Chapter 9
Stress, Self-Efficacy, Resilience, and Happiness Among Mexican Emerging Adults During the Confinement Due to COVID-19

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Abstract An empirical investigation is presented of the relationship between perceived stress, self-efficacy, resilience, and happiness among emerging adults during the confinement imposed by COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account age and level of resilience. This cross-sectional study involved 318 young people from the general population aged 18–29 years, 82 men and 236 women. Most of them were university students or had a career, a small number were tradesmen, and some had unpaid jobs. The scales of Perceived Stress, General Self-Efficacy, the Brief Version scales of Resilience and Happiness, and a sociodemographic data sheet were administered online using Google Forms from March 2020 to July 2021. The descriptive data show that people with high levels of resilience have higher self-efficacy and happiness and lower perceived stress. Positive relationships were observed between self-efficacy, resilience, and happiness and negative ones with perceived stress. Longitudinal studies are required to better elucidate the complex interaction between positive and negative well-being dimensions, in order to develop intervention programs that can inform psychological practice, with the aim of supporting and promoting youth's well-being in the face of the pandemic consequences.

Keywords Perceived stress · Self-efficacy · Resilience · Happiness · Emerging adults

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S. Leontopoulou, A. Delle Fave (eds.), *Emerging Adulthood in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Other Crises: Individual and Relational Resources*, Cross-Cultural Advancements in Positive Psychology 17,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-22288-7_9

9.1 Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has represented an economic, social, educational, and, above all, health challenge for the world. Millions of people have fallen ill and even died due to this disease. Among the actions applied in Mexico to prevent the spread of the contagion, there was confinement, characterized by the suspension of academic and work activities in presence (Gobierno de México, 2020). Even though a gradual return has been implemented nowadays, some sectors keep following the recommendation to remain at home.

Research by Brooks et al. (2020) indicates that younger age, female gender, and low grades in school are related to the negative psychological impact of the pandemic. They also mention stressors during and after quarantine that affect the mental health of individuals, such as duration of quarantine, fear of infection, frustration and boredom, inadequate supplies, inadequate information, economic status, and stigma of the disease. During confinement, the fear of sickness and death has undermined people's physical and psychological well-being, with unfavorable consequences on their quality of life. In the case of young people, studies report higher stress and depressive and anxiety symptoms (Arslan et al., 2020; Huang & Zhao, 2020; Tang et al., 2020).

Although in many countries the rate of contagion and severe disease among youth was lower in contrast to older age groups, at least in the first two waves of the pandemic, "they have been blamed for the spread of the pandemic by defying established restrictions" (Benedicto, 2021, p.129). It has to be however noted that young people experienced various negative consequences, especially in the months of confinement and subsequent restrictions, with a worsening in their physical and mental health problems. In almost all countries, and certainly in Mexico, the pandemic affected this population sector at the academic, employment, social, and economic levels. According to the COVID-19 impact measurement survey, more than five million Mexican students did not continue with their courses for the 2020–2021 school year, due to a lack of economic resources, need to work, and not having conditions for learning (INEGI, 2020).

Young people had to modify their lifestyles; the confinement led to severe restrictions in their possibility of socialization and their relationship and interaction patterns with friends, which are of great importance at this stage of life (Benedicto, 2021). These conditions have negatively impacted youth's mental health; in particular, restrictions in movement and leisure led people to feel uncomfortable and anxious (Dagli, 2020), generating emotional discomfort and making usual circumstances likely to become severe stressors (Vallejo-Sánchez & Pérez-García, 2016). Authors such as Seubert and Reiko (2022) refer that 2 years after the beginning of the pandemic, and despite the end of the confinement, the so-called new normality is being experienced; it is still a time of uncertainty and stress, representing a phase of adaptation to the current conditions.

Nowadays, research on emerging adults is relevant since they are mainly concerned about their future regarding education, marriage, work, health, and social

roles; they thus represent a vulnerable group in the face of anxiety which harms their individual and interpersonal functioning (Arnett, 2001; Côté, 2014).

