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Generalized Self-Efficacy And Well-Being In Adolescents With High Vs. Low Scholastic Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

The aim of this investigation was to analyze the relationship between generalized self-efficacy and psychological well-being in highly vs. lowly efficient Italian adolescents from 14 to 18 year-olds. We used the Generalized Self-efficacy Scale and the short version of Psychological Well-Being Scales. Results showed positive relationships between GSES and PWB, especially with mastery, personal growth, and self-acceptance. For age, except for the autonomy, the highest scores of personal growth, relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance were obtained by 16yrs. adolescents, while the lowest scores were reached by 14yrs. and 18yrs. ones. Boys expressed greater GSES and PWB than girls –specifically, mastery and self-acceptance. Additionally, highly efficient adolescents expressed higher scores in PWB, especially in mastery, personal growth, and self-acceptance, than lowly efficient ones. Conclusion: educational trainings, centred on the effects of self-efficacy on psychological well-being, could be useful to empower personal resources during the adolescence.

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1. Introduction

The perceived sense of self-efficacy guides the actions of individuals and orientates their future planning. Self-efficacy is referred to a person's belief in his/her ability to organize and execute a required course of action to achieve desired goals (Bandura, 1997) and this belief affects the individual's choice of activities, effort, and persistence (Pajares, 1996; Sherer et al., 1982). As noted by Bandura (1989), individuals who possess low self-efficacy for accomplishing a specific task will tend to avoid it, while those who believe they are capable will be

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more likely to realize this task. Self-efficacy has been found to be linked with academic achievement and performance (Salami & Ogundokun, 2009) and is highly contextualized (Bandura, 1997): for this reason, it appeared necessary to study different aspects of its effects in each period of human development and psychological well-being from infancy to adulthood.

The positive psychological approach considered the well-being mainly as the *presence of wellness* rather than the *absence of illness*. Among the most well-known definitions proposed by investigators, noteworthy are those reported by Dunn (1961) as “an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which an individual is capable”, by Ryff and Keyes (1995) as “the striving for perfection that represents the realization of one’s true potential”, by Witmer and Sweeney (1998) as “a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which mind, body, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live life more fully with the human and natural community”. More recently, Bornstein, Davidson, Keyes, and Moore (2003) defined well-being as “the state of successful performance throughout the life course integrating psychical, cognitive, and socio-emotional functions that results in productive activities deemed significant by one’s cultural community, fulfilling social relationships, and the ability to transcend moderate psychosocial and environmental problems”. This construct was articulated in subjective (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB). The first type of well-being is in agreement with the hedonic perspective (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988; Diener et al., 1999) and includes the dimensions linked to physical health, positive and negative affect, and life satisfaction, while the second one is consistent with the eudaimonic perspective (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1996; Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008) and includes the dimensions of self-actualization, personal development, and relations with environment. According to the last viewpoint, psychological well-being has been considered by Ryff (1989) as a set of psychological characteristics implicated in positive human functioning (Keyes, Ryff, & Schmotkin, 2002): autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, purpose in life, positive relations with others, and personal growth. The six dimensions of PWB evoke different challenges that people encounter as they try to function positively (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Individuals attempt to feel good even when aware of their own limitations (self-acceptance), seek to develop and maintain warm and trust in interpersonal relationships (positive relations with others), try to manage their environment so as to meet personal needs and desires (environmental mastery); in addition, individuals look for a sense self-determination and personal authority (autonomy), finding meaning in one’s efforts and challenges (purpose in life); lastly, individuals tend to seek their talents and capacities (personal growth). Several studies have documented the effects of socio-demographic variables such as age and sex in the dimensions of PWB (Clarke et al., 2000; Keyes & Ryff, 1998; Marmot et al., 1998; Ryff & Singer, 1996). In detail, as reported by Ryff (1989), environmental mastery and autonomy tended to increase with age (especially from young to midlife adults), while purpose in life and personal growth decreased with age (especially from midlife to old aged adults), without age differences for self-acceptance and positive relations with others; furthermore, Ryff and Singer (1996) pointed out that women of all ages valued themselves higher on positive relations with others and personal growth. Recently, in Italian context, Sagone and De Caroli (in press) found that late adolescents showed greater personal growth and purpose in life than middle ones and boys valued themselves higher on environmental mastery and self-acceptance than girls.

Psychological well-being and self-efficacy have been shown to predict students’ scholastic performance and success. As reported by some researches, students who expressed high levels of self-efficacy and well-being were motivated to participate in relevant academic activities and to develop positive attitudes that led to success at school (Ozer & Bandura, 1990; Lyubomirsky, 2001; Khramtsova et al., 2007) and were likely to perform well in their academic goals (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Furthermore, students who perceived themselves as highly efficient in school context were likely to develop positive attitudes toward the learning of subjects. Students with high psychological well-being and life satisfaction were found to be more flexible, resilient, and efficient in problem solving and were more committed to their academic goals and pursued success rather than to be focused on avoiding of their failures (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Salami, 2010).

