

PSIWORLD 2012

## Perceived Social Support and Perceived Self-Efficacy during Adolescence

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support during adolescence. 240 teenagers, 40 boys and 200 girls, aged 15 to 20 ( $M=17.46$ ,  $SD=1.94$ ), participated in the research. The statistical analysis has identified statistically significant positive relations as well as significant differences between the teenagers' perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support at the beginning of adolescence, as opposed to the end of this period. The results of the study can be used in school or family counseling, as well as in the configuration of some optimization programs of the pupil/student-teacher, pupil/student-parents relationship.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of PSIWORLD 2012

*Keywords:* Perceived self-efficacy; perceived social support, adolescence.

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### 1. Introduction

Adolescence, the age of rebirth (Rousseau, 1973), between 14 and 20 years old (Crețu, 2009, pp. 270), represents an essential moment in the human psychic development. In order to cope with the multiple changes and transformations characteristic to this stage (of which: the relentless pursuit of self-identity, the development of a coherent self-image, attaining independence and autonomy, the ravage and the rearrangement of the personality structure) (Crețu, 2001), teenagers must be confident in their competence and their ability to deal with new tasks, confidence which determine them to assume life's challenges, to avoid difficulties, to set exciting life goals, to get deeply involved and to fully engage in activity, to re-edify their internal forces quickly after failures and to reduce stress and vulnerability (Negovan, 2010).

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Perceived self-efficacy represents an “acquisition” of the personality, which influences the person in all the fields of activity (Negovan, 2006, pp. 34). A. Bandura (1994) defines the perceived self-efficacy, as the person’s belief regarding his/her own capacity to perform at a certain expected level, belief that influences the way in which the person relates to the events affecting his/her life, the way in which the person feels, thinks, motivates himself/herself and behaves.

The research is based on the idea sustained by specialized literature that the development and the consolidation of perceived self-efficacy are accomplished in relation to perceived social support (Schunk and Meece, 2005). During adolescence, some changes, regarding the need for social support, occur. Teenagers spend most of their time at school, in their teachers and their classmates’ company (Eccles and Roeser, 2003), which explains the increasing need for social support in this area.

Perceived social support is a different construct from the offered or received social support. This difference is even more important during adolescence, the period in which serious discrepancies can appear between what he/she is being offered/receives and what the teenager thinks he/she receives.

One of the most known models of perceived social support is the multidimensional one: the social support offered by family, the social support offered by friends, the social support offered by “significant other(s)” (teachers, classmates) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley, 1988, pp. 30).

The main objective of this study consists of exploring the relation between perceived social support (with all its three dimensions) and perceived self-efficacy during adolescence. The following formulated hypotheses are subordinated to this objective: 1) at the beginning of adolescence, perceived self-efficacy correlates with teenagers’ perception of social support from significant others and from family, while, at the end of this period, perceived self-efficacy correlates with the teenagers’ perception of social support from significant others and from friends; 2) teenagers’ school experience and the three dimensions of the perceived social support predict perceived self-efficacy; 3) there are significant differences regarding the teenagers’ perception of social support (with all its three dimensions) and their perceived self- efficacy at the beginning of adolescence, as opposed to the end of this period.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The participants included in this study were 240 teenagers, 40 boys and 200 girls, aged 15-20 ( $M=17.46$ ,  $SD=1.94$ ): 120 pupils in the first year of high school (9<sup>th</sup> grade) and 120 students in the first university year.

### 2.2. Instruments

The study is based on the data collected through two self-evaluating scales: 1. *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (Zimet et al., 1988), composed of 12 items (e.g. “Every time I’ve needed it, I’ve always found a certain person to be there for me.”); 2. *Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale* (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995), composed of 10 items (e.g. “If I insist, I succeed in solving my difficult problems.”). For each measure, items were averaged so that scores ranged from 1 (indicating the lowest level) to 5 (indicating the highest level). The scales showed a good internal consistency (table 1).

### 2.3. Procedure

The instruments were applied to high school students in their classroom, in the presence of an operator involved in the research and a teacher. The students’ consent to participate in the research was active, while their legal guardians’ one was passive. University students were asked to fill in the questionnaires outside of classes’

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