9.1.1 Perceived Stress

One of the most frequently reported problems within this age group is stress. Selye (1974) defines stress as a set of physiological responses, and a reaction to non-specific stimuli (stressors). Specifically, the perceived stress appraisal process is defined as the individual's assessment of the degree of stress produced by a stressful situation. According to Moscoso (2009), perceived stress can be understood as the degree to which people perceive situations in their lives as unpredictable and uncontrollable, hence deeming them as stressful. It is recognized that perceived stress can affect mental and physical health when a person feels overwhelmed by a situation and when this level of stress is sustained over time (Lazarus, 2009). Folkman and Lazarus' (1988) transactional theory of stress posits that the person and the environment are in a constantly changing dynamic relationship, and this relationship is bidirectional. "When faced with a stressful stimulus from the environment, the organism makes an evaluation and provides coping strategies along with emotional expressions, and it acts accordingly by giving a series of responses" (Zavala et al., 2008, p. 165). Reactions to stress can be a) physiological, b) emotional, and c) cognitive, and the sources of stress can come from positive and adverse events. Stress is a normal response to uncertainty, so it is common for people to experience it in a pandemic context.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful for people worldwide (Tamayo, 2020). As reported by Bowen et al. (2020) in Spain, 49.2% of people consider that COVID-19's impact on their lifestyle has been very or entirely negative. According to Valero et al. (2020) "social distancing has caused people to feel isolated and lonely and may increase stress, anxiety, and fear of disease outbreaks" (p. 64). In addition, it has been reported that women are twice as likely to convey stress and anxiety (Caraveo-Anduaga & Colmenares, 2000). Studies conducted with Mexican samples to investigate emotional dimensions during the pandemic suggest that although women reported lower affective symptoms, they get significantly burdened with caring for people, so they are the ones who frequently present more negative emotions (Ramos-Lira et al., 2020).

The young people's life has been in crisis, not only because of their age but also because of the new conditions of uncertainty that may generate a high perception of daily stress, resulting in emotional discomfort. Therefore, it is essential to inquire about the possible daily stress they may be experiencing in this pandemic confinement environment.

9.1.2 Self-Efficacy

Even under stressful circumstances, people may develop adaptive behaviors which allow them to control the demands of the environment. In this regard, it has been observed that young people face crises with a certain optimism and are confident that they will achieve success, "they believe that they will be able to get ahead because of their abilities and skills" (Benedicto, 2021, p.135). The study done by Megías et al. (2021) indicates that three out of five young Spaniards had an optimistic view of their future. They believed that their personal and work situation would improve compared to their current one in the coming years and expressed a high level of confidence in achieving their social and life integration. These findings suggest that many young people have been active agents during the pandemic. The situation does not necessarily negatively affect them because they have psychological resources to cope better with stressful situations. Scientific research has shown that self-efficacy acts as a protective factor in response to psychological stress (Cascio et al., 2014).

Bandura (1986) defines self-efficacy as "the judgments of each individual about their capabilities, based on which they will organize and execute their actions in a way that will enable them to achieve a desired performance" (quoted in Guillén, 2007, p.373). He also indicates that a person's beliefs in their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action will produce specific results (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is a dynamic state, which, unlike other fixed personality traits, can change over time according to new knowledge or expectations (Luthans & Peterson, 2002).

Self-efficacy comes mainly from achievements in previous executions: the more effective behaviors an individual has had in the past, the more effective they will feel to solve a new given situation, which results in a person capable of better managing stress and anxiety (Calderón et al., 2017). In addition, self-efficacy beliefs represent an essential factor for the sense of achievement (Cleary & Kitsantas, 2017); people with high levels of self-efficacy show greater self-confidence to face situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Gaeta et al., 2021). Above all, it has been observed that it has a protective effect against stress, and it is associated with emotional well-being (Rodríguez et al., 2018). As a result, the self-efficacy construct reflects personal confidence to carry out behavior in challenging situations, such as home confinement by COVID-19.

9.1.3 Happiness

During the last three decades, contributions from positive psychology have provided extensive empirical evidence regarding the relevance of the study of happiness, even more so in times of pandemic.

According to Seligman (2008), there are two reasons to address the issue of happiness concerning health: (1) human beings desire well-being for their own sake, beyond alleviating their suffering; and (2) working on well-being can be one of the

best strategies to treat mental disorder. Thus, several research studies have documented that positive emotional states, such as happiness and subjective well-being, favor health status (Kok et al., 2013).

