

Family Social Climate and Coping Strategies in a Sample of Hidalgo Adolescents.

Clima Social Familiar y Estrategias de Afrontamiento en una muestra de Adolescentes Hidalguenses.

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Abstract:

The family social climate (FSC) plays a fundamental role in the emergence or prevention of factors that may jeopardize the physical and psychological well-being of adolescents. In this sense, the FSC influences the appropriate or inappropriate use of coping strategies. Therefore, this descriptive correlational study aims to analyze the relationship between the FSC and coping strategies in 254 adolescents of both sexes. The Family Environment Scale (FES) and the Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS) were used. The results showed that the predominant FSC dimension in both sexes is the development dimension. Likewise, the predominant coping strategies are worrying, investing in close friends, striving, and seeking success. Significant correlations were found between the FSC dimensions (relationship, development, stability) and coping strategies (social action, self-blame, investing in close friends, physical distraction, and tension reduction). Therefore, it is concluded that the FSC is related to the acquisition and application of coping strategies when facing problematic situations.

Keywords:

Adolescence, Family social climate, Coping

Resumen:

El clima social familiar (CSF) juega un papel fundamental en la aparición o prevención de factores que pongan en riesgo el bienestar físico y psicológico de los adolescentes, en este sentido el CSF participa en el manejo adecuado o inadecuado de las estrategias de afrontamiento. Es por ello que el presente estudio descriptivo correlacional tiene el objetivo de analizar la relación entre el CSF y las estrategias de afrontamiento en 254 adolescentes de ambos sexos. Se utilizó la escala del clima social familiar (FES) y la escala de afrontamiento para adolescentes (ACS). Los resultados mostraron que la dimensión del CSF predominante en ambos sexos es la dimensión de desarrollo, así mismo las estrategias predominantes son preocuparse, invertir en amigos íntimos, esforzarse y tener éxito. Se hallaron correlaciones significativas entre las dimensiones (relación, desarrollo, estabilidad) y las estrategias de afrontamiento (acción social, auto culparse, invertir en amigos íntimos, distracción física y reducción de la tensión). Por lo tanto, se concluye que el CSF se relaciona con la adquisición y aplicación de estrategias de afrontamiento ante situaciones problemáticas.

Palabras Clave:

Adolescencia, Clima social familiar, Afrontamiento

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a fundamental stage in human development due to the emergence of biological, psychological, and social changes that are necessary for the transition into adulthood. According to the scientific bulletin on mental health in adolescents and youth published by the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo (2024), the changes that occur during adolescence may generate mental difficulties such as depression and stress, which could lead to serious long-term consequences, including academic decline and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. The same bulletin highlights the family environment as a protective and preventive factor for youth mental health. In this regard, García and Gonzáles (2024) state that social systems such as the family, with which adolescents interact, can exert either a positive or negative influence on their behavior.

Moos et al., cited by Ramos and Riscos (2019), define the family social climate (FSC) as a set of socio-environmental qualities based on family interaction. They divide the FSC into three dimensions: (1) relationship, which is composed of family cohesion and focuses on interactive dynamics, including the way ideas, emotions, feelings, and concerns are expressed; (2) development, which refers to the personal growth of each family member regarding autonomy, competitiveness, and interest in cultural, sports, and religious activities; and (3) stability, which involves family hierarchy and the way control is exercised.

The family social climate plays a crucial role in the psychosocial development of adolescents, as it can serve as a protective factor against the emergence of social problems commonly observed during this stage. As noted by Kurock et al. (2022), the family social climate is a good predictor of problem-solving abilities, such as preventing violence in relationships, among other aspects of adolescents' social adaptation. Furthermore, Mosquipa and Irpanocca (2022) state that an unstable perception of the family social climate encourages the use of unproductive coping strategies, which may expose adolescents to risky behaviors, negatively affecting their mental health and well-being.

In another sense, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as the cognitive and behavioral efforts a person makes to manage external demands, such as stressors, or internal demands, such as emotional states.

