

## Relationship with parents and coping strategies in adolescents of Lima

Relación con los padres y estrategias de afrontamiento en adolescentes de Lima

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## Summary

This correlational and comparative study aims to determine the relationship between the perception of the relationship with parents and coping strategies in a sample of 320 students chosen through a non-probabilistic sampling of 156 men (48.75%) and 164 women (51.25%). To that end, information gathering instruments like the Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory and Adolescent Coping Scale were used. The results suggest that there are statistically significant correlations between some dimensions of perception of the relationship with parents and coping strategies in the sample studied. Finally, with regard to the perception of parenting styles of both mother and father, we see no significant differences between men and women, except for the extreme autonomy of the father, in which men score higher than women. There were no some statistically significant differences in the analysis of coping strategies in the sample in relation to gender.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, coping, relationship with parents.

## Resumen

El presente estudio, de diseño correlacional y comparativo, tiene por objetivo determinar la relación entre la percepción de la relación con los padres y las estrategias de afrontamiento en una muestra de 320 adolescentes de Lima, elegidos a través de un muestreo no probabilístico, 156 hombres (48.75%) y 164 mujeres (51.25%). Se emplearon, como instrumentos de recojo de información, la Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory y la Escala de Afrontamiento para Adolescentes. Los resultados permiten concluir que existen correlaciones estadísticamente significativas entre algunas dimensiones de la percepción de la relación con los padres y las estrategias de afrontamiento en la muestra estudiada. Finalmente, respecto a la percepción de los estilos parentales de la madre y el padre, podemos observar que no se evidencian diferencias significativas entre hombres y mujeres, con excepción

de la autonomía extrema del padre, en la cual los varones puntúan más alto que las mujeres. Al analizar el afrontamiento en la muestra en relación con el sexo, no se encontraron algunas diferencias estadísticamente importantes.

**Palabras clave:** Adolescentes, estrategias de afrontamiento, relación con los padres.

## Introduction

The adolescence is a stage characterized by coping new situations, such as body changes, the election of a partner or profession, new ways of thinking, personal identity, the establishment of some emotional independence from parents, etc., which can be stressful. In view of this, it is necessary to have resources allowing the students to manage successfully this type of events, as well as skills for an efficient, reasonable and flexible use of the cited resources. The family relationships and coping strategies are the more prominent personal factors that facilitate the development of adapted behaviors.

As to the perception of relationships with parents, they can be defined as a combination of attitudes towards children, generating an emotional climate in which parents act (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The perception of the relationships with parents helps to understand their behaviors and attitudes, and how they relate with the development and well-being of children (Domenech, Donovanick & Crowley, 2009). The perception of parental styles is based on variations of parental dimensions of sensitivity (warmth, affection), paternal demand (parental control) and autonomy given. The evidence indicates that the cited parental dimensions are related with the development and well-being of children (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003).

Parental dimensions of sensitivity, parental control and autonomy given coincide with other classifications, such as the one proposed by Baumrind (1966) and Maccoby and Martin (1983), referred to the acceptance (parental responsiveness), pathological control (parental demandingness) and negligence (uninvolved or neglectful parenting); as well as the one proposed by Schaefer (1965), who proposes a tridimensional model composed of 3 orthogonal factors called: 1) Acceptance versus rejection; 2) Psychological autonomy versus psychological control (parental control through domination,

generating guilt and anxiety; 3) Strict control versus relaxed control (parental control through the imposition of rules and establishment of limits).

Based on a cognitive model, what mainly influences the behavior of adolescents is their perception of the type of relationship with their parents rather than their behaviors (Richaud de Minzi, 2005). Therefore, the perception of children that their parents support them is associated with an increase of their self-esteem, social integration, perception and control and effectiveness of coping strategies, and how they help to understand the behaviors and attitudes of parents, and how they relate with the development and well-being of children (Domenech, Donovanick & Crowley, 2009; Sandler, Wolchick, MacKinnon, Ayers & Roosa, 1997). Moreover, the quality of familiar relationships perceived by children is associated with the ability of adolescents to face problems (Sandler, et al., 1997; Skinner & Welborn, 1994).

