

PSYCHOLOGICAL LIFESTYLE: AN APPROACH FROM THE SCHOOL CONTEXT IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Introduction: The educational context presents human experiences and interactions that shape a lifestyle influenced by the environment where children and adolescents are developing, which can affect their emotional development and psychological well-being.

Objective: To identify the psychological lifestyle of students belonging to the Association of Jesuit Schools of Colombia – ACODESI.

Theoretical Framework: Lifestyles, from a psychological perspective, are related to emotional development, fostering positive interactions in human relationships and community living. In this sense, thoughts, emotions, and human behavior serve as indicators of well-being and the ability to face life's challenges and difficulties at an individual or group level within the educational context. Therefore, the literature identifies five categories corresponding to psychological lifestyles in the educational context: a) Stress Management (SM), a relational process between the individual and their environment; b) Time Perception (TP), allows understanding and making sense of reality, in terms of temporally situated stimuli; c) Social Relationships (SR), process through which a person incorporates beliefs, values, customs, attitudes, and behavior patterns; d) Mental Health (MH), a social construct that can vary from one context to another, depending on the health criteria, illness, normality, and abnormality established within each social group; e) Sleep Quality (SQ), sleep promotes learning and problem-solving skills, managing emotions, and adapting to change. These categories reflect the challenges that children and young people may encounter in their educational environments.

Methodology: A cross-sectional descriptive quantitative study was applied to a population of students (N=839) aged 14.5 ± 2.5 years, enrolled in three schools belonging to ACODESI during the first semester of 2024; 55.1% (n=462) were female and 44.9% (n=377) were male. A self-administered questionnaire was designed with 2 open-ended questions and 16 Likert scale items, achieving a Cronbach's Alpha validity ≥ 0.85 (α). This questionnaire explored variables related to psychological lifestyle such as SM, TP, SR, MH and SQ, according to the ethical code of the American Educational Research Association.

Results: The results reveal negative index for SM, where 55.3% (n=464) of students do not engage in exercises to relax their body and mind when feeling nervous, and 51% (n=428) do not have the habit of deep breathing or meditation to feel calm and relaxed. Additionally, for TP, 57.8% (n=485) fear thinking about their future life as they grow older. On the other hand, the findings show positive index for SR, with 73.3% (n=615) spending most of their time making friends and engaging in activities with close acquaintances. Similarly, for MH, 60.8% (n=510) seek out people to talk to and feel better when they have problems. Finally, for SQ, 55.2% (n=463) do not manage to sleep when they are anxious or worried and 60.3% (n=506) feel tired and sleepy during the day when they do not manage to sleep well at night.

Conclusions: The results highlight the necessity of formulating pedagogical strategies that contribute to the development of the psychological lifestyle of students within the educational context of ACODESI. This can be achieved through educational programs and interventions that promote the attention, prevention, and promotion of mental health in school well-being.

Keywords: Lifestyle, Mental Health, Educational Context.

1 INTRODUCTION

The educational context presents human experiences and interactions that shape a lifestyle influenced by the environment where children and adolescents are developing, which can affect their emotional development and psychological well-being [1].

It can be reasonably argued that healthy lifestyles contribute to the physical, mental, and social well-being of people in a multitude of ways. This implies that the cultural context of an individual exerts a disparate influence on each person, thereby determining their knowledge, skills, ideas, and values regarding what constitutes healthy eating. In the absence of appropriate learning and instruction, these factors can potentially impact the self-image of students. In this regard, the lifestyles established during childhood and adolescence will prove to be of significant consequence in the future [2].

In addition, the physical aspects of lifestyle are not the sole determinants of genuine homeostasis in the individual; psychological factors also play a role [3]. Similarly, from a psychological perspective, lifestyles can be understood as factors that cannot be manifested externally in the body, but that are nevertheless of great importance in the formation of the human person [1].

From a psychological perspective, lifestyles are conceptualized as a pattern of behaviors that are consistent over time. These behaviors, in conjunction with biological vulnerability, age, sex, psychophysiological reactivity, and support networks, influence the health-disease process [4]. Similarly, it is a structuring of the various domains of daily life in accordance with the configuration and integration of the systems of activities, communication, habits, and problem-solving [5].

