

# Parental involvement in homework of children with learning disabilities during distance learning: Relations with fear of COVID-19 and resilience

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## Abstract

The present study investigated parental involvement in the homework of children with learning disabilities, during distance learning due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Also, the role of parents' fear of COVID-19 and resilience in their involvement in homework was examined. The study involved 271 parents (140 mothers and 131 fathers) of children with learning disabilities, who studied in the fifth and sixth grade from 4 schools of Thessaloniki (Greece). Parents completed a set of self-reported questionnaires, which included a scale on parental involvement in homework, a scale on fear of COVID-19, and a scale on resilience. According to the results, both mothers and fathers expressed a high fear of COVID-19, a low sense of resilience, and were involved in homework mostly in terms of parental control. Parental involvement in homework was not significantly differentiated by children's gender and grade. Furthermore, the path analysis model showed that parents' fear of COVID-19 predicted, indirectly and positively, parental control through the mediating role of resilience. The findings show how parents' current emotional state affects their involvement in the homework of children with learning disabilities. Finally, the findings imply the need for parental counseling during the pandemic, to feel more resilient and consequently supportive towards children's learning.

**KEYWORDS**

children with learning disabilities, distance learning, fear of COVID-19, parental involvement in homework, resilience

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The issue of parental involvement in students' homework has attracted scientific interest of many researchers during the last two decades (e.g., Epstein, 1991; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gonida & Cortina, 2014; Jeynes, 2003; Patall et al., 2008). Parental involvement is defined as “the parents' or caregivers' investment in the education of their children” (LaRocque et al., 2011, p. 116), while more specifically parental involvement in children's homework is considered the parental activities at home that are related to children's learning in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The majority of the researchers have agreed that parents' active role in their children's education is considered beneficial for their children's social, emotional, and academic development (Green et al., 2007), contributing in that way to their children's academic success (Graves & Brown Wright, 2011; Mattingly et al., 2002).

However, children's academic outcomes seem to depend on the type of parental involvement in homework (Balli et al., 1997; Fan & Chen, 2001; Patall et al., 2008; Pomerantz et al., 2007). In general, in international literature parental involvement is usually reflected in two different ways in which parents choose to engage in their children's homework. On the one hand, there are parents who display help and support for children's academic efforts, giving clear and consistent guidelines about homework (parental homework support). On the other hand, there are parents who exert pressure on children to complete assignments, and set strict rules, restrictions, and punishments during their involvement in their children's homework (parental homework control; Núñez et al., 2015; Silinskas & Kikas, 2019). These two types of parental involvement (parental homework support/control) seem to be negatively correlated with each other. This means, for example, that the more parents express parental control the less likely they are to adopt parental support when they involve in their children's homework, and vice versa (Núñez et al., 2015; Silinskas & Kikas, 2019). Furthermore, the available findings show that the more supportive the parents they are (e.g., being patient and clear in giving guidelines) during their involvement in school homework (parental homework support) the more likely for children to have higher academic performance. On the contrary, parents' engagement in school homework in a stricter and more controlling way (parental homework control) often makes children more prone to negative academic outcomes (Cooper et al., 2000; Gonida & Cortina, 2014; Ng et al., 2004).

It should be highlighted that the most important reason why the previous studies, as well as the present study, focus on parental involvement during elementary years is the fact that, in general, parents tend to involve in their children's homework to a greater extent during elementary years, as children need more guidance and supervision regarding their learning (Barnard, 2004). On the contrary, parents use to engage in homework less frequently as their children grow older and act more independently during their homework (Epstein & Lee, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Also, the importance of focusing on parents of school-age students lies in the fact that information about the adopted positive (parental support) or negative type (parental control) of parental involvement in homework in the elementary years usually constitutes a predictive factor for children's later academic outcomes in the high school years (Barnard, 2004; Rogers et al., 2009).

Additionally, it is worth noting that most of the related studies that have examined the type of parental involvement in children's homework have been conducted on a sample of parents whose children did not face any learning or developmental difficulty (e.g., Antony-Newman, 2019; Cooper et al., 2000; Gonida & Cortina, 2014; Kalaycı & Öz, 2018; Ng et al., 2004; Tao et al., 2019). Nevertheless, only a few studies have investigated this issue in parents of children with nontypical development, such as children with visual impairments or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD; McDonnell et al., 2012; Rogers et al., 2009). Despite the fact that learning disabilities (LD)<sup>1</sup> are the most common type of special educational needs (World Health Organization, 2015), the

