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## Family and school context in school engagement

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### KEYWORDS

Family support;  
Peer support;  
Support from  
teacher;  
School engagement;  
Secondary education

**Abstract** Family, peers and school are the three main contexts associated with school engagement. This study aims to analyze possible gender and age differences in these contextual variables and school engagement, as well as the relationship between the two. Participants were 1543 secondary school children aged between 12 and 18 years ( $M = 14.24$ ;  $SD = 1.63$ ). Of the total sample group, 728 (47.2%) were boys and 815 (52.8%) were girls. All completed the Family and Peer Support (FPS) scale, the Teachers' Support scale of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) questionnaire, and the School Engagement Measure (SEM). The results reveal significant differences between boys and girls, with girls scoring higher in perceived peer support and behavioral and emotional engagement. Younger respondents were also observed to score significantly higher for perceived support from parents and teachers, as well as for school engagement. Significant correlation indexes were observed between contextual variables, as well as between these variables and school engagement, although it was for support from teachers that the strongest correlation was found.

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

Apoyo familiar;  
Apoyo de amigos/as;  
Apoyo del  
profesorado;  
Implicación escolar;  
Educación secundaria

### El contexto familiar y escolar en la implicación escolar

**Resumen** La familia, los pares y la escuela constituyen los tres principales contextos asociados a la implicación escolar. Este estudio trata de analizar las posibles diferencias en función del sexo y de la edad en dichas variables contextuales y en la implicación escolar, así como la relación entre ellas. Participaron un total de 1543 estudiantes de Educación Secundaria, 728 hombres (47.2%) y 815 mujeres (52.8%) con edades comprendidas entre los 12 y los 18 años ( $M = 14.24$ ;  $SD = 1.63$ ). Todos ellos cumplimentaron la escala de Apoyo Familiar y de Amigos (AFA), la escala de apoyo de profesores del Cuestionario Health Behaviour in School aged Children (HBSC) y el School Engagement Measure (SEM). Los resultados muestran diferencias significativas a favor de las mujeres en la percepción del apoyo de los amigos, así como en la implicación

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comportamental y emocional. Se hallan a su vez, puntuaciones significativamente más altas para el grupo de menor edad en cuanto a la percepción del apoyo tanto de los padres como del profesorado, y en la implicación escolar. Por otro lado, se observan índices de correlación significativos entre las variables contextuales, así como entre éstas últimas y la implicación escolar, si bien es el apoyo del profesorado el que correlaciona con más intensidad.

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## Introduction

The excessive emphasis that has placed classic psychology on students' negative aspects has filtered through to the educational psychology also (Huebner & Gilman, 2003) focusing traditionally, psychoeducational research on a risk model. Among risk or maladjustment indicators further investigated (Buelga, Cava, & Musitu, 2012; Cava, Musitu, Buelga, & Murgui, 2010; Povedano, Jiménez, Moreno, Amador, & Musitu, 2012) are included school failure, expected school failure and interpersonal problems with peers.

In contrast to this approach that focused on maladjustment to the school environment, positive psychology is interested in adjustment, considering students' engagement as a major factor of it. School engagement is considered a vital factor in social-personal development and in academic success (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2013; Ros, Goikoetxea, Gairín, & Lekue, 2012), as well as a protective factor against poor achievement, disaffection and school dropout (Zimmer-Gembeck, Chipuer, Hanisch, Creed, & McGregor, 2006). It is viewed as a possible target for direct intervention during primary school, as part of an attempt to ensure school success and to avoid or at least minimize the occurrence of dropout during secondary school (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

The concept of school engagement varies from one author to another. There are some who consider it as the connection and commitment to their school and motivation to learn and perform (Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009); others, however, understand it as an active engagement, firm commitment and concentrated attention, in contrast to superficial participation, apathy or lack of interest (Newman, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992); or even as a centripetal experience of relating the student to the school (Veiga et al., 2012). Finn's participation-identification model (1989) proposes two elements of school engagement: behavioral and emotional. This model evolved later (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008) with the inclusion of the cognitive component also. Today, it is widely accepted that school engagement is regarded as a meta-construct encompassing diverse related constructs, made up of emotional, behavioral and cognitive components (Fredricks et al., 2004).

The emotional dimension encompasses feelings toward school, teachers and fellow students; the behavioral dimension refers to observable acts or participation in extracurricular activities, finishing set tasks and mean overall grades; the cognitive dimension includes students' perceptions and beliefs about themselves, their school, their teachers and their fellow students.

The term social support refers to the emotional, material and informational input and companionship perceived or received from diverse components of the individual's social network (Gracia, Herrero, & Musitu, 1995). It has been demonstrated that having people you can trust and to whom you can express emotions, difficulties and opinions while feeling listened to and accepted has a major impact on both school adjustment and school engagement (Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). From the perspective of ecological systems theory, three main social contexts are associated with school engagement: family, peers and school (Ou, 2005; Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Reschly-Anderson, 2003). These three contexts have undergone, over recent years, numerous structural, legal, organizational and even philosophical changes, turning them into objects of renewed scientific interest.

The family constitutes an emotional hub that is vital to human beings' full development. It is the child's first development environment (Cava, Musitu, & Murgui, 2006) and its importance for the academic achievement of adolescents is beyond any doubt (Martínez, 2009). It has been shown that parental support plays a key role in both school engagement (Veiga et al., 2012) and school adjustment (Rodríguez, Droguett, & Revuelta, 2012); parents who support their children and have high academic expectations of them prompt them to strive for results (Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006); although while parental influence is greater during children's initial years at school, later on, the adults in the school environment itself tend to become more significant (Woolley & Bowen, 2007).

The peer group becomes during adolescence the most influential socializing context, even though family relations continue to have a strong influence (Fernández del Valle & Bravo, 2000). Relationships with family members cede part of their influence to relationships with the peer group, which become increasingly intense and stable, constituting the priority socializing context and the primary source of support (Allen & Land, 1999; Hartup, 1993; Oliva, 1999). Studies indicate that peers have a considerable influence on several aspects of school adjustment (Studsrod & Bru, 2011), including attitude to school, school engagement and academic success (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). This remains true even in longitudinal studies (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). Moreover, this relationship is even more intense when mediated by beliefs in academic self-efficacy (Buhs, 2005; Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2008). Some studies confirm a positive relationship between peer support and behavioral school engagement (Berndt & Keefe, 1995), affective school engagement (García-Reid, 2007), both these types (Furrer & Skinner, 2003) and general

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