



Research Article

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Social Support and General Self-Efficacy: Predictors of Subjective Discomfort in Ecuadorian Teachers

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Abstract

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has generated new challenges for regular basic education teachers, who, day by day, interact with students and constitute a significant part of the student's development. These new circumstances have affected teachers, raising their stress levels and affecting their skills. In this context, this study aims to determine the influence of social support and general self-efficacy on subjective discomfort in Ecuadorian regular basic education teachers. The methodology used was based on the predictive design in which 311 teachers participated, 230 women and 81 men. The selected instruments were the Duke-UNK-11 Functional Social Support Questionnaire, the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GAS) and the Kessler Subjective Discomfort Scale-10. The results showed that the Social support variable significantly influences subjective discomfort, showing that teachers who have high levels of social support show lower levels of subjective discomfort. It is concluded that social support is a predictor of subjective discomfort in Ecuadorian teachers of basic education.

Keywords: Social Support, General Self-Efficacy, Predictors of Subjective, Ecuadorian Teachers

1. Introduction

Due to the health emergency generated by SARS-CoV-2, companies had to reinvent themselves and adapt to a new way of life, which was experienced by educational institutions in Latin America.

(Abreu-Hernández et al., 2020) The national health and education agencies decreed that the development of classes should take place in a non-classroom setting, in order to reduce the risk of contagion of COVID-19. (Brunotto, 2020).

For their part, regular basic education teachers faced the demands imposed by the government and global reality, clearly showing their limitations for the development of classes, due to the lack of training and little access to virtual environments, as well as the lack of social support for teachers. (Diario Gestión, 2020) In addition, there was little social support for teachers.

This situation has generated that teachers present illnesses, being affected their mental health (Dos Santos et al., 2020), whose discomfort is subjective in teachers. Likewise, social support is understood in terms of the evaluation that a person makes about his or her social network and the opportunities provided by it (Espinoza & Barra, 2018) without neglecting the variety of resources that people perceive as determinants of their social environment. (Topa et al., 2008). General self-efficacy is based on Social Cognitive Theory, in which people can influence their actions, thoughts and feelings. Self-efficacy considers the beliefs of individuals in dominant and specific capacities for a particular situation (Çelik & Kahraman, 2018). On the other hand, subjective discomfort is a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of anxiety and depression (Arvidsdotter et al., 2016). The concept of subjective distress is based on the theory of Kessler and Mroczek (1994), in which psychological distress and subjective distress are equivalent terms, as shown by previous studies (Larzabal, et al., 2020).

Different works have been developed; for example, Novoa y Barra (2015) analyzed the influence of social support on life satisfaction in Chilean university students, finding a significant relationship between both variables. Espinoza y Barra (2018) analyzed whether self-efficacy and social support influenced psychological well-being, finding that self-efficacy had a greater relationship with psychological well-being than social support in asthmatic university students. Çelik y Kahraman (2018) analyzed the relationship between self-efficacy and life satisfaction, finding that general perceptions of self-efficacy had a negative effect on job burnout in elementary school teachers and a positive effect on life satisfaction. Wong et al. (2020) developed a study finding negative associations for subjective distress with anxiety stress and depression among Chinese university students.

According to what has been described, it is important to conduct research in the educational universe, especially in regular basic education teachers, who interact with students on a daily basis and are part of the learner's development. Likewise, the results obtained allow the scientific and educational community to know the behavior of the variables proposed in regular basic education teachers in Ecuador. It allows to deepen the knowledge proposed by Deci y Ryan, (2000) The results obtained also allow the scientific and educational community to learn about the behavior of the variables proposed in teachers of regular elementary education in Ecuador. (Bandura, 1978) It is important to test a theoretical model in which subjective distress is explained by the role of social support and general self-efficacy. Finally, it favors the decision making of the promoter and educational leaders, so that means and resources are implemented to motivate and empower the educational career of teachers.