Happiness is generally considered a component of subjective well-being, Alarcón (2001, quoted by Ardila, 2010) defines it as a state of satisfaction, more or less lasting, which is experienced subjectively by the individual in possession of a desired good. According to Lyubomirsky (2008), happiness can be obtained directly from a person's self-report as a subjective state; thus, its study is relevant during confinement.

Happiness has been related to perceived stress (Victorio, 2008). It has also been reported that, in the case of COVID-19 (Satici et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020), fear of this disease is negatively connected to happiness. Empirical evidence suggests that people who perceive themselves happy respond adaptively in the recovery of negative events (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Regarding the relationship between perceived stress and subjective happiness, an inverse and significant relationship was detected (Chávez-Amavizca et al., 2020; González & Landero, 2014). In a study with Korean university students, McMahan et al. (2016) conducted a study that detected an inverse and significant correlation between perceived stress and subjective happiness, suggesting that well-being can strengthen immune functioning and buffer the impact of stress (Howell et al., 2007). It has "positive effects on health and personal and social well-being, which improve quality of life" (Caballero & Sánchez, 2018; Vargas Pacosonco & Callata Gallegos, 2021, p. 113).

Regarding the relationship between happiness and age, Myers and Diener (1995) indicate that there is no period during which people are happier or unhappier; however, "the emotional background does change, since what makes people happy or unhappy changes with age" (Salgado, 2009. p. 134). The relationship between happiness and age was investigated among a large sample of US citizens between 25 and 74 years old (Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998). Findings showed that negative affect was highest among younger adults and lowest among older adults, suggesting that well-being increases with age because older adults regulate their emotions more effectively than younger or middle-aged adults. Labouvie-Vief and Blanchard-Fields (1982) argued that with maturity, positive affect is maximized, negative affect is minimized, and cognition is restructured, leading to greater happiness. Other researchers, such as Ryff (1989), have reported that young people were less happy than middle-aged and older people.

9.1.4 Resilience

According to Fornet (2018), in psychology resilience is "the ability to bounce back after a disturbing agent or a stressful event" (p.168). For González-Arratia (2018), it involves an interaction of risk and protective factors, both internal and external, brought into play to modify the effects of adverse life events. It implies a set of intrapsychic (internal), social, and cultural (external) attributes that enable a person

to interact positively in the environment and adjust to changes and demands of different situations.

Research has shown that resilience allows people to cope adequately with stressful situations, increases the capacity for achievement, and boosts self-efficacy (Chacón et al., 2016; Forés & Grané, 2008). Research also suggests that resilience contributes to health, well-being, and quality of life (Reyes-Rojas et al., 2021). Beyond promoting a healthy adaptation to adverse conditions, resilience consists of a proactive attitude focused on the positive connotation of events from a more extensive view of existence, with more appropriate and proactive coping strategies (González-Arratia et al., 2009; Páez, 2019) and generates positive modifications in favor of health and well-being (Grotberg, 2006). Likewise, resilience makes it possible to have a healthy life despite living in an unhealthy environment (Rutter, 1987).

In Mexico, a study by González et al. (2021) recently evaluated a structural model on the perceived impact of COVID-19 confinement on different areas of a person's life, including stress tolerance and life satisfaction as predictors. The results confirm that stress tolerance and life satisfaction may protect emotional well-being, physical condition, health, happiness, and peace of mind from the impact of confinement. Research on people's experience during confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic is however still limited in Mexico, even more so among emerging adults, since most studies are aimed to understand the effects on mental health in older adults. The limitation of youth's daily activities, such as the closure of academic, cultural, and sports activities, are described as factors that generate stress, anxiety, and depression among emerging adults, potentially interfering with their development and well-being (Barrera-Herrera & Vinet, 2017; García-Alandete et al., 2018; Monteiro et al., 2009; Sánchez-Boris, 2021). For this reason, it is important to investigate the negative and positive psychological dimensions reported by youth in this age group during the pandemic confinement, in order to develop and implement health policies addressing their needs. Analyzing positive dimensions and resources mobilized during the COVID-19 pandemic is also vital, because this disruptive event is likely to activate potential assets in favor of people's well-being.