During the adolescence, men and women face several stressors derived from the appearance of developmental conflicts, peer groups, family differences, identity, among others (Richaud de Minzi, 2003). Studies with adolescents show the negative effects of stress on attention, concentration, adaptive behaviors (Caballero, Abelló & Palacios, 2007), learning processes (Martín, 2007), psychological well-being (Guarino, Gavidia, Antor & Caballero, 2000) and health in general (Sarid, Anson, Yaari & Margalith, 2004), among others. The gender also has an effect on stress experience. So women show more stress perceived than men. (Calais, Andrade & Lipp, 2003; Heiman, 2004).

The transactional stress theory highlights the assessment and perception on possible consequences represented by objective environmental experiences (Cohen, Kessler & Underwood, 1995). Based on this approach, two processes that occur in the individual-environment relationship are described: Cognitive assessment and coping. According to Lazarus and

Folkman (1986), we can find two types of coping strategies: The first one is focused on the problem, and the second one is focused on the emotion. The coping strategy focused on the problem includes the use of problem solving strategies, decision-making process, information search, etc., which are used when the person wants to change the stressful situation. The coping strategy focused on the emotion is focused on the change of the emotional reaction by using cognitive restructuring technique. These coping strategies, also called cognitive coping strategies, are used when the person considers that it is difficult to do something to change the stressful situation, and there is no other alternative but to withstand it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986).

The literature indicates that people use a wide variety of strategies to deal with different stressful situations. The use of a strategy, as well as its success, will depend on the nature of the stressor event (Taylor, 2007).

Frydenberg (1993), based on Lazarus' statements, conceptualizes the adolescent coping as the expression of a series of actions in response to the demands set out to the person. These actions or behaviors can have different objectives. First, they can be aimed at modifying the stress sources; others allow the adaptation to the demand, and finally, some actions indicate an incompetence to handle the different demands. The model also highlights the reassessment of the result (Frydenberg, 1997; Frydenberg y Lewis, 1997). So every individual, after evaluating the situation, assesses the stress impact and based on that, they conclude if the situation results in damage, threat or challenge, and they estimate their resources available. According to this, the new response is assessed and a new response can be generated. Thus, a feedback mechanism is generated and it provides information to decide if the strategies used will be employed again or will be discarded, according to the assessment result.

Several studies that try to relate the coping strategies and the perception of the relationship with parents indicate that warmth, intimacy

and communication with children forecast that action strategies will be more used when dealing with problems (Herman & McHale, 1993). Moreover, adolescents who perceive their parents as indulgent and negligent use a more cognitive coping, while those that perceive their parents as warmer and as a support source are related to a problem-focused coping strategy. Finally, the perception of parents as more firm and watchful is related to a cognitive and emotion-focused coping strategy (Dusek & Danko, 1994). Parental warmth perceived is positively associated with the active coping; while those who perceive an authoritarian and permissive parenting style from both mother and father, show an active coping with problems (Wolfradta, Hempelb & Miles, 2003).

Other studies (Richaud de Minzi, 2006) indicate that the perception of the relationships with parents influence the coping behavior of adolescents according to the gender and age. Feeling loved and appreciated by parents favors the development of functional coping strategies; while the pathological control is related to non-adaptive or dysfunctional strategies when facing conflicts, specially the emotional dependence, self-guilt and paralysis. Finally, the perception of negligence in parents, basically leads to the avoidance solution and lack of responsibility. Richaud de Minzi, Moreno and Sacchi (2011) say that when the adolescents feel accepted, they develop a functional coping behavior based on the cognitive restructuring, the emotional support search and the action against a problem. At the same time, it seems that when the adolescents perceive parental acceptance, it does not allow the adolescents to develop a dysfunctional coping behavior based on the cognitive avoidance, lack of control and blocking. However, when the adolescents perceive parental rejection, hostility, guilt and autonomy restriction, they develop a dysfunctional coping behavior when dealing with conflicts. Although the control accepted is considered very important in a positive relationship style, the excessive control that restricts the autonomy and safety of the adolescent, is highly negative to deal with a threat successfully.