related studies carried out with parents of children with LD are even more limited. Children with LD can be described as those with specific developmental disorders of school skills, including (a) reading disability, (b) writing disability, and (c) arithmetic disability (World Health Organization, 2015). Although findings on parental involvement in the homework of children with LD are scarce, the limited studies show that the situation with parents' help in children's learning at home differs negatively from those of children without LD. For example, children with LD usually require more help from their parents, compared to their peers without LD (Ferrel, 2012), while having a child with LD often results in conflicts in parent-child relationships (Amerongen & Mishna, 2004). The situation described before makes parents of children with LD adopt a maladaptive way of involvement in their children's homework. For instance, parents tend to exert more pressure, restrictions, and give more orders in school tasks, so that they feel that their children's learning is under control. Also, sometimes parents of children with LD, due to the objective learning difficulties, are not fully motivated to engage in their children's homework, while they often even give up doing so, because they feel less efficacious in doing this (Grolnick et al., 1997).

The importance of the issue of parental involvement in children's homework undoubtedly is highlighted by the recent distance learning circumstances, imposed by policymakers on student populations from many countries, such as Greece, during the period of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The fact that since March 2020 almost all learning activities at all educational levels are carried out exclusively online at students' home has probably affected the way parents involve in their children's homework (Sari & Maningtyas, 2020). However, this effect has received little attention until now. According to the available studies, on the one hand, parents seem to support and supervise their children's homework during distance learning (Novianti & Garzia, 2020; Sari & Maningtyas, 2020). On the other hand, parents report problems about how to help their children and provide them with the necessary learning facilities at home. According to parents' responses, this situation often makes them exert control and adopt strict rules when they are involved in their children's homework (Hafidz et al., 2020). Consequently, the findings above seem to be contradictory, as they sometimes reveal a supportive and other times a less supportive parental type during distance learning. Furthermore, these findings don't inform about the specific type of parental involvement in children's homework during the period of distance learning (e.g., parental support/control). Also, the aforementioned findings are based on parents of children with typical learning development, and consequently, we are not allowed to draw safe conclusions for parents of children with LD.

Additionally, it seems that parents' involvement in children's homework seems to be affected by parents' and children's gender. For instance, mothers mention a more extensive involvement (regardless of the type of involvement) in their children's homework, not just because they choose to themselves, but mainly because they are assigned this role due to gender-based stereotypical behaviors (Georgiou, 2000). On the contrary, fathers, claim as excuses for their lower levels of involvement in homework the lack of time, occupational obligations, as well as the fact that engaging in their children's homework belongs to female duties (Nord, 1998). Regarding children's gender, fathers are concerned with their boys' homework, while mothers seem to engage in both, boys' and girls' homework. This could be attributed to findings which prove that fathers, compared with mothers, interact more with sons than daughters in the context of play and school-related activities in general (Tan & Goldberg, 2009). Based on the findings above, it is obvious that the related studies are considerably limited without informing about the specific type of involvement adopted by each parent. This, in conjunction with the fact that the available findings are based almost exclusively on parents of children with typical development, don't offer sufficient information on whether mothers and fathers of children with LD involve in a different way in cases of boys and girls school homework.

Additionally, taking into consideration the emotionally vulnerable period of the COVID-19 pandemic we are going through, someone could not omit to examine the contribution of parents' current emotional state to their involvement in their children's homework. This lies in the fact that recent studies confirm a negative emotional state

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<sup>1</sup>From this point on and for the rest of the present article learning disabilities will be mentioned as LD.

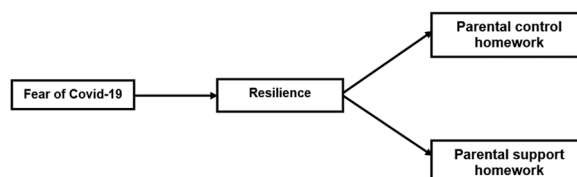
among adults, which seems to be reflected mainly in people's high fear of COVID-19 and low sense of resilience. As far as the first emotional factor, it is mentioned that both male and female adults express a high sense of fear of COVID-19, namely a constant and intense worrying about being infected by a coronavirus (Campagnaro et al., 2020; Gabor et al., 2020). Furthermore, recent findings during the last year (2019–2020) highlight that people's resilience is another emotional factor that has been adversely affected during the period of pandemic. Resilience reflects individuals' ability to adapt positively to a new difficult and adverse condition (Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2006). Based on the available findings, both male and female adults (such as parents) tend to express a low sense of resilience during the period of COVID-19 pandemic (Rosenberg, 2020; Vinkers et al., 2020).

