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*Resilient Attitudes and Fear of Contagion of COVID-19 in Secondary School  
Students in Peru and Mexico*

**Actitudes resilientes y temor al contagio de COVID-19 en  
estudiantes de educación secundaria de Perú y México**

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**Resumen**

Las actitudes resilientes en tiempos de pandemia por el COVID-19, ha permitido a niños y adolescentes desarrollar factores protectores para seguir desarrollándose de manera adecuada, esto queda evidenciado en este estudio, cuyo objetivo fue, analizar la asociación entre las actitudes resilientes y el temor al contagio por COVID-19. La muestra estuvo conformada por 282 estudiantes de educación secundaria de dos países, Perú y México, el rango de edad de 12 a 21 años para estudiantes de Perú y de 12 a 22 años para los de México. Como instrumentos de medición se utilizaron dos cuestionarios, la *escala de resiliencia* de Wagnild y Young (1993) que cuenta con 25 ítems, y la *escala de miedo al COVID-19 (FCV-19S)* de Ahorsu, Lin, Imani, Saffari, Griffiths y Pakpour (2020). En los resultados se puede evidenciar que hay asociación entre actitudes resilientes y temor al contagio por COVID 19. Sin embargo, considerando el resultado por país, en los estudiantes peruanos existe asociación entre las variables, mientras que, en la muestra mexicana, no existe esta asociación. En cuanto a la asociación entre las dimensiones de resiliencia y miedo al contagio

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por COVID-19, en los estudiantes peruanos se encontró asociación en tres factores; ecuanimidad, perseverancia y satisfacción, mientras que en los estudiantes mexicanos solo el factor confianza en sí mismo se asocia con el miedo al contagio. Se concluye que, a pesar de que los estudiantes muestran altos niveles de resiliencia, los estudiantes mexicanos presentan menos miedo al contagio que sus similares peruanos, por lo que probablemente, la cultura, la información recibida sobre la pandemia, y la confianza en sí mismo, etc., pueden jugar un rol importante en esta diferencia.

**Palabras clave:** resiliencia; Temor al contagio; COVID-19; ecuanimidad; Sentirse bien solo; Confianza en sí mismo; Perseverancia; Satisfacción

### **Abstract**

Resilient attitudes in times of a COVID-19 pandemic have allowed children and adolescents to develop protective factors to continue developing adequately. This is evidenced in the current study, whose objective was to analyze the association between resilient attitudes and fear of contagion by COVID-19. The sample consisted of 282 high school students from two countries, Peru and Mexico: The ages ranged between 12 to 21 years of age for students from Peru and between 12 to 22 years of age for those from Mexico. Two questionnaires were used as measurement instruments, the (1993) Wagnild and Young resilience scale, which has 25 items, and the COVID-19 fear scale (FCV-19S) created by Ahorsu, Lin, Imani, Saffari, Griffiths. and Pakpour (2020). The results show that there is an association between resilient attitudes and fear of contagion by COVID 19. However, considering the results by country, in Peruvian students there is an association between the variables, while in the Mexican sample, there is no association. Regarding the association between the dimensions of resilience and fear of contagion by COVID-19 in Peruvian students, an association was found in three factors: equanimity, perseverance, and satisfaction; while in Mexican students only the self-confidence factor is associated with fear of contagion. It is concluded that, despite the fact that the students show high levels of resilience, Mexican students have less fear of contagion than their Peruvian counterparts, for which, probably culture, the information received about the pandemic, and their self-confidence, etc., may play an important role in this difference.

**Keywords:** resilience; Fear of contagion; COVID-19; equanimity; Feeling good alone; Self-confidence; Perseverance; Satisfaction

### **Introduction**

The 2019 coronavirus pandemic, or COVID-19, is one of the worst pandemics of this century (Alshehri, Alatawi, Alghamdi, Alhifany & Alharbi, 2020), which is affecting all sorts of people, adults, adolescents and children alike (Luo, Chua, Xiong, Ho and Ho, 2020; Salehi, Amanat, Mohammadi, Salmanian, Rezaei, Saghazadeh, & Garakani, 2021; Pedreira Massa, 2020). As a consequence, people are developing illnesses such as stress, anxiety, depression, etc., (Havnen, Anyan, Hjemdal, Solem, Riksfjord, & Hagen, 2020), and the effects will not only be short-term. They will also affect the future of adults as well as – and perhaps mainly, the future of young people and children.

However, many people despite living in confined conditions and being exposed to developing mental health diseases, have also developed resilient behaviors that allow them to cushion stressful situations (Alshehri, Alatawi, Alghamdi, Alhifany, & Alharbi, 2020; Anyan, Ingvaldsen, & Hjemdal, 2020; Herrero-Fernández, & Herrero-Fernández, 2020), and continue developing positive attitudes, adapting to the environment, showing short periods of interruption (Bonanno, 2004).

