

# PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT AND ITS RELATION WITH AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

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**Resumen:** La presente investigación pretende analizar la relación que existe entre el ajuste personal, medido a través de la autoestima y la satisfacción personal y la conducta agresiva en adolescentes. Hemos aplicado a 771 adolescentes de 11 a 17 años de centros escolares de Valencia, la Escala Multidimensional de Autoconcepto, la Escala de Satisfacción con la Vida y, la Escala de Conducta Violenta en la Escuela. Los resultados indican que la autoestima y la satisfacción mantienen una relación estrecha con la conducta agresiva. Concretamente en la autoestima, al emplear una medida multidimensional, hemos hallado una relación positiva entre el comportamiento agresivo y la autoestima social, emocional y física y una relación inversa con los dominios académico y familiar. De este modo, el ajuste personal, constituye un excelente predictor del comportamiento agresivo y, a la vez, son factores protectores de los problemas de conducta relacionados con la agresividad durante la adolescencia.

Palabras clave: Ajuste Personal, Autoestima, Satisfacción, agresividad reactiva.

**Abstract:** In order to study the Personal Adjustment related to the Aggressive Behavior, we applied the Multidimensional Self Concept Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale and Violent Behavior Scale on 771 subjects, of which 354 were men and 409 were women, with ages between 11 and 17 years, all of them students' schools belonging to the province of Valencia. The results indicate that self-esteem and satisfaction are closely associated with aggressive behavior. Specifically esteem by employing a multidimensional measure, we found a positive relationship between aggressive behavior and social, emotional and physical self-esteem and an inverse relationship with the academic and family domains. Thus, personal adjustment is an excellent predictor of aggressive behavior and, in turn, are protective factors related behavior problems with aggression during adolescence.

Keywords: Personal Adjustment, self-esteem, satisfaction, reactive aggressive behavior.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

A proper personal adjustment during adolescence, understanding the word adjustment as an optimal self-esteem level and satisfaction, comprises a protection factor against behavior problems and aggressive responses taken place during adolescence in the family and school domains. Simultaneously, self-esteem and satisfaction are excellent predictors of aggressive behavior during this period.

Until the 90s, scientific literature perceived self-esteem as a unitary construct, resulting in a one-dimensional measure of global self-esteem, in accordance with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1986). In this sense, Rosenberg states that self-esteem is the evaluative aspect of the self-concept that corresponds to an overall view of the self as worthy or unworthy during success or failure. In this regard, García and Musitu (1999) noted that self-esteem is related to certain personal qualities originated from self-experience assessed as positive or negative.

From another perspective, self-esteem refers to the beliefs people have about themselves, thus, it is possible peers have a positive or negative overall self-view and conversely have their own personal judgment of worthiness in the educational setting, the social community and the family scenario (Cava, Buelga, Musitu and Murgui, 2010). From this viewpoint, García and Musitu (1999) have developed a Self-Esteem Questionnaire, designed to measure five self-concept dimensions: Academic, Social, Emotional, Family and Physical.

Regarding satisfaction, different developments emphasize on the cognitive and affective aspect in the self-perceived well-being. On the one hand, investigations made by Goldbeck, Schmitz, Besier, Herschbach and Henrich (2007) coincide with the concept of well-fare, which suggested subjective well-being is a broad psychology construct relevant in people's life-satisfaction; in a similar vein Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999) state that subjective well-being is a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life including specific constructs such as family, school and peer groups.

In this sense, the work of Susan, Antaramian, Huebner and Valois (2008) contributes to reveal differences in the various ways in which self-esteem is measured. The one-dimensional scale measures global satisfaction based on subjective perceptions (e.g. "My life is overall how I would want it to be"; "I am unpleased with my life").

The multidimensional scale measures various affective qualities of self-concept, including domain-social confidence and household well-being (Zulling, Valois, Huebner and Drane, 2005). These studies have observed a single-item measure of global self –esteem through a variety of measures including social abilities and family well-being.

Whereas other evidence obtained in this field of study indicate that teacher's support intervenes directly in academic satisfaction (Danielsen, Samdal, Hetland and Wold, 2009). In this sense, Rollan, García-Bermejo and Villarrubia (2005) confirm that household well-being is related to global self-esteem and state that both are key components to understanding the construct of well-being. An interesting find is the fact that a multidimensional trait scale has a variety of measures including domain-social evaluations, academic performance or household well-being.

Many authors have observed a relation between satisfaction with life and self-esteem (Atienza, Balaguer and García-Merita, 2003; Cabañero et al., 2004). In this sense, self-esteem and well-being are two different constructs that measure self-monitoring. As noted by Casas et al. (2005) global satisfaction with life is related to self-esteem, embodied in a scale of two components: positive self-esteem and negative self-esteem.

