

Relationship between Family Functioning and Psychological Well-being in adults in the City of Cuenca-Ecuador

Relación entre Funcionamiento Familiar y Bienestar Psicológico en adultos de la ciudad de Cuenca-Ecuador

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Abstract

Family functioning and psychological well-being are related. However, their specific relationship and the factors involved remain insufficiently explored in local contexts where research is still required. The objectives of this study were to estimate the levels of Family Functioning (FF) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB), to determine the differences in these variables according to sex, and to identify the relationship between FF and PWB in a sample of adults in the city of Cuenca-Ecuador. A cross-sectional design with a quantitative approach was used. Data collection was conducted using validated questionnaires assessing FF and PWB. The statistical analysis included correlations and comparisons between sex to determine the relationship and differences between the variables of interest. The sample included a group of adults from the city of Cuenca-Ecuador. The results indicated moderate levels in both the FF and the PWB. Regarding the PWB dimensions it was found that autonomy was ranked in a higher average and the lowest score was positive relationships. No significant differences between sex were observed in any of the dimensions of the FF and PWB. In addition, a positive and significant correlation was identified between FF and PWB; especially in the dimensions of Self-Acceptance and Purpose in Life, suggesting that better FF is associated with higher PWB. These findings underscore the importance of a healthy family environment for the development and maintenance of PWB.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, Family Functioning, Relationship, Adults.

Resumen

La funcionalidad familiar y el bienestar psicológico están relacionados. Sin embargo, su relación específica y los factores involucrados permanecen insuficientemente explorados en contextos locales aún requeridos. El estudio tuvo como objetivo estimar los niveles de Funcionamiento Familiar (FF) y Bienestar Psicológico (BP) en una muestra de adultos de la ciudad de Cuenca-Ecuador, conocer las diferencias en estas variables según el sexo, e identificar la relación entre el FF y el BP. Se utilizó un diseño transversal con un enfoque cuantitativo. La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo mediante cuestionarios validados que evaluaron el FF y el BP. El análisis estadístico incluyó correlaciones y comparaciones por sexo para determinar la relación y diferencias entre las variables de interés. La muestra estuvo compuesta por adultos de la ciudad de Cuenca-Ecuador. Los resultados indicaron niveles moderados tanto en el FF como en el BP. En las dimensiones de BP se encontró que la autonomía obtuvo un mayor promedio y el menor puntaje fue las relaciones positivas. No se observaron diferencias significativas por sexo en ninguna de las dimensiones del FF y BP. Además, se identificó una correlación positiva y significativa entre el FF y el BP, especialmente en las dimensiones de Autoaceptación y Propósito en la Vida, lo que sugiere que un mejor FF está asociado con un mayor BP. Estos hallazgos subrayan la importancia de un entorno familiar saludable para el desarrollo y mantenimiento del BP.

Palabras clave: Bienestar psicológico, Funcionamiento Familiar, Relación, Adultos.

INTRODUCTION

Family is a primordial aspect of the development of individuals in a social context. Support and positive family dynamics allow individuals to achieve personal balance, and quality of life and even utilize appropriate coping strategies in risk and vulnerability situations (Karakaş & Ersöğütçü, 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2023). Family and psychological phenomena associated with the interaction between family members can work as a determining factor in the positive or the negative course of mental health (Castro-Ochoa et al., 2024; Fuller-Iglesias et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2017).

Therefore, it is of great interest to investigate not only the objective structure of a family, but also how they operate and respond to various situations of social interaction, both at the group and individual levels. In this context, family functioning (FF) plays a fundamental role, as it refers to the way in which family members interact with each other and with their environment (Olson, 2000). FF also encompasses the habitual and relatively stable form of interpersonal and subjective connections that develop and promote identity (Louro, 2004).

For these elements to develop, the components of FF (adaptability or capacity to mobilize resources; cooperation or capacity to participate; development or capacity to support physical and emotional maturation and self-realization; affectivity or expression of affection; capacity for resolution or commitment to dedicate time to the family) must be interacting with each other at the same time as well as with the surrounding context (Smilkstein et al., 1982).

FF has been related to a variety of positive psychic responses at a personal level such as resilience, self-esteem, academic and work success, among others (de Souza Júnior et al., 2021; Perez-Siguas et al., 2020). Therefore, when the family system operates effectively, it becomes an essential element for the protection of its members against various mental health problems (Arce et al., 2022; Montoya-Gaxiola & Corona-Figueroa, 2021). However, the distribution of the balance in terms of FF and the individual's responsibility vis-à-vis the family is often not similar. For example, men tend to present greater difficulties in family

functionality than women (Biffi & Mamede, 2010; Yeom & Lee, 2020). This poses difficulties that could affect adequate performance as a whole.