Resilience has been defined as the ability of human beings to recover and adapt positively to stressful conditions or situations of psychosocial risk (Rutter, 1999). However, according to Daly (2020), this phenomenon has been discussed by professionals in various disciplines due to its uses in other disciplines. Discipline such as physics, which refers to the resistance of materials, as well as the ability to regain their initial state after being subjected to different pressures or forces (García, García, López and Días, 2016). In this regard, it is necessary to understand the concept of resilience from an interdisciplinary perspective, and mainly from different approaches. On the one hand, from those who point out that the resilient capacity that children present would be in their personal qualities that allow them to overcome adversity (Luthar et al., 2000), and on the other hand, those who point out that there would be both protective and risk factors, which are present in the adaptation or maladjustment of children (Rutter, 1999 and Grotberg, 1995).

Daly (2020), points out that, in the scientific literature on the concept of resilience, three important aspects stand out: a) the resistance that children show toward adversity strengthens the internal resources to take advantage of it, b) the mental flexibility that positively favors the coping and, c) the challenges assumed contribute faster to the capacity for recovery. These processes confirm that the concept must be used from various approaches, biological, social, dynamic, etc., which would agree with the postulates of Melillo, Estamatti and Cuestas (2005), who point out that resilience has been characterized as a set of social, psychological and intrapsychic processes that make it possible to have a healthy life while living in an unhealthy environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only had devastating effects on the social and family life of children and adolescents but also on their school life, where approximately 137 million children around the world were left without going to school and more than three million children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean are in danger of dropping out (World Bank Group, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; Velavan and Meyer, 2020); in addition, the closure of schools has generated social isolation, with which the appearance of some mental disorders such as the feeling of anguish, anxiety, anger and uncertainty is more prone (Cuevas-Parra and Stephano, 2020).

Faced with these situations, it is necessary to implement programs that help, and at the same time, to develop resilient capacities in children and adolescents who have been the most silenced group (Pedreira Massa, 2020); thereby helping to cushion the impact of these stressful life experiences in a depressive symptomatology (Herrero-Fernández, & Herrero-Fernández, 2020), which would in turn, have positive effects on people's later well-being

(Armitage, Wang, Davis, Bowes, & Haworth, 2021), so that they could face the situations that affect their mental health in a positive way (Anyan, Ingvaldsen, & Hjemdal (2020).

While it is true that exposure to stressful conditions generated by COVID-19 affects both men and women in a different way (Alshehri, Alatawi, Alghamdi, Alhifany, & Alharbi, 2020), it is also known that resilience develops differently in men and women, even according to age (González-Arratia and Valdez, 2015). Then, it is also necessary to study if the cultural differences of countries are important indicators in the development of resilience attitudes regarding the fear of contagion by COVID-19 in different living conditions, as well as confinement and social vulnerability. In this sense, the present study would help to elucidate these concerns so that effective programs can be developed in a timely manner to attend the mental health care of school-age children and adolescents, since confinement will have repercussions in terms of addictive behaviors to technologies by children, ill behaviors, socialization problems, lack of empathy, etc. Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze the association between resilient attitudes and fear of contagion in secondary school students from two countries, Peru and Mexico; in that manner, children's return to in-person school can be worked out.

## Method

*Design:* The research design was non-experimental with a descriptive and associative scope, due to the fact that the objective of the study was to measure the association between the variables of resilience and fear of contagion in elementary school students from two countries.

*Participants:* 282 high school students from two countries, Peru (220) and Mexico (66) participated in the study. The age range for students from Peru was 12 to 21 years of age, while for the sample from Mexico it was 12 to 22 years of age. According to the data collected in Peru, 150 participants lived with both parents, 8 only with the father, 56 only with the mother, and 6 with guardians, while the Mexican participants answered that 46 lived with both parents, 3 only with the father, 14 only with the mother and 3 with guardians.

*Instruments:* Two scales were used as instruments, the first was the (1993) *Wagnild and Young resilience scale*, which has 25 items and was adapted by several researchers for Peruvian samples (Castilla et al., 2014; Castilla et al., 2016) and, by Alonso, Camacho, Armendariz, Alonso, Ulloa, and Pérez (2016) for a Mexican sample. The application of this instrument can be collective or individual and lasts between 25 to 30 minutes. It also evaluates dimensions such as: Equanimity (7, 8, 11, 12); Feeling good alone (5, 3, 19); Self-confidence (6, 9, 10, 13, 17, 18, 24); Perseverance (1, 2, 4, 14, 15, 20, 23); and Satisfaction (16, 21, 22, 25), according to a 7-point Likert-type format where: 1 is maximum disagreement and 7 means maximum agreement, the scale raises the following levels of resilience, between 98-82 = Very high resilience; 81-64 = High resilience; 63-49 = Normal; 48-31 = Low; and 30-14 = Very low. The Fear of COVID-19 Scale (FCV-19S) prepared by Ahorsu, Lin, Imani, Saffari, Griffiths and Pakpour (2020) was also used; this instrument is unidimensional and

has 10 items on a four-point Likert scale. According to the validation, the instrument has a solid psychometric property.