On the other hand, recent investigations show a growing interest in the analysis and treatment of aggressive behavior. In Spain, as researched by Cangas, Gázquez, Pérez, Fuentes, Padilla and Miras

(2007), approximately 40% of children and adolescents either witness or intervene in violent episodes on a daily basis. Cosi, Vigil-Colet and Canals (2009) consider this increase has a major social impact in the school, work and familiar environment. This aggressive behavior has been defined as the physiological response, in human nature, vital for the survival of the species (Cornellá and Llusent, 2005).

Other authors find an increase in physical and verbal aggressions in adolescents aged between 12 and 15 years (Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur and Armenta, 2010; Lopez and De la Caba, 2011, Mestre, Samper, Tur, Richaud de Minzi and Mesurado, 2012; Mora-Merchán, 2006); as noted in the studies, managing behavior at the preschool stage, intervenes in decreasing adolescent's involvement in violent behavior, being a common behavior in male and female adolescents that is observed to decrease over the years (Sanchez and Fernández, 2007).

In terms of assessing aggressive behavior, overt aggression encompasses physical and verbal behaviors directed at another individual through hitting, insulting and threatening with the intention of causing harm while relational aggression, includes purposeful manipulation of and damage to another's social relationships (Griffin-Gross, 2004 and Gomez et al. 2007). Little, Brauner, Jones, Nock and Hawley (2003) differentiated the proactive aggression, planned and displayed to serve a goal-directed end from the reactive aggression, defensive in nature, emerging in response perceived provocations and finally instrumental aggression, incorporates behaviors that portend self-serving outcomes.

The preset study analyses the relationship between adolescents' adjustment and aggressive response among peers. In particular, reactive aggression is a defensive, retaliatory response to a perceived provocation from a peer and is accompanied by an intense emotional activation, high impulsive and hostility levels and shortage in process information (Raine, 2011).

Various authors have focused on the relation between self-esteem, satisfaction and adolescent's aggressive behavior (Gomez et al., 2007). Thus aggression is a problem linked to severe consequences in personal development and psychosocial adjustment (Cava, Musitu y Murgui, 2006; Estévez, Murgui, Moreno, and Musitu, 2007). According to subsequent views, aggressive response among equals represents a problem in the majority of adolescents' development environments (Liang, Flisher and Lombard, 2007).

Other authors have observed that adolescents' aggressive behavior is directly correlated to a personal or behavioral adjustment. The results of the study confirm that psychosocial adjustment among peer adolescents has a direct relation with peer aggressive response in maltreatment episodes (Hammick, Richards, Luo, Edlynn and Roy, 2004; Margolin and Gordis, 2000; Ozer, Richards and Kliewer, 2004). According to recent research, there is a negative relation between global satisfaction with life and aggressive behavior (Buelga, Musitu, Murgui and Pons, 2008). The purpose of this work is to assess the relation between overt and relational aggressive peer response or reactive aggressive behavior and adolescents' personal adjustment.

# 2. METHOD

## **Participants**

The sample was comprised of 7 teaching centers from the providence of Valencia and its metropolitan area. Of this sample, 55% were females and 45% were males. Participants were aged between 11 and 17 years and were students of 1st and 2nd grade of Compulsory Secondary Education.



#### Instrument

The following scales were used:

Multidimensional Self-concept Scale (AF5) (Garcia and Musitu, 1999). The A or AFA model based on the Self-concept construct, adapted by Garcia and Musitu, is a self-report measure directed towards students of Compulsory Secondary Education. This scale comprises 30 items and measures the view of self-concept in five dimensions: academic, social, emotional family and physical structure. For example, an item stating "Many things make me nervous" that is marked as I strongly agree, should be scored the highest, on a scale from 90 to 99. However, if marked as I strongly disagree, should be scored the lowest on a scale from 00 to 10. Each item can be scored differently, to be precise; there are 99 terms that can be used on a scoring scale.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener and Diener, 1995), adapted by Atienza et al. (2003), is a measure used on preadolescents and adolescents. This instrument is made up of 5 items: 3 positive (items 1,2 and 4) and 2 negative (items 3 and 5), that measure global self-esteem on a Likert rating scale with 4 possible responses ranging from 4 "strongly agree"; 3 "agree"; 2 "disagree" and 1 "strongly disagree". It is one of the most popular scales that perform best in life-satisfaction analysis.

