



## Growing up Strong Program, positive youth development and education: A healthy framework

### Programa Creciendo Fuertes, desarrollo positivo adolescente y educación: un entramado saludable

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#### Abstract

The Growing up Strong Program has been designed within the framework of positive psychology as an exercise in character education based on the identification, recognition, and use of character strengths among teenagers in secondary school. The study explores the role of mental health (understood as proper psychosocial functioning) in the promotion of adolescent psychological well-being and positive youth development. The aim of this research was to evaluate the resources of the subjects following their participation in the Program. The sample comprised 221 male and female adolescents, aged between 12 and 15. The data were collected using the Scale of Psychological Well-Being for Adolescents and the Factors in Youth Development Scale, both with demonstrated reliability and validity. The results showed, after the Program: good levels of positive youth developmental resources (self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy and future orientation); evidence of prevention of psychosocial risk behaviors, specifically in relation to raised awareness of substance use, alcohol consumption and smoking, and non-specifically in relation to social-relational risks; good levels of life satisfaction and psychological well-being; positive correlations between positive youth development, psychological well-being, life satisfaction and prevention of psychosocial risks. It can be concluded that the Growing up Strong Program is an instance in character, emotional and well-being education, which generates a healthy network among adolescent users in the educational community.



*Keywords:* student well-being; adolescence; evaluation; character strengths

#### Resumen

El Programa Creciendo Fuertes fue diseñado en el marco de la Psicología Positiva como un ejercicio de educación del carácter, basado en la identificación, el reconocimiento y el uso de las fortalezas de carácter, entre los adolescentes de la educación secundaria. El estudio explora el papel de la salud mental (entendida como el funcionamiento psicosocial adecuado) en la promoción del bienestar psicológico y el desarrollo positivo de los jóvenes. El objetivo de esta investigación era evaluar sus recursos después de participar en

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el Programa. La muestra comprendía 221 adolescentes de ambos sexos, de entre 12 y 15 años. Los datos se recogieron utilizando la Escala de Bienestar Psicológico para Adolescentes y la Escala de Factores en el Desarrollo Juvenil, ambas de probada fiabilidad y validez. Los resultados mostraron, después del Programa: buenos niveles de recursos positivos para el desarrollo de los jóvenes (autoestima, optimismo, autoeficacia y orientación futura); prevención de conductas de riesgo psicosocial, específicamente en relación con una mayor conciencia del uso de sustancias, el consumo de alcohol y el tabaquismo, y no específicamente en relación con los riesgos socio-relacionales; buenos niveles de satisfacción con la vida y bienestar psicológico; y correlaciones positivas entre el desarrollo positivo de los jóvenes, el bienestar psicológico, la satisfacción con la vida y la prevención de los riesgos psicosociales. Se puede concluir que el Programa Creciendo fuertes es una instancia de formación en educación del carácter, emocional y de bienestar, que genera un entramado saludable entre los usuarios adolescentes en la comunidad educativa.

*Palabras clave:* bienestar psicológico; adolescencia; activos del desarrollo; fortalezas del carácter

The *Growing up Strong Program* is an instance of character, emotional and wellness education (Garcia et al., 2017). It is based on the education of the virtues and character strengths proposed by Peterson & Seligman (2004), which are abstract constructs of human characteristics that are widely valued in different cultures around the world. In fact, they are operationalized in the character strengths considered as personality traits that influence the way people think, act and feel, making possible the subjective experience of a good life in the Aristotelian sense, oriented to a virtuous life. For Peterson & Seligman (2004) the identification, recognition and voluntary practice of personal strengths lead to a healthy character.

The *Growing up Strong Program* is carried out in public or privately run educational institutions through agreements with the Asociación Jóvenes Fuertes Uruguay. Its scope is formal education at the educational level of the basic cycle of secondary school in its three years of formation, namely: first, second and third year. The program is integrated into the educational system as an effort to facilitate the National Reference Curriculum Framework of the National Public Education Administration of Uruguay (ANEP, 2017), which is organized according to three ethical dimensions: ethics of thought: thinking and acting in complexity, ethics of citizenship: participating in democratic life, and ethics of well-being: feeling and being in the group.