To be able to study the association between the perception of relationships with parents and the coping styles, adolescents at universities of the Metropolitan Lima area have been chosen since they are important variables to explain the adjustment of such adolescents to the academic situation and they allow establishing a forecast of adaption to their future academic life.

This study is important in the theory and practice. With respect to the former, the results obtained help providing scientific knowledge of important psychological constructs: the perception of relationships with parents and coping considered relevant to explain part of the adaptation in view of the several demands of the environment (Herman & McHale, 1993). Besides, the results try to contribute to the development psychology area in the Peruvian context, since they provide a profile of how the adolescents face several stress situations through the use of different strategies. The results can provide useful information for the design of primary and secondary prevention programs in adolescents that best fits their needs. In view of a very competitive university system, adolescents require coping skills when facing this or other problems throughout their life. Knowing these variables will allow a better knowledge of the most favorable mechanisms to avoid stress periods in a better way.

## **Method**

This research work has a quantitative approach. It is a non-experimental study with an *ex post facto* correlational-transactional design since it is aimed at establishing and analyzing the relationship between two or more variables. In addition, it tries to know if the perception of relationship with parents is related to the use of coping strategies of a group of adolescents of Lima (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2006).



## Participants.

A total of 320 students participated and they were chosen by a non-probabilistic sampling: 156 men (48.75%) and 164 women (51.25%), who are studying in public and private universities in the Metropolitan Lima area. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the sample with respect to the distribution of age, place of birth and school.

**Table 1.**

*Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Sample*

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
16	110	34.375%
17	90	28.125%
18	120	37.5%
<b>Place of Birth</b>		
Lima	260	81.25%
Province	60	18.75%
<b>School</b>		48,7%
Psychology	220	62.5%
Social Work	100	31.25%

## Instruments.

For purposes of the research work, two instruments were used: the abridged version of the Children Perception Inventory about the Relationships with their Parents and the Coping Scale for adolescents.

The *Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (CRPBI)*, created by Schaefer (1965), is an instrument whereby the children describe the perception of their parents' behavior towards them. It is based on a tridimensional model as a result of the factor analysis that allowed identifying 3 pairs of orthogonal factors: Acceptance versus Rejection, Psychological

Autonomy vs. Psychological Control (parental control through domination and guilt and anxiety instillation) and Strict Control vs. Relaxed Control (parental control through rule imposition and limit establishment). The original version comprises 26 scales of 10 items each with a dichotomic response format (Yes, No).

Richaud de Minzi (2005) prepared a version of 32 items that, in turn, were refactorized. The form for both father and mother provides information about three factors: Acceptance, Pathological Control and Extreme Autonomy aimed at general relationship modes, in which more specific ways of interaction proposed by Schaefer have been included in a balanced way. This new abridged version has shown an adequate validity of the criterion when it is used to study the relationship between parental styles perceived and adolescents' coping behavior, obtaining the expected results according to theory. Despite the reduction of the number of items, the reliability as internal consistency has been satisfactory. The Cronbach quotient was calculated for each one of the three factors, obtaining reliability indexes of 0.81 in acceptance, 0.83 in pathological control and 0.75 in extreme autonomy with respect to the mother, and 0.82 in acceptance, 0.84 in pathological control and 0.73 in extreme autonomy with respect to the father.

The *Coping Scale for Adolescents*, of Frydenberg & Lewis (1997), assesses how adolescents aged between 12 and 18 cope with their problems in general. Specifically, 18 coping strategies are differentiated that can be grouped in three basic coping styles: 1) Solving-problem style, which includes a series of strategies tending to modify the problematic situation to make it less stressful, such as: seeking relaxing diversion, physical recreation, working hard and having success, focusing on the positive and problem-solving; 2) Reference to the others, style that includes strategies, such as seeking spiritual support, investing in close friends, seeking professional assistance, seeking social support, seeking social action and seeking to belong; 3) Non-productive coping comprises the strategies of worry, self-

blame, wishful thinking, ignoring the problem, not coping, keeping to oneself and tension reduction.