Scale of Aggressive Behavior in academic domain (Estévez, Murgui, Musitu 2009; Little et al., 2003). This 4 item instrument measures peer violence against their classmates on a response range going from 1 (never) to 4 (always). This measuring instrument has 3 dimensions: reactive aggression-overt (i.e., "When I'm hurt by someone, I hit him back"; Alpha de Cronbach= 0.78), and relational (i.e., "When I'm hurt by someone, I react with indifference or I cut communication", Alpha de Cronbach=0.62).

#### **Procedure**

Seven educational centers were randomly selected from the province of Valencia and its metropolitan area. The research team met with the Board of Directors to explain the goals of the present investigation. Of the 7 selected centers, three were public and the rest were private and concerted centers.

## **Results**

Regarding self-esteem, in the first place a MANOVA was carried out to confirm the existence of gender and age differences and their interaction. The variable of interest in this work was self-esteem, a construct composed of five dimensions: academic, social, emotional, family and physical structure.

The results showed statistically significant differences between both genders ( $F_{5,259}$ =5,608; p<0,01) and age groups ( $F_{10,518}$ =2,384; p<0,01). However, no statistically significant differences were revealed in their interaction ( $F_{10,518}$ =0,877; p>0,05) (Table 1).

Table 1. A Manova for Self-esteem variables. Gender and Age results rem	ain firm
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Effect	F	Gl Hypothesis	Gl error	Significance
Age	2,384	10,000	518,000	,009**
Gender	5,608	5,000	259,000	,000**
Age*Gender	,877	10,000	518,000	,555
				**0.01 *0.05

\*\*p<0,01, \*p<0,05

The gender results of the ANOVA regarding the five-sub factor self-esteem model show statistically significant differences between genders in the variables of emotional ( $F_{1,82}$ =6,612; p<0,05) and physical ( $F_{1,82}$ =11,642; p<0,01).No statistically significant differences were revealed for the following sub factors: academic ( $F_{1,82}$ =0,357; p>0,05); social ( $F_{1,82}$ =0,108; p>0,05) and familiar ( $F_{1,82}$ =0,057; p>0,05).

In terms of assessing the age dimension, the inter-subject model suggested differences in academic domain ( $F_{2,82}$ =7,465; p<0,01). Whereas no significant differences were found in the remaining dimensions: social  $F_{2,82}$ =0,634; p>0,05); emotional ( $F_{2,82}$ =1,363; p>0,05); familiar ( $F_{2,82}$ =1,348; p>0,05) and physical domain ( $F_{2,82}$ =0,793; p>0,05).

When applying the Tukey Model ( $\alpha$ =0,05), results confirmed differences in adolescents aged between 11 and 12 years and 15 and 17 years, as well as adolescents aged between 15 and 17 years, consequently a significant difference was revealed (table 2).

Table 2. Testing on inter-subject effects. D.V. Academic self-esteem, Social self-esteem, Emotional self-esteem, Familiar self-esteem, Physical self-esteem

Source	Dependent variable	Gl	F	Significance
	Academic Self-esteem	2	7,465	,001**
	Social self-esteem	2	,634	,531
Age	Emotional self-esteem	2	1,363	,258
	Familiar self-esteem	2	1,348	,261
	Physical self-esteem	2	,793	,454
	Academic self-esteem	1	,357	,551
	Social self-esteem	1	,108	,742
Gender	Emotional self-esteem	1	6,612	,011*
	Familiar self-esteem	1	,057	,812
	Physical self-esteem	1	11,642	,001**
	Academic self-esteem	2	,728	,484
	Social self-esteem	2	1,591	,206
Age*Gender	Emotional self-esteem	2	1,360	,259
	Familiar self-esteem	2	,658	,519
	Physical self-esteem	2	,482	,618

<sup>\*\*</sup>p<0,01, \*p<0,05



The satisfaction results of the ANOVA displayed no statistically significant differences between both genders ( $F_{1,82}$ =0,280; p>0,05). Analyzing the age factor ( $F_{2,82}$ =11,667; p<0,01) and the interaction between age and gender, significant differences were revealed ( $F_{2,82}$ =0,188; p<0,05) (table 3).

Table 3. Effects on inter-subject testing. Dependent variable: Satisfaction

Source	Gl	F	Significance
Age	2	11,667	,000**
Gender	1	,280	,597
Age*Gender	2	,188	,829

<sup>\*\*</sup>p<0,01, \*p<0,05

The MANOVA results reveal existing statistically significant differences in overt aggression between males and females (( $F_{3,692}$ =52,092; p<0,01) and participants of three age groups ( $F_{6,139}$ =2,876; p<0,01). Evidence suggested no statistically significant differences ( $F_{6,139}$ =0,322; p>0,05).

