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Family functioning in secondary school students: A systematic literature review

Funcionalidad familiar en estudiantes del ciclo de educación secundaria: una revisión sistemática de la literatura

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Abstract

This study aims to systematically analyze family functioning in secondary school students and its relationship with various factors that influence their educational development. The research was conducted using a systematic review approach, following the PRISMA guidelines. Information was gathered from scientific databases such as Scopus, Redalyc, and Web of Science. Initially, 1253 articles were identified, from which, after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 13 studies were selected for final analysis. The results show that family functioning is closely linked to the sociocultural context, communication, and family cohesion—factors that significantly influence the educational performance and development of adolescents. Furthermore, it was found that adequate family functioning fosters supportive environments that contribute to the students' holistic development. It is concluded that family functioning is a key element in the educational sphere, making it necessary to promote programs and strategies aimed at strengthening the family environment in order to improve the quality of education from home to school.

Keywords: functioning, family, adolescents, education.

Resumen

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar de manera sistemática la funcionalidad familiar en estudiantes de nivel secundario y su relación con diversos factores que influyen en su desarrollo educativo. La investigación se desarrolló bajo el enfoque de revisión sistemática, siguiendo los lineamientos de la declaración PRISMA. La búsqueda de información se realizó en bases de datos científicas como Scopus, Redalyc y Web of Science. Inicialmente se identificaron 1253 artículos, de los cuales, tras la aplicación de criterios de inclusión y exclusión, se seleccionaron 13 estudios para el análisis final. Los resultados evidencian que la funcionalidad familiar se encuentra estrechamente vinculada con el contexto sociocultural, la comunicación y la cohesión familiar, factores que influyen significativamente en el desempeño y desarrollo educativo de los adolescentes. Asimismo, se identificó que un adecuado funcionamiento familiar favorece entornos de apoyo que contribuyen al desarrollo integral de los estudiantes. Se concluye que la funcionalidad familiar constituye un elemento clave en el ámbito educativo, por lo que se hace necesario promover programas y estrategias orientadas al fortalecimiento del entorno familiar, con el fin de mejorar la calidad educativa desde el hogar hacia la escuela.

Palabras clave: funcionalidad, familia, adolescentes, educación.

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Introduction

Family functioning refers to the set of interactions among household members that enable families to navigate the various challenges that arise within the family system (Reyes & Oyola, 2022). An appropriate family dynamic thus supports adolescents' comprehensive development, particularly during secondary education, a period marked by significant emotional, social, and cognitive transitions. Adolescence, typically defined as the stage between ages 10 and 19, represents a transitional phase in which individuals require stable family environments that bolster their socioemotional skills and provide suitable support for their educational journey (Esteves et al., 2020).

From a theoretical standpoint, family functioning can be understood through the contributions of Salvador Minuchin (1974, cited in Caguana-Sopa & Tobar-Viera, 2022), who argued that adequate family functioning depends on the structural organization of the family system and its capacity to adapt in response to change. Similarly, Erik Erikson's framework (1950, cited in Ponce, 2022) sheds light on how adolescents confront identity-related crises, the resolution of which is shaped by the quality of family relationships. These theoretical perspectives help clarify how family dynamics influence students' emotional, social, and educational development.

Previous research has established meaningful connections between family functioning and adolescent outcomes. Nunguce and Sierra (2024), for instance, reported that adequate family functioning correlates with higher levels of emotional intelligence, whereas Inriango (2024) identified family dysfunction as a contributing factor to issues such as teenage pregnancy. Romero and Urra (2022) further emphasized that family communication and cohesion promote improved educational outcomes and more favorable socioemotional adjustment among students.

Despite these contributions, a limited synthesis of evidence on family functioning among secondary school students persists, particularly within specific social and educational contexts whose characteristics may influence family dynamics and adolescent development. In light of this gap, the present study aims to analyze family functioning in secondary education students and its relationship with factors affecting their educational development through a systematic literature review.

