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Teen resilience: the role of school and family connectedness

Resiliencia en adolescentes: el papel de la conectividad con la escuela y familia

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Abstract

The sense of connectedness with family and school is an element associated with the psychosocial development in adolescents, being a factor that can influence the way they respond against adversity and adjust to change. This study aimed to establish the predictive value of intrafamilial relationships and connectedness with school, teachers, and between students on resilience in Mexican high school adolescents. The sample consisted of 645 students (50.7% female), with an age range of 12 to 16 years old (M =13.35, SD = 0.99), from a public high school in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area, México. Participants answered the Intrafamilial Relations Assessment Scale, the subscales of social connectedness with school and students of the MDS3 School Climate Survey, and the revised Resilience Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents. Using correlations and multiple linear regression analyzes, the results indicated moderate positive associations between the study variables and resilience. The higher coefficients were found in the correlation between intrafamilial relationships and resilience. In the predictive analysis, intrafamilial relationship, connectedness with school and between students, conserved its significance for predicting resilience, with family relationships maintaining the highest coefficient. Results suggest that the family environment is the main factor that shapes how adolescents cope with adversity. Limitations and practical implications are discussed. We conclude it is important to generate strategies that promote a higher adolescent connectedness with key environments for the development of protective factors such as resilience.

Keywords: resilience; social connectedness; adolescence; family; school

Resumen

El sentido de conexión con la familia y escuela es un elemento asociado con el desarrollo psicosocial de los adolescentes, siendo un factor que puede influir en su manera de responder a la adversidad y ajustarse a los cambios. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo establecer el valor predictivo de las relaciones intrafamiliares y la conexión con la escuela, los maestros y los estudiantes sobre la resiliencia en los adolescentes de secundaria. La muestra estuvo conformada por 645 estudiantes (50.7% mujeres), con un rango de edad de 12 a 16 años (M = 13.35, DT = 0.99), de una escuela secundaria pública de México. Los participantes respondieron la Escala de Evaluación de Relaciones Intrafamiliares, las subescalas de conexión social con la escuela y los estudiantes de la Encuesta de Clima Escolar MDS3 y el Cuestionario de Resiliencia para Niños y Adolescentes revisado. Los resultados indicaron correlaciones positivas moderadas entre las variables de estudio y la resiliencia, siendo la más elevada la correlación entre relaciones intrafamiliares y resiliencia. En el análisis predictivo, la relación intrafamiliar, la conexión con la escuela y entre estudiantes, conservaron la significancia para predecir la resiliencia, manteniendo las relaciones familiares los coeficientes más altos. Los resultados sugieren que el entorno familiar es el factor principal que determina cómo los adolescentes afrontan la adversidad. Se discuten las limitaciones y las implicaciones prácticas. Concluimos que es importante generar estrategias que promuevan una mayor conexión del adolescente con los entornos que influyen en el desarrollo de factores protectores como la resiliencia.

Palabras clave: resiliencia; conectividad social; adolescencia; familia; escuela



Adolescence is a phase in which maintaining a sense of connection and belonging with the individual's fundamental context becomes a central aspect to promote adequate psychosocial development (Steiner et al., 2019). From a bioecological perspective, the individual development is directly influenced by its interaction with different systems and the relationships between them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In general, family and school are considered two of the most important systems at this stage, within which the subject acquires the necessary elements for its socio-emotional development (Oldfield et al., 2016; Serrano & Rodríguez, 2016).

Regarding family, teenagers who experience positive intrafamilial relationships, characterized by high cohesion and support, tend to have a better self-concept, social skills, and school performance, fewer socio-emotional problems, higher self-esteem and more resilience (Foster et al., 2017; Murillo-Casas et al., 2015; Preston et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2018). Likewise, in cases where adolescents are involved in negative situations (e.g., school victimization), high connectedness in the family serves as a protective factor to cope more adaptively with the experience (Duggins et al., 2016).