There are currently no studies involving young Mexicans with the aim of analyzing the stress they perceived during the period of confinement, as well as self-efficacy and their association with happiness and resilience. This study represents an attempt to fill this gap; it is framed in a Positive Psychology perspective, which was developed to investigate the human mind's positive qualities and characteristics (Vera, 2006). Evidence suggests a close relationship between self-efficacy and resilience (González-Arratia et al. 2021) during confinement, especially in young people. According to Carbajal and Delgado (2020), the relationship between self-efficacy and resilience was proven since resilience allows for overcoming adverse situations (Forés & Grané, 2008). Furthermore, it enables behaviors that bring about desired results, decrease stress, and generate subjective well-being and happiness.

Hence, the central questions of this study are: what is the link between perceived stress and self-efficacy with resilience and happiness in a group of emerging adults?

Will there be differences between these variables concerning the participant's age? Are there differences among stress, self-efficacy, and happiness based on the level of resilience?

Therefore, the following objectives were established:

1. To describe the level of perceived stress, self-efficacy, resilience, and happiness in the sample under study
2. To determine the degree of the relationship between perceived stress, self-efficacy, resilience, and happiness
3. To compare the values of stress, self-efficacy, and happiness in relation to the level of participants' resilience and age ranges

Likewise, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. If there is more perceived stress, there is less self-efficacy, resilience, and happiness.
2. Perceived stress, self-efficacy, resilience, and happiness are different depending on the age.
3. Perceived stress and self-efficacy differ according to a low, moderate, and high level of resilience.

9.2 Method

9.2.1 Participants

This cross-sectional, descriptive, and correlational study involved 318 people aged between 18 and 29 years (Mage = 22.39, SD = 3.67). Among them, 64.8% were women, and 35.2% were men. Participants were enrolled using non-probability purposive sampling. Data collection and participants in this research are from Toluca, the state capital of the State of Mexico located in central Mexico. This city is 2600 meters above sea level and has 873,536 inhabitants, 47.9% men and 52.1% women; it is the fifth most populated area in Mexico. It connects 66 kilometers to the east with the Valley of Mexico, composed of Mexico City and its metropolitan area. It is known for its industrial and cultural development and natural attractions. It is also the location of the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México). Concerning the youth population from the city, within a range of 20–24 years old, 9.8% (41,104) are men, whereas 9.2% are women (42,064) (EBCO, 2018).

Inclusion criteria for participating in this study were being of legal age and signing the informed written consent. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria were not agreeing to participate, whereas the elimination criteria were filling out the instruments incompletely.

9.2.2 Measures

Every participant answered the following self-report scales:

1. Sociodemographic datasheet. Made for this purpose, it includes information on age, sex, marital status, schooling, occupation, and follow-up of health measures.
2. Perceived Stress Scale (Sanz-Carrillo et al., 2002). It measures the degree to which people value life situations as stressful; it includes six factors: F1—tension, irritability, and fatigue; F2—social acceptance; F3—energy and fun; F4—overload; F5—satisfaction with self-fulfillment; F6—fear and anxiety. It consists of 30 items and four response options. The internal consistency is adequate, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.90 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.80.
3. General Self-Efficacy Scale (Baessler & Schwarcer, 1996). This scale evaluates the stable feeling of personal competence for the effective management of various situations. It is a unidimensional scale, and it consists of 10 items and four response options, with a Cronbach's alpha internal consistency of 0.87.
4. Brief Scale of Resilience (González-Arratia et al., 2019). It measures the degree in which a person has the ability and resources that allow he or she to resist in the face of adversity. This version consists of 14 items, its psychometric evaluation with Mexican samples indicates three dimensions (Internal Protective Factors, External Protective Factors, and Empathy) that explain 44.63% of the total variance and an absolute Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.86.
5. Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). This scale is a global measure of subjective happiness. It consists of 4 items with a Likert-type response; the total score is obtained from the sum of every item and divided by the total number of items. Two items ask respondents to characterize themselves using absolute intervals and intervals relative to pairs. The other two items are a brief description of happy and unhappy individuals and ask the respondent to answer the extent to which each characterization describes them. Vera-Villarroel et al. (2011) reported a one-factor solution of 61.65% of the explained variance and a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.87 in Chilean samples.