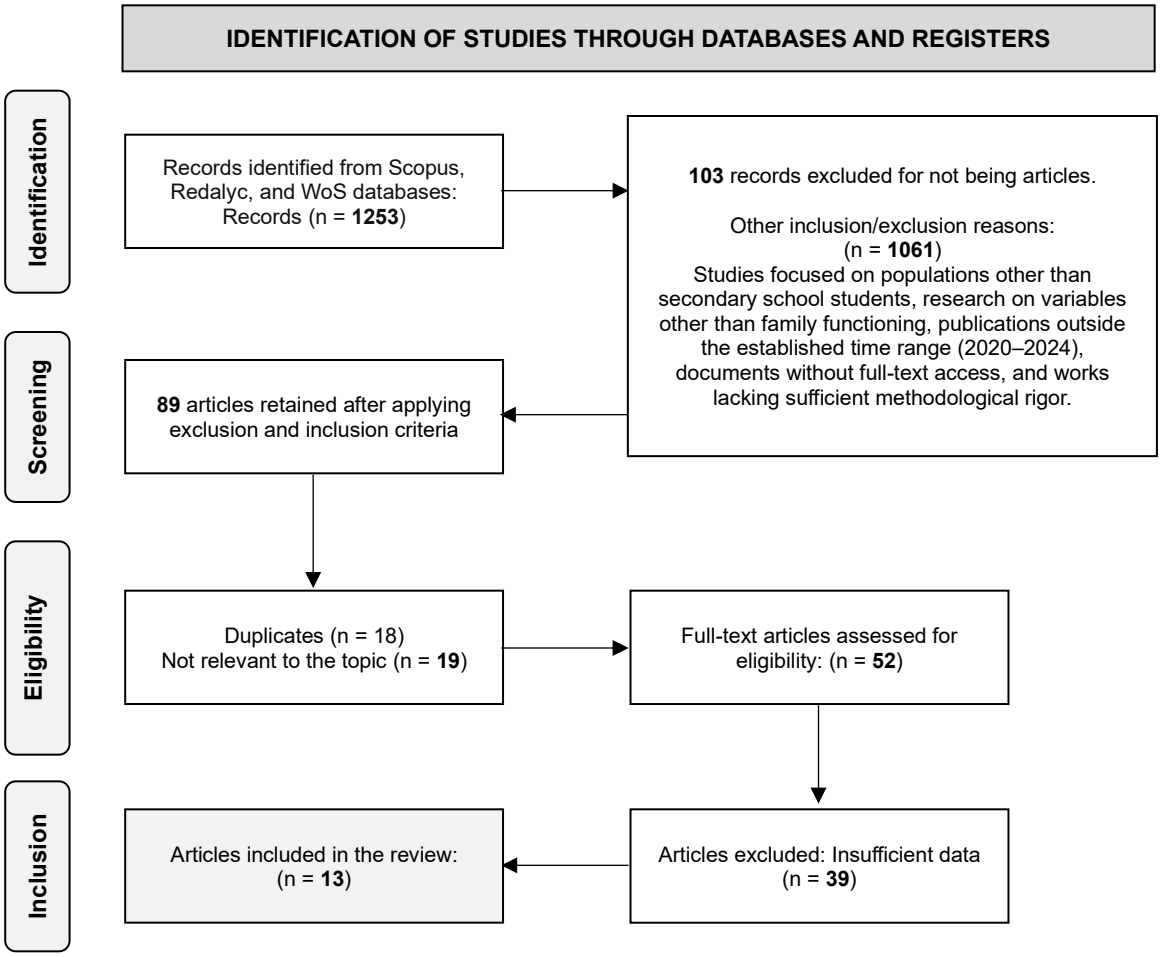
Methodology

This investigation adopted a qualitative approach and employed a systematic literature review design with the objective of analyzing family functioning among secondary school students and its relationship with factors influencing their educational development. To ensure rigor, transparency, and replicability, the review followed the guidelines set forth by the PRISMA statement (*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses*) (Page et al., 2021).

