EDUHEM 2018

VIII International conference on intercultural education and International conference on transcultural health: THE VALUE OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH FOR A GLOBAL, TRANSCULTURAL WORLD

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ADJUSTMENT TO UNIVERSITY LIFE IN ECUADORIAN STUDENTS

Verónica León Ron (a)*, Miguel Ángel Posso Yépez (a), Cristian Guzmán Torres (a), Gabriela Narváez Olmedo (a)
*Corresponding author

(a) Universidad Técnica del Norte, Ciudadela Universitaria, Av.17 de Julio 5-21 y Gral. José María Córdova, Ibarra, Ecuador. *Email: maposso@utn.edu.ec

Abstract

Adjustment to university life is a transition process in which the student must face several challenges related to personal, emotional, academic and motivational aspects. In this context, the social support that the university environment provides is fundamental for the development of a correct adaptation. The objective of this research is to describe the relationship between different types of perceived social support and the dimensions of adjustment to university life. This is a non-experimental design investigation, cross-sectional with correlational scope. A census was carried out to 1374 students of the first two semesters of five Schools in the academic period 2017-2018 at the Universidad Técnica del Norte, to which a University Life Questionnaire. Chilean adaptation was applied. The valid sample was 907 and the pearson correlation coefficient was used. The results showed that the different dimensions presented an average level of correlation, the highest correlation coefficient with r =, 515 corresponds to the dimensions of social adjustment and peer support. The main conclusion is that the dimensions of academic adjustment and social adjustment have a higher level of correlation with all types of support; while the institutional adjustment dimension shows a weak level of association with the different types of support.

1. Introduction

Adjustment to university life is considered to be the process of transition of young people from secondary school towards higher education and it demands multiple adaptations in different areas of life (Baker & Siryk, 1986). University life is very different from what the student was used to handle, this stage demands greater autonomy and independence from the student both to organize their time to study as well as their leisure time; moreover, the contact of the academic institution with the parents is null, the student must learn to self-handle conflicts, solve problems, and, in some cases, they must leave their family and migrate to other regions of the country or abroad. These situations force them to learn to deal with domestic activities, payment of bills, to face loneliness and cultural change. While these challenges can be tackled in a positive way, they can also have a negative physical, emotional, and psychological impact on the student (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

Baker & Siryk (1984) mention that the adjustment process to university life includes dimensions such as emotional adjustment, social adjustment, academic adjustment and institutional adjustment. Being multifactorial, there are different aspects that can contribute or hinder this process, one of these aspects is social support. Different studies have described social support as a protective factor and predictor of emotional well-being and mental health (Barra Almagia, 2012; Brannan, Biswas-Diener, Mohr, Mortazavi, & Stein, 2013; Cohen, 2004; Martínez-López et al., 2014; Sacramento Zanini, Verolla-Moura, & Pinheiro de Abreu, 2009).

Social support is defined in several ways, for example: Zhou, Zhu, Zhang, & Cai (2013) consider that it refers to the perception of having people who care about us, care about our needs, love us, include us in different aspects of life and protect us; Gray, Vitak, Easton, & Ellison (2013) mention that social support is a set of resources provided to a person that include economic support, emotional support and instrumental support.

There are different sources that can provide support in the process of transition to university life. Rueger, Malecki, & Demaray (2010) mention three primary sources: peer support, parent / family support and support from others. However, the perception of effectiveness of the support provided and the way one seeks such support vary accordingly to factors such as culture, age and sex (Brannan et al., 2013).

2. Problem Statement

University desertion is a widespread problem, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO, in Latin America, the dropout rate is around 40% (La deserción universitaria bordea el 40%., 2016). In 2010, in Latin America and the Caribbean, one in ten young people between 25 and 29 years of age had completed university education (UNESCO, 2013). Several studies indicate that the university dropout occurs in the first semesters of university (Martínez et al., 2014), many of them due to factors associated with the difficulties of adapting to the challenges of such life (Ames et al., 2014; Buchanan, Ljungdahl, & Maher, 2015). Some of the main variables associated with the success of the adjustment process is social support (Chavoshi, Wintre, Dentakos, & Wright, 2017; English, Davis, Wei, & Gross, 2017; Páramo Fernández, Araújo, Tinajero Vacas, Almeida, & Rodríguez González, 2017; Rahat & Ilhan, 2016).

