



Life Satisfaction and Character Strengths in Ecuatorian Adolescents

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Abstract

There is empirical evidence that life satisfaction (LS) in adolescence is associated with adequate development and future well-being. Research into the factors underpinning LS can therefore help to promote healthier development of societies. The aim of this study was to extend knowledge about LS among adolescents in Ecuador, a Latin American country for which research on this topic is lacking. Specifically, we analyze the relationship between LS and character strengths, controlling for gender, age, socioeconomic status, and family structure. Participants were 659 adolescents (43.1% female) aged between 12 and 18 years who completed the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS) and the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Y). Their parents or legal guardians completed the Survey of Socioeconomic Stratification (SSES). Correlation analysis and regression modeling were performed. Results showed that LS was not related to age or socioeconomic status, but there was a significant association with gender and family structure, insofar as boys and adolescents living in intact families reported higher levels of LS. Overall, the majority of character strengths were positively related to LS. After eliminating overlap between strengths and controlling for sociodemographic variables, the strengths of hope, zest, love, and prudence significantly predicted LS. We discuss how these strengths, related to the cognitive component of well-being, may play a protective role against difficulties during adolescence. Character strengths-based interventions are proposed to promote healthy development in Ecuatorian adolescents.

Keywords Well-being · Virtues · Youth · Latin America

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1 Introduction

Within the framework of positive psychology, life satisfaction (LS) is considered a relevant variable that is associated with mental health throughout the lifespan (Seligman, 2002). It is defined as the cognitive evaluation that people make of their life as a whole and/or of specific life domains (Diener et al., 2006; Huebner, 1991). Life satisfaction has been studied as a physiological, behavioral, and verbal response of a person, and it has been found to be related to both physical and mental health (Vázquez et al., 2006).

1.1 Life Satisfaction during Adolescence

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage that brings significant changes and challenges. Empirical evidence suggests that LS in adolescence is associated with adequate development and future well-being (Patton et al., 2016). The identification of variables that contribute to enhanced LS during this period could therefore provide a framework for promoting young people's well-being as they progress into adulthood.

Previous studies have found that LS decreases with age from childhood to adolescence, and this has been interpreted as a developmental phenomenon related to the various challenges that young people face during this transition (Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019; Goldbeck et al., 2007; Gonzalez-Carrasco et al., 2017; Rees, 2020). As regards the period of adolescence itself, some authors have found that the level of LS remains relatively stable (Salmela-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2010; Willroth et al., 2021), while others have reported a slight but significant decrease with age (Casas et al., 2012; Weber & Huebner, 2015).

The findings about the association between LS and gender in adolescence are inconclusive. Some studies have found that boys report higher levels of LS than girls (Benavente et al., 2018; Esnaola et al., 2019; Goldbeck et al., 2007; Kaye-Tzadok et al., 2017; Moksnes et al., 2013), whereas others have found the opposite (Gonzalez-Carrasco et al., 2017) or even no differences by gender (Ash & Huebner, 2001; Bendayan et al., 2013; Huebner et al., 2006; Gilman & Huebner, 2003). A meta-analysis by Chen et al. (2020) concluded that this variation in results could be due to the use of different measures of LS. Overall, however, there appears to be a gender difference in the life domains that are related to LS. Among girls, higher scores on LS are linked to social interaction areas (family, friends, and school), whereas in boys high LS is related to self-confidence, free time, health, and perceived physical appearance (Danielsen et al., 2009; Kaye-Tzadok et al., 2017; Rees, 2020; Weber & Huebner, 2015; Yucel & Yuan, 2016).