Human virtues expressed in character strengths are personality traits that make a good life possible from the Aristotelian perspective (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). From this standpoint, the Asociación Jóvenes Fuertes, through the program mentioned before, is in charge of character, emotional and wellness education. The program's workshops are designed as didactic tools to facilitate culturally dense curricular competencies as well as the fundamental learning proposed by the Uruguayan curricular framework.

Human virtues from the approach of positive psychology are grouped into six categories: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The virtues bring together strengths with similar characteristics to one another, so that the virtue of wisdom presents strengths referring to the use of the mind and cognitive abilities; the virtue of courage refers to those emotional strengths necessary to face life and the fulfillment of goals; the virtue of humanity refers to those strengths necessary for adequate social interaction; the virtue of justice refers to those strengths that allow for a healthy life in community; the virtue of temperance refers to those strengths that enable protection from excess in general; finally, the virtue of transcendence brings with it those strengths that enable a person to connect with something beyond the individual experience.

Research has shown the relationship between character strengths and life satisfaction and psychological well-being at different stages of human life (Brdar & Kashdan, 2010; Ovejero et al., 2016; Park & Peterson, 2006; Park et al., 2004; Park et al., 2006). Similarly, the scientific literature reports that in adolescence, inverse relationships of character strengths have been found with psychopathological characteristics, but positive relationships with the perception of family environment and life satisfaction (Giménez, 2010), even as predictors of well-being (Gillham et al., 2011), as well as positive relationships with academic self-efficacy,

school success and appropriate behavior in the classroom (Weber & Ruch, 2012), including the association of character strengths with vocational interests (Proyer et al., 2012). Based on these results, it can be implied that character strengths would be associated with adequate psychosocial functioning in the adolescent stage.

Hence, Sanchez (2014) explained the importance of promoting character strengths in the form of psychological interventions in early ages, specifically adolescence as a stage of life in which psychic resources are reorganized in the process of identity formation. Likewise, he mentioned that the interventions in character strengths in adolescence have shown interesting correlations such as: life satisfaction, academic motivation, classroom performance and others. The main background for interventions aimed at developing the character strengths and virtues in adolescents are: a) *The Strengths Gym Program* with evidence of improved well-being and life satisfaction (Proctor et al., 2011; Proctor et al., 2015); b) *The six-session program* of Quinlan et al. (2015), with effects on educational correlates such as classroom group cohesion, participation and autonomy; c) *The Happy Classrooms program* of Lombas et al. (2019) with effectiveness on psychological well-being and school climate in schools.

Nevertheless, the *Growing up Strong Program* has the goal of a comprehensive education of character strengths in the basic cycle of secondary school. It is operationalized in three academic years, so the organization of the strengths in the program is as follows: For 1st year: self-control, curiosity, love of learning, social intelligence, courage, perseverance, humor and gratitude. For 2nd year: citizenship, kindness, zest, appreciation of beauty and excellence, prudence, humility, creativity, and optimism. For 3rd year: integrity, perspective, open-mindedness, love, leadership, sense of justice, capacity to forgive and spirituality; therefore, each of the character strengths are addressed in the training process.

The program is designed under experiential workshop modalities facilitated by two permanent facilitators trained in positive psychology, who work with the same group throughout the year. The *Growing up Strong Program* is carried out every fifteen days, the length of each workshop is one module -2 hours' class- (eighty minutes approximately), specifically there are two moments: a) strength workshop, and after 15 days, b) strength support workshop. This means that, for each month there are two sessions of the workshop with the students. In order to deepen on didactic and operative aspects of the program, it is recommended to read García et al. (2017) and García-Álvarez et al. (2020), the latter can be found in this same journal.

It is worth noting that the *Growing up Strong Program* presents empirical evidence of its effectiveness in quasi-experimental research designs with pre- and post-intervention measures. Initially, its effectiveness on psychological well-being and self-efficacy was evaluated in participants who were in the first year of the basic cycle of secondary school (García-Álvarez et al., 2018). Then, its effectiveness on the increase of psychological well-being and self-esteem, as well as on the decrease of depressive symptoms was measured in 160 participants of the program in the first, second and third year of secondary school (García - Álvarez & Soler, 2019).