Cohen y Wills (1985) were the precursors in analyzing the subject of social support through a thematic review, there they found that social support responds to needs, provoked by stressful events and affect well-being, according to the theory of processes and social support. There are several studies that were developed; however, there are several studies in the line of health; for example, Sharts-Hopko, Regan-Kubinski, Lincoln y Heverly (1996) analyzed studies on self-efficacy, social support and subjective distress in HIV-infected mothers; they found that the experience of infected mothers can be analyzed in a stress framework and the variables are related, highlighting the level of resource: social support, in the condition of positive coping. Comijs, Penninx, Knipscheer y van Tilbur (1999) analyzed subjective distress in victims of maltreatment, also whether social support and self-efficacy positively influenced their psychological health. They found that social support was favorable on subjective distress, stimulating the development of intervention programs. Chan (2002) developed a study on Chinese elementary school teachers to analyze the role of self-efficacy, social

support and subjective distress in teachers with stress levels, finding that social support moderated the influence of stress and showing that self-efficacy is a protective factor against subjective distress. Mallinckrodt y Wei (2005) In a survey of 430 undergraduate university students, expecting self-efficacy to mediate anxiety, they found that self-efficacy and social support do indeed have a negative influence on subjective distress. Different studies on the same variables were carried out in adolescents (Rosenthal & Wilson, 2008) in university students (Verger et al., 2009) in older adults (Nemeroff et al., 2010) and in groups of African Americans and white Americans (Morin & Midlarsky, 2016). All these studies emphasize the influence of Social Support between Anxiety and Subjective Discomfort, demonstrating that to reduce anxiety it is necessary to enhance social support mechanisms (Kagan, 2020).

Recent studies show the role of social support, self-efficacy and their effect on subjective distress, highlighting the role of family support, friendships and their negative association with depression, stress, and subjective distress (Khalid & Dawood, 2020) The study of Sintos (2020) was conducted in people with hearing difficulties, finding that social support and self-efficacy do not act as moderators. Finally, Lerman Ginzburg, Lemon, Romo y Rosal (2021) found high levels of subjective distress in the U.S. Latino population; however, social support contributed to the decreased likelihood of subjective distress symptoms, depressive symptoms, and stress.

At the level of the investigations given in Ecuador, no studies have been reported on these variables related to the predictive model. Therefore, this represents a knowledge gap, which is why it is necessary to develop studies on the influence of Social Support and Self-efficacy as predictors of subjective discomfort in Ecuadorian teachers.

Therefore, the objective of the present study is to determine whether social support and general self-efficacy predict subjective distress in Ecuadorian teachers.

2. Methodology

2.1 Methodological design

The present research follows the guidelines of a quantitative, cross-sectional predictive design approach (Ato, López & Benavente, 2013).

2.2 Sample design

A non-probabilistic, intentional sampling was used (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 2015), achieving the voluntary participation of 311 Ecuadorian teachers of regular basic education, in which 230 are women representing and 81 men, whose ages are in the range of 23 and 65 years.

2.3 Data collection techniques

To collect the information, a virtual questionnaire was designed using *Google Forms*. The link was then shared through social networks (Facebook and WhatsApp) and e-mails of Ecuadorian basic education teachers. The first section of the link presented the instructions, the objective of the study and requested informed consent, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The Duke-UNK-11 Functional Social Support questionnaire, validated by Aguilar-Sizer, Lima-Castro and Arias (2021) in Ecuadorian population, was used to collect the information. It is composed of 10 items with five Likert-type response options (never, almost never, sometimes, almost always and always). It also proves to be valid (CFI= .99; TLI= .98; RMSEA= .050) and reliable ($\alpha = .70$).

Thus, the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GAS), validated by Moreta-Herrera, et al., was also used. (2019) in Ecuadorian population. It is organized by 10 items with Likert-type response options ranging from: 1 = never to 5 = always. On the other hand, the EAG has been shown to be valid (NFI= .93; CFI= .96; SRMR= .04; RMSEA= .06) and reliable, $\alpha = .80$. (Figuroa, Flores & Vivas, 2021).