Moreover, the school environment acquires a particular relevance during adolescence, due to the increase interest in generating meaningful relationships with peers and adults outside the family nucleus (Loukas et al., 2016). The connection that the adolescent manages to establish with the school and the people in it, represents one of the main factors that influence academic success and socio-emotional development (Ricard & Pelletier, 2016). In particular, relationships with peers and teachers characterized by affection, acceptance, and support can serve as important protective factors against academic, behavioral and mental health problems (Arora et al., 2017; Cyrian et al., 2016; Strati et al., 2017). Also, as Pitzer and Skinner (2016) mentions, students who feel connected to school are more likely to use adaptive strategies to face difficult situations and stay motivated to solve them.

Therefore, the connectedness established in the family and school represents an important factor for the generation of psychological resources involve in the response against adversity in adolescents, that is, the resilience (Murphy & McKenzie, 2016; Stavrou & Kourkoutas, 2017). Resilience is a dynamic process through which personal and contextual factors interact to allow the individual to successfully cope and adapt to adverse events (Friborg et al., 2003). In adolescence, resilience associates with better academic performance, positive interpersonal relationships, fewer emotional problems, more satisfying quality of life, better socio-emotional skills, among other results (Molero et al., 2019; Ruvalcaba et al., 2019; Simón-Saiz et al., 2018; Villalta et al., 2017). Resilience is considered a dynamic process that involves



the interaction between internal and external factors that influence the adaptation process of the individual to adversity (Hjemdal et al., 2006). Even when there is no consent about the elements involved in a resilience response, some authors agree that it usually includes the presence of factors from three main components: (a) personal characteristics, (b) family cohesion, and (c) social support from outside the family (Hjemdal et al., 2012; Limonero et al., 2012).

The influence that intrafamilial relationships and a sense of connection with the school environment have on the development of resilience in adolescents is a topic that has been investigated in some studies. Regarding the family, Dias and Cadime (2017) stated that family ties characterized with constant support and positive modeling of how to respond to adversity, promote greater resilience. In cases where the adolescent experiences a condition of vulnerability or a specific adverse event, the quality of communication, support, and family cohesion are factors that increase resilience and decrease socio-emotional changes (Acuña & Kataoka, 2017; Agustini et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2017).

Regarding the school environment, institutions that establish high academic and social expectations, care relationships, accompanied by opportunities to actively participate in the educational environment, tend to promote greater resilience in students (Aldrige et al., 2015; Yablón, 2015). Regarding social connectedness, the relationships established with peers, teachers, and the school itself are elements that influence resilience, providing a system of care, support, and promotion of skills necessary to face adversities (Aldridge et al., 2015; Kuperminc et al., 2019; Mirza & Arif, 2018).

Although the bond with peers at school is an element that influences psychosocial development of adolescents (Heinsch et al., 2019), this variable has not been commonly studied in direct relation to resilience, observing more attention to the analysis of the influence of connection with peers in a general context. Several investigations have found that peer support is a significant predictor of resilience, being associated with the reduction of socioemotional problems derived from adverse situations (Foster et al., 2017; van Harmelen et al., 2016; Oldfield et al., 2018; Villalobos-Parada et al., 2016).

We can conclude that a sense of connectedness to family and significant persons in the educational environment is an element related to a resilient response against adversity during adolescence. However, most of the existing studies have explored this influence in adolescents facing adverse situation in life (e.g. diseases, bullying, violence, etc), finding only few studies conducted on adolescents who do not face specific problematic situations at home or school.



This situation limits the possibilities to identify the familial and school factors that can influence resilience in the general adolescent population.

Also, even though it is reported that adolescent's connection to family and school jointly influence resilience, most of the studies that address the interaction between these variables tend to explore only some components in a segmented way. Considering this, we intended to analyze from an integrated perspective, the influence that family relationships and different variables of school connectedness have on adolescent's resilience. The integrated analysis of the relationship between these variables will make it possible to identify the components that generate the greatest influence on this psychological resource. Therefore, the objective of this research was to establish the predictive value of intrafamilial relationships and connectedness with school, teachers, and students on resilience in Mexican high school adolescents.

Method

Participants

The final sample consisted of 645 students selected by convenience from two middle schools located in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara, Mexico.