Regarding the search strategy, the following research question guided the process: What scientific evidence exists on family functioning among secondary school students and its relationship with educational development? Using this question as a reference point, searches were performed in recognized scientific databases including Scopus, Redalyc, and Web of Science. Boolean operators such as *"AND"* and *"OR"* were employed, along with keywords in both Spanish and English, among them *"funcionalidad familiar," "family functioning," "adolescentes," "adolescents," "educación secundaria," "secondary education," "desarrollo educativo,"* and *"educational development."* Additional filters were applied relating to publication years (2020–2024), subject areas (Psychology and Education), and document type, with preference given to peer-reviewed articles offering full-text access.

The study selection process unfolded in several stages. Initially, 1,253 records were identified through the database searches. Subsequently, 103 documents were excluded for not being scientific articles, 18 duplicate studies were removed, and 19 investigations were discarded for not being directly relevant to the topic under review. A further 1,061 records were excluded based on other criteria, the primary reasons being: studies focused on populations other than secondary school students; research addressing variables unrelated to family functioning; publications falling outside the designated time frame (2020–2024); documents lacking full-text access; and works exhibiting insufficient methodological rigor. Finally, following a thorough review of full texts, 39 articles were excluded for failing to provide adequate information for analysis, yielding a final sample of 13 scientific articles included in the systematic review.

Figure 1
PRISMA flow diagram



For data analysis, documentary analysis techniques were employed, taking into account relevant aspects such as each study's objectives, methodology, instruments applied, and principal findings. This procedure enabled the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences across the reviewed investigations, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of family functioning among secondary school students.

With respect to ethical considerations, the principles of academic integrity were upheld, ensuring proper citation of consulted sources and respect for authors' intellectual property. Additionally, all collected information was used exclusively for academic and research purposes.

Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the characterization of the included studies, considering aspects such as country of origin, sample size, and main findings reported in each investigation. Analysis of the selected articles revealed relevant findings pertaining to family functioning among secondary school students.

Table 1
Description of studies included in the systematic review

Authors, Year, and Country	Participants	Family Functioning

Castro, O., & Castro, R. (2020) MEXICO	N=1,681 students	Results indicated that among youth with low family functioning, the most prominent variables were mental disorders and suicidal ideation. They also exhibited higher prevalence of social media addiction, cyberbullying, and cybervictimization, suggesting a profile of multiple psychosocial risk.
Esteves, A., Paredes, R., Calcina, C., & Yapuchura, C. (2020) PERU	N=251 students	Findings showed a positive relationship between social skills and family functioning. Specifically, trust emerged as the strongest competency, whereas communication presented greater difficulties.
Pilco, V., & Jaramillo, A. (2023) ECUADOR	N=285 students	Results indicated that 42.5% of youth belonged to families with moderate functioning and 36.1% to dysfunctional families, while the majority demonstrated average academic performance; moreover, 36.1% exhibited low self-esteem and 34.4% moderate self-esteem. Although some students displayed externalizing behavior according to teachers, the positive correlation between family functioning and self-esteem ($r = .553$; $p < .05$) suggests that improving family dynamics could enhance self-esteem, supporting recommendations to adjust educational and family interventions and conduct further post-pandemic studies.
Hinostroza, P., & Lima, D. (2023) ECUADOR	N=218 students	Nearly half of the population (48.6%) showed moderate family functioning, while state anxiety and trait anxiety were at moderate levels (45.9% and 48.6%, respectively). Significant negative correlations ($rs = -0.476$ for state anxiety; $rs = -0.567$ for trait anxiety) point to an inverse relationship: greater family functioning associates with lower anxiety levels.
Caravaca-Sánchez, F., Aizpurua, E., & Stephenson, A. (2021) SPAIN	N=828 university students	The report showed that drug use—particularly recreational sedatives—combined with family dysfunction was associated with greater presence of depressive, anxious, and stress symptoms among university students. These findings indicate that both substance use and family dynamics contribute to the mental health burden in this population.
Peñaherrera, M., Mayorga, W., & Reales, C. (2021). COLOMBIA	N=Homemakers	The study indicates that homemakers exposed to high stress levels may develop this syndrome, requiring primary care to prioritize its detection. Developing early identification and intervention strategies is essential for addressing initial stages before they affect the family unit.