Considering the, a psychological lifestyle is associated with emotional development, which enables constructive engagement in human relationships and coexistence within a community. In this manner, emotional development is associated with self-esteem, autonomy, self-concept, uniqueness, and mutual respect, all of which exert an influence on lifestyles. Consequently, there is a necessity to expand the body of knowledge and research on lifestyles in children and adolescents from the physical and psychological perspective, which represents one of the stages of human development, namely, the school [3].

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Lifestyles, from a psychological perspective, are related to emotional development, fostering positive interactions in human relationships and community living. In this sense, thoughts, emotions, and human behavior serve as indicators of well-being and the ability to face life's challenges and difficulties at an individual or group level within the educational context [1].

Accordingly, psychological lifestyles are defined as the patterns of thought, behavior, and emotions that individuals exhibit, which influence both mental health and emotional well-being and play a pivotal role in the development of an individual's life trajectory [4]. This indicates that these lifestyles are not only associated with mental health but also encompass elements such as self-esteem, self-control, resilience, and social relationships [6].

Accordingly, the implementation of a healthy psychological lifestyle can enhance overall mental health, mitigate the risk of mental disorders such as anxiety and depression, and augment quality of life. Furthermore, it is a structuring of the various domains of daily life in accordance with the conformation and integration of the systems of activities, communication, habits, and problem-solving strategies [5].

In accordance with the aforementioned points, students in an educational context experience a wide range of emotions at school, which influence a variety of cognitive, motivational, and social processes [7]. It is evident that human development at school is closely linked to psychological processes and emotions. From the earliest stages of life, the individual is shaped by their interactions with the social environment. The formation of personality is significantly influenced by emotional experiences, which in turn inform the establishment of social norms, moral criteria, and the development of a range of skills and abilities essential for social functioning [8].

Therefore, the literature identifies five categories corresponding to psychological lifestyles in the educational context. These categories (Table 1) reflect the challenges that children and young people may encounter in their educational environments.

Table 1. Theoretical conceptual categories of lifestyle psychological perspectives.

Categories	Definition
Stress Management	Stress can be conceptualized as a relational process between the individual and their environment. This process entails the consideration of the specific characteristics of the individual and the nature and demands of the environment. Such an occurrence is defined as a situation or encounter that is identified by the individual as a threat, the magnitude of which exceeds their own coping resources, thereby endangering their well-being [9], [10].
Time Perception	Perception is a process that enables us to comprehend and interpret reality through the lens of temporally situated stimuli. Conversely, time is a dimension that influences perceptions and allows subjects to organize their actions. Time can be conceptualized as a construct, as well as a linear and irreversible phenomenon or as a cyclical process with a constant return [11], [12], [13].
Social Relationships	The process by which an individual incorporates beliefs, values, customs, attitudes, and behavioral patterns specific to their reference groups, resulting in a lifestyle that is influenced by historical, cultural, social, and psychological factors that shape people's daily lives [14].
Mental Health	Mental health is a social construct that is contingent upon the specific context in question. The criteria for defining health and illness, normality and abnormality, are established within each social group and directly influence the way people within that group perceive their own health and illness. In this way, mental health is a phenomenon that is linked to people's living conditions, to the social and economic structures in which they move, and to the way subjects interact in their daily lives [15].
Sleep Quality	The quality of sleep can be defined as the ability to obtain sufficient restorative sleep during the night, which in turn enables optimal functioning during the day. It is not only a determinant of health but also a key enabler of a good quality of life [16], [17].

3 METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional descriptive quantitative study was applied to a population of students (N=839) aged 14.5 ± 2.5 years, enrolled in three schools belonging to ACODESI during the first semester of 2024; 55.1% (n=462) were female and 44.9% (n=377) were male. Thus, quantitative research makes it possible to identify trends and averages, make predictions, test relationships, and obtain general results of populations in a cultural and social context [18].

To identify the psychological lifestyle in ACODESI, a self-administered questionnaire was designed with 20 Likert scale items, with a Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.85 (α), which was applied through the Google Forms platform during the first semester of the academic term 2024, which probed psychological lifestyle variables such as stress management, perception of time, social relationships, mental health and sleep quality.

For the analysis and interpretation of the data, we used the IBM SPSS Statistics program, version 27, which is part of the "Academic Software" data package licensed by the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana of Bogotá, Colombia.

Finally, the ethical considerations were addressed within the framework of the deontological standards recognized by the Deontological and Bioethical Manual of Psychology of the Colombian College of Psychologists, which included the signing of consent and informed assent by legal representatives and students. In addition, compliance with the treatment of personal data provided for in Colombian Decree 1377 of 2013 was considered.