Likewise, the Kessler-10 subjective discomfort scale has been validated by Larzabal-Fernández, et al. (2020) for the Ecuadorian population. It is made up of 10 items with five Likert-type response options (never, almost never, sometimes, almost always and always). The scale has been reported to be valid (CFI= .993; TLI= .991; RMSEA= .044) and reliable, $\alpha = .70$ (Figueroa, Flores & Vivas, 2021).

2.4 Statistical techniques for data processing

The information obtained through *Google Forms* was exported to the statistical program IBM SPSS, for Windows version 26.0, in order to analyze and respond to the study objectives using descriptive and inferential statistics, after analyzing the distribution of the data.

2.5 Ethical aspects

This research was submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Universidad Peruana Unión (Resolution 2021-CE-EPG-000010), in addition, the acceptance of informed consent and voluntary participation of teachers was considered.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive analysis

3.1.1 Sociodemographic Data

Table 1 shows that 74% Ecuadorian basic education teachers are women and 26% are men; 50.8% are between 23 and 42 years of age and 52.1% teach at the general education level.

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants

Features		n	%
Sex	Female	230	74,0
	Male		26,0
Age	23 - 42 years old		50,8
	43 - 65 years		49,2
Level of education	Unified General Baccalaureate		33,8
	Basic general education	162	52,1
	Initial		6,1
	High School		8,0

3.2 Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the mean, standard deviation, asymmetry, and kurtosis, for the variables, Social Support, General Self-Efficacy and Subjective Discomfort; likewise, the coefficients of asymmetry and kurtosis are within the range ± 2 .

Table 2: Descriptive analyses of social support, general self-efficacy and subjective distress.

Variable	M	DS	A	K
Social support	38,49	9,264	-,482	-,038
Self-efficacy	43,46	6,573	-,644	1,444
Subjective discomfort	21,14	5,887	1,089	2,000

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation, A = Skewness coefficient, K = Kurtosis coefficient.

3.3 Correlation analysis

Table 3 shows the Pearson correlations between social support, general self-efficacy and subjective distress. The results show that there is a statistically significant direct correlation between social support and general self-efficacy ($r = .436, p < .01$); that is, the higher the social support, the higher the self-efficacy. Likewise, it was found that social support is inversely and statistically significantly related to subjective distress ($r = -.287, p < .01$), so the lower the social support, the higher the subjective distress.

Table 3: Correlation coefficients between social support, general self-efficacy and subjective distress.

	Social support	Self-efficacy	Subjective discomfort
Social support	1		
Self-efficacy	.436**	1	
Subjective discomfort	-.287**	-.085	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

3.4 Predictive analytics

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine which variables best predict subjective distress; the multiple correlation coefficients R, R₂, corrected R₂, standard error of the estimate (SE) and the F value of ANOVA (Table 4) were used.

It can be seen that the coefficient of determination R₂ = .084 indicates that social support and self-efficacy explain 8.4% of the total variance of subjective discomfort. The corrected R₂ explains 7.8%. The F value of ANOVA (F = 14.145, p = .000) report that there is a significant linear relationship between the predictor variables Social Support and Self-efficacy on Subjective Discomfort.

Table 4: Multiple correlation coefficients R, R₂, corrected R₂, EE, F.

Model	R	R ₂	R ₂ corrected	EE	F	Sig
1	.290	.084	.078	5,652	14,145	0,000

a. Predictor variables: (Constant), Social support and general self-efficacy.

b. Dependent variable: Subjective distress

Table 5 shows that the coefficient β (-,308) reveals that social support (predictor variable) significantly predicts subjective distress (criterion variable). The t-value of the beta regression coefficients of the predictor variable is highly significant ($p < 0.01$).

Table 5: Multiple regression coefficients B (unstandardized), β (standardized) and t-test.