Research has also examined the influence that socio-contextual variables such as socioeconomic status and economic hardship may have on LS in adolescence. Some of these studies have found no association between socioeconomic status and LS (Raats et al., 2019; Savahl et al., 2017; Willroth et al., 2021). Others, however, report a positive relationship between LS and certain indicators of socioeconomic

status such as the availability of material resources (Rees, 2020) and family affluence (Lazzeri et al., 2014; Levin et al., 2011, 2012; Kleszczewska et al., 2018). A negative association between LS and economic deprivation has also been observed (Gross-Manos & Ben-Arieh, 2017). This variability in results may be related to the fact that the samples are drawn from different countries with diverse contextual characteristics. Although some predictors of well-being, such as the fulfillment of basic needs, appear to be universal, others are more culturally specific (Diener, 2012; Edwards & Lopez, 2006; Tay & Diener, 2011).

The family context is another variable that has been linked to LS in adolescence (Antaramian et al., 2008), and it has been identified as a key predictor of LS in different ethnic/racial groups (Edwards & Lopez, 2006; Gilman & Huebner, 2003). Specifically, young people living in what are referred to as intact families (i.e., with both biological parents) tend to report higher and more stable life satisfaction and well-being and fewer internalizing or externalizing problems, as compared with their peers living in single-parent families, reconstituted step-parent families, or with other non-parent adults (Antaramian et al., 2008; Bjarnason et al., 2012; Levin et al., 2011, 2012; Willroth et al., 2021; Zullig et al., 2005).

There is also evidence that higher levels of LS among adolescents are associated with other health indicators such as good interpersonal relationships, higher educational achievement, self-esteem, and intrapersonal functioning (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Park, 2004; Kleszczewska, 2018). Higher levels of LS have likewise been related to fewer internalizing problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Bendayan et al., 2013; Fergusson et al., 2015; Gilman & Huebner, 2006), as well as to less participation in violence, aggression, substance abuse, or suicide behaviors (Valois et al., 2001, 2004).

1.2 Character Strengths and Life Satisfaction

In the context of positive psychology, LS has also been linked to a stronger endorsement of character strengths. Character strengths are considered essential for healthy development and are associated with better achievement and well-being in childhood and youth (Blanca et al., 2018; Douglass & Duffy, 2015; Gillham et al., 2011; Ovejero et al., 2016; Park, 2004; Park & Peterson, 2008; Proctor et al., 2011; Reyes & Ferragut, 2016; Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Toner et al., 2012; Weber & Ruch, 2012). Peterson and Seligman (2004) define character strengths as personality characteristics that are visible in the emotions, behaviors, and thoughts of individuals, and they consider them to be universal and measurable positive traits that are relatively stable but flexible enough to be developed. Based on their research, Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified 24 character strengths, which they classified into six broad virtues (Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence). Overall, character strengths have been considered protective factors against psychological difficulties during adolescence, reducing the risk of psychiatric disorders and violent behaviors or attitudes (Bromley et al., 2006; Ferragut et al., 2013; Kumar & Mohideen, 2021; Ma et al., 2008; Park & Peterson, 2006; Yépez-Tito et al., 2021).

In adolescence, some character strengths appear to be more strongly related to LS than are others. Park and Peterson (2006) suggested that this was the case of the so-called *strengths of the heart* (hope, love, gratitude, and zest), which is consistent with research in adults. Subsequent studies with adolescents in other countries, including Spain (Blanca et al., 2018), Germany (Ruch et al., 2014), and Iran (Jabbari et al., 2021), have confirmed the stronger relationship of these character strengths to LS. This suggests that strengths of the heart, in the sense of expecting good things in the future (hope), being grateful for one's life and things that happen (gratitude), appreciating and being capable of maintaining close relationships with others (love), and approaching life with energy and enthusiasm (zest) are more important predictors of LS in adolescence than are *cerebral strengths* (e.g., curiosity, creativity, or love of learning) or *interpersonal strengths* (e.g., kindness, forgiveness, or fairness) (Toner et al., 2012). Some authors, who studied adolescents from the USA and Israel (Gillham et al., 2011; Shoshani & Shwartz, 2018; Weber et al., 2013), have proposed that religiousness should be added to this list of key strengths, insofar as having beliefs about a life's meaning was also linked to higher LS.