Coping strategies are essential resources for safeguarding adolescents' mental health. This is highlighted in a study conducted by Gonzáles (2015), who concluded that individuals with greater development of coping resources display stronger abilities to resist the negative effects of daily stressors and, therefore, have a lower probability of developing psychological disorders or disturbances.

Given the relevance of the family social climate and coping in adolescence, various studies have explored the influence of both variables during this developmental stage. For example, Madriz (2017) conducted a study with 50 Venezuelan adolescents with behavioral problems and concluded that aggressive behaviors present within the family social climate are later reproduced in the school context.

Similarly, Soto and Rodríguez (2019) carried out a study titled Family Social Climate and Academic Performance in Sixth-

Grade Students, which included 204 children. The results highlight the importance of promoting the relationship and stability dimensions within the family to foster better academic performance.

As mentioned, the family social climate is a highly relevant variable in adolescence. Thus, Villa and Ovejero (2021) conducted a study titled Adolescents' Attitudes to Bullying and its Relationship to Perceived Family Social Climate, working with 665 adolescents aged 12 to 14. Their objective was to conduct a psychosocial analysis of the differences reported based on perceived attitudes toward bullying regarding indicators such as support and understanding, punishment and rejection, as well as parental disapproval. Their findings concluded that adolescents with permissive attitudes reported greater use of physical violence, corporal punishment, and psychological aggression by their parents. These results further emphasize the importance of conducting research focused on the family social climate during adolescence, as it may either trigger psychosocial problems or act as a protective factor against them.

In another study, Gonzales and Molero (2022) conducted a systematic review titled Coping Strategies in Conflicts Among Adolescents, which aimed to identify the coping strategies adolescents use when facing social conflict. Their results show a wide variety of coping strategies, such as seeking social support or avoiding the problem, as well as differences depending on sex and age.

Additionally, Abu-Kaf and Khalaf (2020) explored coping strategies in relation to acculturative stress and depressive symptoms in 170 Arab students from northern and central Israel. Their findings indicate gender differences in the use of coping strategies, particularly among female students, who showed higher levels of active and avoidant coping.

Despite the fact that these variables have been studied in different contexts and time periods, very few investigations have analyzed the degree of statistical relationship between them within the Hidalgo context. Therefore, there is a need to gather current data regarding the FSC and coping strategies, which may help clarify the panorama of family relationships among Hidalgo adolescents and provide information that could help understand how they cope with their difficulties. This, in turn, may offer broader insights for mental health professionals working with adolescents.

Based on the aforementioned, the present study aims to analyze the relationship between the family social climate and coping strategies in a sample of adolescents from Hidalgo. The study was conducted under the hypothesis that a relationship exists between the dimensions of the family social climate and the coping strategies used by Hidalgo adolescents.

METHODS

Design

The research was framed within a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional methodology with a descriptive correlational scope, as its purpose was to determine the relationship or degree of association that exists between two or more concepts, categories, or variables within a specific context (Hernández et al., 2014).

Participants

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was used, working with 254 adolescents of both sexes—166 males and 138 females—from the municipality of Actopan, Hidalgo, aged 14 to 17 years.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: adolescent students aged 13 to 17 who had spent most of their lives in the state of Hidalgo. The exclusion criteria included students who did not fall within the age range as well as adolescents not originally from the state of Hidalgo.

Instruments

Family Environment Scale (FES) by R.H. Moos and E.J. Trickett (1981).

This is a self-report instrument composed of 90 items, nine for each of the ten scales, and can be administered starting at 12 years of age. It was adapted in Mexico by Fernández et al. (1989). The total explained variance was 41.32%. The exploratory factor analysis showed an adequate fit for the three-factor model. A high reliability index of 0.77 was found.

Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS) by Erica Frydenberg and Ramos Lewis (1997). This is a self-report instrument applicable to individuals from ages 12 to 18. It consists of 80 items. The psychometric properties of the instrument report an internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of $\alpha = .90$ and an explained variance of 57.498% (Bárcenas & Martínez, 2008). The ACS has been used in studies conducted in Mexico, demonstrating acceptable validity and reliability indexes (Bárcenas & Martínez, 2008; Contreras, Chávez & Aragón, 2012; Martínez & Pedroza, 2011).

