewpoints or appropriate to ask for their opinions.

Professionals also indicated that they see no need to develop an appropriate space for hearing the child. However, it is possible that this item caused confusion, since, according to the original scale authors, this space refers to developing opportunities for the child to feel safe sharing their opinions and views (Kennan & Brady, 2017).

Regarding the child's age, there seems to be a belief that children under 12 are not capable of expressing their opinions. It would be relevant to understand the reasons leading professionals to hold this belief. Nonetheless, this aligns with findings in literature, where younger children tend not to be heard (Correia et al., 2024; Melo & Sani, 2019; van Bijleveld et al., 2013).

It is worth noting that there were some disagreements regarding adapting information to the children's characteristics, even though they consider communication and skills important factors concerning child participation. On one hand, for certain items, professionals agreed that this adjustment should occur, and that children should be informed of their rights and what will happen in their process. On the other hand, they demonstrated that this adjustment is not necessary, nor should children be heard regardless of their characteristics. This may mean that some children are not playing an active role in their processes, or that there are difficulties in adapting to the different age ranges or characteristics of the children, something mentioned as a barrier in the study by Goulão (2024).

In line with the previous topic, it is noteworthy that Portugal still has some shortcomings regarding the provision of means to support foreign children (e.g., translators), in order to access their viewpoints and ensure their participation occurs in the best possible way and their needs can be assessed (CNPDPJ, 2021).

Concerning the relationship with the child, professionals demonstrated agreement that a relationship of trust needs to be developed between the child and the professional, and that the child should be known before the hearing. However, they do not believe that participation is a continuous process, but rather an isolated act. This may mean that professionals consider the hearing to be a single act to be performed, and not something that should be extended over time, where time and resources are invested. This finding is relevant, as it prevents the child from having a voice in the decision-making process and from being informed about the next steps to be taken (Hub na nÓg, 2021).

Furthermore, the need to develop a culture based on the child's right to participation and to ensure this right is implemented proved to be consensual among professionals, which may project a concern or desire for children's participation to be a right known and guaranteed by all. Notwithstanding that the results may indicate that the right to participation is consensual for the participants, the truth is that they do not always ensure it yet, despite the growing number of children being heard (Sílabo, 2024).

The results found continue to align with studies conducted in Portugal, where professionals still demonstrate some ambiguity regarding the fulfillment of the child's right to participation, as well as in how they conceptualize participation. Namely, there are professionals who foster child participation throughout their entire practice, those who include the child in their processes to promote their well-being, and those for whom there is no clear idea of their position regarding this right (Magalhães et al., 2024). Furthermore, regarding issues such as training and skills for listening to children, although in this study professionals mentioned them as important factors, other studies have indicated that training remains a barrier to hearing the child, as in some cases, professionals gain experience throughout their careers (Goulão, 2024).

It is also possible to verify that children remain largely unaware of most of their participation rights, and, for the most part, either do not know of strategies/plans that protect these rights or have a vague idea that they exist, without being able to specify which ones (CNPDPJ, 2021). This demonstrates that it is still necessary to foster the dissemination of information about the right to participation, not only among professionals but also among children, so that they develop self-advocacy skills, enabling them to contribute and have a voice in their processes.

Regarding institutional actors, they mention that, although the child's right is widely discussed and worked on, there is a lack of guiding strategies for implementing the child's right across all sectors of society, and furthermore, children have not played an active role in developing these actions/strategies, which are developed by adults (CNPDPJ, 2021). This further reinforces the fact that the child has not been included in matters that concern them.

To sum up, despite generally satisfactory results, the instrument shows vulnerabilities in its structure, item discrimination power, normality issues, floor and ceiling effects and some items showing a possible response bias. A bigger sample is needed to further explore the psychometric qualities of these scales, as well as is necessary to analyse the scales as a group, in order to test if it can be transformed into a single

instrument. However, the scales present a good variability of child participation dimensions, and are capable of, to some extent, access professionals' beliefs, and it is a great start in terms of comprehending this phenomenon, since the results go, in majority, in accordance with what is found in literature and Portuguese studies.

### **6.1. Limitations**

This study has some limitations when it comes to the sample size. Since it was not possible to achieve five participants per item since this is a difficult sample to access, it is necessary to, in future studies, to try to achieve this methodological criterion in order to achieve more stable results (Barrett & Kline, 1981).

Another limitation is that the checklist FRA (2017) already has a Portuguese version (FRA, 2018), which was not used in this study, as this version was only known later. This could have made differences in terms of item structure and their translation.

Regarding scale structure, there are some fragilities, since some items present ceiling and floor effect (tendency to respond either at the bottom or top of the Likert scale), being an indicative of professionals replying with what they think is socially acceptable and that the items have a low discriminative power or low variability. Yet, there are some scales (e.g. Vis et al, 2010; Keenaghan & Brady, 2017) that show normality issues. With this, in further studies, it would be better to choose non-parametric analysis, reformulate items that have low variability and revise items that show a ceiling or floor effect.