In this way, the present study aims to provide additional evidence of the experience of the *Growing up Strong Program* that goes beyond measuring the statistical impact. For example, in the year 2020 in this same journal a study was presented by García - Álvarez et al. (2020) with the objective of exploring satisfaction, applicability and subjective experience in a user sample of 590 adolescents. Therefore, this article is considered a continuation of the research project concerning the *Growing up Strong Program*.

The authors explained the importance of the comprehensive evaluation of psychoeducational programs taking as criteria some other elements such as the possible influence on other correlates of the participants' daily life. In this case, some possible correlates of the program on psychological well-being and positive youth development can be widely described. Similarly, the social justification considers the position of non-specific prevention in the light of the different psychosocial risks in human development. In other words, the goal is to design interventions that seek to provide life skills in the construction of well-being (Bisquerra, 2003; 2005).

At this point, it is interesting to conceptualize Ryff's (1989; 2014) multidimensional model of psychological well-being, adapted to the adolescent stage in the Ibero-American context by the Argentinean researcher Casullo (2002). For these authors, psychological well-being is found in the convergence of components that facilitate optimal psychological functioning, which is subjectivized in the healthy experience of social bonds,

the perception of control over resources and environmental demands, the acceptance of different personality traits, body and circumstances as well as the belief of having a life project that guides the objectives, goals, efforts and tasks in daily life (García-Alvarez et al., 2020).

Similarly, *positive youth development* is a complex construct that refers to a model of the conception of youth centered on psychological competencies or resources (Benson et al., 2006), which enables the transition from adolescence to adulthood in a healthy, adaptive and wellness-oriented way and in life skills (Oliva, 2015). In this way, the resources and factors that support positive youth development can be conceptualized as developmental assets, that is to say, inter or intrapersonal resources that promote healthy youth development within the extent of the adolescent's relationships and adjustment to his or her socio-cultural environment (Oliva et al., 2017). It is worth clarifying that the developmental assets are more comprehensive than the protective factors, since the latter are limited to the possible risks that an adolescent population is exposed to, while the former are inherent to independent adolescence whether it is a population at risk or a community one.

In that sense, the purpose of this article is to explore the promoting role of mental health, defined as the adequate psychosocial functioning related to adolescent psychological well-being and positive youth development, of the *Growing up Strong Program* in an educational context, specifically in high school students. Hence, the assets of self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism and future orientation were selected as personal mechanisms that can be activated during the character strengths training in adolescents. Furthermore, as Oliva (2015) pointed out, the developmental assets will not only capitalize on personal skills for development, but they also seek to protect against some common problems of adolescence, namely, those psychosocial risks that can affect adolescence without being considered a specific risk factor group. Therefore, the paths of risk prevention and promotion of positive youth development are parallel and not antagonistic (Oliva et al., 2010).

Consequently, the general objective of this research was to determine the positive developmental assets in adolescence and dimensions of psychological well-being after the implementation of the *Growing up Strong Program*. Thus, the specific objectives were to: a) describe the positive developmental assets in adolescence: self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy, and future orientation that may be related to the *Growing up Strong Program*, b) explore the prevention of psychosocial risk behaviors specifically in adolescent risk perception and non-specific prevention after the *Growing up Strong Program*, c) characterize adolescent life satisfaction and psychological well-being after the *Growing up Strong Program*, d) establish the direction, magnitude and significance of the relationships between positive youth development and psychological well-being.

As a result, this study seeks to contribute to the field of educational research from the approaches of positive psychology applied to education, conceived as a range of efforts focused on emotional, character and well-being education as well as a useful tool in the educational system for the promotion of mental health, psychological well-being and positive youth development.