4 RESULTS

The results demonstrate the negative and positive indexes in each of the items evaluated, thereby facilitating an analysis of each category from the perspectives that can be addressed to promote healthy lifestyles in children and adolescents from the psychological dimension in educational environments. Additionally, the results allow for the identification of those aspects that may be enhancing these processes, thus providing inputs for future studies.

Table 1 presents the primary findings in the "Stress Management" category, wherein some negative indexes are evident in the item concerning activities undertaken during the day to promote feelings of calm and relaxation (51%, n=428), as well as in relation to the performance of exercises to relax the body and mind when experiencing feelings of nervousness (55%, n=464). Conversely, 62% (n=520) of the sample demonstrated positive indexes, indicating their ability to differentiate between family and school-related issues and to regulate their emotions in the face of frustration or distress.

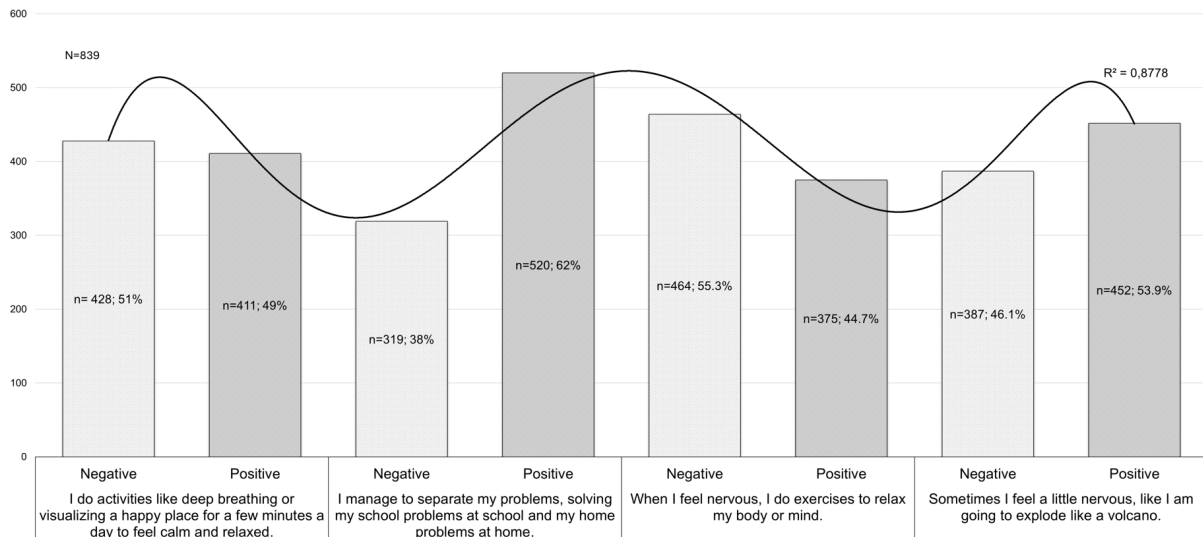


Figure 1. Stress Management

The results of Table 1 suggest that students may lack knowledge of activities and exercises that facilitate relaxation in stressful situations. These situations may be influenced by environmental and social factors within the educational context. Therefore, it is imperative that the school context be involved in facilitating access to the psychological and social resources that are necessary for adequate stress management. This should not only entail the communication of strategies, but also the consideration of the developmental stage of students, ensuring their appropriate use [19].

Table 2 also reveals a negative trend in the “Time Perception” category, with 57.8% (n=485) of students expressing apprehension about envisioning their future adult lives. Conversely, positive indicators indicate that 56.9% (n=477) of students find it invigorating to embrace the ever-changing nature of each day and effectively manage their time between domestic responsibilities and academic pursuits.

