

Adolescents during the Pandemic. Difficulties and Adaptive Strategies

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Abstract: *This paper is a scientific research conducted during the alert state on a sample of 450 adolescents. The main aim of the study is to identify the socio-emotional difficulties of adolescents and the adaptive ways they use during crisis situations, such as the coronavirus pandemic.*

The research questions refer on the one hand to the concerns about the pandemic context and the possibility of infection, social activities, the online school curriculum, and on the other hand to the association between clinical and adaptive variables and coping mechanisms, as well as coping strategies that are predictors of adaptive scales and moderators that are key to understanding adolescents' condition.

The results indicate that the use of functional strategies, such as support strategies, in which support, social relationships and emotional adjustment predominate, can stimulate increased self-confidence in the context of the pandemic. In fact, the results support the relationship with parents and social support in times of crisis.

Keywords: *Adolescents, socio-emotional difficulties, pandemic, clinical scales, adaptive scales, coping.*

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Introduction

This scientific research aims to understand the socio-emotional difficulties faced by adolescents and the adaptive ways they have during the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

Several authors point out that the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has affected people around the world (Damian et al., 2021; Huidu, 2020; Neculau, 2021; Sandu & Nistor, 2021), and isolation, social contact restrictions, economic closure have imposed a complete change in the psychosocial environment of the affected countries (Grigoras & Ciubara 2021). The current situation affects children, adolescents and their families in an exceptional way. Kindergartens and schools were closed, social contacts were severely limited, and leisure activities outside the home were canceled or reduced (Luca, Baroiu et al, 2020; Fegert et al., 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020; Ravens - Sieberer et al., 2021).

At the same time, researchers show that adolescence is a sensitive period for social development, in which there is an increased need for social interactions (Luca, Burlea et al., 2020; Orben et al., 2020). It can be very difficult for adolescents to cope with the current situation and follow the current rules and restrictions, as these circumstances can be experienced as inconsistent with their development, which involves several activities and tasks.

Currently, there is a growing interest in researching the mental health of children and adolescents during the coronavirus pandemic. Zhou et al. (2020) report that 44% of young people aged 12 to 18 had depressive symptoms, 37% had anxiety and 31% had both types of symptoms. High levels of depression and anxiety symptoms in adolescents were also obtained by Duan et al. (2020) and Luca, Ciubara et al. (2020).

Research Methodology

The main objective of the present study is to explore the difficulties and adaptive strategies of adolescents during the coronavirus pandemic.

The research questions refer on the one hand to the concerns about the pandemic context and the possibility of infection, social activities, the online school curriculum, and on the other hand to the association between clinical and adaptive variables and coping mechanisms, as well as coping strategies that are predictors of adaptive scales and moderators that are key to understanding adolescents' condition.

The sample consists of 450 adolescents: 63.2% girls ($m = 15.63$ and $SD = 1.92$) and 36.8% boys ($m = 15.31$ and $SD = 1.98$). The participants of

this sample were selected randomly, by distributing the questionnaire online. The environment of origin is urban and rural, from several areas of the country. There were no exclusion criteria regarding the medical and psychological status for the selection of the sample.

Data were collected between May 2020 and February 2021. The two assessment tools used are the Behavior Assessment System for Children Second Edition (BASC-2; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004) and the Coping Strategies Checklist for Children-Revised (CCSC-R; Ayers & Sandler, 1999).

Research Results

The data indicate that depression levels correlate negatively with distraction strategies ($p = .001$) and support strategies ($p = .000$) and positively with avoidance strategies ($p = .050$). The results obtained indicate that the higher the score on the Depression Scale, the less the adolescent participants use the support strategies and the more the avoidance ones.

Anxiety score correlates negatively with distraction strategies ($p = .004$) and positively with avoidance strategies ($p = .000$). The stronger the anxiety, the less teenagers use functional distraction strategies and the more dysfunctional avoidance strategies they use. The degree of somatization correlates negatively with distraction strategies ($p = .009$). It follows that adolescents who tend to somatize have reduced abilities to get rid of problems, while attention problems correlate negatively with distraction strategies ($p = .003$) and support strategies ($p = .002$). Also, the level of hyperactivity correlates positively with avoidance strategies ($p = .018$) and it should be noted that active coping strategies are not used in the context of the pandemic.

Table 1. Clinical scales and coping
Source: authors' own conception

		Active_coping	Restructuring	Distraction	Avoidance	Support
		ng	ng		ce	
Depression	r	-.018	-.089	-.159*	.092*	-.181*
	p	.699	.060	.001	.050	.000
Anxiety	r	.073	-.029	-.136*	.198*	-.026
	p	.122	.536	.004	.000	.580
Somatization	r	-.007	-.029	-.123*	.077	-.076
	p	.882	.537	.009	.101	.108
Attention_probl	r	-.066	-.076	-.141*	-0.15	-.147*

	p	.163	.109	.003	.755	.002
Hiperactivity	r	.012	.036	.022	.111*	.044
	p	.792	.445	.638	.018	.347

The results of the correlational tests indicate that the level of self-esteem correlates positively with the strategies of positive cognitive restructuring ($p = .000$), distraction ($p = .000$) and support ($p = .000$); the level of self-confidence correlates positively with the strategies of active coping ($p = .007$), distraction ($p = .000$), avoidance ($p = .000$), support ($p = .000$), and the scale score on relationships adolescents with parents positively correlate with distraction strategies ($p = .000$) and support ($p = .001$).

Table 2. Adaptative scales and coping
Source: authors' own conception

		Active_coping	Restructuring	Distraction	Avoidance	Support
Self-esteem	r	.088	.177	.286	-.009	.202
	p	.061	.000	.000	.851	.000
Self-confidence	r	.126	.086	.211	.196	.227
	p	.007	.067	.000	.000	.000
Relationship with parents	r	.031	.021	.204	.043	.150
	p	.514	.663	.000	.362	.001

Discussions and Conclusions

Uncertainty about the future and fear of the unknown cause anxiety among adolescents, who are not only worried about being infected with the SARS-VOC-2 virus, but also about resuming social activities.

The restrictions were more complicated for teenagers, who considered the pandemic a very serious problem (64%). In addition, attention problems are more numerous in the pandemic context, and the higher their level, the more difficult it is for adolescents to go through the new challenges.

The use of functional strategies, such as support strategies, in which support, social relationships and emotional adaptation predominate, can stimulate increased self-confidence in the context of the pandemic. In fact, the results support the relationship with parents and social support in times of crisis.

Finally, taking into account the results that analyze the correlations between psychopathology scales and coping strategies, it is necessary to emphasize the role of psychological counseling and educational counseling. Adolescents need guidance in activating and optimizing coping resources during this period, for better management of the difficult situation.

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