Assessing positive emotional memories with peers: The Early Memories of Warmth and Safeness with Peers Scale for adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Research on the association between early positive relational experiences and later psychosocial adjustment is growing. The quality of peer relationships may have a particularly important effect on adolescents’ wellbeing and mental health. The current study aimed at examining a measure of personal emotional memories of peer relationships characterized by warmth, safeness and affection, which occurred in childhood and adolescence (EMWSSPeers-A).

Distinct samples (N = 584) of adolescents aged between 12 and 18 were used to assess the EMWSSPeers-A factorial structure through a Principal Component Analysis and a Confirmatory Factor Analysis, and to analyse the scale’s psychometric properties. Results indicated a one-dimensional structure with 12 items with very good internal consistency, and construct, convergent, divergent and incremental validities.

By allowing the examination of the role played by memories of positive peer relationships on adolescents’ psychological adjustment, the EMWSSPeers-A may be potentially useful for future model testing and for the assessment of interventions. © 2016 The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The quality of early childhood experiences has been shown to have a significant impact on later physiological, psychological and social development and functioning (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Buss, 2003; Gerhardt, 2004; Panksepp, 2010; Schore, 1994). In particular, early adverse experiences, i.e., of neglect, abuse or rejection, have been associated with a series of indicators of psychosocial maladjustment (Bifulco & Moran, 1998; Irons, Gilbert, Baldwin, Baccus, & Palmer, 2006; Gilbert and Perris, 2000; Rohner, 2004). On the contrary, early relationships and social experiences related to feelings of safeness, warmth and nurturance are associated with increased self-esteem, happiness, quality of life, and with decreased vulnerability to psychopathology (Berscheid, 1985; Bifulco & Moran, 1998; Cacioppo et al., 2000; Gilbert & Irons, 2000).

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2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants in this study comprised distinct convenience samples collected in public schools of the centre region of Portugal.

The factorial structure of the scale and its psychometric properties were initially examined in a total of 230 adolescents (121 females and 109 males) at a public secondary school in an urban area of the district of Coimbra, placed in the centre of Portugal.
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