1.3 Studies in the Latin American Context

The majority of studies about LS in adolescence have been conducted in Europe, the USA, and Asia, with scant research on this topic in Latin America (Chen et al., 2020). The few studies that have been carried out in the latter region have found similar results to those discussed earlier with regard to sociodemographic variables, that is to say, either no differences in LS by age (Góngora & Castro, 2014) or a slight decrease with age (Alfaro et al., 2016; Casas et al., 2012; Oyanedel et al., 2015), inconclusive results in relation to gender (Alfaro et al., 2016; Góngora & Castro, 2014; Oyanedel et al., 2015), and no differences associated with socioeconomic status (Góngora & Castro, 2014) or expenses on education, health, food or toys (Cortina, 2014). To the best of our knowledge, only Cortina (2014) has analyzed the relationship between LS and family structure in Ecuadorian migrant families, finding that the LS of children and adolescents from households where at least one parent had migrated tends to be lower than among those who still live with both parents.

A further point to consider is that most of the studies carried out in Latin America with adolescents are focused on analyzing the psychometric properties of different instruments for assessing LS, rather than on an in-depth exploration of demographic or health correlates (Alfaro et al., 2016; Benavente et al., 2018; Casas et al., 2012). Character strengths have likewise been scarcely studied in this context. Research on this topic in Latin America has generally found that strengths may contribute to the development of prosocial behavior (García-Vázquez et al., 2020), improvement in school-related variables (Grinhauz & Castro, 2014), and the prevention of risk behaviors such as sexting (Yépez-Tito et al., 2021).

1.4 Aim of this Study

To summarize, the majority of studies that analyze LS and character strengths in adolescence have been conducted in Europe, the USA, and Asia (Willroth et al., 2021). Given that some predictors of LS satisfaction are culture specific (Diener, 2012; Edwards & Lopez, 2006; Tay & Diener, 2011), further research is warranted in Latin America. The few studies that have been carried out in this region have involved Mexican and Chilean samples, and hence there is also a need to expand research to other Latin American countries (Castro, 2014; Ramírez-Casas et al., 2017).

The aim of this study was to extend knowledge about LS among adolescents in Ecuador, a Latin American country for which there is limited research on this topic. To this end, we analyzed the relationship between LS and character strengths while controlling for sociodemographic variables, specifically gender, age, socioeconomic status, and family structure. Given that character strengths are postulated to be universal positive traits, it is plausible to expect similar results to those found in other countries, that is to say, LS among Ecuadorean adolescents will be more strongly associated with strengths of the heart, such as hope, love, gratitude, and zest, than with cerebral or interpersonal strengths. A better understanding of the relationship between LS and character strengths among adolescents in Latin American contexts would provide a framework for developing positive psychology interventions aimed at enhancing their well-being. In what follows, we first describe the sample and instruments used to gather data on this issue, after which we present the results of our analysis. Finally, we discuss our findings in light of previous research on this topic.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

Participants were 659 students (375 male and 284 female) aged from 12 to 18 years ($M = 14.61$, $SD = 1.74$) and enrolled in either compulsory secondary education or baccalaureate studies at schools in Quito, Ecuador. They were all native speakers of Spanish. None of them had any previously diagnosed psychological problems, and they volunteered to participate in the study. The majority of students identified themselves as mestizo (90.7%) and Catholic (86.6%). Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. The parents or legal guardians of students (200 male and 459 female) signed informed consent regarding the young person's participation, and they also provided information on the family's socioeconomic status (see Instruments section below). They were aged from 22 to 71 years ($M = 42.34$; $SD = 7.043$).

