

## **The Role of Parents in Emerging Adults' Psychological Well-Being: a Person-Oriented Approach**

### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to gain an overview of Spanish emerging adults' family relationships and their link with psychological well-being and psychological distress. The sample comprised 1502 undergraduate students (903 women and 599 men) aged between 18 and 29 ( $M = 20.32$  and  $SD = 2.13$ ), recruited from two universities in Spain. A cluster analysis identified three groups of families based on the centrality of five family variables: parental involvement, parental support for autonomy, parental warmth, behavioral control and psychological control. The three groups or clusters were labeled high-quality family relationships (HQ), intermediate-quality family relationships (IQ) and low-quality family relationships (LQ). Women were overrepresented in the HQ cluster, whereas men were overrepresented in the IQ cluster. Moreover, emerging adults who perceived better family relationships (high levels of parental involvement, parental support for autonomy and parental warmth, and low levels of behavioral and psychological control) were found to have a higher level of psychological adjustment. Thus, our results indicate that family plays a key role in the psychological well-being of emerging adults. The discussion focuses on the implications of this finding for the parent-child relationship, and explores how it extends our knowledge about family relationships during emerging adulthood.

*Key words: emerging adulthood, Family relationships, Psychological Well-being.*

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Over the past few decades, a reconceptualization of the transition from adolescence to adulthood has given rise to a new life stage known as emerging adulthood, which encompasses the years from 18 to 30 (Arnett, 2014). The development and characteristics of this life stage are different from both adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2007, 2010). While emerging adults no longer see themselves as adolescents, neither do they consider themselves fully-fledged adults; indeed, the majority have not yet achieved the distinctive roles characterizing this stage, namely stability in love and work (Arnett, 2004, 2006). As a result of this instability, emerging adults tend to remain in their family home, a situation which is particularly common in Southern European countries. Despite this, however, few studies have focused on family functioning during emerging adulthood, or on the role played by family relationships in emerging adults' well-being in Spain.

### **EMERGING ADULTHOOD IN A SOUTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRY**

Like other Western societies, Southern European countries have undergone many political, socioeconomic and cultural changes since the Technological Revolution. As a result, young peoples' lives have changed considerably (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Rodríguez & Rodrigo, 2011). One of the most relevant changes is the progressive deferral of transition into adult roles, such as living independently, entering the labor market, getting married and becoming a parent (Aassve, Arpino, & Billari, 2013). However, this transition into adult roles differs from country to country. For example, in the United States and Northern European countries, young people usually leave the family home in their early twenties (Le Blanc & Wolff, 2006). In Southern European countries such as Italy, Portugal, Greece and Spain, on the other hand, a very high percentage of emerging adults do not leave home until a much later age (León & Migliavacca, 2013; Oinonen, 2010).

Overall, in Southern European countries, transition to adulthood occurs within the family context (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014), which itself is based on strong family bonds

(Giuliano, 2007). The importance of family in these countries is rooted in a number of different factors: first, high unemployment rates and job insecurity, particularly among the youth population, which makes it very difficult for many young people to find a job that enables them to live independently; second, insufficient social policies, which obliges families to assume financial responsibility for their adult children (OECD, 2013); and third, a strongly Catholic tradition which fosters the forging of close family ties (Gal, 2010; Moreno, 2013). Indeed, Vogel (2002) talks of “family welfare regimes” when describing the countries of Southern Europe, which are characterized by low employment and social expenditure, strong, traditional families and higher poverty rates and income inequality. Thus, unlike in other European countries and the United States, in Southern Europe the family acts as the main provider of care and security not just during infancy and adolescence, but also during emerging adulthood (Bosch, 2015; Moreno & Mari-Klose, 2013).

Spain is a typical example of such “family welfare regimes” and the influence of this situation is clearly evident in the transition to adulthood, with almost eight out of ten young people aged between 16 and 29 (or in other words, around 79% of the entire youth population) still living with their parents (CJE, 2016), and 31.5% of young people aged between 18 and 24 being university students (MEDM, 2016). Moreover, 39.4% of men and 39.2% of women between the ages of 20 and 24 are unemployed (EPA, 2016), and the average age for getting married for the first time is 32.6 years for women and 34.8 years for men (INE, 2016).

### **THE FAMILY SYSTEM DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD**

For many young people, changes in the transition to adulthood also include changes in their relationship with their parents (Lefkowitz, 2005). Since the family is a complex, dynamic system, different changes in family patterns have been observed during this time period, as

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those involved strive to establish a new balance in their relationships (Fosco, Caruthers, & Dishion, 2012; Parra et al., 2013).

Against this background, several studies have suggested that emerging adults are, to a large extent, socially supported by their parents (Lee & Goldstein, 2016). Emerging adults have been reported to perceive an average level of parent warmth (Gomez & McLaren, 2006) and intense parental involvement (Duchesne, Ratelle, Larose, & Guay, 2007). In relation to the psychological and behavioral control exercised by parents, some studies have found medium or low levels during this stage (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, & Knapp, 2014; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Sierens, 2009).