Also, it is worth mentioning that the literature confirms the existence of predictive relationships between the variables under study (parental involvement, fear of COVID-19, and resilience) per two. For example, some researchers mention that there is a negative predictive relationship between adults' fear of COVID-19 and their sense of resilience. In other words, adults who are processed by a high fear of COVID-19, they are more likely to express a low sense of resilience (e.g., Karataş & Tagay, 2020; Seçer et al., 2020). Also, other studies conclude that parents' sense of resilience has been reported as a positive predictive factor for their involvement in children's learning at home (e.g., Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007). That is, parents who feel more resilient in general tend to adopt more beneficial (supportive) ways when they involve in their children's homework and vice versa (e.g., Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007). Taking into consideration the findings above, it is implied that there is a network of relationships among fear of COVID-19, sense of resilience and parental involvement in children's homework. Nevertheless, according to the author's knowledge almost no study has been identified that addresses this network of relationships, and especially for parents of children with LD. Something that could offer a more holistic and, subsequently more realistic perspective on how emotional mechanisms explain a particular parental behavior.

## 1.1 | Purpose, goals, and hypotheses of the present study

Based on the literature review and the literature gaps mentioned above, the present study aimed to investigate the type of parental involvement in the homework of children with LD during distance learning in the period of COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the study examined the role of parents' fear of COVID-19 and resilience in their involvement in homework. Specifically, the following research questions emerged: What type of involvement in homework of children with LD is mostly adopted by parents during distance learning? Is the type of involvement in homework affected by parents' and children's gender? What is the network of the relationships among the variables under study (parental involvement, fear of COVID-19, and resilience)? Based on the related literature, the theoretical connection model of the variables involved is illustrated in Figure 1.

According to the majority of the related findings, it is expected that during distance learning in the period of COVID-19 pandemic parents of children with LD adopt a maladaptive type of involvement in children's homework, such as parental control, to a greater extent than a beneficial one, such as parental support (Hypothesis 1; Amerongenm & Mishna, 2004; Ferrel, 2012; Grolnick et al., 1997). Also, regarding parents' gender (and in accordance with the previous Hypothesis) it is expected that mothers are involved in their children's homework in



**FIGURE 1** Hypothetical structural model of the network of the relationships among variables

terms of control to a greater extent, compared to fathers (Hypothesis 2a; Georgiou, 2000; Nord, 1998). As far as children's gender, it is expected that mothers are involved in terms of control in both boys' and girls' homework, while fathers are involved in terms of control mainly in boy's homework (Hypothesis 2b; Tan & Goldberg, 2009). Finally, regarding the network of the relationships among the variables under study the following are expected: Parents' fear of COVID-19 predicts indirectly (in a negative way) their support and (in a positive way) control type of involvement in homework, through the mediating role of their sense of resilience (Hypothesis 3; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007; Karataş & Tagay, 2020; Seçer et al., 2020).

## 2 | METHODS

### 2.1 | Sample

The pilot sample of the study consisted of 50 randomly selected parents of different families (30 [60%] mothers, 20 [40%] fathers), whose children had been diagnosed with LD and studied in the fifth and sixth grade from schools located in economically diverse districts of Thessaloniki (Greece). Parents were contacted via email by the Educational and Counseling Centers (K.E.S.Y.) of Thessaloniki, which are officially authorized centers by the Greek Ministry of Education for the diagnosis of LD among a student population of each prefecture (Ministry of Education MINEDU, 2018). The parents of the pilot sample were approached during the first period of lockdown in Greece (March–April 2020) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The parents were asked to complete a set of online self-reported questionnaires. The pilot study did not indicate the need to modify the questionnaires. Therefore, the pilot sample ( $N = 50$ ) was integrated into the sample of the main study (221 parents), which was approached online during April–May 2020 (first period of lockdown in Greece) and November 2020 (second period of lockdown in Greece), resulting in a total sample of 271 randomly selected parents of different families (140 [52%] mothers, 131 [48%] fathers). Regarding the children of the 271 families, 151 (56%) were boys and 120 (44%) girls, while as far as their grade 140 children studied in the fifth (52%) and 131 (48%) in the sixth grade of elementary school<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.2 | Instruments

For the present study, a set of self-reported online questionnaires was used. The initial questions concerned parents' (gender) and children's demographic characteristics (diagnostic category, gender, and grade). After this introductory part, three main parts followed.

#### 2.2.1 | Questionnaire on parental involvement in homework

The measurement of parental involvement in students' homework was carried out with the Greek translation of a related questionnaire constructed by Núñez et al. (2015), to reflect the basic two dimensions of parental involvement in homework. The questionnaire has been used in other studies with elementary school students, with good psychometric properties (Núñez et al., 2015; Silinskas & Kikas, 2019). For the purpose of the present study expressive modifications were made so that the questionnaire to address parents (not children) of elementary school children. The questionnaire consists of eight items, which are grouped into two distinct factors reflecting the following two negatively correlated types of parental involvement in children's homework: (a) *parental support*

<sup>2</sup>In the Greek educational system, elementary school lasts 6 years followed by high school, split into junior high and senior high school (Ministry of Education MINEDU, 2018).

homework (e.g., "I help my child with homework if he/she asks for assistance"), and (b) *parental control homework* (e.g., "I scold and punish my child if he/she doesn't do all the homework"). Parents are asked to respond to these statements on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) = *completely false* to (5) = *completely true*.