9.2.3 Procedure

This study was conducted during the first and second periods of confinement in Mexico from March 2020 to July 2021. Participants living in Mexico were contacted through an invitation on social networks. First, they were informed about the research aims, and those who agreed to participate signed an informed consent form and accessed the online survey in Google forms.

9.2.4 *Data Analysis*

Descriptive analyses were carried out; the mean and standard deviation was obtained, and the normality of the data was evaluated using a K-S test. Levels were obtained from the total scores of each scale and classified according to the author's indications. Validity data were obtained through exploratory factor analysis, and reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. A Pearson correlation coefficient test was carried out to determine the degree of relationship among variables. The studies were carried out with the program SPSS, version 23.

9.2.5 *Ethical Considerations*

The protocol is registered with the UAEM (6337/2021SF) and the University's Institute of Studies Ethics Committee (2021/P05). Every participant filled out an informed consent form as per the ethics of research involving human subjects; their participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential.

9.3 Results

As concerns participants' sociodemographic features, the majority reported being students, 26.7% were career people, a fewer percentage were tradesmen, and some had unpaid jobs. The marital status reported by the majority was single (85.8%) (Table 9.1).

The descriptive results show a moderate level of self-efficacy and stress, average happiness, and high resilience. The number of factors obtained for each scale through exploratory factor analysis is consistent with the pattern detected for the original version of the scales. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to obtain reliability, which was acceptable for three scales, according to the criteria of Campo-Arias and Oviedo (2008), except for the happiness scale, characterized by low reliability (alpha below 0.65) (Table 9.2).

Pearson's correlations highlighted significant relationships between self-efficacy, happiness, and resilience, whereas there was an inverse relationship with perceived stress (Table 9.3).

The total score in the Resilience Scale was used to group participants according to the levels in this variable, which were then considered as percentile referents. Three levels of resilience resulted from this criterion. An ANOVA was carried out to determine the differences in Self-Efficacy, Stress, and Happiness values, across the three groups identified by the resilience levels: high, moderate, and low. As reported in Table 9.4, the group classified as High Resilience presents greater self-efficacy,

Table 9.1 Participants' sociodemographic data

Sociodemographics	Frequency (%) $N = 318$
Age	
18–23	206 (64.8)
24–29	112 (35.2)
Gender	
Men	82 (25.78)
Female	236 (74.22)
Marital status	
Single	273 (85.8)
Married	31 (9.7)
Divorced	2 (0.6)
Other	12 (3.8)
Occupation	
Student	208 (65.4)
Professional	85 (26.7)
Housewife	5 (1.6)
Tradesmen	20 (6.3)

Table 9.2 Descriptive statistics and scales' reliability

Variables	Min-Max	Mean	SD	% total variance	No. of factors	α coefficient
Self-efficacy	19–40	32.71	4.43	53.29	1	.847
Stress	51–106	75.05	11.02	54.95	4	.804
Happiness	1–7	4.81	3.43	61.16	1	.329
Resilience	42–70	61.70	5.80	48.20	3	.851

SD standard deviation

Table 9.3 Intercorrelations for self-efficacy, stress, happiness, and resilience total scores

	1	2	3	4
1. Self-efficacy	–			
2. Stress	$-.25^{**}$	–		
3. Happiness	$.30^{**}$	$-.28^{**}$	–	
4. Resilience	$.51^{**}$	$-.18^{**}$	$.36^{**}$	–

Note: Every coefficient is significant to $p < .01$

happiness, and lower perceived stress in contrast to the other two groups. The effect size varies from medium to high (Table 9.4).

As for age group, a Student's *t*-test revealed only differences in the happiness variable. The perceived stress average score was slightly lower in younger participants, without being significant (Table 9.5).