Likewise, results of relational aggression corroborate no statistically significant differences between both genders ( $F_{3,684}$ =0,822; p>0.05), participants of three age groups ( $F_{6,139}$ =1,186; p>0,05) and their interaction ( $F_{6,137}$ =0,942; p>0,05) (table 4).

Table 4. A Manova for Overt Aggression. Gender and Age results remain firm

Effect	F	Gl Hypothesis	Gl error	Significance
Age	2,876	6,000	139,000	,009**
Gender	52,092	3,000	692,000	,000**
Age*Gender	,322	6,000	139,000	,926

<sup>\*\*</sup>p<0,01, \*p<0,05

The results of the ANOVA show statistically significant differences between males and females in the variable of reactive aggression ( $F_{1,82}$ =154,107; p<0,01), whereas relational forms of reactive aggression was not statistically significant ( $F_{1,82}$ =0,949; p>0,05).

The inter-subject model focused on the age factor, suggested differences in reactive aggression ( $F_{2,82}$ =8,021; p<0,01) in comparison with relational forms of reactive aggression ( $F_{2,82}$ =2,642; p>0,05). When applying the Tukey Model ( $\Omega$ =0,05), results confirmed differences in aged between 11 and 12 years and 15 and 17 years (table 5).

Age Gender

Age\*Gender

	,			00
Source	Dependent variable	Gl	F	Significance
Age	Overt Reactive aggression	2	8,021	,000**

2

Table 5. Testing on inter-subject effects.D.V. Overt Reactive form of Aggression

Overt Reactive aggression

Overt Reactive aggression

,000\*\*

,798

154,11

,226

It can be confirmed that there is a positive correlation between satisfaction with life and the five self-concept dimensions: academic (.329); social (.264); emotional (.106); familiar (.486) and physical structure (.349) (table 6).

Table 6. Correlation among Satisfaction and Psychological adjustment

	Academic self-esteem	Social elf-esteem	Emotional self-esteem	Familiar self-esteem	Physical self-esteem
Satisfaction with life	,329**	,264**	,106**	,486**	,340**

<sup>\*\*</sup>p<0,01, \*p<0,05

By contrast, substantial evidence shows a link between overt and relational forms of reactive aggression and self-esteem and satisfaction as an interpersonal adjustment. Thus, overt aggression negatively affects the academic (-.111) and satisfaction domain (-.089); whereas it has a positive impact in the physical dimension of self-esteem (.109). Relational aggression is negatively related to the emotional (-.133) and satisfaction structure (-.062) (table 7).

Table 7. Correlation among Reactive Aggression and Psychological Adjustment

	Academic self-esteem	Social elf-esteem	Emotional self-esteem	Familiar self-esteem	Physical self-esteem	Satisfaction with Life
Overt						
reactive form of Aggression	-,111**	-,005	,083	,027	,109**	-,089*
Overt						
relational form of	,024	-,033	-,133**	-,086	-,005	,-,062
aggression						

<sup>\*\*</sup>p<0,01, \*p<0,05



<sup>\*\*</sup>p<0,01, \*p<0,05

### 3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The general picture that emerges from these studies is that males have higher emotional and physical self-esteem than females. As derived from a recent work of Amezcua and Pichardo (2000), our results also confirm heightened emotional self-esteem for males but not for females, whom are found to be more sensitive about their self-perceived skills. However, as other authors note, females have higher emotional self-esteem (Candela et al., 2002). According to our results, the evaluation of physical appearance is critical during adolescence, women are more likely than men to have lower self-esteem.

Evidence for satisfaction measurement reveals that females are more satisfied than males, even in Spain (Mestre et at., 2012; Mestre, Tur, Samper and Latorre, 2010). Additional studies don't corroborate these results (Goldbeck et al., 2007). Studies carried out by Bisegger et al. (2005) supports the idea of negative attitudes about the self in women, caused by physical changes during puberty, creating a direct conflict with cultural stereotypes on beauty. Scientific literature shows differences between preadolescent females and the rest of the groups. In this sense, Brooks-Gunn and Paikoff (1993) noted that starting puberty; girls are more likely to report anxiety about the evaluation of their physical appearance. Body image dissatisfaction among women usually takes place during this stage.

Results of aggressive behavior indicate gender is a discriminatory factor, males appear to be more aggressive than females during direct confrontation with the intention of causing harm (push, hit, threaten, insult...), expressed in a defensive mode. Findings from the present study are consistent with the view that violent behavior is more frequent among males than among females (Archer, 2004; Martínez et at., 2008; Salmivalli et al., 2000; Tapper and Boulton, 2004).