In line with the main assumption of the current investigation, focused on the contribution of perceived self-efficacy on psychological well-being expressed by adolescents, we carried out an explorative analysis of the reciprocal relationship between the generalized self-efficacy and the dimensions of psychological well-being in highly vs. lowly efficient adolescents in relation to their scholastic performances.

2. Methodology

Consistent with the positive effects produced by the perception of self-efficacy in different domains of human development (Bandura, 1996; Schwarzer, 1994), we hypothesized that:

- adolescents highly efficient in scholastic performance will score higher in generalized self-efficacy than lowly efficient ones (H_{1a}); furthermore, adolescents highly efficient in scholastic performance will obtain higher mean scores in psychological well-being and its dimensions than lowly efficient ones (H_{1b});
- early, middle, and late adolescents will score equally in generalized self-efficacy (H_{2a}), as previously found in Sagone and De Caroli (in press); additionally, late adolescents will obtain higher mean scores in psychological well-being and its dimensions than early and middle ones (H_{2b});
- boys and girls will score equally in generalized self-efficacy, as noted in Sagone and De Caroli (in press) (H_{3a}); additionally, boys will report higher mean scores in psychological well-being and its dimensions than girls (H_{3b}), consistently with findings emerged by another study carried out with a sample of Italian adolescents (Sagone & De Caroli, in press);
- the more the adolescents will perceive themselves as efficient, the more they will score highly in the six dimensions of psychological well-being and vice versa (H_4), with significant differences for scholastic performances, age groups, and sex.

2.1. Participants

The sample was composed by 136 Italian adolescents (64 boys and 72 girls) between 14 and 18 years of age, randomly recruited from all classes belonging to three Public Secondary Schools in Catania (East Sicily, Italy). Participants were divided in two subgroups in relation to the perceived self-efficacy in scholastic performance: $n=76$ highly efficient adolescents (36 boys and 40 girls) vs. $n=60$ lowly efficient adolescents (28 boys and 32 girls). Parental consent was obtained for the participation of adolescents to this study.

2.2. Measures and procedure

2.2.1. Generalized self-efficacy scale

The Generalized Self-efficacy Scale (GSES: Sabilia, Schwarzer, & Jerusalem, 1995) was used to assess the general sense of perceived self-efficacy in order to predict coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. This scale consisted of 10 items (e.g. “When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions”, “I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort”, “If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want”) on a 4-point Likert scale ($\alpha=.86$) ranging from 1 (corresponding to *not at all true*) to 4 intervals (corresponding to *exactly true*). Total score ranged from 10 to 40 points.

2.2.2. Psychological well-being scale

The PWB is a self-report inventory (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), used in the short form Italian version proposed by Zani and Cicognani (1999) and composed by a set of 18 items for each of which individuals had to evaluate themselves on a 6-point Likert scale, indicating their degree of agreement from 1 (equal to *strong disagreement*) to 6 (equal to *strong agreement*). The 18 items were grouped in the following six subscales (α from .63 to .76), analyzed by Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Singer (1995, 1996) in order to define the psychological construct of well-being in the eudaimonic perspective: autonomy (e.g. “I have confidence in my opinions, even if contrary to the general consensus”), environmental mastery (e.g. “In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live”), purpose in life (e.g. “Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them”), positive relations with others (e.g. “People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others”), personal growth (e.g. “I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world”), and self-acceptance (e.g. “I like most aspects of my personality”). Responses were totaled for each of the six subscales and a total PWB score was calculated by adding all items of six dimensions. Half of the responses were reverse scored.

2.3. Data analysis

Statistical analyses were realized using the SPSS 15, with the application of ANOVA, linear correlations and t-tests. Scholastic performance (highly vs. lowly efficient adolescents), age groups (early vs. middle vs. late adolescence), and sex (boys vs. girls) were considered as independent variables, while mean scores obtained in dimensions of psychological well-being and generalized self-efficacy were counted as dependent variables. In detail, we used a rating scale on 5-points by means of which each student has indicated the perceived quality of his/her outcomes at school, from the lowest (corresponding to poor) to the highest level (corresponding to excellent). Comparing the six dimensions of PWB, descriptive analyses showed that adolescents scored more highly in personal growth ($M=14,10$, $sd=2.05$), positive relations with others ($M=13,43$, $sd=2.75$), and environmental mastery ($M=12,24$, $sd=2.36$), whereas less highly in autonomy ($M=11,56$, $sd=1.87$), self-acceptance ($M=11,68$, $sd=3.29$), and purpose in life ($M=11,46$, $sd=3.18$) ($F=28,32$, $p<.001$). In relation to generalized self-efficacy, adolescents obtained a medium-high total score ($M=30,13$, $sd=4.34$).