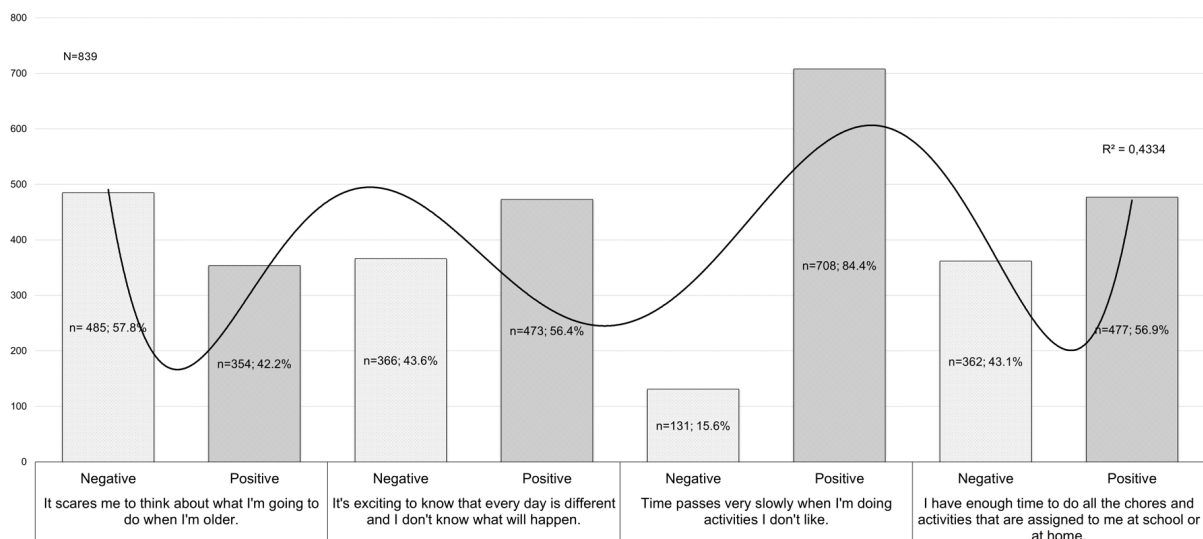


Figure 2. Time Perception

The perception of time is a crucial aspect that enables children and adolescents to develop the capacity to regulate and manage their daily lives. As evidenced in Table 2, there is a notable correlation between the perception of time and the various indicators of students' well-being.

Therefore, the results indicate an improvement in this ability as students demonstrate an ability to manage their assigned tasks and activities in a balanced manner. This is a notable finding, as it highlights the importance of time management and time perception skills not only for academic success but also for the emotional well-being of students. This, in turn, could have an impact on the development

of children and adolescents' ability to maintain a healthy balance between their academic and personal responsibilities [20].

Table 3 presents the results of “Social Relationships”, wherein positive indicators are observed in all items. Most students indicated a preference for being accompanied (65.6%, n=550), spending time making new friends (73.3%, n=615), reporting a positive family relationship (89.2%, n=748), and engaging in community activities (85%, n=713).

