

Relationship between sense of community, well-being, mental health and gender in schooled adolescents

Relación entre sentido de comunidad, bienestar, salud mental y género en adolescentes escolarizados

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Received: January 14, 2021

Accepted: June 14, 2021

Background

The sense of community (SC) is defined as a feeling of belonging, where each member is essential to the other and the group. In adolescence, the SC grows thanks to positive experiences with peers and significant adults, contributing to the development of personal and social identity. In this context, educational communities play an important role by influencing the well-being (WB) and mental health (MH) of their students through the policies and practices adopted, the values promoted, and the opportunities offered for socializing. Evidence points out that during adolescence, SC, WB and MH are associated. Indeed, the importance of the sense of belonging for adolescent SM and WB is highlighted. It provides opportunities to contribute and participate in communities. On the other hand, gender at this stage adopts a relevant role as stereotypes increase in this area. Thus, when exploring and getting involved in a community, there would be gender-based schemes related to differences in socialization. Specifically, in the case of CS, they would be related to cultural patterns of involvement in a community that differs between men and women.

Aims

This study analyzed the relation between Sense of Community, Well-Being, Mental Health and Gender in schooled adolescents in Chilean adolescents.

Method & procedures

Using a non-probabilistic sampling for convenience we sampled 2839 students from 11 municipal educational establishments of the commune of Calama (Antofagasta Region, Chile) All students were from the 6th to 12th grade, and aged between 11 and 18 years old. Sense of Community, Well-being and Mental Health difficulties were assessed through the SCI-2, Kidscreen-27 and PSC-17 scales, respectively. For the analysis, Student's t-tests, one way ANOVA and multiple linear regressions were performed.

Results & discussion

Regarding the predictive models obtained, the importance of SC in the school context is confirming, influencing both WB and MH. It is consistent with the available evidence, which indicates that those with a higher level of SC in schools show a better perception of their physical and psychological well-being, autonomy, and relationship with their parents. When focusing the SC on the different educational levels, a high level was observed in each dimension during elementary education, decreasing as education progressed. It is consistent with studies that point out that SC in school contexts decreases as middle school is reached. Finally, referring to the role of gender, males present higher SC and WB, and better MH compared to females. These results are consistent when looking at the level of education completed. In this case, the man presents higher levels of BN and better SM regardless of the level of education achieved.

Conclusion

This study corroborated the importance of the SC experienced in the school context and its influence on the WB and MH reported by adolescents in school. It confirms the importance of the context and how it is perceived and evaluated. Likewise, during adolescence, the results showed that gender also influences the integration of individual strengths with contextual factors. These results allow us to hypothesize that SC in school contexts can become a means of strengthening adolescent WB and MH.

Keywords: adolescence, gender, mental health, sense of community, well-being

Financial support: Fondecyt Regular Project No. 1171634; Fondo U-Inicia, Vicerrectoría de Investigación y Desarrollo (VID), Universidad de Chile, Code No. UI006/15.

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How to cite: Leiva, L., Mendoza, A., Torres-Cortés, B., & Antivilo-Bruna, A. (2021). Relación entre sentido de comunidad, bienestar, salud mental y género en adolescentes escolarizados. *Psicoperspectivas*, 20(2).
<https://dx.doi.org/10.5027/psicoperspectivas-vol20-issue2-fulltext-2205>



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