Model	B	EE	β	t	Sig
1(Constant)	26,744	2,194		12,190	,000
Social support	-,196	,038	-,308	-5,087	,000
Self-efficacy	,044	,054	-,050	,820	,413

a. Dependent variable: Subjective distress

4. Discussion

The level of anguish and stress of basic education teachers is increasing (Stapleton et al., 2020); since the early 2000s, it has been recognized as a widespread problem that deserves investigation (Chan, 2002). In this sense, the objective of this research was to determine the influence of Social Support

and General Self-Efficacy on Subjective Discomfort in Ecuadorian basic education teachers.

The results of this research confirm that there is a relationship between social support, general self-efficacy and subjective distress. This result is coherent with that reported by Khalid y Dawood (2020) et al, who showed that social support had negative relationships with subjective distress. These findings are consistent with previous research, which indicated that social support is an important source for reducing psychological distress. (Espinoza & Barra, 2018; Kagan, 2020). On the other hand, the findings of this research confirm that social support is inversely and statistically significantly related to subjective distress. This result is in harmony with Morin y Midlarsky (2016) who found similar results in older adults; it is also in agreement with the study of Bolaños Ceballos y De Keijzer (2020) who reported the same coefficients in males. The results suggest that people who show higher levels of social support show lower levels of Subjective Discomfort, in agreement with previous studies (Leigh et al., 2021) and in different cultural contexts, according to which, similarly, the Social support has a direct and indirect effect on subjective distress (Verger et al., 2009). Various studies emphasize the importance of Social Support, constituted as a means of response to the stressors of life (Nemeroff et al., 2010).

On the other hand, the self-efficacy variable shows a negative relationship with subjective discomfort, in agreement and similarity with Bandura's theory (1978), where people with low levels of Self-efficacy could be led to believe that the aspects are more difficult than expected. they really are, and thus raise the level of stress and depression. Likewise, these results are different from those reported by Chan (2002) who stated that there was no evidence that self-efficacy interacted with distress directly, as does social support, which was more determinant for psychological distress.

The results also indicate that social support significantly predicts subjective distress. Our study confirms that realized social support for an individual is given by other people; e.g., family members, friends, co-workers, relatives, and neighbors (Thoits, 1985). This socioemotional support generally refers to affirmations or demonstrations of love, affection, esteem, value, empathy, sympathy and/or group membership. In addition, studies emphasize that an individual's family context plays an important role in his or her ability to regulate his or her emotions. (Gross, 2014). thus, social support significantly predicts psychological distress. (Gökdağ, 2021). Similar studies show that Social Support is a buffer mechanism for subjective discomfort (Bourbonnais et al., 2005).

These findings serve as the basis for research on subjective distress in basic education teachers, including the search for other factors that interact in the work environment and that can represent potential triggers of psychological distress and that are also analyzed in similar studies (Cobos-Sanchiz et al., 2020).

This study also shows some limitations, for example. Procedures for predictive analysis have been used, and it is recognized that they might be limited in confirming causal inferences (Levin, 2006). Likewise, we consider that the sample size could be more representative since only participants from denominational schools were considered. Likewise, it is likely that the participants had additional motivations to answer the questionnaire. On the other hand, being a cross-sectional study, the data were collected at a single moment. Therefore, given the reported limitations, it is recommended to replicate this study with a larger sample and considering other cultural and institutional environments, in order to broaden the generalization and understanding of the study variables. The model put to the test can also be complemented, considering the variables: age, hours of work and number of students. Further research is needed to confirm these results, particularly at other academic institutions.

Despite these limitations, this study broadened the understanding of Social Support and General Self-Efficacy as predictors of Subjective Discomfort, in a sample of 311 Ecuadorian regular basic education teachers. First, this study contributes to the literature by addressing the variables Social Support and Self-Efficacy. Second, this study found that social support negatively predicts subjective distress in Ecuadorian teachers, which based on the predictive model (Table 05) shows that, of the two variables, Social Support and Self-efficacy, it is social support, which is shown to be the strongest predictor of subjective distress, which is consistent with recent scientific literature and

provides strong support for theoretical perspectives on social support. Finally, Ecuadorian teachers who showed high levels of social support decreased levels of subjective distress.

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