Table 9.4 Self-efficacy, stress, and happiness values across groups with different resilience levels

	Low resilience group $n = 136$		Moderate resilience group $n = 115$		High resilience group $n = 67$				
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	f	p	η^2
Self-efficacy	30.30	3.85	33.87	3.60	35.59	4.31	50.16	.001	1.2
Stress	77.91	10.57	75.88	11.48	72.59	10.41	5.37	.005	.05
Happiness	18.22	3.39	19.80	2.96	20.58	3.63	13.67	.001	.06

SD standard deviation; f variance ratio; p significance level; n sample size; η^2 square eta/effect size

Table 9.5 Comparison of variables' levels between age groups

	Group 1 18–23 years $n = 206$		Group 2 24–29 years $n = 112$				
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	p	η^2
Self-efficacy	32.50	4.40	33.09	4.48	–1.14	.25	–
Stress	76.15	11.30	75.89	10.55	.20	.83	–
Happiness	18.98	3.38	19.86	3.46	–2.19	.02	.02
Resilience	61.53	5.94	62.01	5.55	–.71	.47	–

SD standard deviation; Student's t value p significance level; n sample size; η^2 square eta/effect size

9.4 Discussion

The study's objective was to analyze the relationship between well-being dimensions and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic confinement in a group of Mexican young adults.

It was possible to observe a moderate stress in the sample under study, possibly related to the uncertainty regarding the pandemic and its evolution. Although the evaluation of daily stressors done through the subjective perception of suffering a stressor is the broadest trend, in this case, the frequency of a stressful experience was evaluated. Therefore, timely follow-up of the participants is required since individuals respond in multiple ways to a stressful situation over time. If it is not resolved, the situation may be prolonged and become a source of chronic stress. This monitoring would provide more information regarding stress management; similarly, it is essential to evaluate the stress coping styles used, which allow for an adequate functioning in the current circumstances and determine the tendency toward vulnerability or resilience.

These results are coherent with those obtained by Díaz Loving et al. (2022), who detected moderate levels of stress and resilience in Mexican adults during the first period of voluntary confinement.

Participants in the present study reported high levels of self-efficacy. This suggests that they were prone to make a more significant effort in their activities and to be more persistent in their execution (Baessler & Schwarcer, 1996). Another

characteristic of high self-efficacy is that people keep their goals and continue trying to achieve them no matter the failures encountered along the way.

The scores obtained on the happiness scale in this study are moderate, a finding which coincides with the study by Vera-Villarroel et al. (2011) in Chilean participants. Likewise, Lyubomirsky (2008) pointed out that "when applying the subjective happiness scale to many different groups of people, the average score ranges from 4.5 to 5.5, which means that people evaluate themselves as moderately happy" (p. 50). The same author indicated that happiness levels can be increased, which is essential, since people who perceive themselves to be happy respond more adaptively in decision-making and in recovery from negative events. It should be considered that "most people have their idea of what it is to be happy, when they are happy or when they are not, and are able to report it accordingly" (Lyubomirsky, 2008, p.48).

An encouraging 54% of the participants in this study showed high levels of resilience, concurring with Rutter's results (1987), who reported a prevalence of resilience ranging from 15 to 50% depending on the population under study. Participants show qualities that allow them to adapt more safely to challenging situations, such as a pandemic. This result is also consistent with Del Rio Saavedra's (2018) findings, showing high levels of resilience in the age group from 18 to 30 years.

In the face of a health crisis, this study found that self-efficacy is positively related to happiness; Rosales-Castillo (2017) suggests that strengthening self-efficacy is essential, as people develop multiple skills to attain optimal development and mental health. Similarly, the presence of a low level of stress is associated with higher happiness (Morillo, 2013; Tafet, 2018).

The relationship between perceived stress, self-efficacy, resilience, and happiness is consistent with the results of Lopez-Walle et al. (2020). The fact that these variables are associated means that the lower the stress, the higher the self-efficacy, resilience, and happiness will be in this group of young people. These findings are also consistent with Gómez et al. (2007) in Colombian samples; as well as with the investigations by Fernández-Millán & Bretones (2021) and Miralles (2021) in Spanish samples and Palomera et al. (2022) in Polish samples.

Numerous studies (Liu et al., 2013; Plomecka et al., 2020; Uchida & Oishi, 2016) have detected similar associations among these variables; perceived stress, self-efficacy, resilience, and happiness are constructs of great interest to psychology due to their theoretical, empirical, and practical value. However, most studies have not helped to clarify their interaction in an extraordinary situation such as a pandemic. Hence, our findings not only provide the knowledge on how they are linked but also shed light on the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and the psychological functioning of Mexican emerging adults.