On the contrary, FF problems and limitations are also associated with adverse effects such as social support problems (Tariq et al., 2022), substance use (Karakaş & Ersöğütçü, 2023; Castro-Ochoa et al., 2024; Caravaca-Sánchez et al., 2021; Narváez & Castro-Ochoa, 2017) and even psychopathological conditions such as depression (Guerrero-Muñoz et al., 2022) among others; for which reason it is important to monitor the performance of this phenomenon so as to clearly establish the dynamics it keeps in the adult population, as well as the interaction and even the impact it has against other constructs, especially on those attributes that allow the healthy development and strengthening of people.

Referring to the above, FF is essential for current and future individual functioning. Evidence points out that the type of FF, as well as, its load and intensity can impact the quality of life directly (de Souza Júnior et al., 2021) and indirectly through other variables (Szcześniak & Tułeczka, 2020). An adequate FF brings positive aspects of life such as the mental health of individuals (Caravaca et al., 2021; Montoya-Gaxiola & Corona-Figueroa, 2021) being an important element for the well-being of people (Wiegand-Grefe et al., 2019).

Regarding this last attribute, well-being is one of the most relevant areas of study, especially in the role it plays in the family and mental health in general (Mena-Freire et al., 2023). The relationships established by individuals with their parents are often linked to the development and strengthening of personal well-being throughout their lives (Szcześniak & Tułeczka, 2020). According to the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) people's well-being is closely related to the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs in which social conditionings are also involved.

Thus, people's commitment and participation will depend on social conditions, facilitating or hindering self-motivation and healthy psychological development. According to this model, three innate psychological needs have been identified: a) competence, b) autonomy, and c) social relationships, which when satisfied increase self-motivation and mental well-being, but when frustrated, decrease (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Among the theoretical traditions that analyze well-being is the eudaimonic tradition which is focused on aspects associated with personal development and growth. This eudaimonic or psychological well-being (WPB) is defined from a more explicit criterion as the state of balance and harmony in which a person feels with themselves and with their social and physical environment (Diener, 1984). These also comprise the condition of existence or state of consciousness, in which psychological needs are satisfied (Pan American Health Organization (PAHO); World Health Organization (WHO); Latin American and Caribbean Center for Health Sciences Information, 2022).

From this point of view, it is relevant to consider that unlike other ways of understanding well-being based exclusively on happiness and life satisfaction (Diener, 1999; Moreta-Herrera et al., 2023), it is necessary to recognize that PWB is also about reaching fulfillment in search of personal improvement and the attainment of personal goals and achievements (Ryff, 1989). These aspects include self-acceptance, mastery of the environment, autonomy, positive relationships, personal growth, and purpose in life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

PWB is a relatively stable condition that generally manifests moderately during adulthood (Moreta-Herrera et al., 2023; Yáñez-Ramos & Moreta-Herrera, 2020). Although evolutionary transitions suggest that PWB tends to decrease with age. This reduction is not usually significant, except in extreme risk and vulnerability situations (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019); however, it should be noted that PWB may be sensitive to other conditions such as sex, in which is estimated that women may be more affected than men (Matud, 2004; Li et al., 2015; Tamres et al. 2002), or in socioeconomic conditions where economic constraint may be a trigger for inadequate PWB (Du et al., 2019; Evans, 2016).

Regarding the interaction between FF and PWB, it is known that FF plays a key role in the management of well-being as both are apparently linked (Olson et al., 2002). Thus, people who are part of families with adequate internal dynamics or functionality, enjoy a greater sense of PWB (Thanakwang, 2015).

In this context, the evidence indicates there is a positive correlation between them at mild to moderate levels. (Anderson et al., 2013; Kazarian, 2005; Lotfnejadafshar et al., 2022). However, it is important to note that much of the current evidence has not been verified in the context of the region or Ecuador. In addition, although it is generally mentioned that they interact with each other, it is not explained in greater depth which components of the PWB could be more or less correlated, which would help to better understand the contribution and incidence of the FF for the development of the PWB.

Based on the above, the following objectives are established: a) To estimate the levels of PWB and FF in a sample of adults in Ecuador; b) To understand the differences between males and females and the variables; and c) To identify the relationship between FF and PWB. Therefore, the hypothesis is that FF and PWB levels are adequate (H1). Differences between males and females were found (H2); and that FF and PWB are correlated (H3).