The Argentinian original version shows an analysis of the internal consistency, a Cronbach alpha of 0.75. In the Peruvian context, Caycho, Castilla and Shimabukuro (2014) obtained evidences of validity and reliability that support its use in samples of adolescents. The analysis of item-test correlation found highly significant associations ( $p < .001$ ) for each one of the reagents. Moreover, a high internal consistency is obtained ( $\alpha$  of Cronbach = 0.88); while the factor analysis performed showed that ACS has a structure of eleven factors.

### **Procedure.**

The tests were collectively administrated. Before students answer the items, they were asked to read the instructions of each test carefully. They were also remembered that there is no time limit to answer both scales. The participant completed the data about age, gender, civil status and work situation, keeping them anonymous when answering the scales. The participation of the students was voluntary and anonymous, and they sign the informed consent that guarantees the reliability of the data provided. With respect to the data analysis, version 22 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used.

## **Results**

### **Correlational Analysis.**

Firstly, correlations and the level of significance between the three parental styles of the father, perceived by children, and the coping strategies are observed (Table 2). There are negative and statistically significant correlations between cognitive restructuring and pathological control ( $r = -0.444$ ,  $p < .05$ ), anxiety and extreme autonomy ( $r = -0.390$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and pathological control and isolation activities ( $r = -0.377$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 2.**

*Correlations between Three Styles of the Relationship with the Father and the 11 Coping Strategies.*

	<b>Pathological control</b>	<b>Acceptance</b>	<b>Extreme autonomy</b>
Cognitive restructuration	<b>-0.444*</b>	-0.114	-0.186
Self-blame	-.095	0.250	-0.186
Fatalism	-0.195	-0.078	-.087
Avoidance through amusement	-.014	-.044	-0.101
Problem-Focused Coping	0.241	.047	-0.197
Avoidance through physical activity	0.192	-0.290	.070
Emotional support	.036	-.061	-0.125
Emotional discharge and somatization	-0.190	0.144	.070
Anxiety	.084	-.094	<b>-0.390*</b>
Isolation	<b>-0.377*</b>	.031	0.107
No action	-0.365	-.026	-.052

\* $p < .05$

Table 3 shows the correlations and the level of significance between the three styles of relationship with the mother perceived by children and the coping strategies. It indicates that self-blame shows statistically significant and negative correlations with the pathological control ( $r = -0.620$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and statistically significant and positive correlations with acceptance ( $r = 0.566$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, we found a negative correlation between the pathological control and isolation activities ( $r = -0.398$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Table 3.**

*Correlations between the Three Styles of Relationship with the Mother and the 11 Coping Strategies.*

	Pathological control	Acceptance	Extreme autonomy
Cognitive restructuration	-.017	-.013	-.207
Self-blame	<b>-0.620**</b>	<b>0.566**</b>	0.170
Fatalism	-0.286	0.146	0.149
Avoidance through amusement	-0.201	0.146	.085
Problem-Focused Coping	-0.202	0.251	-.072
Avoidance through physical activity	.068	-0.134	.025
Emotional support	-0.326	0.323	-.027
Emotional discharge and somatization	-0.221	0.261	0.163
Anxiety	-0.325	0.254	-0.133
Isolation	<b>-0.398*</b>	0.167	0.113
No action	-0.300	.030	0.161

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

### Complementary Analysis.

Comparison analyses of averages of study variables were performed to determine the existence of differences according to gender. When analyzing the coping strategies in relation to gender (Table 4), there were no statistically significant differences.

