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Steps in the construction and verification of an explanatory model of psychosocial adjustment



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Perceived social support;
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Abstract The aim of the present study was to empirically test an explanatory model of psychosocial adjustment during adolescence, with psychosocial adjustment during this stage being understood as a combination of school adjustment (or school engagement) and subjective well-being. According to the hypothetic model, psychosocial adjustment depends on self-concept and resilience, which in turn act as mediators of the influence of perceived social support (from family, peers and teachers) on this adjustment. Participants were 1250 secondary school students (638 girls and 612 boys) aged between 12 and 15 years (Mean = 13.72; SD = 1.09). The results provided evidence of: (a) the influence of all three types of perceived support on subject resilience and self-concept, with perceived family support being particularly important in this respect; (b) the influence of the support received from teachers on school adjustment and support received from the family on psychological wellbeing; and (c) the absence of any direct influence of peer support on psychosocial adjustment, although indirect influence was observed through the psychological variables studied. These results are discussed from an educational perspective and in terms of future research.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Apoyo social percibido;
Autoconcepto;
Resiliencia;
Bienestar subjetivo;
Implicación escolar

Pasos en la construcción y verificación de un modelo explicativo sobre el ajuste psicosocial

Resumen El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo someter a comprobación empírica un modelo explicativo sobre el ajuste psicosocial en la adolescencia, entendiendo el ajuste psicosocial en esta etapa de la vida como la conjunción del ajuste escolar (o implicación en la escuela) y el bienestar subjetivo. Según este modelo hipotetizado, el ajuste psicosocial depende del

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autoconcepto y de la resiliencia, que a su vez funcionan como mediadores de la influencia del apoyo social percibido (de la familia, pares y profesorado) sobre dicho ajuste. Participaron en esta investigación un total de 1250 estudiantes de ESO (638 mujeres y 612 hombres) de entre 12 y 15 años ($M = 13.72$; $DT = 1.09$). Los resultados aportan evidencias de: a) la influencia de los tres tipos de apoyo percibido sobre la capacidad de resiliencia y sobre el nivel de autoconcepto, destacando el de la familia; b) del apoyo del profesorado sobre el ajuste escolar y de la familia sobre el bienestar psicológico; y c) del nulo influjo directo del apoyo de los amigos sobre el ajuste psicosocial, pero sí indirecto a través de las variables psicológicas. Estos datos se discuten tanto desde perspectivas educativas como en orden a futuras investigaciones.

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Introduction

The concept adjustment is closely related to adaptation and has been defined in terms of social competence manifested at a behavioral level, or in terms of success in the performance of developmental tasks during a specific development stage (Masten & Tellegen, 2012). Therefore, it is opposed to the concept of misfit at school and with it related variables: stress, burnout, bullying, etc. (Otero-López, Villardefrancos, Castro & Santiago, 2014). Given that the school context is an unquestionably important framework of reference for adolescents, of the many indicators that may be used to measure psychosocial adjustment we can highlight school adjustment, as an index of social adaptation, and personal adjustment, understood as psychological wellbeing (Rodríguez-Fernández, Drogue, & Revuelta, 2012).

By school adjustment we mean subjects' adaptation to the demands and characteristics of the school system, as well as the degree to which they feel committed to and comfortable and accepted at school (Appleton, Christeson, & Furlong, 2008; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008). For its part, psychological wellbeing is made up of life satisfaction and positive and negative affect (Diener, 1994; Rodríguez-Fernández & Goñi, 2011). The most desirable outcome would be to achieve both (school adjustment and psychological wellbeing), which is why it is important to identify the variables associated with each, in order to foster their optimization.

It is also important to remember that adaptive behavior during adolescence is better explained when a broad range of different factors are taken into consideration (Moreno & Vera, 2011). In this sense, an adequate explanation of psychosocial adjustment should bear in mind both contextual and psychological variables (De la Torre-Cruz, Casanova, Villa-Carpio, & Cerezo, 2013), both of which are involved in its determination (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2012).

The adjustment of young people and adolescents to the family and school environment is currently a source of concern for both educational institutions and society in general, with news items about behavioral problems among this age group in diverse interaction environments abounding in the media. Family, school and peers are young people's main

points of reference, and can fulfill either a protective function or, in some cases, can foster the emergence of situations of social maladjustment (Saldaña, 2001).

The importance of parental socialization in adolescents' school achievement is beyond doubt (Martínez, 2009), since the family is considered the main agent of socialization in children's development (Gavazzi, 2013). However, it is also closely related to adolescents' personal development (Cava, Musitu, & Murgui, 2007), since it plays a key role in children's psychological adjustment, serving as a protection factor (Lorence Lara, Hidalgo-García, & Dekovic, 2013). When relations between parents and their adolescent children are characterized by affection, support and positive communication, this fosters children's social acceptance and school (Gaylord, Kitzmann, & Lockwood, 2003) and personal adjustment (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, although relations with parents continue to be important during adolescence, during this developmental stage the peer group gradually becomes the most influential socializing context (Fernández & Bravo, 2000). As children progress from adolescence to young adulthood, their self-esteem and life satisfaction depend more and more on their peer relations and less and less on the support they receive from their parents (Oliva, Parra, & Sánchez-Queija, 2002). In relation to school adjustment, some studies indicate that peers have considerable influence on attitudes to school, school engagement, academic success, motivation and liking for school (Lubbers, Van Der Werf, Kuyper, & Offringa, 2006; Studsrød & Bru, 2011). However, other more recent studies refute the influence of peers on school adjustment, affirming that only family has an effect here, while peers only influence satisfaction with life (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2012).

There is a notable degree of consensus regarding the influence of the school context on the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents, particularly as regards the development of adaptive and maladaptive behaviors (Otero-López, 2001). Here, the figure of the teacher is especially important, particularly when we take into consideration the fact that the climate of the school is created mainly by the adults present in that environment (Woolley, 2006). It is therefore logical to assume that a good relationship between teachers and students will have multiple benefits

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