Procedure

With the support of the Executive Secretariat of the Comprehensive Protection System for Girls, Boys, and Adolescents (SIPINNA) in the municipality of Actopan, Hidalgo, access was granted to a public upper-secondary institution in Actopan. With assistance from school administrators and teachers, a Google Form was distributed to the students. The application of the instruments was conducted in two phases: the first included the completion of informed consent and the Family Environment Scale, and the second included the Adolescent Coping Scale.

Statistical Analysis

Once the results were obtained, a database was created using the SPSS statistical software, version 25. The mean scores were calculated to identify the predominant FSC dimensions and coping strategies within the study population. A normality test was then conducted, revealing a non-normal distribution of the data; therefore, Spearman's Rho statistic was selected for the analysis.

RESULTS

In Table 1, the predominance of the family social climate dimensions can be observed, showing that the development dimension is predominant among females ($A = 58.61$). Similarly, for males, the development dimension is also the predominant one ($A = 56.64$).

Table 1.

Predominant FSC dimensions in males and females.

Sex		relationship	development	stability
Male	A	49.57	56.64	49.40
	N	116	58	58
	S.D	10.80	10.93	14.53
Female	A	47.45	58.61	47.57
	N	138	69	69
	S.D	9.92	10.02	11.99

In Table 2, it is shown that among females, the predominant coping strategies are worrying ($A = 72.47$), investing in close friends ($A = 65.54$), and striving and achieving success ($A = 63.94$). Similarly, among males, the predominant strategy is worrying ($A = 68.14$), followed by investing in close friends ($A = 64.62$) and striving and achieving success ($A = 58.69$).

Table 2.

Predominant coping strategies in males and females.

C.A		Male		Female	
		A	S.D	A	S.D
Social Support	Seeking (Ss)	51.72	18.48	50.43	17.56
Focusing on the Problem (Fp)		49.24	18.95	54.61	17.91
Striving and Achieving Success (St)		58.69	18.02	63.94	16.57
Worrying (Wo)		68.14	18.21	72.47	17.74
Investing in Close Friends (Ic)		64.62	18.29	65.54	16.86
Seeking Belonging (Sb)		55.10	16.75	56.23	18.18
Wishful Thinking (Wt)		54.90	16.30	59.36	18.05
Non-Coping (Nc)		45.03	15.61	48.41	15.85
Tension Reduction (Tr)		44.69	17.04	47.51	15.84
Social Action (Sa)		40.78	16.26	40.91	12.10
Ignoring the Problem (Ip)		37.50	19.67	36.52	17.39
Self-Blame (Sb)		43.28	16.87	43.38	15.46
Keeping to Oneself (Ko)		49.31	18.90	52.16	19.67
Seeking Spiritual Support (Ss)		57.97	18.71	59.71	18.00
Focusing on the Positive (Fp)		50.34	18.49	51.74	21.70
Seeking Professional Help (Sp)		55.88	19.28	60.46	16.19
Seeking Relaxing Fun (Sr)		48.09	22.25	52.29	24.04
Physical Distraction (Pd)		52.86	18.20	61.75	19.10

According to Table 3, a strong negative correlation was found between the relationship dimension and the self-blame strategy ($r = -.676$, $p = .022$), with a large effect size ($r^2 = .457$), indicating that approximately 45.7% of the variance in the self-blame strategy is explained by the relationship dimension. This suggests that lower levels in the relationship dimension are associated with higher levels of self-blame as a coping strategy. Additionally, a weak positive correlation was found between the relationship dimension and the social action strategy ($r = .219$, $p = .042$), with a small effect size ($r^2 = .048$), indicating that this dimension explains approximately 4.8% of the variance in the social action strategy.