Furthermore, emerging adults are more independent from their parents than in previous years because they are able to make their own decisions and plan their own futures (Norona, Preddy, & Welsh, 2016). Some researchers have found that emerging adults' parents foster their autonomy to a moderate or large extent during their transition to adulthood (Inguglia, Ingoglia, Liga, Lo Coco, & Lo Cricchio, 2014). However, parents also provide them with financial support, meaning that they remain economically dependent (Fingerman & Yahirun, 2016; Norona et al., 2016). Specifically, 84.7% of young Spaniards claim that they need to resort to another source of income besides their own (mainly their parents), in order to make ends meet (INJUVE, 2013).

In this sense, previous studies have focused on family income and its effect on emerging adults' development. The results indicate that belonging to a high income family may facilitate opportunities for a longer education (Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark, & Gordon, 2003; Sironi, Barban, & Impicciatore, 2015) and delay both entry into the labor market (Sironi et al., 2015) and residential (Blaauboer & Mulder, 2010) and financial independence (Cohen et al., 2003). Furthermore, young people from high income families

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tend to postpone both marriage (Wiik, 2009) and entry into parenthood (Rijken & Liefbroer, 2009).

Women and men differ in the relationships they maintain with their parents during this period. Women tend to maintain closer family ties (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991) and perceive their relationship with their parents as warmer and more affectionate and intimate than men (Marinho & Mena, 2012). Therefore, women maintain closer contact with their parents than men (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991) and perceive a greater degree of family support (García-Mendoza, Parra & Sánchez-Queija, 2017), are more impacted by family dynamics (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2007) and seem to obtain greater benefits from support provided by parents (Sifers, 2011).

The majority of the results outlined above were reported by studies conducted either in the United States or in Central and Northern European countries. However, as Arnett himself points out (2013), the way in which young people navigate through adolescence towards adulthood and their experiences during this period vary largely according to the macro cultural context in which they live and the social groups to which they belong. In accordance with this idea, the present study explores the family relationships of Spanish emerging adults, in order to determine the extent to which the findings described above can be extrapolated to the Spanish context.

## **THE IMPACT OF PARENTING ON EMERGING ADULTS**

Parenting dimensions such as warmth, involvement and support, as perceived by young people in connection with the parent-child relationship, provide numerous benefits for emerging adults' adjustment (Meeus, Iedema, Maassen, & Engels, 2005; Tubman & Lerner, 1994). Specifically, higher levels of warmth, affection, closeness and support in relationships with parents are associated with higher levels of well-being (Inguglia et al., 2014), while

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distant and emotionally disengaged family environments are negatively related to life satisfaction (Parra, Oliva, & Sánchez-Queija, 2015). Similarly, autonomy-supportive parenting is associated with better adjustment among emerging adults (Joussemet, Landry, & Koestner, 2008; Kins, Beyers, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2009). In particular, parental support for autonomy has been linked to a higher level of well-being in this population group (Downie et al., 2007), and higher levels of affection, closeness (Crespo et al., 2011), involvement (Reinherz, Paradis, Giaconia, Stashwick, & Fitzmaurice, 2003), warmth and support are associated with lower levels of stress and depression (Crespo et al., 2011; Reinherz et al., 2003).

Another aspect of family functioning is the control exercised by parents during emerging adulthood (Abaied & Emond, 2013). Some findings have shown that controlling parenting is problematic for emerging adults' adjustment (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Soenens et al., 2009). In particular, high levels of parental control, both behavioral and psychological, are associated with lower levels of parent-child closeness and higher levels of anxiety and depression (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, Christensen, Evans, & Carroll, 2011). In other words, high levels of psychological and behavioral control are linked to negative outcomes in the transition to adulthood (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

The findings reported by previous studies, mainly carried out in the United States and Central and Northern European countries, coincide in highlighting the benefits of positive family relations for young people, and the harmful effects of control. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised when extrapolating these results to the Spanish context. Cross-cultural studies, such as the one conducted by Deater-Deckard et al., (2011), warn of the danger of assuming equivalences in the meaning of parenting behavior (such as control) across cultures. It should not be forgotten that parents' childrearing beliefs, attitudes and behaviors are

constructed and interpreted within their historical and cultural contexts (Harkness & Super, 1992).

## THE PRESENT STUDY

The main aim of the present study was to gain an overview of Spanish emerging adults' family relationships and their link with psychological well-being and psychological distress.