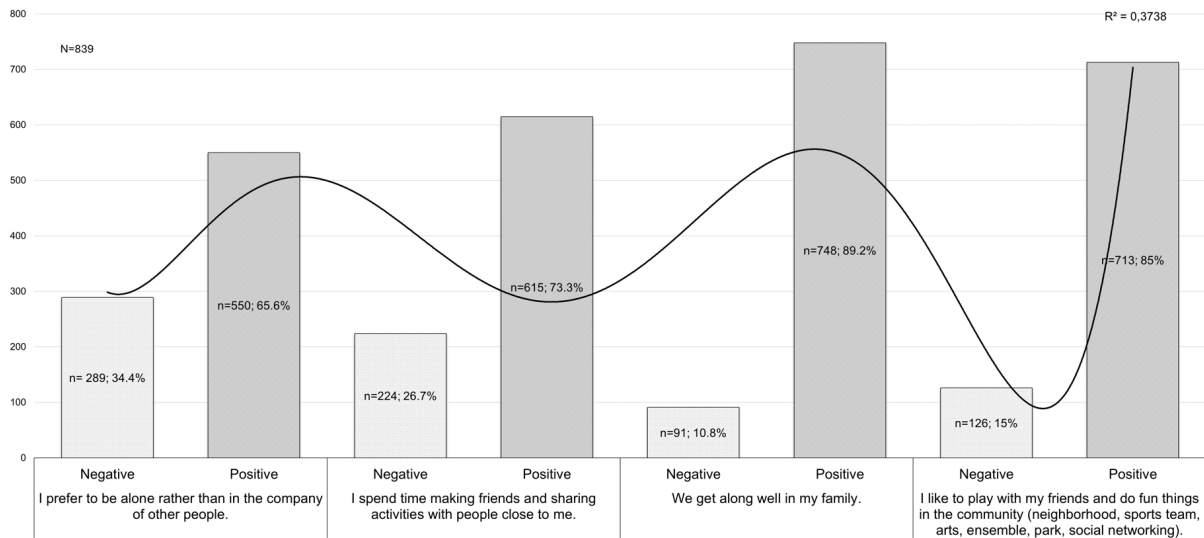


Figure 3. Social Relationships

These findings are consistent with the notion that socialization and the formation of meaningful social connections are crucial in the school setting, as they contribute to the emotional well-being and integration of children and adolescents. This approach is consistent with the literature, which defines the acquisition of social skills as a fundamental aspect of the socialization process [21]. Accordingly, this process of socialization and skills acquisition is crucial for students' development, as it enables them to adapt effectively and navigate the challenges of their environment, both within the educational context and in their daily lives.

Furthermore, the literature indicates that social skills should be emphasized as a means of fostering assertive communication, effective problem-solving, and empathy from an early age. This approach has been shown to positively impact students' academic success and their ability to interact effectively with their peers [21].

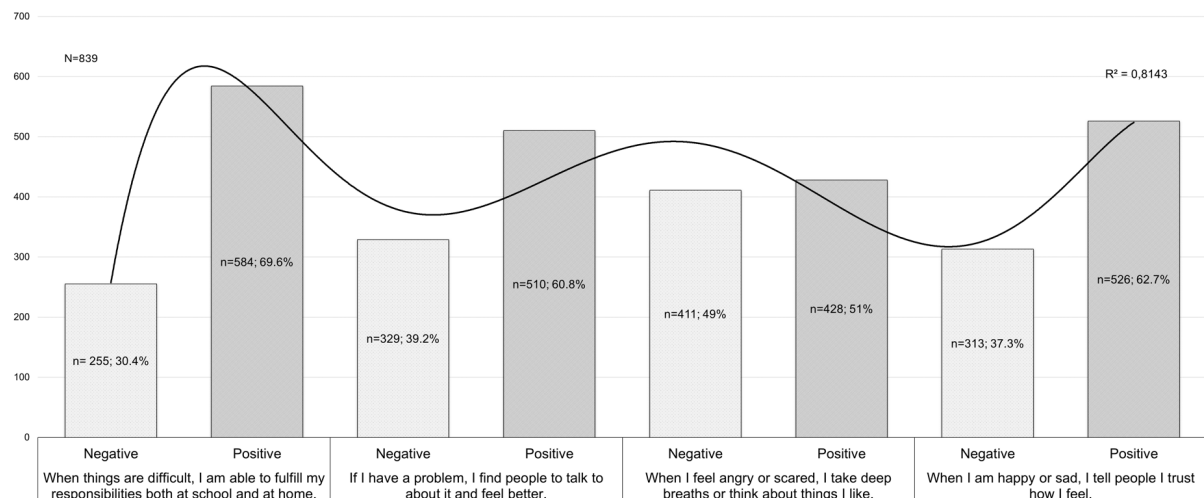


Figure 4. Mental Health

Table 4 (above) illustrates the outcomes of the “Mental Health” category, which, akin to the social relations category, exhibits positive indexes across all items. In challenging circumstances, students fulfill their obligations (69.6%, n=584), and in the event of a problem, they seek assistance and resources to improve their well-being (60.8%, n=510). Additionally, when they experience positive or negative emotions, they have individuals they can rely on to provide them with a listening ear (62.7%, n=526).

The positive results presented in Table 4 indicate the potential for identifying resources within participating educational institutions that facilitate student comprehension of the evaluated dimensions, given that existing literature suggests a discrepancy between this finding and the prevailing trend. According to more than half of the parents of children and adolescents who are likely to present a mental health problem, there was no perceived need to seek help. This contrasts with the perceptions of adults and children and adolescents alike. This highlights the necessity for instruments such as those employed in this research to incorporate students' understandings [22].

For the last category, "Quality of Sleep" (Table 5), the results indicate that approximately half of the questions yield a positive index, while the remaining half yield a negative index. Regarding the responses indicating a negative index, 55.2% (n=463) reported that, when experiencing anxiety or worry, they are unable to sleep. Furthermore, 60.3% (n=506) indicated that they experience daytime fatigue and sleepiness when they do not obtain sufficient sleep at night. Conversely, the responses revealed that 54.2% (n=455) exhibited a positive rating for their ability to sleep for more than eight hours per day. Additionally, 52.1% (n=437) reported adhering to specific sleep schedules.