### **6.2. Suggestions for future studies**

Although the attempt of develop a scale that combines the best of different instruments in order to capture the multidimensionality underlying the concept of children participation, it would also be beneficial to correlate these beliefs with professionals' actions regarding their processes, to analyse if there is a correlation, its nature and direction, as well as if they are conscient about this influence and the presence of their beliefs.

Additionally, it would be interesting to analyse infra-humanization, since it is shown that there a attribution of primary emotions (non-human emotions, e.g. tension, fear, anger) to people who are not part of out-group, and secondary emotions (human emotion, e.g. hate, affection, guilt) to people who are a part of our group. This is important because the out-group members are seen as less deserving of respect, perceived as less human, and associated with lower morality and intellect, which paves the way for discrimination based on race, socioeconomic status, and gender, for example. However, it is emphasized that

this differentiation is not always conscious nor made with malicious intent but can influence decision taking (Rodríguez-Torres et al., 2005).

## **Conclusion**

This study initiated the development of a scale adapted to the Portuguese context, aiming to capture the multidimensionality of child participation.

The data are highly relevant, as they provide a glimpse into how our professionals perceive child participation. Although, overall, there are encouraging results, some aspects still hinder the full realization of this right. Some of these factors may include professionals' career length, profession, and age.

At times, professional rigidity can, in a way, act as a mediating lens for this phenomenon. It remains necessary to continue investing in continuous training for magistrates on child participation, as well as in initial training, especially for psychology and law professionals (judicial auditors), as they are the ones who have the most contact with children.

Furthermore, the development/continuation of opportunities for reflection on the practices and methodologies used in child hearing is equally important, as it enables a continuum of knowledge sharing and the development of standardized measures.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A. Psychology Ethical Committee

## COMISSÃO ESPECIALIZADA DE ÉTICA DE PSICOLOGIA

### PARECER [Final] PSI\_69/2024-B

#### I – Identificação

**Projeto nº:** 69/2024

**Identificação do(a) proponente:** Beatriz Oliveira

**Curso:** Mestrado em Psicologia Comunitária: Proteção de Crianças e Jovens em Risco

**Título do Projeto:** Escala de Crenças sobre a Participação das Crianças/jovens para técnicos

**Data de resubmissão do pedido:** 30/04/2025

**Data do parecer:** 05/05/2025

#### II – Análise

A avaliação do presente projeto levantou algumas questões e levou a recomendações, que foram apresentadas no Parecer Condicional PSI\_69/2024-A. Em resposta, os investigadores prestaram esclarecimentos adicionais e introduziram as revisões necessárias. A Comissão Especializada de Ética em Psicologia considera que estas alterações cumprem as normas éticas exigidas e, por isso, emite um parecer final favorável ao prosseguimento da investigação.

### Appendix B. Content Analysis: phase 1

Scale	Item	Sentence Feedback / Grammar	Content / Participation relatedness	Final item suggestion
Vis et al. (2010)	2	"I don't know if "that hears them" here..."	"Maybe they don't like to talk with a stranger or that they associate the person with a problem" "It's not like that, I wouldn't say it. I would say that they may be more or less comfortable, which is normal (...). On the contrary. In my experience, they tell me that they don't have any problem in	Children do not like to talk to the professional who listens to them because he/she is a stranger

being heard, they even wish it (...).  
There may be some discomfort, but it doesn't seem effectively correct to say they don't like"

3	"I rather say hearing"	<p>"Here is not the maximum possible, maybe some things (...). Normally you even know the minimal as possible" "More than information that is important about that child in specific, (...) it's more important to know the child"</p>	It is important to know the child before the first audition
4	"There is no need to always have "they""	<p>"Here I don't think that it's well, I think that they just need to know"</p>	No changes
5		<p>"Here I don't know if the expression "care" is the most correct, it's more the way questions are made"</p>	No changes
6		<p>"Which kind relationship are we talking about? (...) In terms of child hearing, it doesn't say much to me" "I don't understand this one" "I think this needs to go in the sense of understanding if they think that it's not necessary to build a relationship with the goal of facilitate communication with the child"</p>	A relationship that facilitates communication with children must be established
7	"Then, before the decision is made"	<p>"Before they are made... what does this mean?"</p>	It is not always in the child's best interest for them

	"Before they are made, before they are decided" "Here too [the word "they"]"	"Before what is made?"	to give their opinion before decisions are made
8	"Which interviews? (...) Maybe it's better to say "children shouldn't be present in all interviews that happen in the process""	"Interviews with the parents?" "I don't understand the meaning of this question (...) they should be [in the ones] that concerns them"	Removed
9	"See? Here you have decisions"		No changes
11	"It should be something like "it's important to hear them, but n ot considering what they say for the decision"" "It's more important to hear the children, than always decide in their favor"	"It's more important to hear the child than...to whose way?" "How is the last one? Doing things their way, whose way? (...) This one isn't very clear" "What does it mean doing things their way?"	Removed