Thus, the first aim of the study was to analyze how young people in Spain perceive their relationship with their parents in terms of parental warmth, parental support for autonomy, parental involvement, behavioral control and psychological control. Based on previous research carried out in other countries (Duchesne et al., 2007; Lee & Goldstein, 2016; Padilla-Walker et al., 2014; Soenens et al., 2009), we hypothesized that we would find high levels of parental involvement, parent support for autonomy and parental warmth, and conversely, medium or low levels of behavioral and psychological control. The study's second aim was to identify and describe family relationship patterns during emerging adulthood. A person-centered approach was adopted to identify unique clusters of individuals who perceived different patterns of family relationships. The third aim of the study was to analyze the link between the quality of family relationships, psychological well-being and psychological distress among emerging adults.

## METHOD

### Participants and procedure

Participants were drawn from a study of emerging adults entitled (information removed in order to ensure blind review). The sample for the analyses presented here comprised 1502 undergraduate students aged between 18 and 29 ( $M = 20.32$  and  $SD = 2.13$ ). The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are provided in Table 1. Participants were recruited from two universities in Spain, (information removed in order to ensure blinded review), and were represented proportionally in the five major knowledge areas: Arts and

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Humanities, Sciences, Health Sciences, Social and Legal Sciences and Engineering and Architecture.

Faculty members from two Spanish universities were contacted in order to explain the purpose of the study, and permission was requested to enter their classrooms and gather information from their students. All participants fulfilled our single inclusion criterion, namely being aged between 18 and 29, and voluntarily and anonymously completed a booklet of questionnaires during class periods, in the presence of a research assistant. The questionnaires took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The responses provided were then used to form a data matrix. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 20.0 for Windows (IBM SPSS) was used for the data analysis. Responses were processed in accordance with the highest standards of privacy and scientific rigor. The study was approved by the Coordinating Committee for the Ethics of Biomedical Research in Andalusia (Spain).



Characteristics	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Female	903	60.1
Male	599	39.9
Perceived family income		
Low family income	237	15.8
Medium family income	1050	69.9
Medium-high family income	211	14.0
Total	1502	100

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample group

## Measures

*Demographic variables.* All participants indicated their age, gender and perceived level of family income. Perceived Family Income was measured using an *ad hoc* scale developed by the research team, on which emerging adults were asked to rate the income level of their family unit on a 3-point scale ranging from 1 (*perception of serious economic difficulties*) to 3 (*perception of having a high enough income to live comfortably*).

*Parenting dimensions.* Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS), College Student Version (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991; Robbins, 1994). This questionnaire consists of 20 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). The POPS has three subscales: parental involvement ( $\alpha = .83$ , e.g., My parent finds time to talk with me), parental warmth ( $\alpha = .82$ , e.g., My parent accepts me and likes me as I am) and parental autonomy support ( $\alpha = .82$ , e.g., My parent helps me to choose my own direction). The global Cronbach's alpha for this scale was  $\alpha = .92$ . High scores indicate high parental involvement and warmth as well as strong fostering of autonomy.

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*Family control.* Two different measures were used to assess family control. Psychological control was measured using the corresponding subscale of the Parenting Styles Scale (Oliva, Parra, Sánchez-Queija, & Gaviño, 2007). Emerging adults answered eight questions on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*). Sample question: “My father/mother is always telling me what to do”. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was  $\alpha = .87$ . High scores indicate high levels of perceived psychological control.

Behavioral control was measured using items adapted for Emerging Adults from Kerr and Stattin's Control Subscale (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). Emerging adults answered five questions on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*). Sample question: “My father/mother tries to set rules about what I do in my spare time”. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was  $\alpha = .77$ . High scores indicate high levels of perceived behavioral control.

*Psychological well-being.* This variable was assessed using the Spanish adaptation (Diaz et al., 2006) of the Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWBS) (Ryff, Lee, Essex, & Schmutte, 1994), reduced version. This scale is a questionnaire comprising 29 items rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*). The PWBS has six subscales which are grouped into a second-order factor called general psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was  $\alpha = .88$ . Example item: “When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out”. High scores indicate high levels of psychological well-being.

*Psychological distress.* This variable was assessed using the Spanish adaptation (Bados, Solanas, & Andrés, 2005) of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), reduced version. This questionnaire consists of 21 items rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*does not apply to me at all*) to 4 (*applies to me very much, or most of the time*). The DASS-21 has three subscales: depression, anxiety and stress, which

are grouped into a second order factor called general psychological distress ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Example items: "I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything". High scores indicate high levels of psychological distress.

### **Data analysis**

We conducted descriptive analyses, obtaining the means and standard deviations of all the variables included the study, and we also compared gender differences and estimated correlations between them. Subsequently, in order to categorize different groups of emerging adults in accordance with their perceptions of their relationship with their parents, a cluster analysis was performed. The two-stage process recommended by Lévy and Varela (2003) was used for this purpose. In the first stage, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted using Ward's method and the Squared Euclidean Distance (Steinley & Brusco, 2007), since the variables are measured on an interval scale. The scores for the five study variables were also standardized in order to ensure that the classification would not be impacted by differences in scale variability. To determine the number of clusters, we examined the hierarchical dendrogram. In the second stage, we performed a k means cluster analysis to strengthen the classification obtained through the hierarchical cluster analysis. Next, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to analyze any possible differences between the three clusters in the five family variables, as well as in relation to emerging adults' psychological well-being and psychological distress. Finally, Chi-Squared was estimated in order to identify differences between the clusters obtained in terms of gender and perceived family income. Cohen's *d* and Cramer's *V* (Cohen, 1988) were calculated to determine effect size.