In Ecuador, according to the National Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation SENESCYT, in 2012, the dropout rate was 50%, for the year 2014, of more than 400,000 students enrolled in public and co-financed universities, 26% left the chosen career in the first semesters (El 26% de universitarios se retiró en los primeros años, 2016). Despite the high dropout rates in the Country, research and proposals for intervention and prevention around the problem and its possible causes are scarce.

3. Research Questions

For the present study, the following research questions were proposed:
- Is there a relationship between the different types of perceived social support and the dimensions of adjustment to university life?
- If so, what is the level of relationship between the different types of perceived social support and the dimensions of adjustment to university life?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the relationship between the different types of perceived social support and the dimensions of adjustment to university life.

5. Research Methods

The design of the present investigation is non-experimental, cross-sectional, with a correlational scope.

5.1. Participants

A non-probabilistic sample of 1374 first and second semester students from the five Schools of the Universidad Técnica del Norte in Ecuador was used (School of Health Sciences, School of Engineering in Agricultural and Environmental Sciences FICAYA, School of Engineering in Applied Sciences FICA, School of Administrative and Economic Sciences FACAE and School of Education, Science and Technology FECYT); from them, the valid sample was 907 students.

5.2. Process

Authorization requests were addressed to the authorities of each school to carry out the study and an explanatory meeting was held with them in which the purpose of the investigation was explained. Once the approval was obtained, we proceeded to explain the project's objectives and to sign the informed consent of the students, the data was collected during class hours and the survey process took 3 months.

5.3. Data analysis procedure

Once the data was obtained, we proceeded to create the basis for the analysis using the SPSS 2.0 statistical software. To analyze the correlations between the different types of social support and dimensions of university adjustment, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used.

5.4. Instruments

For data collection, the University Life Questionnaire (Pérez & Díaz, 2017) was applied, which consists of 10 sub-scales with 140 items. Of them, sub-scale A was used, corresponding to the Chilean version of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1989), it contains 44 items, with a Likert type response format of seven points (1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree). It seeks to measure four types of adjustment: academic, social, personal-emotional and institutional; with α = .72 for academic adjustment, α = .81 social adjustment, α = .86 personal-emotional adjustment and α = .70 for institutional adjustment. The sub-scale D was also used, which corresponds to the Chilean adaptation of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Ortiz & Baeza, 2011) created by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988). The reagents were oriented to the university context. The sub-scale is composed of 12 items grouped into 3 factors: social support from family and partner or other significant figures. It has a Likert type response format of seven points (1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree). Reagents have a reliability index of α = .912 for the support dimension of pairs, of α = .85 for the support dimension of the family, α = .84 for support for others and α = .89 for the full scale.

6. Findings

The purpose of the research was to describe the relationship between the different dimensions of adjustment to university life (academic adjustment, social adjustment, emotional adjustment, institutional adjustment) and the different types of social support (peer support, family support, support from others). Table 1 shows the correlations between the aforementioned variables, in which a positive correlation was found, with a level of association between the variables academic adjustment and support from others, also, between social adjustment and the three types of support. Emotional and institutional adjustment variables showed correlation with all types of support; while the academic adjustment variable showed a low level of association with family support and peer support.

Table 01. General correlations

Correlations		Support from others	Family support	Peer's support
Academic Adjustment	Pearson's Correlation	,347**	,272**	,268**
	Sig. (two tailed)	0	0	0
Social Adjustment	Pearson's Correlation	,456**	,350**	,515**
	Sig. (two tailed)	0	0	0
Emotional Adjustments	Pearson's Correlation	,222**	,236**	,209**
	Sig. (two tailed)	0	0	0
Institutional Adjustments	Pearson's Correlation	,227**	,160**	,189**
	Sig. (two tailed)	0	0	0

Note: ** Correlation is significative at <0,01 level (two tailed)

In addition, it was decided to calculate the correlations by school, finding that FACAE, FECYT, FICAYA and the School of Health Sciences showed a positive correlation (p <0.01) between the different adjustment dimensions and the different types of support; in FICA, a positive correlation was found (p

<0.01) between the social adjustment dimension and the three types of social support, and the academic adjustment dimension with family support (p <0.05). On the other hand, the only school that showed no correlation between the dimensions of academic adjustment, social support and support from others, emotional adjustment, institutional adjustment and the three types of social support, was FICA as shown in Table 02.