The age range was 12 to 16 years (M = 13.35, SD = 0.99, 50.7% female). The 54.7% of the students went to school in the morning shift and the rest belonged to the afternoon shift.

Instruments

Resilience. Resilience was measured through the total score of the Resilience Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (González-Arratia, 2016) in its revised version for Mexican population (α = .85; Bravo-Andrade et al., 2019). The 18 items were anchored on a Likert scale with five response options ranging from never to always. The instrument has a four-dimension structure (introspection, empathy, problem solving and external protective factors) and a total score, which was the only element considered in the analysis. The alpha values in all the measurement instruments applied were > .70, which are considered representative of an adequate internal consistency in all the measurement instruments applied (Celina & Campo, 2005).

Intrafamilial relations. We applied the brief version of the Intrafamily Relations Assessment Scale (IRAS; Rivera & Andrade, 2010; α = .81), consisting of 12 items with five response options ranging from totally disagree to totally agree. The instrument was developed for Mexican population and consist of three dimensions: union and support, expression and difficulties. The instrument allows a total score, which was used for the present study.



School connectedness. To evaluate the school connectedness variables, two subscales of the version for students of the MDS3 School Climate Survey were applied, adapted for Mexican population (Shkula et al., 2019). The school connectedness subscale (α = .81), which has four items that address the sense of pride and satisfaction that is experienced towards the school (e.g., I enjoy learning in this school); and the connection between students subscale (α = .83), which has five items that include aspects related to perceptions of trust, support, and connection with peers (e.g., In this school, students help each other). The two subscales have response options on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The subscales were coded so higher scores indicate a greater sense of connectedness.

Procedure

After obtaining a signed informed consent by school authorities, the parents were informed that schools were conducting this research. The voluntary nature of the students' participation and the confidentiality of the information was made explicit to parents and students. The instruments were applied in the morning and afternoon shift, including all the participants present at the moment of data collection with the only criteria of being actively enrolled at the school.

The participants provided informant assent previous to the data collection, the instruments were applied in the classrooms during school hours by psychology students previously trained in survey application. Considering the data collection was going to be conducted anonymously, we only include measurement instruments that evaluated the variables from a positive perspective, more focused in the identification of protective factors.

Data Analysis

Although no statistical normality was found using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the asymmetry and kurtosis statistics $< \pm 2$ are indicative of a distribution close to normal, therefore the chosen statistical procedures were parametric (Abad et al., 2011). Descriptive statistics, reliability indices, comparisons of means with the Student's t-test, Pearson product-moment correlations, and multiple linear regression analyzes were established. To measure effect size and statistical power, the G*Power v3 program was used. For the rest of the analysis, we used IBM SPSS v.25.

To examine the assumptions required for multiple linear regression, we performed the following analyzes: a) Linearity, we analyzed the trend towards linearity between the variables in scatter diagrams. b) Homoscedasticity, the Levene test corroborated the equality of variances



for the dependent variable: resilience F(643) = 3.110 p = .078. The graphs of the residuals from the regressions were examined, where no association patterns were observed. c) No autocorrelation. Even when the no autocorrelation criteria was not met (Durbin-Watson = 1.14), the value obtained was near of the statistical standard and considering the rest of the assumptions were fulfilled, we considered adequate to continue with the analysis. d) Non-collinearity. The scores of the indicator of variance inflation factors (VIF), as well as of tolerance, were close to 1. The condition indices were kept below 30, with variance proportions that did not overlap.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, where all the study variables were above the theoretical mean.

Table 1Descriptive statistics and correlations of observed variables (N = 645)

Variable	М	SD	Min	Max	K-S	Skew	Kurtosis -	Correlation analysis		
								1	2	3
1. Resilience	70.16	10.91	18	90	.10***	-0.72	0.43	-		
Intrafamilial relationships	45.68	8.43	12	60	.06***	-0.43	-0.15	.46**	-	
3. Connectedness between students	14.05	3.34	5	20	.09***	-0.35	0.19	.35**	.30**	-
4. Connectedness with school	12.81	2.56	4	16	.13***	-0.88	0.95	.41**	.35**	.52**

^{**}p < .01; ***p < .001

A comparison of means by sex was carried out using the *Student's t-test* for independent samples. The results showed that there were no differences in any of the variables. The matrix of bivariate correlations is included in Table 1. All the associations were positive and statistically significant at a level of < .01. The magnitude was low to moderate. The largest associations were found between the variable Resilience with Intrafamilial Relations and Connectedness with the school. As expected, the correlation of Connectedness between students and Connectedness with school was relatively high, because both are part of the same instrument.