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

Participants	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Gender		
Male	375	56.9
Female	284	43.1
Age (years)		
12–13	208	31.6
14–16	329	49.9
17–18	122	18.5
Socioeconomic status		
Low	2	0.3
Medium-low	87	13.2
Medium	275	41.7
Medium-high	268	40.7
High	27	4.1
Family structure		
Single-parent or restructured	150	22.8
Two-parent	509	77.2

2.2 Instruments

Sociodemographic Variables and Socioeconomic Status The adolescents' parents or legal guardians completed the Survey of Socioeconomic Stratification (SSES). This is a public-access instrument designed by Ecuador's National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC, 2011) that contains 25 items covering six areas (type of housing, access to technology, household possessions, consumer habits, education, and household economic activity). In accordance with INEC criteria, socioeconomic status was classified as low (score in the range 0–316 on the SSES), medium-low (score of 316–535), medium (535–696), medium-high (696–845), and high (845–1000). Given the distribution of socioeconomic status in the sample (only two participants were classified as having low socioeconomic status), we collapsed the categories low and medium-low into a single category for the purposes of analysis.

Life Satisfaction This was assessed with the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS; Huebner, 1991), in its Spanish version (Galindez & Casas, 2010). Each of the seven items is rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = totally disagree; 6 = totally agree), and a total score is computed. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction with life. Cronbach's alpha in the present sample was .77.

Character Strengths This variable was measured using the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Y; Park & Peterson, 2006), in its Spanish version (Vázquez & Hervás, 2007). The inventory includes 198 items that are rated using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all like me; 5 = very much like me). The VIA-Y assesses 24 character strengths: creativity, curiosity, love of learning, open-mindedness, perspective, bravery, persistence, authenticity, zest, love, kindness, social

intelligence, teamwork, fairness, leadership, forgiveness, modesty, prudence, self-regulation, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and religiousness. Cronbach's alphas in the present sample ranged from .60 to .79. Higher scores indicate a stronger endorsement of a given strength.

2.3 Procedure

The study was carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Ministry of Education in Ecuador, as well as by the principals of the schools, who supervised all ethical aspects. The adolescents' parents/legal guardians signed informed consent and completed the SSES at home. Adolescents responded to the two questionnaires (SLSS and VIA-Y) in a single one-hour session held during class time. Their regular teacher and a psychologist were present during this session. All students participated voluntarily and they did not receive incentives for doing so.

2.4 Data Analysis

In order to analyze the association between LS and character strengths, we computed Pearson correlation coefficients between scores on the SLSS and scores on the VIA-Y. Following Cohen's criterion (Cohen, 1988) we considered coefficients of $|.10|$, $|.30|$, and $|.50|$ as indicating a small, moderate, and strong correlation, respectively.

Given that character strengths are inter-correlated, we performed multiple regression analysis to identify the strengths most closely associated with LS, once the overlap between them has been eliminated. Specifically, we used a regression modeling approach, including each character strength as a predictor in a step-by-step fashion, after first introducing sociodemographic variables as control variables. In the first stage, gender (0=female, 1=male), age, socioeconomic status (dummy variables: low/medium-low, medium, and medium-high; reference group: high), and family structure (0=single-parent or restructured, 1=two-parent) were introduced (model 1). In the second stage, each strength with a correlation coefficient higher than $|.30|$ was added, starting with the strength with the highest coefficient and proceeding with the rest, one at a time, in descending order. At each step, we tested the change in R^2 , and if the change was statistically significant, the predictor was retained in the model. If no significant change was observed, we proceeded to test the next predictor.

3 Results

The mean score on LS was 3.92 ($SD=0.93$). Table 2 shows correlations between scores on LS and the 24 strengths. Although 22 strengths showed a significant positive correlation with LS, only six were above the cut-off (.30) for a moderate correlation: hope, zest, love, prudence, gratitude, and persistence. Consequently, these were the strengths entered in the regression modeling.