## **RESULTS**

### **Descriptive statistics and correlations between family variables**

The means and standard deviations for parental involvement, parental support for autonomy and parental warmth suggested that the emerging adults in our study perceived positive family

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relationships, with mean scores of over 5 (range =1-7). Moreover, participants were found to perceive low levels of psychological and behavioral control, with mean scores of under 2.2 (range = 1-6). They were also found to have high levels of psychological well-being, with mean scores of over 4 (range = 1-6) and low levels of psychological distress, with mean scores of under 34 (range = 0-120) (Table 2).

Women perceived higher levels of parental involvement, parental support for autonomy and parental warmth than men, whereas men perceived higher levels of psychological and behavioral control than women.

The results also revealed that both behavioral and psychological control were negatively associated with psychological well-being and positively associated with psychological distress. The remaining variables were inversely related to adjustment among the emerging adults in our study (Table 2).

	Total	Women	Men	F	Cohen's	2	3	4	5	6	7
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) <i>Range</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) <i>Range</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) <i>Range</i>		<i>d</i>						
Psychological control	2.12 (1.00) 1-5	2.10 (1.01) 1-6	2.16 (.98) 1-5.75	1.44	-.06	.57**	-.55**	-.68**	-.47**	-.27**	.30**
Behavioral control (2)	2.20 (1.03) 1-5	2.12 (1.01) 1-6	2.32 (1.04) 1-5.60	13.52*	-.20		-.27**	-.47**	-.17**	-.20**	.18**
Parental warmth (3)	6.04 (.96) 1.17-7	6.12 (.96) 1.17-7	5.92 (.94) 1.83-7	15.85*	.21			.76**	.74**	.40**	-.27**
Parental support for autonomy (4)	5.52 (.98) 1-7	5.59 (.99) 1-7	5.42 (.95) 1.88-7	11.50*	.17				.65**	.38**	-.28**
Parental involvement (5)	5.55 (1.14) 1-7	5.65 (1.15) 1.33-7	5.40 (1.11) 1-7	16.82*	.22					.34**	-.27**
Psychological well-being (6)											-.46**
Psychological distress (7)											--

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics according to gender and correlations between all study variables**

## Cluster Analysis

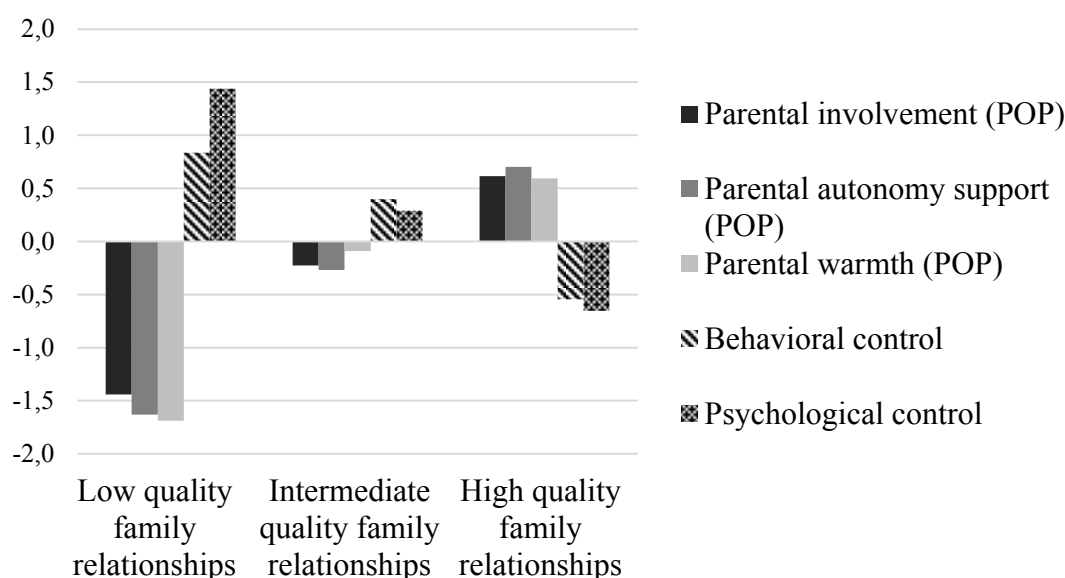
The dendrogram that arose from the hierarchical cluster analysis described in the data analysis section revealed that a three-cluster solution would provide the most parsimonious, homogeneous and meaningful representation of the data. For its part, the k means cluster analysis identified the participants assigned to each of the 3 clusters. Figure 1 graphically represents the three groups identified. To analyze differences between the three clusters in the five family variables, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, revealing significant differences in all variables: parent involvement  $F(2, 1495) = 890.93, p < .001$ , parent warmth  $F(2, 1495) = 1188.28, p < .001$ , parental support for autonomy  $F(2, 1495) = 1479.27, p < .001$ , psychological control  $F(2, 1492) = 895.01, p < .001$  and behavioral control  $F(2, 1492) = 333.82, p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni post hoc test revealed differences between each cluster (1 vs. 2, 1 vs. 3, 2 vs. 3) in each of the five parenting variables that were used to generate the clusters.