On this subject, Cobo & Garcia (2017) explain that positive education is focused on applying the innovations in the field of positive psychology in the educational context, aiming at the personal growth of the students, but at the same time, of the whole educational community. In fact, positive education postulates the teaching of well-being through the recognition, identification and implementation of the character strengths as one of the main strategies that should be used to make viable the comprehensive development of the students. Additionally, this research aims to contribute to the contextualization and applicability of theoretical elements of psychological science in educational spaces as systematic psychoeducational efforts, either workshops or training programs that can improve school performance.

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 221 adolescents who participated in the *Growing up Strong Program* and were chosen through a non-probabilistic type of directed sampling. They were students from the basic cycle of secondary education that corresponds to the first, second and third year, the educational stage the program is designed for.

In this regard, there were 133 male teenagers (60.2%) and 88 female teenagers (39.8%) between the ages of 12 (19.8%), 13 (33%), 14 (30.8%) and 15 (16.4%) having an average age of 13.51 years and a standard deviation of 1.1 year. In terms of the academic year, there are: first year (38%), second year (30%) and third year (32%).

### **Instruments**

Based on the fruitful theoretical contributions of Oliva (2015), Oliva et al. (2010) and Oliva et al. (2011) on positive youth development, an instrument called "factors in youth development" was designed. The scale consists of 23 items that have four answer options: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree, in order to be applied after the annual cycle of the *Growing up Strong Program*. The scale is oriented to evaluate possible factors of youth development on the basis of self-perception.

On one hand, it is aimed at measuring the promotion of developmental assets in adolescence specifically self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism and future orientation. On the other hand, the scale measures the risk perception and prevention of psychosocial risk behaviors related to self-control, social relationships, and drug, alcohol and cigarette consumption. Finally, the scale measures life satisfaction. Since the scale was created specifically for the purposes of this research, evidence of content validity was collected through the judgment of eight national and international experts in the field. Also, in this study the internal consistency reports a Cronbach's alpha of .91.

To measure the psychological well-being variable, Casullo's (2002) *Scale of Psychological Well-being for Adolescents* was used. It consists of 13 items that have three answer options: disagree, neither agree nor disagree and agree. The author reports that the scale presents adequate factorial validity through four components of multidimensional well-being, namely: control, bonds, projects and acceptance. Likewise, in the original study, the scale presented an internal consistency of .74. In a similar way, the internal consistency of the scale in the current study as measured by Cronbach's alpha was .79. Therefore, a data collection booklet was designed using the scales described above in an anonymous format, containing socio-demographic data such as age, sex and academic year.

### **Procedure**

The research was carried out in the educational institutions of Montevideo (Uruguay), where the *Asociación Jóvenes Fuertes* has institutional agreements to implement the above mentioned program. In that regard, the necessary permits were arranged and logistical conditions were considered as well as the ethical aspects and informed consents, as indicated by the American Psychological Association (APA). Confidentiality, anonymity and scientific use of the collected data were ensured. At the same time, the physical and mental health of the adolescent sample was not at risk in the process. Data collection was conducted by the facilitators during the last session of the annual cycle of the *Growing up Strong Program* using the booklet described above. The researchers had no interaction with the sample.

### **Data analysis**

The data was processed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 18 (PASW). An exploratory data analysis was carried out and descriptive statistical measures of the variables were calculated, such as the median and the interquartile range, due to the marked asymmetry in the distribution. The histograms were verified, and the goodness-of-fit tests were also carried out through Kolmogorov-Smirnov with Lilliefors' significance correction to know their distribution and the results indicated non-normal distribution ( $p < .05$ ), so the use of non-parametric inferential statistics such as the Spearman correlation and Mann Whitney U-test was decided for the fulfillment of the research objectives.