Table 2 Correlations between scores on life satisfaction and strengths

Strengths	Life satisfaction
Hope	.43***
Zest	.42***
Love	.40***
Prudence	.33***
Gratitude	.32***
Persistence	.32***
Love of Learning	.24***
Perspective	.24***
Authenticity	.23***
Social Intelligence	.23***
Leadership	.22***
Teamwork	.21***
Creativity	.21***
Open-mindedness	.20***
Fairness	.20***
Self-Regulation	.19***
Religiousness	.18***
Curiosity	.16***
Bravery	.12***
Apprec. of Beauty	.12***
Kindness	.11**
Humor	.09*
Modesty	.07
Forgiveness	.06

$N=659$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3 shows the results of the regression modeling. After first introducing sociodemographic variables as control variables, the contribution of hope, zest, love, and prudence was statistically significant. Table 4 displays the results of the final model, with R^2 equal to .29 and $F(10, 648) = 25.83$, $p < .001$. This model shows

Table 3 Model comparison from the regression analysis with life satisfaction as the dependent variable

Model	Variables	Model comparison	R^2	ΔR^2	p
1	Control variables (CV)		.02		.053
2	CV, Hope (H)	1 vs. 2	.20	.18	<.001
3	CV, H, Zest (Z)	2 vs. 3	.23	.03	<.001
4	CV, H, Z, Love (L)	3 vs. 4	.26	.03	<.001
5*	CV, H, Z, L, Prudence (P)	4 vs. 5	.28	.02	<.001
6	CV, H, Z, L, P, Gratitude	5 vs. 6	.28	<.01	.99
7	CV, H, Z, L, P, Persistence	6 vs. 7	.28	<.01	.41

$N=659$. * selected model

Table 4 Results from the regression analysis with life satisfaction as the dependent variable

Variables	<i>B</i>	95% CI <i>B</i>		<i>SE B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>				
Control variables							
Gender	0.13	0.01	0.25	0.06	0.07	2.02	.04
Age	0.01	-0.04	0.04	0.02	<0.01	-0.02	.99
Socioeconomic status							
Low/Medium-low	-0.21	-0.55	0.14	0.17	-0.08	-1.18	.24
Medium	-0.14	-0.46	0.17	0.16	-0.08	-0.90	.37
Medium-high	-0.15	-0.46	0.17	0.16	-0.08	-0.92	.36
Family structure	0.19	0.04	0.34	0.07	0.09	2.55	.01
Strengths							
Hope	0.16	0.03	0.29	0.06	0.12	2.46	.01
Zest	0.24	0.12	0.35	0.06	0.18	3.92	<.001
Love	0.29	0.19	0.40	0.05	0.22	5.43	<.001
Prudence	0.24	0.13	0.34	0.05	0.16	4.38	<.001

N=659. *CI*=confidence interval; *LL*=lower limit; *UL*=upper limit. Coding: Gender (0=female, 1=male), socioeconomic status (reference group: high), family structure (0=single parent or restructured, 1=two-parent family)

that scores on LS are higher for males and for adolescents from a two-parent family. In addition, adolescents with higher scores on LS also tend to score higher on hope, zest, love, and prudence.

4 Discussion

The aim of this study was to extend knowledge about LS among adolescents in Ecuador, a Latin American country for which research on this topic is lacking. To this end, we analyzed the relationship between LS and character strengths while controlling for sociodemographic variables, specifically gender, age, socioeconomic status, and family structure.

Regarding sociodemographic variables, the results showed no relationship between LS and either age or socioeconomic status. This is consistent with previous studies in both Latin America and other countries which have found that overall levels of LS remain fairly stable during adolescence (Góngora & Castro, 2014; Salmela-Aro & Tynkkyinen, 2010; Willroth et al., 2021), and that LS is not dependent on socioeconomic status (Góngora & Castro, 2014; Raats et al., 2019; Savahl et al., 2017; Willroth et al., 2021). These findings suggest that economic support alone may not be enough to improve LS, especially among adolescents, and hence public policies aimed at improving well-being need to consider not only economic but also subjective indicators (Cortina, 2014). It should be noted, however, that our study sample included very few adolescents in the low socioeconomic status group, so presumably most of our participants had their basic needs covered. Given that

basic needs are strongly related to life evaluations across nations (Tay & Diener, 2011), further studies involving a larger sample with low socioeconomic status are needed. Note also that the results reported here were obtained using a global indicator and unidimensional measure of LS. Further research is therefore needed to explore whether satisfaction with specific life domains (e.g., family, friends, school, living environment, etc.) may vary according to age and socioeconomic status.