Cluster 1 ( $n = 238$ ; 15.9 % of the sample) consisted of emerging adults who had scores below the mean in parental involvement ( $z = -1.44$ ), parental warmth ( $z = -1.69$ ) and parental support for autonomy ( $z = -1.63$ ). It also included emerging adults who had scores above the mean in psychological control ( $z = 1.44$ ) and behavioral control ( $z = .83$ ) exercised by parents. This cluster will be referred to from here on as the *low quality family relationships* (LQ) cluster.

Cluster 2 ( $n = 723$ ; 48.2 % of the sample) consisted of emerging adults who had scores above the mean in parental involvement ( $z = .61$ ), parental warmth ( $z = .59$ ) and parental support for autonomy ( $z = .70$ ). It also included emerging adults who had scores below the mean in psychological control ( $z = -.65$ ) and behavioral control ( $z = -.55$ ) exercised by

parents. This cluster will be referred to from here on as the *high quality family relationships* (HQ) cluster.

Cluster 3 ( $n = 538$ ; 35.9 % of the sample) consisted of emerging adults who had scores slightly below the mean in parental involvement ( $z = -.23$ ), parental warmth ( $z = -.27$ ) and parental support for autonomy ( $z = -.09$ ). It also included emerging adults who had scores slightly above the mean in psychological control ( $z = .29$ ) and behavioral control ( $z = .40$ ) exercised by parents. This cluster will be referred to from here on as the *intermediate quality family relationships* (IQ) cluster.



*Figure 1.* Family relationship cluster: means of standardized scores for parental involvement, parental support for autonomy, parental warmth, psychological control and behavioral control.

A number of descriptive analyses were conducted to examine differences between clusters in relation to two demographic outcomes (gender and perceived family income). Chi-square analyses indicated a significant difference in both variables as a function of the clusters. Significant gender differences were found ( $\chi^2(2) = 27.3, p < .001$ , *Cramer's V* =

.13). The adjusted standardized residuals indicated that women were overrepresented in the HQ cluster ( $z = 5.1$ ), while men were overrepresented in the IQ cluster ( $z = 4.4$ ).

Significant family income differences were also found ( $\chi^2(4) = 27.3, p < .001$ , *Cramer's V* = .10), with emerging adults with a medium-high perceived family income being overrepresented in the HQ cluster ( $z = 2.3$ ) and those with a low perceived family income being overrepresented in the LQ cluster ( $z = 4.8$ ). Finally, emerging adults from moderate income families were overrepresented in the IQ cluster ( $z = 2.1$ ).

### **Differences in accordance with Psychological Well-being and Psychological Distress**

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to explore any possible differences between the three clusters and emerging adults' psychological well-being and psychological distress. The results are shown in Figure 2. The comparative analysis (ANOVA) indicated that the three clusters analyzed differed in terms of both psychological well-being,  $F(2, 1495) = 125.16, p < .001$ , and psychological distress,  $F(2, 1489) = 70.37, p < .001$ .

In relation to psychological well-being, pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni post hoc test revealed differences between HQ and LQ (*Mean Difference* = -.62;  $p < .001$ ), with a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 1.07$ ), HQ and IQ (*Mean Difference* = .35;  $p < .001$ ), with a medium effect size (Cohen's  $d = .66$ ) and finally, LQ and IQ (*Mean Difference* = -.27;  $p < .000$ ), with a small effect size (Cohen's  $d = -.45$ ). Emerging adults from the HQ cluster scored highest on the PWBS, following by those from the IQ and, finally, those from the LQ groups.

In relation to psychological distress, the post hoc procedure again revealed significant differences between the three clusters analyzed. Specifically, these differences were between HQ and LQ (*Mean Difference* = 18.00;  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = .97$ ), HQ and IQ (*Mean Difference* = -5.88;  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -.30$ ) and LQ and IQ (*Mean Difference* = 12.12;  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = .57$ ). The results also indicated that the effect size was large between the



two extreme clusters (HQ and LQ), small between the LQ and IQ clusters and medium between the HQ and IQ clusters.