### **Results and discussion**

The results will be presented in the order of the formulated research objectives. In order to describe the developmental assets in the sample of adolescents participating in the *Growing up Strong Program*, response percentages were calculated (relative frequency in percentage). In Table 1 it can be observed that the items "I have learned to believe in myself (a)" and "I have discovered strengths that did not know I had" corresponding

to self-esteem, report the highest percentage. Likewise, in the self-efficacy developmental asset, the item “when I have problems, I find the necessary self-confidence to solve them” and in optimism, the item “I try to see the good side of things”, present the highest percentage.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics of the developmental assets in adolescence and life satisfaction*

Item	Percentages			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>Developmental asset: Self-esteem</i>				
1. I have discovered strengths that did not know I had.	47.5	35.7	10.9	5.9
2. I have learned to believe in myself (a).	50.7	33.9	10.4	5.0
3. I accept that I do things well	46.2	38.5	10.4	5.0
4. I think I know myself better now.	44.8	32.1	17.2	5.9
5. I love myself more.	28.0	38.0	24.0	10.0
<i>Developmental asset: Self-efficacy</i>				
6. When I have problems, I find the necessary self-confidence (a) to solve them.	53.4	29.9	10.0	6.7
7. I feel confident to do some things.	48.0	33.5	11.3	7.2
<i>Developmental asset: Optimism</i>				
8. When I experience difficult moments, I believe things can get better... everything will pass.	45.2	35.7	11.8	7.3
9. I try to see the good side of things.	51.9	36.2	7.7	4.2
<i>Developmental asset: Future orientation</i>				
10. I believe that if I make an effort, I can reach my goals or dreams.	68.8	24.0	5.4	1.8
11. I leave this course with more knowledge to face life.	53.9	35.7	7.2	3.2
12. Even though I may have difficult moments in my life, I feel that I will be okay.	56.6	31.2	9.0	3.2
13. After new experiences, I discover new ways to face life.	49.3	40.3	8.1	2.3
<i>Developmental asset: Life satisfaction</i>				
14. I feel good with myself.	56.1	25.8	8.6	9.5
15. I feel satisfied with my achievements.	57.1	26.2	9.5	7.2

Note.  $N = 221$ ; Min = 0; Max = 4; Cronbach's alpha .91

Regarding the future orientation as a developmental asset, the items “I believe that if I make an effort I can reach my goals or dreams” and “even though I may have difficult moments in my life, I feel that I will be okay” also present the highest percentage of relative frequency, similarly to the item “I feel satisfied with my achievements”, about adolescent life satisfaction. In contrast, the item “I love myself more” reported the lowest frequency in the responses of “strongly agree”.

As for exploring the prevention of psychosocial risk behavior specifically in adolescent risk perception and non-specific prevention after the *Growing up Strong Program*, in Table 2 we can see that the items “I have learned that drugs, although they can be fun, are dangerous”, and “I understand that cigarettes are bad for my health and I try to avoid them”, referring to the prevention of risk behaviors regarding alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, reach the highest percentages as well as the items “I have tried not to bully my classmates” and “I have apologized when I had a misunderstanding with someone”, concerning the social area.

The adolescent sample is characterized by reporting percentages above 50% in all the items referring to psychological well-being in the answer option “agree”, see Table 3 for more details. In fact, the item with the highest percentage was “I have friends who I trust”, and the lowest was: “In general, I am satisfied with the body I have”. In this regard, in Table 4 it is possible to observe the sample median of psychological well-being, which is considered to be an appropriate level of it. Likewise, the sample median of adolescent life satisfaction, non-specific prevention of psychosocial risks and developmental assets such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism and future orientation are considered to be adequate levels.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive statistics on risk perception and prevention of psychosocial risk behaviors*

Items	Percentages			
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I have learned that drugs, although they can be fun, are dangerous.	76.0	15.4	5.0	3.6
2. I understand that cigarettes are bad for my health and I try to avoid them.	75.1	16.7	5.0	3.2
3. Alcohol can be dangerous for my health.	69.3	19.0	7.7	4.0
4. I have learned to get along better with others.	56.2	31.2	7.2	5.4
5. I have tried not to bully my classmates.	69.2	20.4	7.7	2.7
6. I have learned not to lose control in difficult situations.	44.3	35.7	10.9	9.1
7. I have learned to control myself more in order not to fight with others	48.0	33.5	9.5	9.0
8. I have apologized when I had a misunderstanding with someone.	62.0	25.3	8.6	4.1