METHOD

Design

The present work is based on a quantitative, descriptive, comparative, correlational and cross-sectional study (Ato et al., 2013) of FF and PWB in a sample of adults in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador.

Participants

A sample of 600 adults between the ages of 19 and 64 who lived in Cuenca was selected for this project. As shown in Table 1, the participants are characterized mainly by being young, mostly single, and having mestizo ethnic self-identification. Most of them reported having a fair or good socio-economic status and the distribution by sex is slightly higher among women.

Table 1*Sociodemographic analysis of participants*

Variables	%
Sex	
Female	56,5%
Male	43,5%
Marital Status	
Single	65,5%
Common law marriage	6,7%
Married	18,5%
Divorced	7,3%
Widowed	2,0%
Ethnicity	
White	2,5%
Indigenous	5,2%
Mixed race	90,3%
Afro	1,2%
Other	0,8%
Family and socio-economic situation	
Bad	4,3%
Regular	46,5%
Good	42,5%
Very good	6,7%
Age	
Youth	64,0%
Adulthood	31,8%
Seniors	4,2%

Note. 600 cases

Participants were selected through a non-probabilistic convenience sampling, which considers inclusion criteria such as a) being of legal age and within the contemplated age range; b) participation is voluntary; and c) authorization by the participant to be a project member.

Instruments

Psychological Well-Being Scale by Carol Ryff (Ryff, 1989), in the version by (Velíz, 2012). This scale assesses the presence of psychological well-being (PWB) using a Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) across six dimensions: a) self-acceptance (items 1, 7, 13, 19, 25, and 31); b) environmental mastery (items 5, 11, 16, 22, 28, and 39); c) positive relationships (items 2, 8, 14, 20, 26, and 32); d) personal growth (items 24, 30, 34, 35, 36, 37, and 38); e) autonomy (items 3, 4, 9, 10, 15, 21, 27, and 33); and f) life purpose (items 6, 12, 17, 18, 23, and 29). The maximum score is 234 points, divided into four rating ranges where a score greater than 176 indicates high PWB; scores between 141 and 175 represent a high level, from 117 to 140 show moderate level, and below 116 a low level. The obtained values were: Self-acceptance ($\alpha = 0.79$), Positive relationships ($\alpha = 0.75$), Autonomy ($\alpha = 0.67$), Environmental mastery ($\alpha = 0.62$), Purpose in life ($\alpha = 0.54$), and Personal growth ($\alpha = 0.78$), indicating acceptable reliability for most subscales. Additionally, the confirmatory factor analysis yielded an RMSEA of .068, CFI of .95, NNFI of .94, and an SRMR of .060, demonstrating a good model fit (Velíz, 2012).

The APGAR Family Questionnaire (APGAR; Smilkstein et al., 1982) consists of a series of closed-ended questions that assess family functioning perception (FF's) at a given time. This evaluation focuses on five aspects: adaptation, participation, personal resources gradient, affection, and available resources. The total score ranges from 0 to 10, with a 3-point Likert scale, in which a family is considered to have adequate functionality if the score is seven or higher, mild dysfunction scores between 4 and 6 points, and severe dysfunction scores between 0 and 3 points. The tool shows moderate internal consistency ranging from 0.71 to 0.83 for different contexts (Suarez & Alcalá, 2014), while the present study revealed an even higher internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.90$. The fit indices of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis indicate a good model fit to the data (CFI = 0.994; TLI = 0.988; RMSEA = 0.0587; 90% CI [0.0267 – 0.0933]).

Procedure

The research project was initially presented to potential participants, outlining the study's

objectives, the procedures to be carried out, and the evaluation process. The instruments were then applied using Google Forms via the link: <https://forms.gle/svaVZVjagnyatSKX9>, which participants completed individually. Before participation, participants signed a consent form, indicating their voluntary participation and authorizing the use of the information for academic and scientific purposes. The form requested participants to provide their sociodemographic information and responses to the instruments above. The data were subsequently processed and digitized for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing.

Whitney U test was used to determine whether there were significant differences between the two independent groups. To complement the results of statistical significance and provide a magnitude measure of the differences, the effect size was calculated using Cohen's d to assess the magnitude of observed differences. Finally, Spearman's correlation coefficient (Rho) was used to study the relationship between the variables, with correlation values expected to be $Rho > 0.20$. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27 (IBM Corp, 2020), encompassing descriptive and inferential statistics.