**Table 4.**

*Differences in the Coping Style according to Children's Gender.*

Scale	Feminine (n = 164)		Masculine (n = 156)		t	Sig.
	M	D.E.	M	D.E.		
Cognitive restructuration	3.56	0.82	3.81	0.79	0.752	0.459
Self-blame	2.09	0.74	2.08	0.96	-.034	0.973
Fatalism	2.37	0.72	2.16	1.16	-0.600	0.554
Avoidance through amusement	3.27	0.79	3.50	0.82	0.676	0.505
Problem-Focused Coping	3.44	0.63	3.48	0.72	0.134	0.895
Avoidance through physical activity	2.65	0.89	3.16	0.94	1.339	0.192
Emotional support	3.33	0.94	3.19	0.85	-0.381	0.706
Emotional discharge and somatization	2.49	0.67	2.38	1.00	-0.354	0.726
Anxiety	3.46	0.64	3.25	0.80	-0.749	0.460
Isolation	2.39	0.66	2.97	0.73	2.037	.052
No action	1.89	0.68	2.06	0.88	0.592	0.559

Table 5 shows the differences found in the perception of the relationship with the father according to the gender. There are only significant differences in extreme autonomy. This difference was low ( $d = 0.25$ ), men score higher than women.

**Table 5.**

*Differences in the Perception of the Relationship with the Father according to Children's Gender:*

Scale	Feminine (n = 164)		Masculine (n = 156)		t	Sig.
	M	D.E.	M	D.E.		
Pathological control	18.57	5.05	18.5	2.88	-.038	0.97
Acceptance	23.95	7.5	23	6.59	-0.315	0.755
Extreme autonomy	17.14	3.61	20.63	4.03	2.25	.03*

\*p < .05

As to perception of the relationship with the mother (Table 6), we can observe that there are no statistically significant evidences between men and women.

**Table 6.**

*Differences in the Perception of the Relationship with the Mother according to Children's Gender:*

Scale	Feminine (n = 164)		Masculine (n = 156)		t	Sig.
	M	D.E.	M	D.E.		
Pathological control	22.43	2.98	18.38	5.78	-1.890	.093
Acceptance	23.81	7.06	28.13	6.15	1.51	0.141
Extreme autonomy	17.57	3.12	18.25	1.83	0.574	0.571

## Discussion

This research work examines the correlation between the perception of the relationship with parents and the coping styles in a group of adolescent students of Lima. The results report that some styles of relationships with parents are linked to the coping strategies of the adolescents.

As to relationships between the father and the mother acceptance and coping strategies, we found that using more strategies characterized by the fact that people feel responsible for the problems they suffer is associated with a lower perception of hostile control and a greater mother's acceptance. Our results coincide with Richaud de Minzi, Moreno and Sacchi (2011), who say that a parents' perception of acceptance is a protecting factor for the coping development based on the cognitive avoidance. The relationship between the mother's acceptance and the emotion-focused strategies is important since they are related to low levels of performance, as well as to the development of psychosomatic symptoms and guilt feelings and self-criticism, if they cannot cope with problem. (Canessa, 2002).

In the cases observed in relation to the mother, where an acceptance is perceived with low levels of pathological control, the responsibility for problems comes with anxiety disorders that, in turn, increase the probability to use support seeking strategies (Marcoen, Goossens & Caes, 1987), an association absent in our sample.

As to the hypothesis referred to the possible relationship between the pathological control of the father and of the mother, and the coping strategies, we observe that, in the case of the father, using more strategies characterized by a change of positive attitude is associated with a lower perception of hostile control of parents. According to Richaud de Minzi (2006a, 2006b), the cognitive restructuring act on the real problem and the emotional support seeking. This result would be related to what was exposed

by Richaud de Minzi, Moreno and Sacchi (2011), who say that the hostile control reduction, along with a greater acceptance, would allow developing a coping based on the cognitive restructuration, emotional support seeking and action on the problem.

Besides, the absence of excessive control of parents would be related to using more coping styles focused on the assessment that suggest that, when the problematic situation cannot be modified, it is more feasible to make it more cognitively manageable (Richaud de Minzi, 2005). The foregoing is in contrast to what was stated by Wolfradt, Hempel and Miles (2003), who indicate that those people who perceive the relationship with their parents as authoritarian have higher scores in active coping with problems.