Pérez-Siguas, R., Hernan Matta-Solis, H., & Matta-Solis, E. (2023) PERU	N=571 students	Among youth with severe family disorders, 157 (51.8%) exhibited low resilience; in moderate cases, 155 (100%) showed moderate resilience, and in mild cases, 5 (100%) presented low resilience, whereas youth with better family functioning (108; 100%) achieved high resilience. These patterns suggest that family interventions are needed to identify risk factors that hinder the development of youth competencies.
González, A. & Molero, M. (2024). SPAIN	N=743 students	Analysis showed that family functioning moderates the relationship between prosocial behavior and certain aspects of school climate. Addressing these variables in educational contexts may foster optimal development and personal well-being among students.
Molina, P., Fernández, S., Molero, M., Pérez, M. & Gázquez, J. (2024) PERU	N=1,094 students	Family functioning related positively to mental health and emotional intelligence, with significant gender differences observed in these variables. Furthermore, the high-functioning group obtained higher mean scores in psychological well-being and emotional intelligence than the medium- and low-functioning groups, underscoring the key role of the family environment in adolescent development.
Morelato, F., Korzeniows, I., & Valgañon, V. (2024) ARGENTINA	N=39 parents	The study showed that many families exhibit low coherence and flexibility, with extreme functional patterns; at the same time, a greater range of adaptability/flexibility was significantly associated with better parental performance. These observations prompted nursing staff to reflect on their role in the face of unexpected crises.
Andrade, J., Silva, A., Frazão, I., Perrelli, J., Silva, T., & Cavalcanti, A. (2021). BRAZIL	N=61 caregivers	The study found that women with mental illnesses and families with children at home obtained lower family Apgar scores; additionally, difficulty in the caregiver-user relationship, patient stress, physical aggression, and agitation elevated the mean subjective burden. These factors contribute to greater family vulnerability during episodes of mental illness.
Alwuqaysi, B., Abdul-Rahman, A., & Borgo, R. (2024) UNITED KINGDOM	N=563 students	The study suggests the need to identify demographic factors that modulate the relationship between social media use and family functioning and to evaluate the efficacy of the *Social Brain Action* app; compared to baseline, the mean psychological well-being score decreased significantly after its use. These results provide insight into the complex interactions among social media, mental health, and family dynamics, opening avenues for targeted interventions.

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Kars, S., Tansarıkaya, S., Abaoğlu, H. & Huri, M. (2024) TURKEY	N=138 parents	The study found that parents received social support from partners, family, and friends, and that this perceived support associated positively with occupational balance and family functioning in the rehabilitation context, although parents reported a perception of poor occupational balance. Investigating these relationships in parents of individuals with autism across different age groups and in families with special needs, as well as further evaluating occupational balance and parental participation, is recommended.

Note. Authors' own elaboration based on selected articles

The findings demonstrate that family functioning relates significantly to various aspects of adolescent development, including mental health, self-esteem, resilience, academic performance, social skills, prosocial behavior, and the prevention of risk behaviors such as substance use, cyberbullying, and internet addiction.

Moreover, most investigations report that adequate family functioning promotes emotional and educational well-being, whereas family dysfunction associates with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and other psychosocial difficulties. Collectively, the studies reviewed underscore the importance of the family as a protective factor in adolescents' comprehensive development.