*Procedure:* The data collection was carried out online (Google forms) through the students' teachers, with whom the application of the instruments was coordinated, for which the willingness to participate or not freely has been recorded in the study. 100% of those who entered, made the decision to participate and answer the questionnaires. Once the answers were obtained, the analysis was carried out using the SPSS statistical software version 23.

## Results

According to the evidenced results, it is known that students from both countries have developed acceptable levels of resilience during the time of confinement for COVID-19. Of the total number of students surveyed in Peru (220) 66 show a fair level of resilience, while 154 show a high level of development of this capacity. On the Mexican side, 21 shows a fair level of resilience and 45 a very good level.

**Figure 1**

*Distribution of resilience levels according to country of origin*

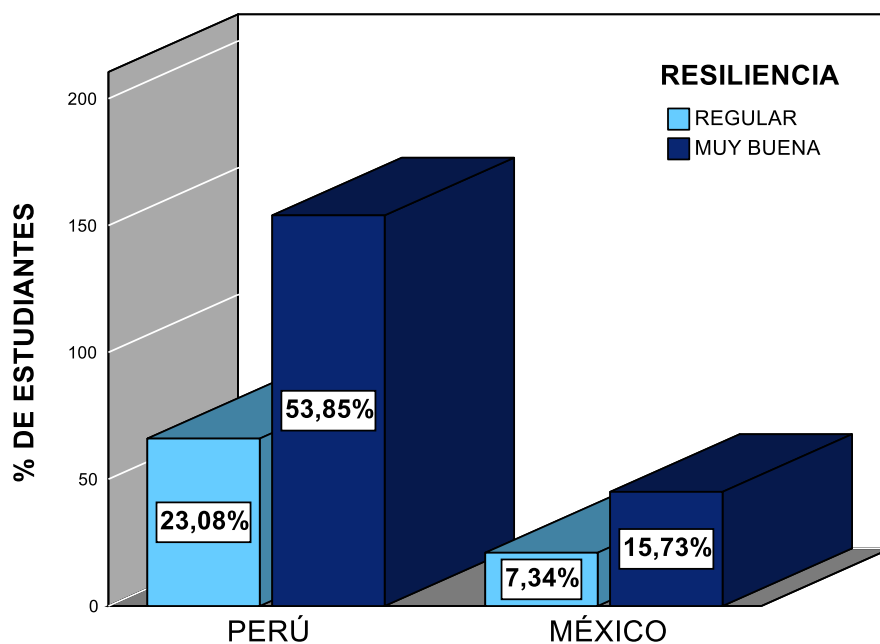


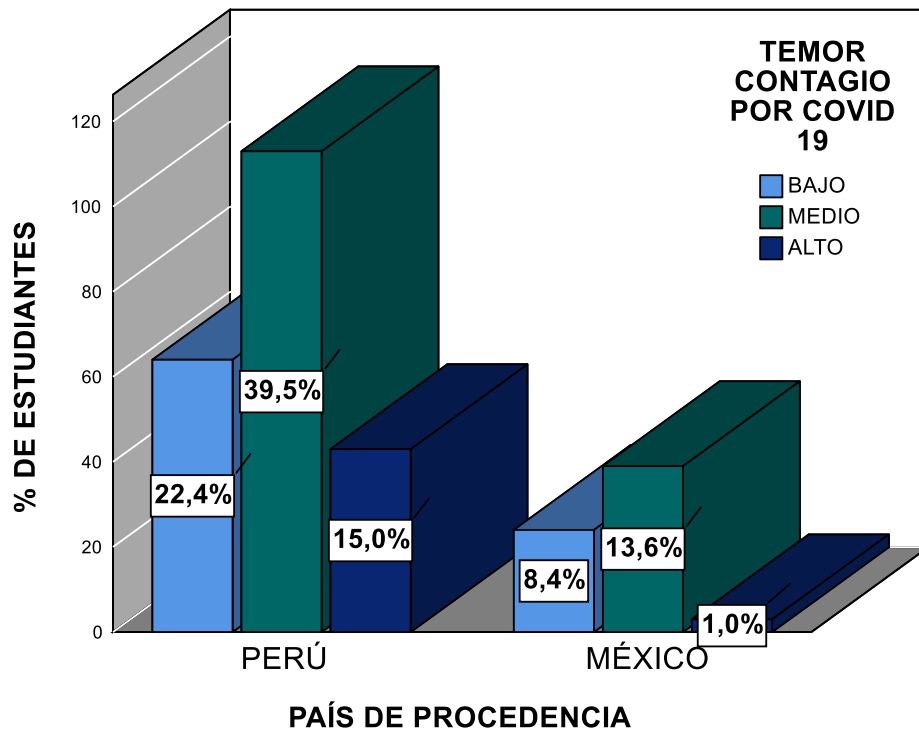
Figure 2 shows the level of fear of contagion of COVID-19 that secondary education students have in the two countries, Peru and Mexico. In the case of students from Peru, it is evident that they are more afraid of being infected (113 medium level and 43 students their fear of being infected is high) unlike students from Mexico (39 students have a medium level of fear of being infected, while that 3 students have high fear). However, at a general level, there is a significant level of students who report having a fear of catching COVID-19.