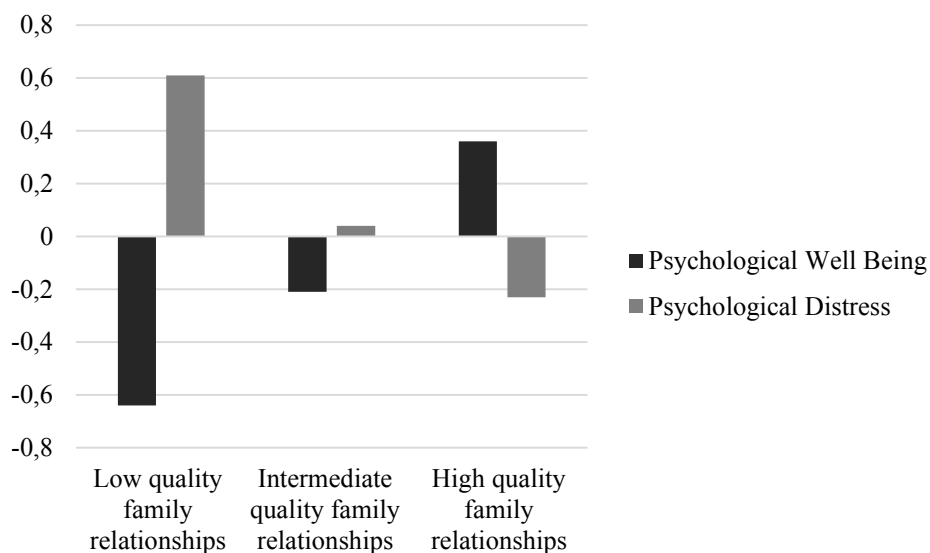


Figure 2. Means of standardized scores for psychological well-being and psychological distress, according to family cluster.

## DISCUSSION

According to our results, the emerging adults in our study perceived high levels of parental involvement, parental warmth and parental support for autonomy. Our findings are consistent with those of several other studies which have found that emerging adults have a strong family system characterized by generally good relationships with parents (Milevsky, Thudium, & Guldin, 2014).

The results also revealed that the emerging adults in our study perceived low levels of psychological and behavioral control. This is almost certainly the result of negotiations which have taken place in the family previously, during the adolescent stage (Bámaca-Colbert et al., 2017), and which enable a more egalitarian and reciprocal relationship between parents and emerging adults that, without doubt, facilitates the latter's autonomy (Aquilino, 2006; Crocetti & Meeus, 2014).

In this study we used a person-centered technique to examine unique clusters of individuals who perceived different patterns of family relationships. As opposed to Variable-Centered analyses, which treat each variable as being related to another variable, Person-Centered analyses enable the identification of "groups of individuals who function in a similar way at the organism level and in a different way relative to other individuals at the same level" (Magnusson, 2003, p.16). The two-step cluster analysis procedure identified three clusters based on the centrality of five family variables (parental involvement, parental support for autonomy, parental warmth, behavioral control and psychological control) within the family system.

The LQ cluster was the smallest group in the study. Those in this group perceived a poorer relationship with their parents than their counterparts in other clusters and felt more tightly controlled, both psychologically and behaviorally. The IQ group showed a similar pattern, although its levels were closer to the mean. Thus, we can conclude that the emerging adults in this group perceive a low to moderate quality of parent-child relationships. Finally, it appears that the HQ group may be the most representative of Spanish undergraduate students, since almost half of all participants were grouped into this cluster. The emerging adults in this group perceived high levels of parental involvement, parental support for autonomy and parental warmth, while at the same time perceiving low levels of behavioral and psychological control by their parents. It is important to note that in all three clusters, control (both behavioral and psychological) was found to be inversely related to all three positive variables (parental warmth, involvement and support of autonomy).

In our opinion, this relationship could be a two-way one. Firstly, it is not illogical to assume that in a good family climate supervision is no longer exercised directly, but rather through warmth and involvement, especially once the children have reached adulthood. Indeed, almost two decades ago, Kerr and Stattin (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000)

found that during adolescence, the most effective means of control was child disclosure, i.e. a spontaneous disclosure of information by the adolescent him or herself, resulting from a series of affective and communicative family patterns. Thus, in HQ homes, emerging adults may be controlled through the affective climate established with their parents. At the same time, however, this low level of control may also contribute to improving the family climate, meaning that low control and high involvement, support for autonomy and warmth go hand in hand. In LQ homes, on the other hand, high perceived levels of control may generate feelings of rejection among emerging adults. These feelings may in turn have a negative effect on family relationships, thus decreasing levels of closeness and affection. Conversely, more difficult family relationships may provoke the need for direct parental supervision, which will probably contribute to making the family climate even more troublesome.