A strong positive correlation was found with the strategy of investing in close friends ($r = .713$, $p = .004$), with a very large effect size ($r^2 = .508$), indicating that approximately 50.8% of the variance in this strategy is explained by this dimension. The higher the level of family development—understood as growth, autonomy, and support for personal achievement—the greater the use of the “investing in close friends” strategy among adolescents. Likewise, a weak positive correlation was found with the strategy of seeking relaxing fun ($r = .177$, $p = .038$), with a small effect size ($r^2 = .031$), suggesting that the development dimension explains about 3.1% of the variation in this coping strategy. As family development increases, there is also a slight increase in the use of strategies aimed at seeking activities that generate fun or relaxation.

Finally, a weak negative relationship was observed between the stability dimension and the tension-reduction strategy ($r = -.192$, $p = .005$), with a small effect size ($r^2 = .037$), indicating that approximately 3.7% of the variance in this strategy is explained by the stability dimension. Lower perceived family stability is associated with a slightly greater use of the tension-reduction strategy.

Table 3.

Correlation between FSC dimensions and coping strategies.

		Relación	Desarrollo	Estabilidad
Ss	Rho	0.27	-.102	-.013
	Sig.	.721	.255	.888
Fp	Rho	-0.75	.054	-.051
	Sig.	.400	.964	.570
St	Rho	.015	-.108	.020
	Sig.	.868	.228	.821
Wo	Rho	-.056	-.144	-.006
	Sig.	.534	.106	.946
Ic	Rho	-.070	.713	-.057
	Sig.	.431	.004	.525
Sb	Rho	.100	.019	-0.56
	Sig.	.265	.832	.535
Wt	Rho	.005	.033	.087
	Sig.	.959	.717	.333
Nc	Rho	.071	.085	-.005
	Sig.	.428	.340	.951
Tr	Rho	.066	.057	-.192
	Sig.	.461	.523	.005
Sa	Rho	.219	.025	-.102
	Sig.	.042	.782	.252
Ip	Rho	-.032	-.058	-.067
	Sig.	.717	.520	.452
Sb	Rho	-.676	.087	-.062
	Sig.	.022	.329	.486

		Relación	Desarrollo	Estabilidad
Ko	Rho	.053	-.077	-.046
	Sig.	.553	.391	.609
Ss	Rho	.024	.011	-.074
	Sig.	.790	.901	.405
Fp	Rho	.048	.079	-.042
	Sig.	.592	.380	.643
Sp	Rho	.086	.054	-.040
	Sig.	.336	.545	.648
Sr	Rho	-.026	.177	-.086
	Sig.	.768	.038	.344
Pd	Rho	.119	.016	.037
	Sig.	.184	.863	.677

Significant relationship $p < .05$

Highly significant relationship $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

The results found in the present study show similarities with those reported in other research conducted around the world. For example, it was found that the predominant FSC dimension in both sexes is the development dimension, indicating that adolescents' families are oriented toward personal growth and share cultural, sports, and religious practices. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Guerrero (2014), who also found that the development dimension was predominant in both sexes.

Regarding coping strategies, it was found that for both males and females, the most frequently used strategy is worrying (which involves a constant concern about future well-being), followed by investing in close friends (referring to the effort to engage in close interpersonal relationships and to form new friendships), and striving and achieving success (referring to the individual's effort to work hard to solve their problems). These findings differ from those of Moreno et al. (2023), who worked with 61 abused adolescents of both sexes and found that the predominant strategies were worrying, ignoring the problem, non-coping, tension reduction, and self-blame.

The results obtained regarding coping strategies suggest that both male and female adolescents tend to use similar coping strategies, which aligns with the findings of Carlo et al. (2024), who concluded that both females and males tend to use similar coping styles when facing various stressors.

In the study population, a weak positive relationship was found between the relationship dimension (referring to open communication of feelings, opinions, thoughts, and conflicts) and the social action strategy (expressing concerns to others and seeking help through petitions or group meetings), as well as a strong negative relationship with the self-blame strategy (seeing oneself as responsible for the problem). This suggests that greater expression of emotions, opinions, thoughts, and conflicts within the family is associated with greater use of the social action strategy and less reliance on self-blame. These findings differ from those of Herrera and Ramos (2016), who found a weak negative relationship between the relationship dimension and the strategies of investing in close friends and keeping to oneself.