With respect to the research problem, the analyzed studies provide evidence that family functioning maintains a significant relationship with adolescents' educational, emotional, and social development. The systematic review demonstrates that family dynamics characterized by communication, cohesion, and support foster psychological well-being, social skills, resilience, and appropriate academic performance, while family dysfunction is associated with anxiety, low self-esteem, risk behaviors, and difficulties in the educational process.

Regarding mental health, the findings of Castro and Castro (2020), Hinostroza and Lima (2023), and Caravaca-Sánchez et al. (2021) indicate that low family functioning relates to mental disorders, suicidal ideation, anxiety, stress, and substance use. These results show important convergences across authors, who maintain that the family acts as a protective factor against psychological and social difficulties during adolescence. Similarly, Alwuqaysi et al. (2024) identified that inappropriate social media use and deteriorating psychological well-being also correlate with deficient family dynamics, broadening the understanding of risks associated with unstable family environments.

Various studies further highlight the positive role of family functioning in strengthening socioemotional skills. Esteves et al. (2020) found a favorable relationship between family functioning and social skills, especially regarding interpersonal trust. Molina et al. (2024) likewise reported positive correlations between family functioning, mental health, and emotional intelligence, while González and Molero (2024) argue that family functioning plays a moderating role in prosocial behavior and school climate. These findings suggest that functional families not only contribute to preventing emotional and behavioral problems but also bolster competencies essential for adolescents' comprehensive development.

Other studies delve into specific variables related to the family environment. Pérez-Siguas et al. (2023) demonstrated that adolescents with higher levels of family functioning exhibit greater resilience, while Pilco and Jaramillo (2023) identified a positive relationship between family functioning and self-esteem. Both studies concur that adequate family relationships strengthen personal resources that enable individuals to cope with adverse situations and facilitate emotional and social adaptation.

From a theoretical perspective, the results align with the propositions of Minuchin (1974, cited in Caguana-Sopa & Tobar-Viera, 2022), which maintain that family dynamics and organization directly influence the behavior and development of family members. In this sense, the reviewed studies provide evidence that functional families create environments of support and emotional stability. The theory of Erikson (1950, cited in Ponce, 2022) similarly helps elucidate how, during adolescence, the family environment plays a fundamental role in identity formation and emotional strengthening.

In relation to the Peruvian context and particularly to Ayacucho, the results suggest that economic, social, and family conditions may significantly influence adolescents' educational and emotional development. Additionally, factors such as family stress, economic constraints, and communication difficulties within the household could affect

student well-being and academic performance. These findings underscore the need to promote family intervention strategies and educational programs aimed at strengthening family coexistence and support.

In this regard, the systematic review addresses the research problem by confirming that family functioning constitutes a determining factor in adolescents' comprehensive development, given its direct influence on emotional, social, and educational dimensions.

Conclusions

This systematic review analyzed the scientific evidence on family functioning among secondary school students, revealing that family functioning represents a determining factor in adolescents' emotional, social, and educational development. The reviewed studies converge in finding that adequate family functioning, characterized by effective communication, cohesion, and adaptability, promotes students' comprehensive well-being.

Furthermore, adolescents from functional families were found to exhibit higher levels of self-esteem, better social skills, and more appropriate emotional management, all of which positively influence their academic performance.

In contrast, family dysfunction is associated with difficulties such as anxiety, depression, and risk behaviors, highlighting the importance of the family environment in youth development.

Regarding the sociocultural context, economic and social factors were found to significantly influence family dynamics. In regions such as Ayacucho, these conditions may generate less favorable family environments, underscoring the need to address family functioning from a contextualized perspective.

Finally, family functioning must be considered a fundamental axis within the educational sphere, making it necessary to promote programs and interventions aimed at strengthening family dynamics, especially in vulnerable contexts. Such efforts would contribute to adolescents' comprehensive development and the improvement of educational quality.

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