

Subjective well-being in school context: differences between children and adolescents from public and private schools from Porto Alegre/RS - Brazil

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Theme: Social support and education outcomes
Subtheme: Subjective well-being

Abstract:

The school environment plays an essential role in child development, being the place where children and adolescents spend most of their time and one of the main contexts that can be related to their satisfaction with life. It is at school that children will expand their interpersonal relationships, starting to relate with peers and teachers beyond the family nucleus. Participation at school is understood as a protective factor when it provides positive relationships that stimulate children's self-esteem and self-efficacy. When this teaching-learning and socialization environment fails to promote a propitious context to a healthy psychosocial development, some differences between the levels of children and adolescents' well-being can be seen. Aiming at giving voice to children, this study investigates children and adolescents' satisfaction with the safety and the relationships established in the school environment and their subjective well-being comparing the perception of children from public and private schools. Participants are 622, being boys (44,7%) and girls (55,1%), aged between eight and 12 years old, from public (65,6%) and private (34,4%) schools from Porto Alegre/RS-Brazil collected in the "Children's Worlds Survey" (ISCWeB). To evaluate the perception of social support, four items were selected regarding the quality of relationships established with colleagues and teachers, how safe they feel at school, and how much they perceive that in this environment they have opportunities to make decisions about things that are important to them. To measure subjective well-being, the Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale (CW-SWBS) scale was chosen, consisting of six items that assess life satisfaction. Data analysis was performed using means comparison by type of school (public and private) and Pearson's correlation among school items and SWB. The results showed that there are significant positive correlations between all safety and the relationships in school items and subjective well-being of children, highlighting the importance of school in children's development and socialization, also being considered as a space of protection against vulnerabilities that they face in several other contexts. It was evidenced that the correlations between well-being and school safety and the relationships items are stronger in the group from private schools, when compared to the group from public ones, and also that all items presented lower means for children from public schools, with moderate effect sizes (Cohen's d from 0,294 to 0,521). In the Brazilian context, these results can indicate the existing social inequities between classes, that also reflects in school, taking into

account that most public school students come from vulnerable families. These results emphasize the importance of considering the context in which children are inserted so that we can reflect and problematize the issues that threaten children's well-being. Social support increases children and adolescents' resources, helping them to develop adaptive strategies to deal with adverse life situations. More investigations should be carried out on the subject and interventions and greater investments in public schools must take place so that this environment can provide positive relationships, exercise its protective role and, consequently, contribute to the promotion of a positive child development.