To test the validity of the questionnaire, a principal component analysis was carried out using the main component method and Varimax-type rotation (KMO = 0.898, Bartlett  $\chi^2 = 1871.340$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Two distinct factors emerged with an eigenvalue more than 1.0 and significant interpretive value (Table 1) in line with the original factor structure: Factor 1 = parental control homework, explaining 33.23% of the total variance, and Factor 2 = parental support homework, explaining 21.15% of the total variance. The internal consistency indexes for each factor separately are: Factor 1 ( $\alpha = 0.828$ ), and Factor 2 ( $\alpha = 0.772$ ). The affinities (according to Pearson's correlation coefficient  $r$ ) of the score of each question by each Factor with the sum of the scores of the remaining questions of the same factor (corrected item – total correlation) are considered satisfactory<sup>3</sup>: Factor 1 (from  $r = 0.59$  to  $r = .81$ ), and Factor 2 (from  $r = 0.55$  to  $r = .88$ ).

### 2.2.2 | Fear of COVID-19 Scale

Parents' fear of COVID-19 was measured with the Greek translation of the Fear of COVID-19 Scale (FCV-19S; Ahorsu et al., 2020). The scale was created to assess individuals' sense of fear of COVID-19. The scale includes seven statements and constitutes one distinct factor measuring participants' emotional state towards COVID-19 (e.g., "I am most afraid of coronavirus-19," "It makes me uncomfortable to think about coronavirus-19."). Participants are asked to respond to the statements based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) = *strongly disagree* to (5) = *strongly agree*. The index of fear of COVID-19 derives from the average of the total score of the statements. The higher the score of the participants the higher their fear of COVID-19.

To test the validity of the scale, a principal component analysis was carried out using the main component method and Varimax-type rotation (KMO = 0.898, Bartlett  $\chi^2 = 1829.191$ ,  $p < .001$ ). One factor emerged with an eigenvalue more than 1.0 and significant interpretive value (Table 2) in line with the original factor structure: Factor 1 = Fear of COVID-19, explaining 58.51% of the total variance. The internal consistency index for the factor is  $\alpha = 0.898$ . The affinities (according to Pearson's correlation coefficient  $r$ ) of the score of each question of the factor

**TABLE 1** Principal component analysis of the questionnaire on parental involvement in students' homework

Statements/proposals	F1	F2
1. My child doing his/her homework is very important to me.	<b>0.747</b>	-0.123
2. I want to know if my child completes all his/her school tasks.	<b>0.705</b>	-0.019
3. Before my child participating in extracurricular activities (e.g., soccer, tennis, swimming, and dancing), I check if he/she did all his/her homework.	<b>0.658</b>	-0.221
4. I will not let my child watch TV, or play with his/her friends ... until he/she has finished homework.	<b>0.583</b>	-0.129
5. I scold and punish my child if he/she doesn't do all the homework.	<b>0.501</b>	-0.102
1. I help my child with homework if he/she asks for assistance.	-0.109	<b>0.534</b>
2. Generally, I ask my child if he/she has questions or need help with his/her homework.	-0.101	<b>0.771</b>
3. I try to give useful explanations to my child, when he/she has to do homework.	-0.015	<b>0.701</b>

Note 1: F1: Factor "Parental control homework," F2: Factor "Parental support homework."

Note 2: All of the above-standardized loadings of the two factors are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

**TABLE 2** Principal component analysis of the Fear of COVID-19 Scale

Statements/proposals	F1
1. I am most afraid of coronavirus-19.	0.559
2. It makes me uncomfortable to think about coronavirus-19.	0.799
3. My hands become clammy when I think about coronavirus-19.	0.498
4. I am afraid of losing my life because of coronavirus-19.	0.588
5. When watching news and stories about coronavirus-19 on social media, I become nervous or anxious.	0.594
6. I cannot sleep because I'm worrying about getting coronavirus-19.	0.712
7. I feel I am part of the Facebook community.	0.505
8. My heart races or palpitates when I think about getting coronavirus-19.	0.539

Note 1: F1: Factor "Fear of COVID-19."

