Perceived Social Support and Perceived Self-Efficacy during Adolescence

Carmen Adler-Constantinescu\textsuperscript{a}, Elena-Cristina Beşu\textsuperscript{b*}, Valeria Negovan\textsuperscript{c}

\textsuperscript{a}Faculty of Psychology, University Titu Maiorescu, Bucharest, Romania,  
\textsuperscript{b}Association for Continuous Education, Training and Professional Development, Bucharest, Romania, 
\textsuperscript{c}Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, Romania.

Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support during adolescence. 240 teenagers, 40 boys and 200 girls, aged 15 to 20 (M=17.46, SD=1.94), participated in the research. The statistical analysis has identified statistically significant positive relations as well as significant differences between the teenagers’ perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support at the beginning of adolescence, as opposed to the end of this period. The results of the study can be used in school or family counseling, as well as in the configuration of some optimization programs of the pupil/student-teacher, pupil/student-parents relationship.

Keywords: Perceived self-efficacy; perceived social support, adolescence.

1. Introduction

Adolescence, the age of rebirth (Rousseau, 1973), between 14 and 20 years old (Creţu, 2009, pp. 270), represents an essential moment in the human psychic development. In order to cope with the multiple changes and transformations characteristic to this stage (of which: the relentless pursuit of self-identity, the development of a coherent self-image, attaining independence and autonomy, the ravage and the rearrangement of the personality structure) (Creţu, 2001), teenagers must be confident in their competence and their ability to deal with new tasks, confidence which determine them to assume life’s challenges, to avoid difficulties, to set exciting life goals, to get deeply involved and to fully engage in activity, to re-edify their internal forces quickly after failures and to reduce stress and vulnerability (Negovan, 2010).

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +40-72-4208950  
E-mail address: cristina.besu@yahoo.com
Perceived self-efficacy represents an “acquisition” of the personality, which influences the person in all the fields of activity (Negovan, 2006, pp. 34). A. Bandura (1994) defines the perceived self-efficacy, as the person’s belief regarding his/her own capacity to perform at a certain expected level, belief that influences the way in which the person relates to the events affecting his/her life, the way in which the person feels, thinks, motivates himself/herself and behaves.

The research is based on the idea sustained by specialized literature that the development and the consolidation of perceived self-efficacy are accomplished in relation to perceived social support (Schunk and Meece, 2005). During adolescence, some changes, regarding the need for social support, occur. Teenagers spend most of their time at school, in their teachers and their classmates’ company (Eccles and Roeser, 2003), which explains the increasing need for social support in this area.

Perceived social support is a different construct from the offered or received social support. This difference is even more important during adolescence, the period in which serious discrepancies can appear between what he/she is being offered/receives and what the teenager thinks he/she receives.

One of the most known models of perceived social support is the multidimensional one: the social support offered by family, the social support offered by friends, the social support offered by “significant other(s)” (teachers, classmates) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley, 1988, pp. 30).

The main objective of this study consists of exploring the relation between perceived social support (with all its three dimensions) and perceived self-efficacy during adolescence. The following formulated hypotheses are subordinated to this objective: 1) at the beginning of adolescence, perceived self-efficacy correlates with teenagers’ perception of social support from significant others and from family, while, at the end of this period, perceived self-efficacy correlates with the teenagers’ perception of social support from significant others and from friends; 2) teenagers’ school experience and the three dimensions of the perceived social support predict perceived self-efficacy; 3) there are significant differences regarding the teenagers’ perception of social support (with all its three dimensions) and their perceived self-efficacy at the beginning of adolescence, as opposed to the end of this period.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants included in this study were 240 teenagers, 40 boys and 200 girls, aged 15-20 (M=17.46, SD=1.94): 120 pupils in the first year of high school (9th grade) and 120 students in the first university year.

2.2. Instruments

The study is based on the data collected through two self-evaluating scales: 1. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988), composed of 12 items (e.g. “Every time I’ve needed it, I’ve always found a certain person to be there for me.”); 2. Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995), composed of 10 items (e.g. “If I insist, I succeed in solving my difficult problems.”). For each measure, items were averaged so that scores ranged from 1 (indicating the lowest level) to 5 (indicating the highest level). The scales showed a good internal consistency (table 1).

2.3. Procedure

The instruments were applied to high school students in their classroom, in the presence of an operator involved in the research and a teacher. The students’ consent to participate in the research was active, while their legal guardians’ one was passive. University students were asked to fill in the questionnaires outside of classes’
time within a 3 day time period. The purpose of the questionnaires was explained and the filled questionnaires were handed directly to the researcher.

2.4. Data Analysis Procedures

The descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for all variables. The differential, correlational and regression analyses were used in order to test the research hypotheses.