Note. N = 221; Min = 0; Max = 4; Cronbach's alpha .91

**Table 3**

*Descriptive statistics of adolescent psychological well-being*

Items	Percentages		
	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
1. I think that I take responsibility for what I say and do.	69.2	25.8	5.0
2. I have friends who I trust.	80.1	13.1	6.8
3. I think I know what I want to do with my life.	65.6	26.7	7.7
4. In general, I am satisfied with the body I have.	55.7	28.5	15.8
5. If something goes wrong I can accept it and admit it.	71.1	25.3	3.6
6. I care about thinking what I will do in the future.	74.7	19.0	6.3
7. People generally like me.	57.5	32.5	10
8. I know people who can help me if I need it.	79.2	17.6	3.2
9. I am quite happy with who I am	66.0	24.0	10.0
10. If I am upset about something, I am able to think about how to change it	60.6	31.7	7.7
11. I think that in general, I get along well with people.	61.5	31.2	7.3
12. I am capable of thinking about a project for my life.	69.3	23.5	7.2
13. I can accept my mistakes and try to get better.	70.6	25.3	4.1

Note. N = 221; Min = 0; Max = 3; Cronbach's alpha .79

**Table 4**

*Descriptive statistics of the variables*

	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Interquartile range
Developmental asset: Self-esteem	5.0	20.0	16.0	4
Developmental asset: Self-efficacy	2.0	8.0	7.0	2
Developmental asset: Optimism	2.0	8.0	7.0	2
Developmental asset: Future orientation	5.0	16.0	14.0	4
Non-specific prevention	13.0	32.0	28.0	6
Life satisfaction	2.0	8.0	7.0	2
Psychological well-being	21.0	39.0	35.0	5

Therefore, it is interpreted that the participating adolescent sample presents adequate levels of self-esteem, considered as the evaluation made by the subject about himself, and of course this implies recognizing skills, strengths and competences, believing that they are important and that they give him value. Similarly, the adolescent sample is characterized by an average level of self-efficacy, in other words, they believe in their own ability to solve problems, perform specific tasks or achieve goals. In fact, self-efficacy is just as valuable as self-esteem, but the latter is more generalized, while self-efficacy is the perception of personal agency the

adolescent has, which generates the activation of other resources that are configured, organized and put into practice to achieve results (Oliva et al., 2011). Even other authors had already highlighted the relationships of character strengths with these constructs. Sanchez (2014, p. 10) states, in a serious review of character strengths in adolescence, that: "[...] the more strengths an adolescent has, the higher the beliefs of self-efficacy.

Similarly, the developmental assets of optimism and future orientation are two intrapsychic resources that refer to the adolescent capacity to perceive reality as dynamic, to recognize that he has an active role in the ideation, planning and evaluation of the future, in other words, it is through effort, personal initiative, open-mindedness and self-determination that goals, objectives, tasks can be achieved over time. It also refers to the dynamic nature of reality, which allows people to understand that both good and bad days are fleeting, to understand that reality is not static and that having a sad, down or disappointing day does not define life (Scheier et al., 1994).

The adolescent sample presents adequate levels of both life satisfaction and psychological well-being, the former being an asset of positive youth development, due to its relationship with adaptive indicators. Since life satisfaction is defined as the adolescent's assessment on how he or she has led his or her existence, especially in terms of quality of life and the presence of negative and positive affects, it is also called subjective personal well-being (Reina et al., 2010).

At the same time, multidimensional psychological well-being is about optimal psychosocial functioning and even positive psychological functioning (Merino Rivera et al., 2017) in the adolescent's ability to enjoy social relationships or nurturing attachments, note that this was the most frequent item, as well as the belief in having life projects that provide meaning, order and structure to the existence. It is also expressed in the control capacity perceived by the subject to take advantage of the resources and environmental demands, and finally, with self-acceptance. Notice that the item with lower frequency was the one referred to body acceptance, which is expected according to the pubertal development stage (Casullo, 2002), see Table 3.