Note 2: All of the above-standardized loadings of the factor are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

Abbreviation: COVID-19, coronavirus disease 2019.

with the sum of the scores of the remaining questions of the factor (corrected item – total correlation) are considered satisfactory: Factor 1 (from  $r = 0.45$  to  $r = 0.74$ ).

### 2.2.3 | Resilience Scale

The measurement of parents' resilience was carried out with the short version of the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (The Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale - CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003) of Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007). The original long version of the CD-RISC (25 items) investigates people's positive adaptation to stressful and/or difficult situations. According to Campbell-Sills and Stein (2007), the factor structure of the original CD-RISC is unstable across demographically equivalent samples, while the short version of the scale has excellent psychometric properties in student population. This finding demonstrates that resilience can be reliably assessed with a subset of the CD-RISC items. Thus, in the short version of the CD-RISC, resilience is measured through 10 representative statements/proposals (they reflect individuals' ability to tolerate experiences such as change, personal problems, illness, pressure, failure, and painful feelings), which form a single-distinct factor "resilience" (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007). These statements/proposals are answered on a 5-point Likert scale (from 0 = *not at all true* to 4 = *almost always true*). Examples of the statements/proposals are the following: "I am able to adapt to change," "I tend to bounce back after illness or hardship," and "I can handle unpleasant feelings." Individual items are summed to produce an overall score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of resilience.

To test the validity of the scale, a principal component analysis was carried out using the main component method and Varimax-type rotation ( $KMO = 0.819$ , Bartlett  $\chi^2 = 1819.399$ ,  $p < .001$ ). One distinct factor emerged with eigenvalue more than 1.0 and significant interpretive value (Table 3) in line with the original factor structure: Factor 1 = resilience, explaining 65.23% of the total variance. The internal consistency index for Factor 1 is  $\alpha = 0.829$ . The affinities (according to Pearson's correlation coefficient  $r$ ) of the score of each question by Factor 1 with the sum of the scores of the remaining questions of the factor (corrected item – total correlation) are considered satisfactory: Factor 1 (from  $r = 0.59$  to  $r = 0.81$ ).

<sup>3</sup>In a sample of 300 and 600 people, loadings of more than 0.29 and 0.21, accordingly, are accepted (Field, 2005).

**TABLE 3** Principal component analysis of the Resilience Scale

Statements/proposals	F1
1. I am able to adapt to change.	0.599
4. I can deal with whatever comes.	0.711
6. I try to see humorous side of problems.	0.590
7. Coping with stress can strengthen me.	0.719
8. I tend to bounce back after illness or hardship.	0.545
11. I can achieve goals despite obstacles.	0.771
14. I can stay focused under pressure.	0.513
16. I am not easily discouraged by failure.	0.801
17. I thinks of self as strong person.	0.759
19. I can handle unpleasant feelings.	0.530

Note 1: F1: Factor "Resilience."

Note 2: All of the above-standardized loadings of the factor are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

## 2.3 | Design

After the approval for the survey by the Greek Ministry of Education, an email was sent to 80 randomly selected parents of different families, whose children had been diagnosed with LD and studied in the fifth and sixth grade from schools located in economically diverse districts of Thessaloniki (Greece). The email was sent by the Educational and Counseling Centers (K.E.S.Y.) of Thessaloniki, where their children had been diagnosed with LD. The email included an attached consent form with details about the study and the identity of the researcher (the author of the article), who is an employee of K.E.S.Y. of Thessaloniki, as well as the link of the survey questionnaires that were designed using the online Google Drive platform. Finally, in the end of the consent form parents were asked to mention the diagnostic category of their children's LD. Out of the 80 parents, 50 responded positively to the researcher's email, coming from economically diverse districts of Thessaloniki (western, eastern, and central). The answers of the participating parents were automatically entered in a logistic sheet of the platform. The above process, which led to the selection of the pilot sample, led to no modifications of the online questionnaires. Consequently, the same process was carried out for the selection of the larger sample of the main study ( $N = 221$  parents), forming in that way the final sample of the study ( $N = 271$  parents). It should be highlighted that most of the participating parents didn't clarify the specific LD their children had been diagnosed with. This did not allow the researcher to investigate (with appropriate statistical analyses) the effect of students' diagnostic category of LD on the variables studied. The duration for the completion of the questionnaires was estimated at around 10–15 min. Undoubtedly, the participation of the parents was voluntary, while all the criteria of anonymity and confidentiality of the data were met.