3. Results

3.1. Generalized self-efficacy: differences for scholastic performances, age, and sex

We predicted that adolescents highly efficient in scholastic performances would obtain higher mean scores in GSES than lowly efficient ones (H_{1a}): on the contrary, results showed no significant differences for scholastic performances between the two groups. In relation to age differences, we predicted that early, middle, and late adolescents would score equally in GSES (H_{2a}): significant age groups differences were not found. As regards sex differences, we predicted that boys and girls would score equally in generalized self-efficacy, as noted in Sagone and De Caroli (H_{3a}): on the contrary, statistical analysis revealed that boys expressed a greater GSES ($t_{(134)}=2,40$, $p=.018$) than girls ($M_{boys}=31,06$, $sd=4,1$; $M_{girls}=29,31$, $sd=4,4$).

3.2. Psychological well-being: differences for scholastic performances, age, and sex

We predicted that adolescents highly efficient in scholastic performances would obtain higher mean scores in psychological well-being and its dimensions than lowly efficient ones (H_{1b}). Statistical analysis showed that the adolescents who perceived themselves as highly efficient in scholastic performances expressed higher mean scores in PWB ($t_{(134)}=-2,69$, $p=.008$) and, particularly, in environmental mastery ($t_{(134)}=-3,02$, $p=.003$), personal growth ($t_{(134)}=-2,97$, $p=.004$) and, marginally, in self-acceptance ($t_{(134)}=-1,94$, $p=.05$) than the adolescents who felt as lowly efficient in scholastic performances (Table 1).

In relation to the effect of age, we predicted that late adolescents would obtain higher mean scores in PWB and its dimensions than early and middle ones (H_{2b}). Except for the autonomy ($F_{(2,133)}=4,97$, $p=.008$), as shown in Table 2, statistical analysis showed that the highest mean scores of personal growth ($F_{(2,133)}=3,20$, $p=.044$), positive relations with others ($F_{(2,133)}=4,80$, $p=.010$), purpose in life ($F_{(2,133)}=3,39$, $p=.037$), and self-acceptance ($F_{(2,133)}=7,09$, $p=.001$) were obtained by 16yrs. adolescents, while the lowest mean scores were reached by 14yrs. and 18yrs. adolescents; on the contrary, the highest mean scores of autonomy were obtained mainly by 18yrs. adolescents.

Table 1: Mean scores on dimensions of PWB: differences for scholastic performance

Dimensions of psychological well-being	Scholastic performance	Mean scores	Std. Dev.
Autonomy	Lowly efficient	11,63	1,53
	Highly efficient	11,50	2,09
Environmental mastery*	Lowly efficient	11,57	2,25
	Highly efficient	12,76	2,33
Personal growth*	Lowly efficient	13,53	1,89
	Highly efficient	14,55	2,06
Relations with others	Lowly efficient	13,43	2,46

	Highly efficient	13,42	2,97
Purpose in life	Lowly efficient	11,03	2,88
	Highly efficient	11,79	3,38
Self-acceptance*	Lowly efficient	11,07	3,34
	Highly efficient	12,16	3,18

Table 2: Mean scores on dimensions of PWB: differences for age groups

Dimensions of psychological well-being	Age groups	Mean scores	Std. Dev.
Autonomy*	Early	11,00	1,92
	Middle	11,56	1,29
	Late	12,11	1,95
Environmental mastery	Early	12,15	2,67
	Middle	12,31	1,96
	Late	12,27	2,30
Personal growth*	Early	13,96	2,16
	Middle	14,88	1,72
	Late	13,77	2,03
Relations with others*	Early	13,61	2,58
	Middle	14,44	2,35
	Late	12,61	2,93
Purpose in life*	Early	10,65	2,91
	Middle	12,44	3,23
	Late	11,65	3,26
Self-acceptance*	Early	11,00	3,99
	Middle	13,50	1,97
	Late	11,23	2,75

Considering the effect of sex, we predicted that boys would report higher mean scores in PWB and its dimensions than girls (H_{3b}). Statistical analysis showed that boys obtained higher mean scores in PWB ($t_{(134)}=3,06, p=.003$) and, specifically, in environmental mastery ($t_{(134)}=3,56, p=.001$) and self-acceptance ($t_{(134)}=3,64, p<.001$) than girls (Table 3).