With respect to the other two sociodemographic variables we considered, namely gender and family structure, both were found to be associated with LS. In line with previous research (Benavente et al., 2018; Esnaola et al., 2019; Goldbeck et al., 2007; Góngora & Castro, 2014; Kaye-Tzadok et al., 2017; Moksnes et al., 2013) we found that boys scored higher than girls on LS. This gender difference may be explained on the basis of the more intense hormonal changes, greater perceived stress, and lower body satisfaction that adolescent girls experience in comparison with boys, as well as their different styles of coping with negative life events (Blanca et al., 2020; Esnaola et al., 2019; Salmela-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2010; Hamilton et al., 2015). Our analysis also showed that scores on LS were higher among adolescents who lived in intact families, that is, with both parents, reflecting the results of previous studies involving Ecuadorian adolescents from migrant families (Cortina, 2014). The findings are also consistent with research in other countries showing that the traditional family structure is significantly associated with higher life satisfaction among adolescents, presumably because it is more likely to offer a good and stable environment for development (Antaramian et al., 2008; Bjarnason et al., 2012; Levin et al., 2011, 2012; Willroth et al., 2021; Zullig et al., 2005). As a key source of support and affection, the family context plays an important role in adolescent development and emotional adjustment (Lima et al., 2017), and in this respect our findings confirm the importance of considering family context when conducting research in this field.

Regarding the association between LS and character strengths, the correlation analysis showed that LS was positively associated with almost all the character strengths considered, supporting the idea that strengths are related to the cognitive component of well-being and help to promote healthy development in adolescence (Blanca et al., 2018; Douglass & Duffy, 2015; Gillham et al., 2011; Ovejero et al., 2016; Park, 2004; Park & Peterson, 2018; Proctor et al., 2011; Reyes & Ferragut, 2016; Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Toner et al., 2012; Weber & Ruch, 2012). More specifically, we found that hope, zest, love, prudence, gratitude, and persistence were the strengths most strongly related to LS, and the first four remained as significant predictors in the regression model, once the overlap between them had been eliminated. These findings are consistent with results obtained in other countries, highlighting the robust relationship between LS and strengths of the heart (Blanca et al., 2018; Gillham et al., 2011; Jabbari et al., 2021; Ruch et al., 2014; Shoshani & Schwartz, 2018; Toner et al., 2012; Weber et al., 2013).

Concerning hope, and in line with previous studies (Blanca et al., 2018; Gillham et al., 2011; Jabbari et al., 2021; Ruch et al., 2014; Toner et al., 2012), our results suggest that adolescents who expect the best from the future and who believe they can work to achieve it experience greater LS. This is consistent with the empirical evidence indicating that hope protects against difficulties in adolescence and

promotes healthy development (Gungor & Avci, 2017), it being specifically associated with lower levels of depression, less substance use, and fewer internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems (Brooks et al., 2016; Hagen et al., 2005; Jiang et al., 2013; Lagacé-Séguin & d'Entremont, 2010). Higher levels of hope have also been linked to higher self-esteem, greater academic and interpersonal satisfaction, and better regulation of emotions (Hellman & Gwinn, 2017; Ling et al., 2015).

Life satisfaction was also positively associated with zest, indicating that adolescents with a greater capacity to live life with passion and energy and who show enthusiasm even in difficult situations (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) are more likely to report higher LS. Zest, like hope, is one of the strengths that implies a positive outlook on life, and it has been linked to well-being in children, adolescents (Shoshani & Shwartz, 2018; Toner et al., 2012), and adults (Park et al., 2004). It has also recently been proposed as one of the protective factors against suicide in youth, and as a characteristic related to resilience (Shahram & Smith, 2021). Park et al. (2004) suggested that zest is associated with higher LS because people with high levels of zest are more focused on living in the “here and now”.