In addition, the model of positive youth development proposes in its core the mental health, psychological well-being and the adolescent's personal agency for its promotion (Oliva et al., 2011c). In order to achieve this, the awareness about the common psychosocial risks in this stage of the life cycle would help preserve these health conditions. In this sense, the study sample presents adequate levels of awareness of the harmful effects of the use of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes as the main factors that could affect adolescence in this constant search for new sensations and experiences that could lead to risky situations. Similarly, there is evidence of such awareness in common situations with friends and peers, whether they are having a misunderstanding, apologizing or avoiding making fun of peers. Remember that friends, peers and support networks are developmental assets (Oliva, 2015). Social skills, fairness and respect for diversity are also important to enable proper social relationships.

Continuing with the idea of describing the results, it was decided to group them according to an ad hoc scale that allowed the classification of the adolescent sample by low, medium and high levels of the measured variables, see Table 5. The highest percentages were: self-esteem in the high group with 48.4%, self-efficacy in the low group with 40.7%, similar to optimism with 43.9%. Meanwhile, future orientation in the high group reported 61.6%, non-specific prevention 46.6% as well as life satisfaction 45.2% and psychological well-being 42.1%, which have the implications discussed above.

**Table 5**

*Percentage distribution of the adolescent sample according to variable levels*

	High	Medium	Low
Developmental asset: Self-esteem	48.4	22.2	29.4
Developmental asset: Self-efficacy	35.8	23.5	40.7
Developmental asset: Optimism	33.5	22.6	43.9
Developmental asset: Future orientation	61.6	11.3	27.1
Non-specific prevention	46.6	26.7	26.7
Life satisfaction	45.2	18.1	36.7
Psychological well-being	42.1	27.6	30.3



Also, in terms of the correlations between the variables of the study, they must be positive, significant and moderate, see Table 6. From the perspective of positive youth development, there is a very interesting correlation between developmental assets, life satisfaction and non-specific prevention, and psychological well-being in the adolescent sample of the *Growing up Strong Program*. Self-esteem has been reported as one of the developmental assets that has been most correlated with life satisfaction and psychological well-being, since personal assessments of self-concept and self-worth are likely to influence the perception of well-being (Gutiérrez & Gonçalves, 2013). Similarly, self-efficacy has been considered a variable that is related to well-being in Uruguayan adolescent samples, and even along with self-esteem they have predictive qualities in adolescent psychological well-being over psychological distress and depressive symptoms, (García - Álvarez et al., 2019).

**Table 6**  
*Correlations between variables*

	Psychological well-being	Self-efficacy	Self-esteem	Optimism	Future orientation	Life satisfaction
Psychological well-being						
Self-efficacy	.474**					
Self-esteem	.534**	.598**				
Optimism	.470**	.479**				
Future orientation	.541**	.437**	.487**	.493**		
Life satisfaction	.601**	.596**	.555**	.423**	.395**	
Non-specific prevention	.573**	.472**	.552**	.457**	.526**	.530**

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .001$

Furthermore, studies have shown the possible relationship between optimism, resilience and adolescent psychological well-being (Omar et al., 2011) as well as a negative relationship between optimism and depressive symptoms and other psychopathological aspects in adolescence (Sánchez & Méndez, 2009). On the other hand, Omar (2007) explained the important role of future orientation, defined as the personal attitude towards future constructions; its healthy correlates expressed in correlations with positive bonds, social-emotional development and with the ability to believe in being able to control future situations that arise in the course of life.

In contrast, future orientation has been negatively correlated with drug and alcohol consumption, and risk behaviors. It could be inferred that the lesser the future orientation, the more likely it is that the adolescent will face greater psychosocial risks. In fact, the author noted that an elevated present orientation is associated with an inability to delay gratification and high risk behaviors. In short, both optimism and future orientation, as developmental assets in adolescence, have resilient and protective properties of psychological well-being.

Similarly, the correlations found between the perception of non-specific prevention, life satisfaction and adolescent psychological well-being are expected. It is expected that a low perception of psychosocial risks will be expressed in the low occurrence of risky behaviors such as the consumption of substances, alcohol and cigarettes as well as in the perception of healthy social bonds that will lead to a low frequency of psychosocial risk behaviors in peer relationships, which in turn will be related to life satisfaction and adolescent psychological well-being. It has been found that life skills act as protective factors against life risks in adolescents (Andrade et al., 2019).