Data Analysis

The descriptive analysis was conducted using measures of central tendency, including arithmetic mean (M), median, and standard deviation (SD) to assess the current state of family functioning (FF) and psychological well-being (PWB) to determine normality, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied, where the assumption of normality was supported by the absence of statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). A comparative analysis by sex was then conducted to identify possible sex differences ($p < 0.05$). The Mann-

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of PWB and its dimensions, such as the FF, revealing variability. Family functioning (FF) was the least rated. At the same time, autonomy (AUT) and positive relationships (RP) reflected the diversity of experiences within the group, with autonomy scoring the highest and positive relationships scoring the lowest. Statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) was observed for all variables.

Table 2

PWD and FF Descriptive Analysis

Variables	M	Me	SD	W de Shapiro-Wilk	p-value
PWB	155.76	159	38.981	0.94	<.001
AA	24.87	26	6.52	0.93	<.001
DOM	24.33	25.5	6.33	0.93	<.001
RP	23.38	24	6.35	0.96	<.001
CP	27.54	28	7.77	0.97	<.001
AUT	30.62	31	8.37	0.97	<.001
PV	25.03	27	6.88	0.92	<.001
FF	18.17	19	4.56	0.96	<.001

Note. M = Mean; Me = Median; SD = Standard Deviation; PWB = Psychological Well-being; AA = Self-acceptance; DOM = Environmental Mastery; RP = Positive Relationships; CP = Personal Growth; AUT = Autonomy; PV = Purpose in Life; FF = Family Functioning.

Table 3 compares the mean scores by sex for both FF and PWB in general and across its dimensions. The results show that, for PWB and its dimensions,

female participants generally scored higher than males, whereas male participants scored higher than females for FF.

Table 3

Preliminary Descriptive Analysis by Sex for PWB and FF Variables

Variable	Grupo	N	M	Me	SD
PWB	Female	339	156.1	159.0	37.75
	Male	261	155.3	160.0	40.59
AA	Female	339	24.8	26.0	6.27
	Male	261	24.9	26.0	6.84
DOM	Female	339	24.5	26.0	6.16
	Male	261	24.1	25.0	6.57
RP	Female	339	23.6	24.0	6.19
	Male	261	23.1	24.0	6.57
CP	Female	339	27.6	28.0	7.55
	Male	261	27.5	28.0	8.07
AUT	Female	339	30.7	32.0	8.17
	Male	261	30.5	31.0	8.66
PV	Female	339	24.9	26.0	6.78
	Male	261	25.2	27.0	7.04
FF	Female	339	18.1	19.0	4.50
	Male	261	18.3	19.0	4.65

Note. PWB = Psychological Well-being; N = Sample size; M = Mean; Me = Median; SD = Standard Deviation

Regarding the differences, table 4 shows the comparison of PWB and FF across genders. No significant statistical differences were observed ($p < 0.05$), indicating that variations in mean scores are irrelevant. Furthermore, the effect dimensions calculated using Cohen's d confirm

that the magnitudes of the observed differences are minimal. These results suggest that the gender differences in the studied variables are insignificant and do not have a substantial practical impact.

Table 4

PWB and FF comparative analysis by sex

Factors	U	p	Cohen's D
PWB	43901	.872	-0.02
AA	42594	.434	0.015
DOM	43455	.709	-0.063
PR	43171	.611	-0.078

PC	43862	.858	-0.013
AUT	43297	.654	-0.024
PV	42556	.423	0.043
FF	42946	.538	0.044

Note: U: Mann-Whitney test; p: significance; Cohen's D: Difference among groups; PWB: Psychological well-being; AA: Self-acceptance; DOM: Environmental Domain; PR: Positive Relationships, PG: Personal Growth, AUT: Autonomy; LP: Life Purpose Dimension; FF: Family Functioning.

Table 5 illustrates the interaction between the variables of PWB and FF. Regarding internal factors of PWB, covariances range from moderate (self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and purpose in life) to weak (positive relationships,

personal growth, and autonomy). At the same time, the overall evaluation shows a mild covariance. In all these cases, the covariance is positive.

Table 5

Correlation Analysis between Family Functioning (FF) and Psychological Well-being (PWB)

Variables	PWB	AA	DOM	RP	CP	AUT	PV	FF
PWB	1	.898**	.899**	.840**	.872**	.906**	.861**	.432**
Self-Acceptance (AA)		1	.812**	.678**	.734**	.781**	.842**	.475**
Environmental Mastery (DOM)			1	.732**	.756**	.780**	.783**	.434**
Positive Relationships (RP)				1	.713**	.760**	.661**	.287**
Personal Growth (CP)					1	.761**	.671**	.359**
Autonomy (AUT)						1	.710**	.348**
Life Purpose (PV)							1	.458**
FF (Family Functioning)								1

Note: PWB: Psychological Well-being; AA: Self-Acceptance; DOM: Environmental Mastery; RP: Positive Relationships; CP: Personal Growth; AUT: Autonomy; PV: Life Purpose; FF: Family Functioning.