These results highlight the importance of investigating stress in times of global crisis, as well as recognizing which psychological resources are available to people within these age groups, in order to appropriately face these events, overcome difficulties and, better yet, get stronger (Tapia et al., 2021). These results also provide useful suggestions for designing public policies that contribute to individual

and social well-being improvement. In praxis, it is beneficial to plan appropriate strategies according to individual needs, based on positive psychology, which focuses on human strengths, virtues, and healthy features that allow for enhancing people's optimal functioning to respond to the environment's demands.

Concerning the objective to investigate differences in stress and happiness across groups with different levels of resilience, results showed that highly resilient participants reported lower stress, as well as higher self-efficacy and happiness. These findings are consistent with those obtained in other Latin-American studies, such as the resilience study performed by Villalba and Avello (2019) in Peruvian samples, who report that 60% of the participants showed a medium-high level of resilience, 30% a high level and 10% a low level; additionally, they indicate that a significant relationship exists between resilience and happiness. They also support the view of Suh et al. (1996), suggesting that adaptation capacity is crucial in determining subjective well-being, and the findings by Schwartz et al. (2011), showing that t is true especially in emerging adults' samples.

As concerns age differences in happiness and stress, only for happiness a difference was detected, in favor of the older group aged between 24 and 29 years. This result is in line with findings reported by other Latin-American authors, suggesting that the older the age, the greater the happiness (Alarcón, 2001; Castilla et al., 2016; Romero, 2015), marking the need to analyze with even greater emphasis the differences of the other variables regarding age. More specifically, this result suggests that a person's self-referent thoughts regarding their competence to handle a wide variety of stressful situations effectively is what allows them to trust their ability to manage daily life stressors adequately (Baessler & Schwarcer, 1996; Ortiz et al., 2022), which makes the manifestation of resilient behaviors more likely.

Regarding resilience, it is necessary to investigate it among emerging adults, as it helps people to perform effectively and healthily. Further exploration is required, since in Mexico there is still higher interest in the study of stress and the concomitant psychosocial risks, rather than in the systematic analysis of personal resources to face health crises. From our point of view, self-efficacy development and resilience promotion would undoubtedly buffer the significant costs high-stress levels have on people, their families and their social, school, and work environment.

It is important to note that people's reactions to the pandemic may vary from one population to another. In general, it was observed that, despite the circumstances, people somehow have psychological resources to cope with adversity, which should be studied in other age groups. However, nowadays it is crucial to study the individual's background, in particular the presence of social, family, and friend support, which represents a significant pillar in the face of the pandemic (Valero et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is necessary to analyze other psychological factors that could be involved in young people's resilience and happiness in order to have more articulated evidence on this matter.

9.5 Study Limitations and Research Directions

Among the limitations of the present study, it should be noted that most of the participants are women, and in this regard, it has been observed that women have higher levels of resilience than men (Betancourt et al., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to be cautious in interpreting the results, making it essential to expand the sample of male participants to learn more about how these variables interact, which will be the subject of further study by the authors.

Another limitation concerns the reliability of the subjective happiness scale scores in the sample under study, which turned up below the pointed criteria (Campo-Arias & Oviedo, 2008). Therefore, we should be cautious regarding its interpretation and it is advisable to perform an in-depth scale review and analysis for its use within the Mexican context.

The data analysis so far allows us to draw some conclusions about resilience in emerging adulthood, and about its association with self-efficacy and happiness. Nonetheless, experience indicates that obtaining more information regarding coping styles usually used in a pandemic situation is crucial. It should not be forgotten that both risk and protective factors depend on the individual, family, and social context, as well as elements such as age and life cycle (Claver & Pereda, 2011). Psychological tools and resources must be provided to individuals, in order to allow them to develop life skills in the face of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the framework of positive psychology, we suggest that the identification of strengths and their use in daily life could increase personal safety (Vázquez & Hervás, 2009). The investigation of these variables is undoubtedly helpful in strengthening adaptive and functional behaviors in the current context, since it is necessary to reinforce young people's emotional state, physical and mental health to benefit their individual and social well-being.

Further research is also needed to understand the impact of the pandemic on different populations (Gausman & Langer, 2020), especially in Spanish-speaking countries, and to further analyze differences due to gender and estimate more accurately each of the variables in the pandemic.

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