We carried out a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis, which initially included the variables Connectedness with school and Connectedness between students, explaining 20% of the variance (Table 2). In the second model, the variable Intrafamilial Relations was included, reaching 29% of the variance. An increase in the size of the effect was obtained, positioning it



as high, and the model showed high statistical power. The variable with higher predictive coefficient was intrafamiliar relationships, followed by connectedness between students.

Table 2 $Multiple \ linear \ regression \ analysis \ with \ Resilience \ as \ dependent \ variable \ (N = 645)$

Variables	R^2 adjusted	F(df)	β	t	f^2	1-β
Model 1	.19	7588.852(2,642) **			0.24	1
Connectedness with school			.19	4.54**		
Connectedness between			.31	7.56***		
students						
Model 2	.29	7628.018(3,641)**			0.40	1
Connectedness with school			.13	3.46**		
Connectedness between			.23	5.58**		
students						
Intrafamilial relationships			.34	9.58***		

^{**}p < .01; ***p < .001

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to analyze the predictive value of intrafamilial relationships, connectedness with school and peers over Resilience in Mexican adolescents. An important contribution of this study was to explore the interaction between these variables in a general adolescent population, considering that previous research has analyzed this relationship in depth with individuals who face specific difficulties (Acuña & Kataoka, 2017; Agustini et al., 2019; Villalobos-Parada et al., 2016; Yablón, 2019). In the results, we found that the quality of the connection that is perceived with these environments also maintains a significant influence over the resilience of adolescents in the general population, identifying that family is one of the systems with greatest influence.

Initially, the correlations between the study variables obtained low to moderate coefficients, finding the highest values in the associations of Resilience with Intrafamilial Relationships and Connectedness with school. This result coincides with the mentioned in different studies where it is reported that a sense of connectedness with family and school are factors associated with resilience in adolescents (Aldrige et al., 2015; Dias & Cadime, 2017; Ross et al., 2017). This is relevant because resilience is a process that influences how adolescents make decisions, solve problems and face difficulties, representing an important protective factor against different problems (Molero et al., 2019; Simón-Saiz et al., 2018).

Regarding the results of the linear regression, the final model indicates that Intrafamilial Relationships, Connectedness with school, and with peers maintained a predictive power of 29%



of the variance observed in resilience. Intrafamilial relationships emerged as the variable with the highest predictive value, corresponding with previous studies which mentioned that elements derived from a positive family dynamic tend to promote higher levels of resilience and lower negative results derived from exposure to adverse events (Agustini et al., 2019; Oldfield et al., 2016; Ross et al., 2017). As mentioned by Dias and Cadime (2017), the family environment shapes how the adolescent understands adversity, providing a key context for developing effective coping skills and obtaining the necessary support to face adverse events. Therefore, it is important to continue analyzing the role that specific elements of the family climate (e.g., values, spirituality, communication, etc.) can have on the resilience of general adolescent populations, seeking to determine the variables that need to be considered in future interventions.

The components of Connectedness with the school and between students also remained significance in predicting resilience in adolescents. As mentioned by some authors, the sense of belonging and connection that a student has with school and peers are elements that influence how the adolescent faces difficult situations (Aldridge et al., 2015; Heinsch et al., 2019; Mirza & Arif, 2018). Regarding this result, it is noteworthy that the connection with students maintained a higher prediction coefficient compared to the connection with school. Previous studies have related the support of peers at school as an important mediator in adverse situations such as bullying, constituting a factor that increases resilience and reduces the socio-emotional consequences of this phenomenon (Dudugins et al., 2016; van Harmelen et al., 2016; Worsley et al., 2019). However, few investigations had explored the specific role that the connection between students have on resilience, being necessary to continue delimiting the components of peer interaction that are particular to the school environment and that influence resilience.