The results indicate that emerging adults who perceived higher levels of parental involvement, warmth and support for autonomy also reported higher levels of psychological well-being and lower levels of psychological distress. As stated in the introduction, due to its Catholic tradition and socioeconomic characteristics, family is one of the mainstays of Spanish society, and continues to be so during young people's transition towards adulthood. Indeed, in Spain, family is a key element, not only as a provider of financial support for young people, but also as a context for socialization within a familialist culture of dependence (Moreno, 2008). It is therefore hardly surprising that those young people who maintain positive bonds with their families report higher levels of well-being than those who do not. In addition to experiencing their transition to adulthood in a safe, family environment, these young people are also fulfilling expectations by "gaining their independence within the context of family dependence" (Moreno, 2008). The fact that distress and adjustment problems are evident among those who perceive negative family relations is also logical,

since in addition to being forced to live in a less supportive context, these young people are also contravening the expectations of the familialist culture in which they are immersed.

Emerging adults who felt more controlled by their parents, both psychologically and behaviorally, also reported higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of psychological well-being. In this sense, previous studies have found that warmth, involvement, support (Gomez & McLaren, 2006; Meeus et al., 2005) and autonomy-supportive parenting (Joussemet et al., 2008; Kins et al., 2009) provide numerous benefits for emerging adults' adjustment. On the contrary, parents who exercise undue control have a damaging effect on emerging adults' psychological adjustment, generating more anxiety and depression (Nelson et al., 2011). This suggests that, unlike during adolescence, during which behavioral control is necessary and rules and limits have been proven to be beneficial (Lippold, Glatz, Fosco, & Feinberg, 2017), during emerging adulthood it is important for the home environment to stimulate maturity and autonomy, with lower levels of direct control. Indeed, even when emerging adults continue to live in the family home and maintain good family relations (Moreno, 2008), continuing parental control has a negative effect since it goes against their legitimate need for autonomy. Relationships with parents are strongly linked to emerging adults' well-being and distress. Thus, as hypothesized, emerging adults from the high-quality family relationship group were also those who scored highest for psychological well-being and lowest for psychological distress. As stated earlier, this finding serves to highlight how important and beneficial it is for emerging adults to have close, affectionate relationships with their parents (Inguglia et al., 2014), and for parents to foster autonomy (Downie et al., 2007; Joussemet et al., 2008; Kins et al., 2009), reducing the levels of direct control. This is particularly important in a country such as Spain where the majority of emerging adults still live in the family home until almost 30 years of age (León &

Migliavacca, 2013) and where the familialist culture of dependence and solidarity among family members is the backbone of society (Moreno, 2008).

Regarding gender differences, our results reveal that young women perceive a higher level of parental involvement and warmth than their male counterparts, and feel that their parents foster and support their autonomy more and exercise less control over them. Similarly, men were overrepresented in the IQ group, which is characterized by slightly lower levels of parental involvement, parental warmth and parental support for autonomy, with the opposite being true in the HQ group. These results are not surprising, since previous studies carried out in Portugal, a country with a very similar culture to Spain, have found that men tend to adopt a less involved attitude in the parent-child relationship than women, and tend to perceive family closeness as intrusive and threatening to their own autonomy (Marinho & Mena, 2012).

Spain differs from other cultures in the degree to which people adhere to traditional gender roles, with Spanish women occupying a key position in family life (Calvo-Salguero, Salinas & Aguilar-Luzón, 2012). This identification with traditional gender roles may be the reason why women perceive a greater degree of parental involvement and warmth, as indeed has been reported by other studies carried out in other cultures, according to which women tend to view their parents as a more important source of emotional support than men (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991), and tend to maintain closer relationships with their parents during this stage (Sneed et al., 2006).

In our opinion, the gender differences observed in parental control (behavioral and psychological) and fostering of autonomy are more surprising. Women were overrepresented in the group perceiving less parental control and greater parental support for autonomy, which was unexpected in a culture which accepts and adheres to traditional gender roles. It may be that, although parents control and foster their male and female offspring's autonomy to the

same extent, men's demand for autonomy is greater than that of women, meaning that they feel more controlled. Another possible explanation is that, during emerging adulthood, parents may perceive their daughters as more mature than their sons, which in turn may prompt them to respect their daughters' opinions and decisions more, control them less and make a greater effort to foster their autonomy. Whatever the case, the role of parental control (behavioral and psychological) and support for autonomy during emerging adulthood and its moderation by culture is an interesting area of research that deserves more attention.