Scale	Item	Sentence Feedback / Grammar	Content / Participation relatedness	Final item sugestion
FRA (2017) ; FRA (2018)	1		"During hearings...This one I don't understand" "I find that one more interesting than the item 6"	More important than the hearing itself is the relationship of trust that is established between the child and the professional
	4	"This one has too much information (...) Maybe I would put "In case one hearing isn't enough, professionals should know that during hearings, it's important to establish a trust relationship, and that these are made by the same professional""		More important than the hearing itself, it's the trust relationship that is established between the child and the professional  Children should always be heard by the same professional

Keenaghan and Redmond (2016)	All		“These ones, I don't find them interesting (...) There is none that adds anything”	
	1		"Who are the children with less opportunities?" “This is a false question. I think that all children must be heard”	Regardless of his/her characteristics and limitations, we must assure that all children are heard
	2	"The second one is repeated with number 1 (...) Maybe underline the differences”		No changes

Scale	Item	Sentence Feedback / Grammar	Content / Participation relatedness	Final item suggestion
Kennan et al . (2017)	1	"Instead of decision, I would put something like opinion" “It’s important to provide what they need, maybe, to form a decision”	"This one is dangerous, because the children won't decide" "The first one repeats a little about the information idea, to others already seen"	Removed
	3			Regardless of the circumstances, it is important to ensure that children are heard by those who have the power to make decisions
	4	"Visions are opinions. This repeats" "Seems like the same thing as item 3 (...) Maybe you could join them. "Children are heard by those who have the power of decision and are taken into account" “Taken into consideration”		No changes
	7		"This one is repeating [the idea]"	Removed
	8		“It’s not always appropriate to ask in a direct way”	It’s not always appropriate for children to be involved in their process besides their hearing

8 to 12 "There is some confusion here, maybe it's repeating a little (...) Here on 8 talks about opinions and on 12 talks about decision involvement, they are two completely different things. The child expresses their opinion, but their decision involvement it's after the evaluation is made by the adult"

10

"Adults are the ones who have to make decisions (..) I don't know what you want there eventually. Maybe put a question mark"

Removed

12

"In what? Being involved in judicial processes?"

There is no need to hear children with less than 12 years, since they have difficulties expressing their opinions

Ozturk and Doganay (2017)

All experts agreed with this scale, with no changes

Scale	Item	Sentence Feedback / Grammar	Content / Participation relatedness	Final item suggestion
Morris et al. (2000)	All items	“Again, I would underline the differences, because I had to read “low high, low high, low and other, high and other” to check if everything was right. Since they’re all the same”		<p>Receiving a family from the same cultural group/ethnicity/descent as mine makes me feel...</p> <p>Receiving a family from a different cultural group/ethnicity/descent than mine makes me feel...</p> <p>Receiving a family of low socioeconomic status makes me feel...</p> <p>Receiving a family of low socioeconomic status makes me feel...</p>

### **Appendix C. Reformulated participation Beliefs items**

1. Specific skills are needed to talk to children about how they feel.
2. Children do not like talking to the professional who listens to them because they are a stranger.
3. It is important to get to know the child before the first hearing.
4. It is easier for children to say what they really want if they know the professional who is listening to them well.
5. Care must be taken when asking children about any difficult experiences they may have had.
6. A relationship that facilitates communication with children should be established.
7. It is not always in the child's best interest for them to give their opinion before decisions are made.
8. Talking about their problems is an additional burden for children.
9. Information must be adapted to the child's age, maturity, and level of understanding.
10. It should be verified that the child feels properly informed about their rights.
11. The child should be informed about the next steps in the process in which they were heard.
12. More important than the hearing itself is the relationship of trust established between the child and the professional.
13. Children should always be heard by the same professional.
14. Regardless of their characteristics and limitations, it must be ensured that all children are heard.
15. To be able to participate genuinely, children must receive all relevant information appropriate to their age and circumstances.
16. To be able to participate genuinely, children must receive legal-technical support appropriate to their age and circumstances, which guarantees their rights and interests.
17. For participation to be effective, meaningful, and sustainable, it needs to be understood as a process and not as an isolated act, and it requires a continuous commitment in terms of time and resources.
18. Children should always be fully informed about the scope of their participation.
19. It is important to access children's points of view.
20. Regardless of the circumstances, it is important to ensure that children are heard by those who have the power to decide.

21. It is important that children's opinions are taken into account.
22. The child's opinions influence the decisions made regarding their personal well-being, protection, or care.
23. It is not always appropriate to ask children for their opinions on matters that concern them.
24. It is necessary to guarantee an appropriate space for children to be heard.
25. There is no need to hear children under 12 years old, as they have difficulty expressing their opinions.
26. It is not always appropriate for children to be involved in the process beyond their hearing.
27. I believe in the need to find ways to ensure that children participate in decision-making within a judicial or non-judicial hearing context.
28. I believe it is necessary to establish a culture based on the child's right to participate in a judicial or non-judicial hearing context.
29. I believe that education on children's rights is necessary to prevent the violation of these rights