Concerning the predictive value that Connectedness with school and between students maintained, it is remarkable that, by including Intrafamilial relationships in the second model, the overall predictive strength increased; however, the prediction coefficients of the first two variables decreased. This result might be related to the reported by other authors who pointed out that, even though the connection with school and peers are elements that influence resilience and other socio-emotional competences, the family maintains a greater weight on the development of these psychological resources (Dias & Cadime, 2017; García & Paino, 2017; Moore et al., 2018; Oldfield et al., 2016). Also, some studies reported that the protective role that school or peer connectedness can have on resilience seems to be mediated by the quality of intrafamilial relationships (Murphy & McKenzie, 2016, Olfield et al., 2018). From a bioecological perspective it is important to analyze, not only the influence that these systems have separately, but also from an integrated approach.



On the interaction of these variables, Murphy and McKenzie (2016) found that school connectedness was a protective factor against the negative influence that poor-quality familial relationships can have on the development of resilience. In other words, students who have a low connection with their family, but maintain a feeling of belonging and connection with the school environment, have greater possibilities of developing psychological resources such as resilience. Regarding the connection with students, when an adolescent experiences positive family interactions, the connection with peers is positioned as a factor that can favor the development of psychological resources to face adversity (Moore et al., 2018; Oldfield et al., 2018). In cases with negative family interactions, the connection with peers can become a risk factor for the development of socio-emotional problems. Therefore, it is necessary to continue analyzing the mediating role that school and student connectedness might have in the interaction between intrafamilial relationships and resilience.

Based on the mentioned so far, it is possible to conclude that the sense of connectedness to family and school are elements that influence the development of protective resources such as resilience. Therefore, it is important to conduct future research oriented to the promotion of stronger links between the adolescents and their key environments, being also necessary to strengthen the links between these systems from an integrated perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The development of stronger links between family and school can promote that creation of environments that provide more opportunities to stablish connections and increase the sense of belonging for the adolescent. Considering this, it is necessary to continue analyzing the factors of the family and school environment that can interact positively to promote the development of psychological resources such as Resilience.

Limitations and practical implications

The limitations of this study include the method of collecting information through self-reports, recommending the development of future research that includes different evaluation methods (e.g., observational, measurement instruments responded by teachers/parents/, etc). In addition to the above, even when we included a representative sample, the sample selection method used limits the possibility of establishing generalizations based on the results obtained, so it is important to carry out studies that include larger samples, from different contexts and selected using random methods.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, it is important to note that this study offers relevant information for families, professionals, and educational authorities involved in the process of generating contexts that promote a positive development in adolescents. Although



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the results from the predictive analysis are moderated, they provide relevant information that should be taken into consideration in future research. It would be important to continue exploring other family and school variables that might be interacting with the connectedness in the prediction of resilience and other protective factors.

One of the practical implications of this research was to be able to analyze the influence that connection with family and school environment has on teenager students from the general population. This allows us to get a sense of the predictive value of these components and identify the variables that need to be included in future studies to analyze the factors that promote a more successful coping with adversities in adolescence.

Moreover, the results of this research made it possible to identify that the connection between students -a variable not commonly included in previous studies- is an element that influences resilience with greater importance than school connection. This finding highlights the importance of continuing to analyze those components of peer interaction that are specific to the school environment, which can have a significant influence on the development of different psychological resources.

Finally, it would be important to consider the results from this research for the development of intervention strategies at family and school level. As several research has pointed out, it is necessary to develop practical mechanisms that promote a stronger connection with key environments for adolescents, supporting the creation of safe spaces oriented to well-being and mental health.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

GO, and HB contributed to the conception and design of the study. GO organized the database. HB performed the statistical analysis. NR wrote the first draft of the manuscript. GO, HB, NR, and LA wrote sections of the manuscript. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

Data Availability Statement

The raw database that supports these study conclusions will be made available to any qualified researcher upon request.



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