A strong positive relationship was found between the development dimension and the strategy of investing in close friends; that is, the greater the degree of personal growth within the family—as well as the presence of cultural, sports, and religious activities—the greater the effort to engage in close interpersonal relationships and form new friendships. Within this same dimension, a weak positive relationship was also found with the strategy of seeking relaxing fun, indicating that as personal growth increases and cultural, sports, and religious activities decrease, adolescents are more likely to engage in relaxing leisure activities such as reading, painting, or playing an instrument. This finding is consistent with Herrera and Ramos (2016), who also found a weak positive relationship between the development dimension and the strategy of seeking relaxing fun.

Finally, one of the results obtained in this study shows a weak negative relationship between the stability dimension (which involves knowing each family member, their organization, and the degree of control they exert over one another) and the tension-reduction strategy (which consists of relieving distress through actions such as crying, shouting, or avoiding the situation). This indicates that lower knowledge of family characteristics and lower control among members is associated with greater efforts to reduce tension through behaviors such as crying, shouting, or avoidance. This differs from the findings of Chávez and Valderrama (2023), who did not find any relationship between the stability dimension and coping strategies.

CONCLUSION

The results obtained in the present study showed a predominance of the development dimension in both male ($A = 56.54$, $S.D = 10.93$) and female ($A = 58.61$, $S.D = 10.02$) adolescents. Based on this finding, it can be inferred that there is a higher prevalence of families oriented toward the personal growth of each of their members, particularly in terms of autonomy, competitiveness, and interest in cultural, sports, and religious activities within the study population.

Regarding coping strategies, it was found that the most frequently used strategies among adolescents of both sexes were worrying, investing in close friends, and striving and achieving success. This suggests that adolescents in Hidalgo, when faced with a problematic situation, tend to worry about what is happening and what may occur in the future, seek close interpersonal relationships—such as spending more time with a close friend or forming new friendships—and work intensely to solve their problems. Based on the results, it was concluded that there is no significant difference between male and female adolescents in the use of coping strategies.

A weak positive relationship was found between the relationship dimension and the social action strategy ($Rho = .219$, $p < .05$) and a strong negative relationship with the self-blame strategy ($Rho = -.676$, $p < .05$). This indicates that as open communication of feelings, opinions, thoughts, and conflicts increases, so does the use of social action strategies such as sharing concerns with others and seeking help through petitions or group meetings while the tendency to blame oneself decreases.

Within the development dimension, a highly significant positive relationship was found with the strategy of investing in

close friends ($Rho = .713$, $p < .01$) and a weak positive relationship with the physical distraction strategy ($Rho = .177$, $p < .05$). These results suggest that as personal growth increases in terms of autonomy, competitiveness, and interest in cultural, sports, and religious activities, adolescents are more likely to seek close interpersonal relationships and engage in relaxing activities such as reading, painting, or playing an instrument to cope with stressful or challenging situations.

Regarding the stability dimension, the results show a highly significant weak negative relationship with the tension-reduction strategy ($Rho = -.192$, $p < .01$). This finding indicates that greater knowledge of family characteristics, roles, and levels of control among family members is associated with a reduced tendency to engage in tension-reducing behaviors such as crying, shouting, or avoiding stressful situations.

The results obtained confirm the research hypothesis, as significant relationships were found between the dimensions of the family social climate and the coping strategies used by the study population.

These findings highlight the importance of the family social climate in the development of coping strategies among adolescents. Promoting open family communication and supporting personal growth may contribute to more adaptive coping strategies. Additionally, the results of this study may be useful for designing targeted interventions.

It is important to note that the study presents certain limitations. One limitation is the sample, as it was conducted in a single educational institution, making it difficult to generalize the results to the entire adolescent population in the state of Hidalgo. Another limitation was the lack of an updated instrument with the same or higher levels of validity and reliability to measure the FSC. Furthermore, most correlations found were only moderately significant.

Based on the results and conclusions of this study, it is recommended that future research include larger samples from different regions. It is also advisable to conduct studies that examine the relationship between coping strategies and other associated variables.

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