3. Results

As it can be noticed in table 1, the mean of the scores regarding perceived social support from family is the highest, while the mean of the scores regarding perceived social support from friends is the lowest. Perceived self-efficacy is close to value 4 ("to a great extent"), which means a good perception of self-efficacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>Alpha reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived self-efficacy</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.641</td>
<td>-.319</td>
<td>.391</td>
<td>.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived significant others support</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.803</td>
<td>-.927</td>
<td>.883</td>
<td>.734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived family support</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>-1.223</td>
<td>1.378</td>
<td>.846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived friends support</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.846</td>
<td>-.686</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.713</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1. The relations between the teenagers’ perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support at the beginning of adolescence in comparison with the end of this period.

The correlational analysis of the collected data shows that there are statistically significant positive relations between the perceived self-efficacy scores and the perceived social support scores (with all its three dimensions) (r between .221-.239, with p<0.01) in the entire study sample. When the sample is separated according to the school experience criterion, which corresponds to the beginning and the end of adolescence, perceived self-efficacy correlates with perceived social support from family (r = .234, with p = .01) and from significant others (r = .279, with p = .002) in the case of high-school students. As far as university students are concerned, perceived self-efficacy correlates with the perceived social support from friends (r = .25, with p = .006) and from significant others (r = .236, with p = .009). Although the coefficients have a moderate significance (size of the effect, r²= between .054 - .077), they indicate the direction of the relation between the variables.

3.2. Determinants of teenagers’ self-efficacy.

In order to identify the effects of school experience and perceived social support on teenagers’ self-efficacy, a regression analysis has been conducted, with perceived self-efficacy as dependent variable and school experience, gender and the three dimensions of the perceived social support as independent variables. The regression equation was significant (R² = .126, F (5,234) = 6,739, p<0.01).

Out of the five independent variables, school experience (B = .217, β = .169, t(238) = 2.57, p = .011) and perceived social support from significant others (B = .149, β = .186, t(238) = 2.676, p = .008) predict the teenagers’ perceived self-efficacy.
3.3. Differences regarding the teenagers’ perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support between the beginning of adolescence and the end of this period

The comparisons of the mean scores expressing the teenagers’ perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support at the beginning of adolescence (first year of high school) and at the end of adolescence (first year of university studies) were accomplished through the Independent-Samples T Test. There were significant differences between high-school students and university students regarding perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support from family and from friends. Thus, university students (M=4.02, SD=.638) are more confident than high school students are (M=3.77, SD=.622) (t =-3.11, df=238, p=.002, 95% confidence interval of the difference: lower -.41 and upper -.09). As far as the perceived social support is concerned, university students (M = 4.33, SD = .679; M = 3.98, SD = .815) perceive more intensely the social support from family (t = -3.92, df = 238, p<.01, 95% confidence interval of the difference: lower -.58 and upper -.19) and from friends (t = -3.20, df = 238, p = .002, 95% confidence interval of the difference: lower -.55 and upper -.13) than high school students do (M=3.95, SD=.826; M = 3.63, SD = .845). However, university students do no report statistically significant higher levels of perceived support from significant others, in comparison with high school students.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The present study had the objective to explore the relation between the perceived social support (with all its three dimensions) and perceived self-efficacy during adolescence. The presented data confirm the hypotheses of the research and they allow us to think that the objective has been achieved. Thus, perceived self-efficacy is positively associated with the teenagers’ perceived social support. The results sustain the hypothesis that perceived self-efficacy correlates with the teenagers’ perception of social support from significant others and from family at the beginning of adolescence, while, at the end of this period, perceived self-efficacy correlates with the teenagers’ perception of social support from significant others and from friends. The regression analysis emphasized the fact that school experience and perceived social support from significant others predicted the teenagers’ perceived self-efficacy. These results are in concordance with those presented in specialized literature (Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald and Aherne, 2012; Mercer, Nellis, Martinez and Kirk, 2011; Surjadi, Lorenz, Wickrama and Conger, 2011).

The differential analysis partially confirmed the expected differences: university students have more self-confidence than high school students do and they perceive more intensely the social support from family and from friends. However, students do not report statistically significant higher levels of perceived social support from significant others compared to high school students, which can be explained by the fact that both the 9th grade and the first year of university represent a transition level. These results are also concordant to previous research results (Surjadi et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, the results obtained must be regarded with caution due to some limits of the research. Some of these limits are the ones determined by the use of self-evaluating scales. The data reported by the subjects can be affected by their own capacity of self-knowledge and self-expression.

Beyond these limits, the results obtained contribute to the knowledge of the teenagers’ personality and of the factors that maintain the optimal functioning. They lead to the understanding of teenagers’ needs for social support. The information provided by this study can be used in school and family counseling, as well as in the configuration of some optimization programs of the pupil/student-teacher, pupil/student-parents relationship.

It may be concluded that the results of the research outline new objectives for future in-depth approaches of this relation, by confirming the assumptions regarding the complex relation between the teenagers’ perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support.
References