Further research has shown the protective role of self-concept and self-efficacy in the avoidance of risk behavior on a sexual level in adolescents (Orcasita et al., 2018). In other words, psychological well-being and mental health are also built by knowing the main risks that can be experienced throughout life and how to face them. In that sense, it is believed that these intervention programs can seek to promote different positive developmental assets in adolescence that would be intertwined with psychological well-being, mental health and that could influence the protection of different psychosocial risks that can affect this stage of development.

Therefore, the school has a privileged place in the role of prevention, detection and referral of health problems, but also has an active role in the promotion of mental health as an ideal setting for the

implementation of programs with a systematic and long-lasting approach that generate protective qualities in its participants (Leiva et al., 2015). Likewise, some other intervention programs in the educational context, based on character strengths in adolescents, have shown to be adequate tools for the promotion of mental health along with their interesting correlates, namely: Strengths Gym and Happy Classrooms, previously described in the introduction.

In turn, Parra et al. (2009) explained that programs in other formats such as those described here, namely, after-school positive development programs, can also be useful resources for taking advantage of adolescents' free time, based on constructive leisure for the acquisition of skills and competencies for life, especially in vulnerable populations. In another instance, Schiavon et al. (2020) consider that educational institutions are collective spaces that should provide opportunities and resources for academic learning as well as work on the mental health and well-being of their teachers and students. In fact, these authors carried out a systematic review that indicated that there is interesting correlative evidence of interventions applied to education and based on positive psychology, but that there is still a long way to go. The authors even specified that despite the popularity of positive psychology, there are very few scientifically documented interventions in educational contexts.

Consequently, evidence-based initiatives founded on the education of the character strengths and virtues proposed by positive psychology can be means to fulfill the objectives of an emotional, character or well-being education (Bisquerra & Hernandez, 2017; Garcia - Alvarez et al. 2018), or of positive education as some authors propose to call it (Adler 2017; Faria, 2017; Seligman et al., 2009), both movements framed in the educational orientation. Although these initiatives are suggested as ways to help in the educational action, this article shares Prieto's call (2018), which refers to psychology as a descriptive science that contributes to education in the way human beings learn, but it is education as a normative theory that decides the aims of education. From this approach, this paper seeks to provide evidence on strategies aimed at promoting psychological well-being, mental health and positive youth development in educational contexts that can help education in its normative goals: comprehensive personality development.

### Conclusions

According to the research objectives formulated, it is concluded: a) adequate levels of positive developmental assets in adolescence, namely: self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy and future orientation after the program; b) evidence of prevention of psychosocial risk behaviors specifically in raising awareness of substance, alcohol and cigarette consumption, as well as non-specific prevention at the level of social relationship risks in difficulties with friends, peers and partners; c) adequate levels of life satisfaction and psychological well-being in the adolescent sample of the *Growing up Strong Program*; d) positive, significant and moderate correlations between positive youth development, psychological well-being, life satisfaction and prevention of psychosocial risks. In short, it can be concluded that the *Growing up Strong Program* is an instance of training in character, emotional and well-being education that generates a healthy framework in the adolescent user sample in the educational community.

However, these conclusions should be taken with caution since one of the main limitations of this study is its research design itself, that is, the difficulty of having control groups or randomized participants may prevent more robust research designs. This is a very frequent methodological limitation in psychoeducational interventions carried out in natural educational contexts. In spite of this, the conclusions are encouraging, motivating and optimistic because the measurement was carried out right at the end of the year, which is a school period characterized by fatigue among the members of the educational community and, above all, by the expectation of enjoying a vacation.

In order to continue deepening this healthy framework that is gradually being built in the *Growing up Strong program*, it is recommended as a future work line to include school satisfaction as a positive developmental asset in adolescence to be measured, and also to consider how to include in future research designs the family perception of both the adolescent and his or her main adult family reference, and of course how to explore the perception of the teaching staff of the institutions that participate in the implementation of the program.

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