Table 02. Correlations FICA

Correlations		Support from others	Family support	Peer's support
Academic Adjustment	Pearson's Correlation	,063	,145*	,115
	Sig. (two tailed)	0	0,038	0,101
Social Adjustment	Pearson's Correlation	-,023	-,004	,085
	Sig. (two tailed)	0,741	0,957	0,214
Emotional Adjustments	Pearson's Correlation	-,116	-,11	,295
	Sig. (two tailed)	0,092	0,108	0,295

Note: * Correlation is significant at <0,05 level (two tailed)

Discussion

The present study aimed to describe the relationship between the different types of social support with the different dimensions of adjustment to university life, as observed, the variables correlated positively, which suggests that the process of adaptation to university life, is influenced, in part, by perceived social support; this agrees with several studies in which social support is established as a strong predictor of university adjustment (Rahat & Ihan, 2016) as well as being a strong predictor of emotional well-being and a protective factor against stress and depression (Albright & Hurd, 2017; Cohen, 2004; Lee, Dickson, Conley, & Holmbeck, 2014).

The results showed the strongest association between the variables peers' support and social adjustment; Studies like those of Maunder (2017) and Matsushima (2016) corroborate this data because it mentions that students who showed greater and better relationships with their peers, present a better adjustment to university life.

Although there is a general positive correlation between the variables of social support and all the dimensions of adjustment to university life, the family support variable shows the lowest level of association with the university adjustment dimensions, in this case, we can suppose that socio-economic and cultural factors influence this level of association, due to the fact that students attend a state university and many of them are the first generation in their families to access higher education, the pressure that the family context places on these young people can become intense, generating more stress and worry about their academic performance and behavior. Brannan et al. (2013) mention that the perception of need and effectiveness of social support that is available, depends on multiple factors such as culture; he stays that, in more independent societies, personal problems are private and must be handled without the participation of third parties, in more interdependent societies, the seek for support in times of need can be understood as signs of weakness and disregard for the harmony of the group in which they develop.

7. Conclusion

Considering the relationship between the variables of social support and adjustment to university life and, taking into account that an aspect related to dropout and academic failure is university adjustment, it becomes important to generate and review, within higher academic institutions, programs aimed at the detection, strengthening and counseling in the management of difficulties associated with the transition to university life, preventing, not only desertion, but also promoting the emotional and physical well-being of young people.

Contributing to the development of preventive and intervention programs that take into account the cultural and sociodemographic factors of our students, requires more investment for research in this area.

Acknowledgments

References

Albright, J. N., & Hurd, N. M. (2017). Constellations of social support among underrepresented college students: Associations with mental health. *Applied Developmental Science*, *22*(4), 258-269.

Ames, M. E., Wintre, M. G., Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M. W., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J., & Adams, G. R. (2014). Rural Compared to Urban Home Community Settings as Predictors of First-Year Students' Adjustment to University. *Journal of College Student Development, 55*(2), 208-215.

Baker, R. W., & Siryk, B. (1984). Measuring adjustment to college. *Journal of counseling psychology, 31*(2), 179.

Baker, R. W., & Siryk, B. (1986). Exploratory intervention with a scale measuring adjustment to college. *Journal of counseling psychology, 33*(1), 31.

Baker, R. W., & Siryk, B. (1989). *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) [Measurement Instrument]*. Western Psychological Services.

Barra Almagia, E. (2012). Influencia de la autoestima y del apoyo social percibido sobre el bienestar psicológico de estudiantes universitarios chilenos. *Diversitas: Perspectivas en psicología,* 8(1),29-38.