Table 3: Mean scores on dimensions of PWB: differences for sex

Dimensions of psychological well-being	Sex	Mean scores	Std. Dev.
Autonomy	Boys	11,37	1,79
	Girls	11,72	1,91
Environmental mastery*	Boys	12,97	2,16
	Girls	11,58	2,35
Personal growth	Boys	13,97	1,79
	Girls	14,22	2,25
Relations with others	Boys	13,87	2,48
	Girls	13,03	2,93
Purpose in life	Boys	11,84	3,07
	Girls	11,11	3,26
Self-acceptance*	Boys	12,72	2,68
	Girls	10,75	3,51

3.3. Correlations between GSES and PWB

For the last hypothesis (H₄), we predicted that the more the adolescents would perceive themselves as efficient,

the more they would score highly in the six dimensions of psychological well-being. Results partially confirmed the positive relationship between GSES and PWB ($r_{(136)}=.38, p<.001$) and, especially, with environmental mastery ($r_{(136)}=.42, p<.001$), personal growth ($r_{(136)}=.29, p=.001$), and self-acceptance ($r_{(136)}=.27, p=.001$).

Consistently with differences for scholastic performances of adolescents (Table 4), the more the lowly efficient adolescents felt as efficacious in their daily life, the more they reached high scores in environmental mastery, personal growth, and self-acceptance; furthermore, the more the highly efficient adolescents felt as efficacious in their daily life, the more they reached high scores in the dimensions of autonomy and environmental mastery.

Table 4: Correlations between GSES and dimensions of PWB: differences for scholastic performance

	Scholastic performance	Autonomy	Environmental mastery	Personal growth	Relations with others	Purpose in life	Self-acceptance
GSES	Lowly efficient	-,09	,42 (**)	,50 (**)	,11	,23	,33(*)
	Highly efficient	,35 (**)	,42 (**)	,03	,19	-,14	,18

Levels of significance * for $p<.05$ and ** $p<.01$

In relation to the age groups (Table 5), the more the early adolescents perceived themselves as successful in daily life, the more they scored highly in environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance; additionally, the more the middle adolescents felt as efficacious in daily life, the more they reached high scores in the dimensions of autonomy and purpose in life; finally, the more the late adolescents valued themselves as efficacious in daily circumstances, the more they obtained high scores in environmental mastery.

Table 5: Correlations between GSES and dimensions of PWB: differences for age groups

	Age groups	Autonomy	Environmental mastery	Personal growth	Relations with others	Purpose in life	Self-acceptance
GSES	Early	-,09	,53 (**)	,78 (**)	,42 (**)	,16	,57 (**)
	Middle	,38 (*)	,24	-,26	,01	,35 (*)	-,26
	Late	,23	,38 (**)	,01	-,03	-,19	,06

Levels of significance * for $p<.05$ and ** $p<.01$

As regards sex differences (Table 6), the more the boys attributed to themselves a generalized self-efficacy, the more they scored highly in environmental mastery and self-acceptance; additionally, the more the girls considered themselves as efficacious in daily life, the more they reached high scores in environmental mastery and personal growth.

Table 6: Correlations between GSES and dimensions of PWB: differences for sex

	Sex	Autonomy	Environmental mastery	Personal growth	Relations with others	Purpose in life	Self-acceptance
GSES	Boys	,20	,42 (**)	,17	,10	-,13	,29 (*)
	Girls	,11	,36 (**)	,40 (**)	,12	,17	,18

Levels of significance * for $p<.05$ and ** $p<.01$

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the reciprocal relationship between perceived self-efficacy and psychological well-being during adolescence. About the results concerning the generalized self-efficacy expressed by adolescents who perceived themselves as highly efficient in scholastic performance, we found that H_{1a} was not confirmed; furthermore, results indicated a confirmation of H_{2a} in sense that early, middle, and late adolescents

showed a comparable sense of generalized self-efficacy; finally, H_{3a} was not confirmed.

Findings of this study underlined that: as regards H_{1b}, highly efficient adolescents were more likely to be able to manage their social context and to develop a sense of personal improvement in various aspects of self and a positive self-image than lowly efficient ones; in relation to H_{2b}, middle adolescents were more likely to realize their own potentialities, underlining the importance of new challenges, more able to express strong feelings in interpersonal relationships and to consider self-image as a positive outcome of personal growth, than early and late adolescents; furthermore, late adolescents were more able to resist to social pressures and standards, acting mainly in independent way, than early and middle ones and this last datum confirmed the initial hypothesis; finally, as indicated in H_{3b}, results revealed a partial confirmation in the sense that boys were more likely than girls to manage their environment and accept their own good and bad qualities.

The main hypothesis of this study concerned the relationship between generalized self-efficacy and psychological well-being (H₄): results showed that the more the adolescents perceived themselves as highly efficient in coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of life events, the more they experienced a sense of mastery and competence in managing their environment, considered themselves as open to new experiences and with a sense of realizing their own potential, and were able to accept multiple and different aspects of self-image.

The complexity of these findings, not always overlapping with those emerged from other studies both in Italian context and in other countries, will need the deepening of the possible mediating role of other psychological variables, such as personality traits and family educational styles, in the explanation of differences for sex and age occurred in the relationship between self-efficacy and well-being.

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