In relation to family income levels, our results indicate that emerging adults who perceived a poorer financial situation at home were overrepresented in the LQ cluster, while those who perceived a better financial situation were overrepresented in the HQ cluster. Other studies have also found that individuals experiencing poverty or economic stress report adjustment problems, including internalizing (e.g., Evans & English, 2002; Hammack, Robinson, Crawford, & Li, 2004; Najman, Hayatbakhsh, Clavarino, Bor, O'callaghan, & Williams, (2010) and externalizing problems (e.g., Conger et al., 1991). Low income individuals also report experiencing many more and often multiple stressors compared to other individuals (Evans & Cassells, 2014; Evans & English, 2002; Hammack et al., 2004). Our results suggest that, as well as impacting the individual members of the family unit, economic difficulties also influence the family as a system, and are related to more dysfunctional family patterns during emerging adulthood. The "Family Stress Model" (Conger, Rueter & Conger, 2000) holds that the experience of poverty is one of the most important factors which increase family dysfunction, and our results support this. The young people in our study who perceived more economic difficulties also perceived poorer family relationships and had more adjustment problems. This finding is particularly interesting in light of the fact that our sample group was comprised exclusively of university students, who despite studying in public universities (which the majority of Spanish universities are),

nevertheless must have at least a minimum level of resources in order to access and remain in higher education. Thus, even though our entire sample group came from families with a minimum level of financial solvency, it is interesting to note that our findings nevertheless highlight the negative effect of economic difficulties on both individual well-being and the functioning of the family system. This underscores the need for social policies designed to combat poverty, which once again is shown here to affect not only individuals themselves, but also the entire family system.

The findings of our study make an important and pioneering contribution to the field, helping to deepen our knowledge of family relationships during the third decade of life in Spain, a country which, as explained earlier, differs from the United States and other countries in Central and Northern Europe, in which the majority of studies to date on emerging adulthood have been carried out.

### **Limitations**

The present study is not without limitations. First, the cluster groups were formed using a data-driven approach which must be interpreted in the context of the sample composition. In this sense, it is important to bear in mind that the sample was made up entirely of university students, meaning that the results may not be applicable to the non-university emerging adult population. Moreover, 90% of the sample were under 24 years of age, and were therefore young emerging adults. Future research needs to focus on emerging adults who are outside the university sphere, as well as on the entire age range encompassed by the emerging adulthood concept (18-29), in order to gain a more complete view of family relationships during this period. The second limitation is that no distinction was made between mothers and fathers when asking about perceived parental relations. Consequently, no separate analysis of mother-child and father-child relationships can be conducted, although this would have been interesting. The third limitation is the fact that the study did not take parents' opinions into

account. As the other main players in the relationship, analyzing their views also would provide useful information regarding relationships in the family environment during this specific development phase. The fourth limitation is the exclusive use of self-report questionnaires as the only source of information. Future studies may wish to consider sources of qualitative information also, in order to enable a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the situation. Finally, using cross-sectional data limited the study's ability to discern the direction of the association between family profiles and youth adjustment. Emerging adults with more negative emotional symptoms may perceive more negative family relationship patterns, and negative behaviors exhibited by emerging adults with emotional problems may contribute to parents keeping their emotional distance and exercising more control over their children (Coyne, 1976). Future studies may wish to consider using longitudinal designs to discern the direction of this relationship with a greater degree of clarity.

## CONCLUSIONS

Notwithstanding these limitations, the present study provides important insights into parent-child relationships during emerging adulthood. Indeed, it is worth mentioning that it is one of the first studies in Spain to analyze the family system and its effect on the adjustment and maladjustment of young people during this development phase. The characteristics of emerging adulthood vary in accordance with the society of reference, and if we are truly to understand young people's transition towards adulthood, then we must take the sociocultural context in which said transition occurs into account (Arnett, 2010; Kloep & Hendry, 2014). Society impregnates family life and family dynamics, and there are cross-cultural differences in the many ways that parents strive to enable children's developmental competence (Harkness & Super, 1992; Kagitcibasi, 2017). Therefore, studies such as the one presented here are necessary to gaining a clearer and more accurate picture of family relations during



emerging adulthood beyond the borders of the United States and the countries of Central and Northern Europe.

Taken together, the results reported here are meaningful, since they reveal much about family functioning and the role played by family relationships in the well-being of emerging adults in Spain. They also have interesting implications for family interventions, since they highlight the important role families continue to play during emerging adulthood in relation to young people's well-being (Carlson, 2014). In this sense, the present study underscores the need for public administrations to implement family support policies not just during childhood and adolescence, but also during young people's transition to adulthood. Parents may feel particularly lost during this phase, and unsure as to what exactly their role should be, not only because their children are now adults, but also because they have no references to teach them how to adapt to this change. Having your economically dependent children live with you until they reach the age of 30 (more or less) is a recent social development, and no role models exist to show parents how to act. It is therefore vital to develop resources for parents designed to foster positive parenting during emerging adulthood also. These resources, which are fairly scarce in most countries (e. g., Arnett & Fishel, 2013), are nonexistent in Spain.

We hope that this study will help raise awareness among the Spanish public administration regarding the need to invest in resources designed to support families during their children's emerging adulthood. We also hope it will serve to make parents more aware of the vital influence they continue to have on their children, even during the third decade of their lives.

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