## 3 | RESULTS

### 3.1 | Methods of analyses

For the present study, to depict parental involvement in the homework of children with LD (Hypothesis 1), as well as parents' fear of COVID-19 and resilience descriptive statistics were applied. To test Hypotheses 2a



and 2b two multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were used, setting the two types of parental involvement as dependent variables in both analyses. In the first analysis parents' gender and in the second analysis students' gender were considered as independent variables. To investigate the dyadic relationships between the variables under study (parental involvement, fear of COVID-19, and resilience), a series of Pearson correlation analyses were carried out (Pearson  $r$ ). Finally, the confirmation of Hypothesis 3 was checked by applying path analysis to the data (using the Mplus programme with the Maximum Likelihood method) to depict the network of the relationships among the variables involved, which leads to the types of parental involvement in the homework of children with LD.

### 3.2 | Descriptive statistics

According to the parents' responses, it seems that they use a control ( $Mean = 4.15, SD = 0.70$ ) to a greater extent, compared with support ( $Mean = 2.58, SD = 0.54$ ) when they involve in their children's homework, which confirms Hypotheses 1. Also, the results showed that parents expressed a high sense of fear of COVID-19 ( $Mean = 4.09, SD = 0.77$ ) but a relatively low sense of resilience ( $Mean = 2.05, SD = 0.85$ ).

### 3.3 | MANOVAs results

According to the results, parents' gender did not seem to significantly differentiate their type of involvement in their children's homework ( $p > .05$ ), rejecting in that way Hypotheses 2a. Hypotheses 2b was also rejected, as parental involvement in homework was not statistically affected by children's gender ( $p > .05$ ).

### 3.4 | Correlations among variables

In Table 4, it seems that parental support is negatively correlated with parental control in children's homework ( $r = -0.399, p < .01$ ). Also, there is a negative correlation between parents' fear of COVID-19 and their sense of resilience ( $r = -0.518, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, parental control is positively correlated with parents' fear of COVID-19 ( $r = 0.151, p < .05$ ) and negatively correlated with their sense of resilience ( $r = -0.301, p < .01$ ). On the contrary, parental support is negatively correlated with parents' fear of COVID-19 ( $r = -0.157, p < .05$ ) and positively correlated with their sense of resilience ( $r = 0.398, p < .01$ ).

**TABLE 4** Correlations among variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1 Parental control				
2 Parental support	-0.399**			
3 Fear of COVID-19	0.181*	-0.157*		
4 Resilience	-0.301**	0.398**	-0.518**	

Note 1: \* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Note 2: No statistically significant correlations ( $p > .05$ ) were omitted.

Abbreviation: COVID-19, coronavirus disease 2019.

### 3.5 | Path analyses among variables

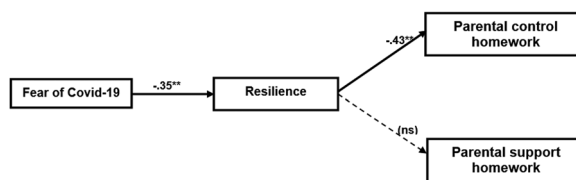
To map the network of the relationships among the variables involved (parental involvement, fear of COVID-19, and resilience), which leads to the type of parental involvement in the homework of children with LD, a series of preliminary analyses of linear stepwise regressions were performed to check the predictive relationships between the variables per two. Meeting the assumptions of normality and without any missing cases, the path model that emerged from the parents' responses had good fit indexes (Figure 2):  $\chi^2 (27, N = 271) = 35.033, p > .05$  (CFI = 0.991, TLI = 0.991, RMSEA = 0.064, SRMR = 0.083)

According to Figure 2, parents' fear of COVID-19 constitutes a direct and negative predictor of their sense of resilience. That is, parents who express a high sense of fear of COVID-19 (as proved in the present study) tend to be characterized by a low sense of resilience. Parents' sense of resilience in turn seems to be a negative predictor of their involvement in children's homework in terms of control (parental control) but not in terms of support (parental support). In other words, parents who are characterized by a low sense of resilience (as it proved in the present study) tend to adopt a maladaptive type of parental involvement, such as parental control, in the homework of their children with LD. By examining the statistically significant mediating role of parents' sense of resilience in the relationship between their fear of COVID-19, on the one hand, and their parental control, on the other hand, the following was found: parents' fear of COVID-19 indirectly and positively predicts their control in homework through their sense of resilience ( $Z^4 = -2.39, p < .05$ ). This finding confirms Hypotheses 3 only partially, as parents' resilience was not proved to be a mediating variable between their fear of COVID-19 and their support in their children's homework.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the types of parental involvement in the homework of children with LD during distance learning in the period of COVID-19. At the same time, the role of parents' fear of COVID-19 and resilience in their involvement in their children's homework was examined.

