

LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS ABOUT FLOURISHING AND ITS PREDICTORS DURING EMERGING ADULTS FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Emerging adulthood is a developmental phase that has arisen in Western countries as a result of the social and economic changes of recent decades and refers to the period between the ages of 18 and 29 years (Arnett, 2000). Among other things, the phase is characterised by instability and negativity (Reifman, Arnett, & Colwell, 2007), with part of the difficulties which may affect young people's flourishing stemming from a mismatch between their needs and desires and the resources offered by the context in which they find themselves (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006).

For its part, flourishing is a concept which refers to high levels of hedonic and eudemonic well-being (Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). This study aims to analyse contextual demands, operationalised as markers of adulthood; resources, defined as perceived social support; and emerging adults' needs and desires, operationalised as self-efficacy, academic priorities and viewing emerging adulthood as a time for experimentation and for focusing on themselves. This in turn will help us understand how to foster flourishing during this period. Although several previous studies have analysed these variables cross-sectionally, few have adopted a longitudinal approach, taking gender differences among emerging adults into account also.

Aim

To analyse from a longitudinal and gender-based perspective how some of the variables linked to young people's needs, desires and resources are associated with flourishing throughout emerging adulthood.

Method

Longitudinal monitoring of a group of emerging adult university students in Spain. The sample comprised 400 students (67% women) who were interviewed at the beginning of the emerging adult period (W1, mean age: 20.3 years) and three years later (W2, mean age: 23.7 years).

Participants completed a questionnaire featuring sociodemographic variables, markers of adulthood (having a job, a romantic partner and living independently) and perceived academic performance; the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA; Reifman, Arnett, & Colwell, 2007); the Flourishing Scale (FS; Diener et al., 2010) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MMPS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). A regression analysis was carried out using the independent entry method for each sex.

Results

- The regression analysis revealed gender-based differences in the variables found to predict flourishing.
- Flourishing among men at W2 was associated with two W1 variables: the perception of emerging adulthood as a period for experimentation and the priority given by young people to their academic studies.
- Among women, flourishing at W2 was also associated with two W1 variables, although in this case they were: viewing the period as an opportunity to focus on themselves and social support from family.

Results

Table. Linear Regression Analysis of W1 predictors of flourishing at W2

| W1 Predictors | Men | | Women | |
|-------------------------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|
| | β | ΔR^2 | β | ΔR^2 |
| Income Level | -.05 | | .12 | |
| Employment | .05 | | -.04 | |
| Romantic partner | -.07 | | .10 | |
| Living independently | .04 | | -.00 | |
| Experimentation/Possibilities | .33* | | -.02 | |
| Self-focused | -.12 | | .27** | |
| Getting good marks | .03 | | .11 | |
| Prioritising studies | .33* | | .05 | |
| Social Support from Friends | .13 | | .14 | |
| Social Support from Family | .24 | | .20** | |
| Social Support from Partner | .00 | | -.12 | |
| Total R^2 | | .17 | | .16 |

Note: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$

Conclusion

- The results highlight the importance of taking the implications of gender differences into consideration when analysing emerging adulthood, and clarify the role played by variables linked to educational context and social support in young people's well-being.
- Further research is needed which explores the variables related to well-being during emerging adulthood from a gender-based perspective, in order to enable the design of intervention programmes aimed at facilitating the transition to adult life.

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