Our results also show a negative correlation between the pathological control and isolation activities, which suggests that a higher perception of hostile control of parents is associated with a reduction of activities of scape, flight and lack of responsibility for the problem associated with solitude (Richaud de Minzi, 2006a). This solitude would not facilitate the reflection and calm feeling since it would be related to mistrust and rejection feelings towards others (Richaud de Minzi, 2002). Other authors (Richaud de Minzi, 2002) state that the excessive or pathological control can cause children to feel rejected, affecting their approach to peers. Our results would be in accordance with Alíes- Jardel, Fourdrinier, Roux and Schneider (2002), who say that certain restrictions are necessary since they allow the establishment of adequate relationships between peers. Therefore, a perception of more watchful and strict parents is associated with the use of emotion-focused coping styles (Richaud de Minzi, 2002); while an insufficient control, along with the extreme autonomy of parents, would be associated with the presence of antisocial behaviors (Dishion, 1990).

Finally, as to the possible association between the perception of extreme autonomy of the father and of the mother with coping strategies and



styles, we found only one significant relationship (for father) with the strategy called anxiety. This indicates that using more the actions expressing fear of future is associated with a lower control of parents. According to Wolfradta, Hempelb & Miles (2003), anxiety would be related in a negative way to the perception of parental warmth. Richaud de Minzi, Moreno and Sacchi (2011) indicate that, if, although the control is important, a parental style characterized by the excessive control can limit the autonomy and safety of the adolescent, which is not beneficial at all to face the problem successfully. Children that perceive a lack of protection due to a lack of control and limits, experience higher levels of emotional instability. (Richaud de Minzi et al., 2013).

There were no statistically significant differences in coping according to gender, which does not relate to the Peruvian literature (Canessa, 2000; Cassaretto, Chau, Oblitas & Valdés, 2003; Casuso, 1996; Martínez & Morote, 2001; Cassaretto, 2009), which indicates that women use more often social support, continuously resorting to religion; while men usually use, to a greater extent, active strategies compared to women.

Finally, in relation to the comparisons of the perception of the parental styles with respect to gender, we can observe that in the case of the father, there are significant differences in extreme autonomy. Sons score higher than daughters; that is, sons perceive a greater lack of control of parents. This result coincides with the different studies showing that sons perceived their parents as more negligent compared to daughters (Hines, Kantor & Holt, 2006; Shek, 1998, 2000). Other study (Rodriguez, Del Barrio & Carrasco, 2009) indicates that also sons perceive their parents as more controlling, permissive and hostile. Based on the foregoing, we can consider that sons are more sensitive to control and discipline perception (Sources, Motrico & Bersabé, 2001; Mestre, Samper, Tur & Díez, 2001).

The results in relation to gender and perception of parental styles allow sustaining the stereotype of “strict father and loving mother” (Shek, 1998) since, although mothers are perceived as more affectionate and fathers as strict, the results are not statistically significant, as stated by other authors (Shek, 2000; Sorbring, Rödhholm-Funnemark & Palmerus, 2003). Despite this, the scientific literature referred to the perception of the relationship with parents with respect to gender is not free of controversy, as shown in several results (Forehand & Nousiaien, 1993; Musitu & Cava, 2001; Shek, 1998). This controversy can be caused by the changes made in the education style of fathers and mothers (Lanz, Scabini, Vermulst & Gerris, 2001; Sorbring et al., 2003).

The results of the study suggest the relationship of interaction patterns among parents and children and coping strategies, which are important variables in the adaptation of adolescents. However, it is necessary to study how the fact that a style prevails over another one depends on the adjustment between the psychosocial conditions in which the family lives, the education scenario built by parents or carers and their characteristics.

The results of this research work must be considered in light of the following limitations. First, this work only considered the participation of perception constructs of the relationship with parents, putting aside other important family constructs when using certain coping strategies. Therefore, it will be important to develop new studies in the future that jointly assess the contribution of several family variables in relation to coping of adolescents and young people in the Peruvian context. Second, when the sample is taken from a university student population of Lima by means of a convenience sampling, the results have a limited generalization capacity compared to the rest of the country, given the cultural differences and the life style in the Coast, Highlands and Forest regions. Third, it is necessary to have a higher number of participants from different social sectors in the next research work in order to test the regression model.

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