According to the results, parents of children with LD seemed to adopt to a great extent a less beneficial way when they engage in their children's learning at home. Specifically, they seemed to be controlling by exerting pressure on their children, interfering, and using orders during their involvement in homework (parental control). On the contrary, the beneficial type of parental involvement, such as providing consistent learning and guidance to their children when they really need it (parental support), seemed to be adopted to a lesser extent by parents of children with LD. The findings confirm Hypothesis 1, according to which it was expected that parental control is mostly expressed in case of involvement in the homework of children with LD, as well as studies, which mention that parents' engagement with the homework of children with LD usually reflects controlling, commanding, interfering or abstaining (Amerongenm & Mishna, 2004; Ferrel, 2012; Grolnick et al., 1997). Students' objective



**FIGURE 2** Schematic representation of the path model for parental involvement. Note 1: The values on the arrows are standardized coefficients of the model. Note 2: \*\* $p < .01$ , (ns) = non-significant. COVID-19, coronavirus disease 2019

difficulties in specific learning domains constitute for many parents an unfamiliar field (Amerongenm & Mishna, 2004). This often makes parents feel that they don't have control of their children's learning situation, as they are unable to help them effectively with homework (Amerongenm & Mishna, 2004). Obviously, parents trying to compensate for this situation adopt a more controlling or interfering pattern of engagement in children's learning at home. Furthermore, this parents' attitude towards children's homework could be associated with the current period of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital illiteracy of many parents in combination with technical and financial issues raised at home due to the online learning, such as the need for good quality of internet connection, separate room for school, teleconferences, possible purchase of more than one computer/laptop (Hafidz et al., 2020) could possibly trigger a more conflicting family environment, leading parents to make use of less patient and beneficial ways of helping their children with their school homework.

Furthermore, the results showed that both mothers and fathers expressed a high fear of COVID-19 and a relatively low sense of resilience. These findings confirm related studies conducted on adults during the last year of the pandemic (e.g., Campagnaro et al., 2020; Gabor et al., 2020; Rosenberg, 2020; Vinkers et al., 2020). It is likely that the significant and sudden changes and the intense socio-emotional consequences on people's life during lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Rogers et al., 2021) made parents, regardless of their gender, experience stress, insecurity, and a low ability to adapt positively to the current difficult and adverse situation. Additionally, the present study revealed that parents' gender didn't significantly affect their type of involvement in their children's homework. This finding disconfirms Hypothesis 2a, according to which mothers were expected to be more involved in their children's school issues, regardless of the type of involvement, compared to fathers. Also, this finding is not in line with related studies, which highlight mothers' generally higher involvement in children's homework (e.g., in control or supportive way), compared with their husbands (Georgiou, 2000; Nord, 1998). Taking into consideration the fact that the studies mentioned before have been carried out with parents of children without LD, someone could argue the following: the existence of objective learning difficulties among children is likely to make both mothers and fathers more alert regarding their children's learning at home, leading parents to almost equal involvement in homework issues. However, the fact that LD often constitutes an unclear field for parents, as described earlier, possibly explains why the involvement of both mothers and fathers seems to be maladaptive (controlling and interfering). Also, the fact that both mothers and fathers seemed to get involved in children's homework could be attributed to the period of COVID-19 pandemic. The confinement measures imposed by the Greek government to all citizens during the pandemic (Papiris et al., 2020) increased the time spent at home for both parents (Daniels, 2020), possibly making mothers and fathers more available to engage and supervise their children's homework. Nevertheless, this extra time that parents spent on their children's homework doesn't seem to be supportive in most cases. Another finding of the present study was that children's gender didn't significantly affect the types of parental involvement. This finding disconfirms Hypothesis 2b, according to which it was expected that mothers are involved in both boys' and girls' homework while fathers are involved mainly in boy's homework. Accordingly, this finding is in contrast with related studies conducted on parents of children without LD, which reveal the pattern of parental involvement described before based on children's gender (e.g., Tan & Goldberg, 2009). These parents' gender-based stereotypical behaviors (Georgiou, 2000) don't seem to apply in the case of parents of children with LD. As mentioned before, it is likely that raising a child with LD in combination with both parents' more time spent at home during the period of lockdown (Daniels, 2020) make mothers and fathers more available for supervising their child's homework during distance learning (even in a maladaptive way). Therefore, based on the findings above, the following is concluded: The fact that during distance learning both parents seemed to be interested in the homework of their children with LD, regardless of their children's gender, could be considered positive. However, it seems that parents choose to involve in a less beneficial way (parental

<sup>4</sup>Z = standardized normal distribution value.

control), which is more alarming taking into consideration that children with LD usually need a more supportive and personalized way of parental guidance in their homework (Keeffe, 2017; Polychroni et al., 2006).