On the other hand, no significant differences were revealed between an indirect violent behavior, consequence of a defensive response and a particular situation that requires direct aggressive behavior. However, as noted in other studies, women are observed to be more involved in the relational form of reactive aggression, whereas men tend more toward direct aggression (Little et al., 2003; Prinstein, Boergers and Vernberg, 2001).

Subsequently, analysis on age differences indicated that adolescents aged between 11 and 12 years have high school performance self-esteem. School performance self-esteem refers to one's sense of general competence and includes academic performance, efficacy and agency. Scholars aged between 15 and 17 years were found not to be high in school performance self-esteem. On the other hand, adolescents aged between 15 and 17 years have higher global self-esteem satisfaction than students aged between 11 and 12 years. Steinberg (2002) previously stated that during early adolescence, lower levels of self-esteem are linked to significant body changes.

Regarding the relation between constructs, a positive correlation was observed between the dimension of satisfaction and self-esteem. The results coincide with recent investigations which indicate a direct correlation between both constructs (Cava et al., 2010; Ying and Fang-Biao, 2005). Other authors have observed that self-esteem is a perfect predictor of satisfaction with life (Biro, Striegel-Moore, Franko, Padgett and Bean, 2006). Results coincide with other studies (Drew and Huebner, 1994; Diener and Diener, 1995).

Aggressive behavior was also observed to correlate negatively with personal adjustment. Regarding the means of these variables, the lower the satisfaction and the academic, social, emotional and familiar self-esteem is, the higher the violent behavior is where the aggressor tries to interfere in the victim's well-being. Findings from the present study show a negative correlation between psychosocial adjustment and interacting in aggressive episodes (Liang et al., 2007). Valois, Paxton, Zullig and Huebner (2006) indicate that satisfaction with life is negatively related to adolescents' risk behaviors,

including physical fights, carrying a gun or fights that consequently require medical treatment.

By contrast, evidence shows an unclear link between self-esteem and aggressive behavior during adolescence (O'Moore and Kirkham, 2001). Estévez, Martínez and Musitu (2006), have argued that this contradiction is related to the type of construct used, thus self-esteem decreases in aggressors as a one-dimension scale is used. However, when a multidimensional scale is used, contradictory results are found.

Applying a multidimensional trait, results coincide with studies carried out by Estevez, Murgui, Musitu and Moreno (2008) and Moreno, Estevez, Murgui and Musitu (2009), which find that low family and academic self-esteem is associated with aggressive behavior. Wild, Fisher, Bhana and Lombard (2004) have observed a relation between low family and academic self-esteem and violent aggression in social domains. Both dimensions have been used as variables to analyze risk behavior, including school violence during adolescence, observing adolescents hardly interact in risk behavior. In this sense, Cava et al. (2006) highlight the academic and family domain as two dimensions where family members have an influence on the adolescent children. The reason could reside in the relations and dynamics taken place in the family womb as well as the need to encourage children in the academic results.

According to our results, social situations have a negative effect on aggressive behavior. However, as noted in other studies, social domains have a significant relation with peer aggressors (Estévez et al., 2006). Likewise, physical structure has a positive relation with the overt form of aggressive behavior, carried out with the intention of causing harm, expression of a defensive conduct.

In the view of these results, it can be clarified that physical performance requires higher strength and an athletic condition for aggressors to have high status in their peer group. In this sense, Sanchez-Bernardos and Quiroga (2007) confirm that self-esteem is enhanced by the view significant others hold of the self. Thus adolescents come to respond to themselves in a manner consistent with the way of those around them. This is why occasionally violent behavior is functional and enhances physical and social self-esteem on aggressors (Gomez et al., 2007).

Furthermore, studies on emotional self-esteem revealed a negative relation with aggression. Nevertheless, various studies emphasize aggressors have an overall view of themselves as worthy and successful in emotional situations. Apparently, they appear to feel more successful than other classmates not involved in violence problems (Cava and Musitu, 2003).

Other works show that aggression and emotional instability are two factors correlated directly and positively (Del Barrio, Carrasco, Rodríguez and Gordillo, 2009; Mestre, Tur, Samper and Latorre, 2010; Richaud, Mesurado, Samper, Llorca, Lemos and Tur, 2013). In this sense, according to Bermudez, Teva and Sanchez (2003), individuals with higher emotional self-esteem have higher self-control in adverse circumstances. Consequently, adolescents confront future outcomes and are less involved in aggressive behavior at the school setting.

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