DISCUSSION

The objectives of the present study were to estimate the levels of Family Functioning (FF) and Psychological Well-being (PWB) in a sample of Ecuadorian adults, to examine the differences based on sex in the variables of interest, and to identify the relationship between FF and PWB.

Regarding the estimation of FF and PWB levels, the results indicate moderate levels for both FF and PWB. On the dimensional level, autonomy had the highest average, while positive relationships received the lowest scores compared to other

PWB dimensions. In line with previous research, PWB and its component dimensions show high percentage indicators in aspects such as autonomy, which is frequently among the most representative scores (De-Juanas et al., 2013; Mahmud et al., 2022). It is crucial to understand that adulthood is a stage characterized by fostering autonomous activities, but these are often limited due to inherent human conditions (Breton et al., 2014; Portegijs et al., 2014; Sánchez-García et al., 2019).

In this regard, autonomy is considered a crucial PWB dimension in adults, representing the capacity to make independent decisions and act

according to personal values and beliefs. This consideration is consistent with the perceptions of Díaz et al. (2006) and Ryff (1989), who argue that autonomy aims for self-determination, independence, and behaviour self-regulation, which helps individuals endure social pressures and act with self-conviction and authority. Additionally, personal growth is recognized as the feeling of continuous development and expansion (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff, 1989). In contrast, positive relationships scored lower, an unusual result that could be attributed to inferential conditions, such as the study being conducted post-COVID-19 pandemic, which may have led to a loss of social skills, including diminished interest in interpersonal relationships (Al-Aly, 2022; Gnecco et al., 2024).

The sex-based comparative analysis of FF and PWB shows no significant differences in any of the dimensions, suggesting that variances between sexes are minimal. In comparison with previous research, these findings support a similar condition between sex and psychological well-being (PWB), indicating that adult women generally report higher well-being than men in most of the analyzed dimensions, although these differences did not reach statistical significance (Cargua & Gaibor, 2023; González-Rivera et al., 2017; Mayordomo et al., 2016). Furthermore, Tamres et al. (2002) meta-analysis revealed that women reported slightly higher PWB levels than men. However, this disparity was minimal, suggesting that the perception of BP by sex is mainly similar.

The correlation analysis shows that PWB, in general, and its dimensions (Self-Acceptance, Environmental Mastery, Positive Relationships, Personal Growth, Autonomy, and Purpose in Life) have positive and significant relationships with FF. This result suggests that better FF is associated with higher PWB and vice versa. The dimensions of Self-Acceptance and life Purpose show the strongest correlations with FF, indicating that these specific aspects of PWB are crucial for FF.

The significant correlation found between the FF and PWB variables aligns with previous research, which has also documented these positive relationships, where FF is directly and significantly associated with PWB, emphasizing the importance of early childhood experiences

and family dynamics for individual well-being (García et al., 2018; Tatal & Yalcin, 2021; ObaidAllah & El Sayed El Keshky, 2022). This connection suggests that a family environment that fosters healthy functioning may positively contribute to individuals' PWB, supporting the importance of considering individual and contextual factors in promoting and maintaining BP. It also highlights the potential for mutual influence between these variables, where personal and social aspects interact dynamically in human development and fulfilment.

Finally, future research should consider certain limitations to enhance and expand upon new study lines. It is important to note that these results are based on a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to generalize long-term conclusions, highlighting the need for further studies to confirm these correlations. This study was conducted specifically in Cuenca, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other cities in Ecuador. These findings suggest the need for additional research incorporating a wider geographic diversity. Another limitation is the treatment of adults as a homogeneous group, ignoring group differences that may exist. A notable limitation of the study is the socio-economic perception of the analyzed population, which ranged from regular to good. This range may limit the generalizability of the results to groups with different socio-economic conditions, as their perceptions might alter the conclusions derived from this analysis.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of a functional family environment in fostering psychological well-being among adults. The findings reveal that self-acceptance and environmental mastery are the most closely associated dimensions with family functioning, underscoring their importance in the development of personal and relational well-being. While no significant gender differences were observed, the results reinforce the relevance of exploring these dynamics in specific cultural contexts like Ecuador.

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FCO: Conceptualization, manuscript writing, methodology, formal analysis and interpretation of results, and review.

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