Finally, the results of the path analysis model revealed that parents' fear of COVID-19 predicts indirectly and positively their control in their involvement in children's homework, through the negative mediating role of parents' resilience. This means that Hypothesis 3 was confirmed only partially. At the same time, Hypothesis 3 was partially disconfirmed, as parents' resilience didn't mediate between their fear of COVID-19 and their support in their children's homework. The path analysis results reflect findings of previous studies, which conclude that adults' fear of COVID-19 can lead to a low sense of resilience (e.g., Karataş & Tagay, 2020; Seçer et al., 2020), which in turn can result in adopting a less beneficial way of involvement in children's learning at home (e.g., Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007). Actually, the indirect (and not the direct) effect of parents' fear of COVID-19 on their controlling involvement in their children's homework could be considered encouraging, as it implies that strengthening parents' low sense of resilience during the current period could suspend the above effect. In other words, parents who experience stressful feelings during the unstable and unsecure period of COVID-19 pandemic does not necessarily mean that they adopt more maladaptive ways of involvement in their children's learning at home, as long as they are possessed by a high sense of resilience. Undoubtedly, this is of high practical importance for prevention/intervention actions by mental health professionals during the period of lockdown considering parents' reported vulnerable emotional state (see Contribution of the study section). Finally, the fact that parents' current emotional state (high fear of COVID-19, low resilience) didn't significantly predict their parental support towards their children's homework could be attributed to the fact that this type of parental involvement was adopted to a much lower extent in general by the participating parents.

In summary, the present study concludes that during the current period of distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic parents of children with LD tend to adopt a less beneficial type of involvement (control) in homework. Furthermore, parents' high fear of COVID-19 and low sense of resilience, displaying the current period, seem to constitute crucial predictive factors for their control type of involvement in children's learning at home. Therefore, the present study could argue that the maladaptive way of parental involvement in the homework of children with LD (e.g., control) that has been reported before the period of the COVID-19 pandemic (Amerongenm & Mishna, 2004; Grolnick et al., 1997) could possibly be burdened due to the evoked parents' vulnerable emotional state the current period.

#### 4.1 | Limitations, future research, and contribution of the present study

The findings of the present study should be interpreted with caution as they are subject to specific limitations. For example, the restriction to parents of a particular city limits the possibility of generalizing the results. Also, the study followed a quantitative method, which did not allow for an in-depth qualitative investigation of the parents' relevant feelings and practices. Finally, the lack of information about the specific diagnostic category of children's LD, did not allow the examination of the effect of these diagnostic categories (e.g., dyslexia) on parental involvement. These limitations could trigger future relevant studies conducted on a sample of parents from other cities as well. A larger sample of parents would allow the investigation of the statistical effect mentioned before. Furthermore, a related study conducted on both parents and children with LD could offer a more realistic view of the issue studied, as according to some researchers (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Núñez et al., 2015) children's perceived parental involvement in homework is more real than the actual nature or extent of parents' engagement in homework. In addition, a complementary qualitative investigation of the issue under study, through individual semi-structured interviews or focus groups with parents, could better capture their emotional state and their experiences with their involvement in their children's homework during distance learning, possibly highlighting other parameters of the issue studied.

Nevertheless, the present study contributes to international and mainly Greek literature on the topic. It constitutes the first attempt to depict the network of the relationships between emotional (fear of COVID-19, resilience) and behavioral factors (parental involvement) that explain the way parents of children with LD involve in learning at home during the period of distance learning. Undoubtedly, these findings constitute an important source of information and awareness for the professionals of mental health. The findings imply the need for living or even online educational and psychological support for parents during the period of pandemic. This initiative could be addressed by school counselors of each prefecture or school psychologists, who are officially responsible for organizing prevention/intervention actions (even online) for the members of the school community (e.g., parents) regarding current school issues in General and Special Education (Jacob et al., 2016; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2008), such as parental involvement in homework during the lockdown. Also, these actions could be supported by competent Counseling Centers under the auspices of each country's Ministry of Education, such as the Educational and Counseling Centers in Greece, where psychologists and special education teachers are in constant (even distance) cooperation with the school community, to guide and help classroom teachers and parents of children with LD to effectively adjust to adverse circumstances (Ministry of Education MINEDU, 2018), such as the period of the pandemic. This psychological and educational support should focus on beneficial types of parental involvement in their children's homework, promoting autonomy support and cognitive engagement, during distance learning. Furthermore, psychological help to parents, through short-term (online) sessions, is important to address strategies about managing parents' stressful feelings about the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as enhancing their sense of resilience during the current period. The latter strategies may act protectively against the development of dysfunctional types of parental involvement in homework, forming in that way a family environment that could be considered supportive for children's academic performance.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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