Brannan, D., Biswas-Diener, R., Mohr, C. D., Mortazavi, S., & Stein, N. (2013). Friends and family: A cross-cultural investigation of social support and subjective well-being among college students. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 8*(1), 65-75.

Buchanan, J., Ljungdahl, L., & Maher, D. (2015). On the borders: adjusting to academic, social and cultural practices at an Australian university. *Teacher Development, 19*(3), 294-310.

Cohen, S. (2004). Social relationships and health. *American psychologist, 59*(8), 676.

Chavoshi, S., Wintre, M. G., Dentakos, S., & Wright, L. (2017). A developmental sequence model to university adjustment of international undergraduate students. *Journal of International Students, 7*(3), 703-727.

El 26% de universitarios se retiró en los primeros años. (2016). *El comercio*. Retrieved from http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/ecuador-universitarios-desercion-educacion-jovenes.html

English, T., Davis, J., Wei, M., & Gross, J. J. (2017). Homesickness and adjustment across the first year of college: A longitudinal study. *Emotion, 17*(1), 1.

Gray, R., Vitak, J., Easton, E. W., & Ellison, N. B. (2013). Examining social adjustment to college in the age of social media: Factors influencing successful transitions and persistence. *Computers & Education, 67*, 193-207.

La deserción universitaria bordea el 40%. (2016). *El Telégrafo*. Retrieved from https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/sociedad/4/la-desercion-universitaria-bordea-el-40

Lee, C., Dickson, D. A., Conley, C. S., & Holmbeck, G. N. (2014). A closer look at self-esteem, perceived social support, and coping strategy: a prospective study of depressive symptomatology across the transition to college. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 33*(6), 560-585.

Martínez-López, Z., Fernández, M. F. P., Couñago, M. A. G., Vacas, C. T., da Silva Almeida, L., & González, M. S. R. (2014). Apoyo social en universitarios españoles de primer año: propiedades psicométricas del Social Support Questionnaire-Short Form y el Social Provisions Scale. *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología, 46*(2), 102-110.

Matsushima, R. (2016). The relationship between situational change and selectiveness in friendships for adjustment to the university. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 21*(3), 356-368.

Maunder, R. E. (2017). Students' peer relationships and their contribution to university adjustment: the need to belong in the university community. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 42*(6), 756-768.

Ortiz, M., & Baeza, M. (2011). *Psychometric Properties of a Scale Design to Measure Perceived Social Support in Chile*. Universitas Psychological.

Páramo Fernández, M. F., Araújo, A. M., Tinajero Vacas, C., Almeida, L. S., & Rodríguez González, M. S. (2017). Predictors of students' adjustment during transition to university in Spain. *Psicothema, 29*(1), 67-72

Pérez, M. V., & Díaz, A. (2017). *University Life Questionnaire [Measurement Instrument]* Universidad de Concepción.

Rahat, E., & İlhan, T. (2016). Coping Styles, Social Support, Relational Self-Construal, and Resilience in Predicting Students' Adjustment to University Life. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice, 16*(1), 187-208.

Rueger, S. Y., Malecki, C. K., & Demaray, M. K. (2010). Relationship between multiple sources of perceived social support and psychological and academic adjustment in early adolescence: Comparisons across gender. *Journal of youth and adolescence, 39*(1), 47.

Sacramento Zanini, D., Verolla-Moura, A., & Pinheiro de Abreu, R. Q. I. (2009). Apoio social: aspectos da validade de constructo em estudantes universitários. *Psicologia em estudo, 14*(1), 195-202.

Thurber, C. A., & Walton, E. A. (2012). Homesickness and adjustment in university students. *Journal of American college health, 60*(5), 415-419.

UNESCO (2013). *Situación Educativa de América Latina y el Caribe: Hacia la educación de calidad para todos al 2015*. Santiago de Chile: OREALC/UNESCO Santiago.

Zhou, X., Zhu, H., Zhang, B., & Cai, T. (2013). Perceived social support as moderator of perfectionism, depression, and anxiety in college students. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal, 41*(7), 1141-1152.

Zimet, G., Dahlem, N., Zimet, S., & Farley, G. (1988). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. *Journal f Personality Assessment, 52*, 30-41