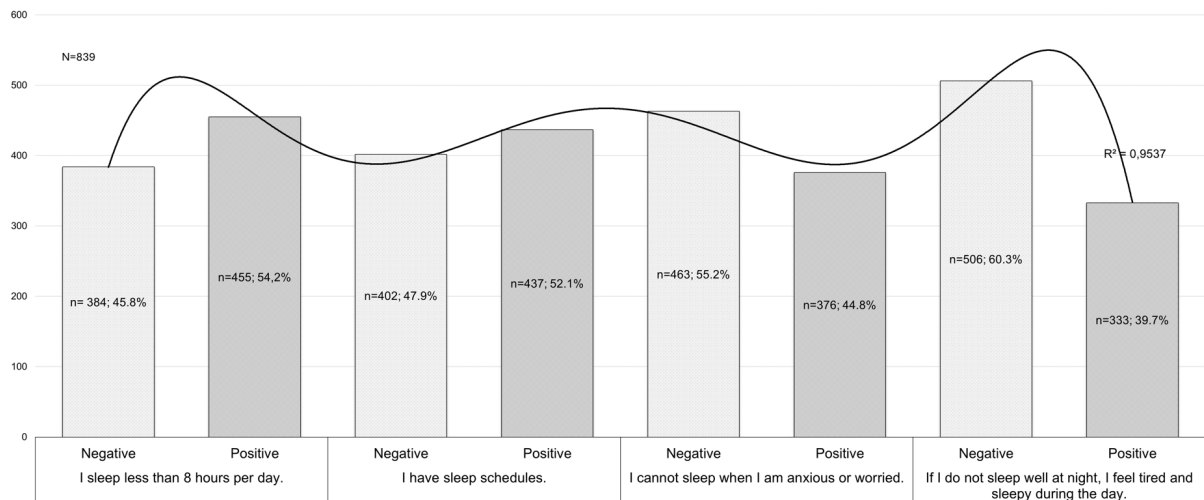


Figure 5. Sleep Quality

The results presented in Table 5, it can be reasonably deduced that this phenomenon is not isolated, as academic responsibilities or other extracurricular activities may contribute to the inability to obtain sufficient sleep. Therefore, it can be concluded that not only emotions, but also the demands of daily life, play a role in sleep disruption. Therefore, the conjunction of emotional concerns and academic burdens is associated with sleep and impacts both the physical and mental well-being of individuals [23].

Furthermore, the significance of cultivating and ensuring the provision of secure environments and support networks where children and adolescents can express their emotions in a comfortable, safe, and reliable manner is acknowledged. Consequently, educational programs can be designed to impart a range of emotional communication skills as part of a comprehensive approach to psychosocial development. The promotion of positive mental health in educational and family contexts should adopt a multifaceted strategy that encourages emotional expression and the development of skills to establish trusting relationships within support networks, particularly in the context of emotional distress and crisis.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This research identifies the relationship between the educational context and its influence on the formation of healthy lifestyles, based on observations of the population of children and adolescents belonging to ACODESI, who are in a stage of physical, emotional, and cognitive development. The study suggests that students' lifestyles are related to their interaction in the school environment, where

psychological development is fostered through emotions, self-care, and the promotion of healthy habits towards mental health and school well-being.

The findings underscore the importance of developing pedagogical strategies that foster the psychological well-being of students within the ACODESI educational framework. Thus, the psychological dimension of lifestyle in children and adolescents from the three ACODESI-affiliated schools exhibits characteristics associated with the participants' life cycle stage and their environmental development context, namely the school.

In this way, the institution in question serves as an agent of change regarding the development of behaviors and practices that are conducive to good health, and it plays an important role in guiding students in the formation of habits that can positively influence their future quality of life. The results obtained are in line with the objectives of the study and highlight the necessity to implement pedagogical strategies aimed at fostering the comprehensive development of students and creating an environment that is conducive to the acquisition of psychological healthy lifestyles.

Ultimately, the results accentuate the necessity of conducting further research to assess the involvement of children and adolescents in the configuration of psychological healthy lifestyles. This should entail the incorporation of the dimensions of their developmental stage. Furthermore, it should involve the formulation of strategies that engage both students and those who accompany them in their development, including teachers, guardians, and caregivers. Additionally, it should identify characteristics of environments that facilitate development.

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