Also in line with previous research (Blanca et al., 2018; Jabbari et al., 2021), the results suggest that love, defined as the capability to appreciate close and intimate relationships with others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), is another relevant strength in adolescence, insofar as those adolescents who scored higher on love also reported greater LS. Adolescence is a period in which social relationships are essential due to the need for belongingness and attachment, and love can play an important role here in helping young people to establish a social identity and experience security and support (Porto et al., 2019; Shoshani & Slone, 2013). Accordingly, love has been linked to peer acceptance and friendship, as well as to specific interpersonal domains of LS (Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Wagner, 2019).

Finally, the analysis showed a positive association between LS and the strength of prudence. Prudence is defined as being careful about one's choices and thinking before acting, without taking undue risk. As a strength associated with the virtue of temperance it is considered to protect against excess (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and it is also related to well-being (Gillham et al., 2011; Toner et al., 2012). Previous studies have found that prudence is associated with less depression and fewer externalizing problems, as well as being a characteristic of popular students and one of the strengths that helps adolescents to avoid experiences that undermine their well-being (Gillham et al., 2011; Park & Peterson, 2006).

In summary, the results suggest that LS among adolescents in Ecuador is not related to age or socioeconomic status, whereas gender and family context are both relevant variables, insofar as boys and adolescents who lived in intact families reported higher LS. In addition, LS was positively related to the character strengths of hope, zest, love, and prudence. In other words, adolescents who report higher LS also tend to expect the best from the future, to approach life with energy and enthusiasm, to be more capable of maintaining close relationships with others, and to be more careful in their personal choices. This is the first study to analyze LS in a large sample of adolescents in Ecuador, including participants from across the age range of this developmental period and gathering information about socioeconomic status through a standardized and structured instrument

completed by the adolescents' parents or legal guardians. It is also the first study involving Latin American adolescents to analyze the role of character strengths in predicting LS. Notwithstanding these strengths, the study has a number of limitations that need to be considered. The first concerns the cross-sectional design, in which the association between variables was studied at a specific point in time. Second, the participants were all from the city of Quito, and hence the findings may not be generalizable to other regions or countries. Finally, the instruments used were all self-report measures, with the inherent possibility of bias. The task for future research is therefore to gather and analyze longitudinal data, including samples from other Latin American countries so as to add to knowledge about the correlates of LS and their development during the lifespan.

To conclude, this study extends knowledge about LS among adolescents in Latin America, identifying some key character strengths related to well-being that may play a protective role against difficulties during this developmental period. The results confirm the importance of hope, zest, and love in relation to LS, and in a different cultural context to that of existing studies in this field. In addition, our analysis suggests that the strength of prudence also plays a relevant role in the LS of Ecuadorian adolescents. These results provide a framework for the design of positive psychology intervention programs aimed at promoting young people's well-being. More specifically, the findings suggest that these interventions should focus on character strengths and include activities aimed at helping adolescents to expect good things in the future, to focus on achieving goals, to approach life with energy and enthusiasm, to seek and maintain close relationships with others, and to exercise prudence in all aspects of personal decision-making. This reflects the view of other authors who have highlighted the important role that character strengths-based interventions may play in promoting positive and healthy development among children and adolescents (Lavy, 2020; Grinhauz & Castro, 2014; Hellman & Gwinn, 2017). In Ecuador, the context for the present study, current legislation designed to protect the rights of children and adolescents aims to promote their survival, development, and participation in society (Reyes, 2017). In this respect, our findings suggest that public policy makers in Ecuador should seek to design programs that promote the aforementioned character strengths, both in school and within the family, thus helping to provide a good and stable environment for young people's development.

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Declarations

Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Ethics Approval The procedure was carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by Ministry of Education in Ecuador as well as by the principals of schools, who supervised all ethical aspects. The procedure was also approved by the Experimentation Ethics Committee of the University of Malaga.

Consent to Participate The participants signed an informed consent for participate in the study.

Consent for Publication The participants were informed about the research purpose and signed the informed consent.

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