**Figure 2**

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*Distribution of students according to country of origin and level of fear of contagion*



The level of resilience is known to be fair to medium, both in students from Peru and Mexico. But also, regarding the level of resilience with respect to the parental figure with which the boy or girl lives (table 1), it is observed that all students in general, regardless of the country and if they live with both parents, only the mother, single parent, or guardian, have a very good resilient attitude

**Table 1**  
*Resilience level according to parental figure*

Country of origin	of	The participant lives with	Resilience		Total
			Good	Very good	
Perú	Father and Mother	Father and Mother	49	101	150
		Mother	3	5	8
	Father	14	42	56	
	Tutor	0	6	6	
	<b>Total</b>		66	154	220



<b>México</b>	Father and Mother	15	31	46
	Mother	1	2	3
	Father	4	10	14
	Tutor	1	2	3
	<b>Total</b>	21	45	66
<b>Total</b>	Father and Mother	64	132	196
	Mother	4	7	11
	Father	18	52	70
	Tutor	1	8	9
	<b>Total</b>	87	199	286

The fear of contagion by COVID-19 that students have is also similar in both countries, regardless of whether they live with both parents, only with the mother, only with the father or a guardian. There is a regular tendency for students to fear contagion, which is evidenced by the results in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Level of Fear of Contagion by COVID-19, according to parental figure*

Country of origin	The participant lives with	Fear of Contagion by COVID-19			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
<b>Perú</b>	Father and Mother	37	85	28	150
	Mother	3	4	1	8
	Father	22	20	14	56
	Tutor	2	4	0	6
	<b>Total</b>	64	113	43	220
<b>México</b>	Father and Mother	17	26	3	46
	Mother	2	1	0	3
	Father	4	10	0	14
	Tutor	1	2	0	3
	<b>Total</b>	24	39	3	66
<b>Total</b>	Father and Mother	54	111	31	196
	Mother	5	5	1	11
	Father	26	30	14	70
	Tutor	3	6	0	9
	<b>Total</b>	88	152	46	286

Table 3 shows that there is an association between resilient attitudes and fear of contagion of COVID 19, considering all the students in the study (with p-value = 0.023 <0.05). According to the countries of residence, at the Peru level the association between resilient attitudes and fear of contagion of COVID 19 (with p value <0.05) is considered; while, at the Mexico level, the association between the study variables (with p value > 0.05) cannot be affirmed.

**Table 3**

*Association between resilience and fear of contagion by COVID-19 according to the Country of origin*

<b>Level</b>	<b>Pearson's Chi-square</b>	<b>Degrees of freedom</b>	<b>Significance (p value)</b>
General	7.577	2	0.023
Perú	9.122	2	0.010
México	0.048	2	0.976

Considering all the students in Table 4, an association is observed between the factors of equanimity and perseverance with fear of contagion of COVID 19 (p values <0.05). In Peru, the association of factors such as perseverance and satisfaction with fear of contagion of COVID 19 can be found (p values <0.05). In Mexico, the association of the Confidence Factor in oneself with Fear of contagion of COVID 19 (p value <0.05) is contemplated

**Table 4**

*Association between resilience factors and fear of contagion depending on the country*

<b>Level</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Pearson's Chi-square</b>	<b>Degrees of freedom</b>	<b>Significance (p value)</b>
<b>General</b>	Equanimity	11.458	4	0.022
	Feel good alone	3.594	4	0.464
	Self-confidence	5.470	4	0.242
	Perseverance	12.516	4	0.014
	Satisfaction	6.840	4	0.145
<b>Perú</b>	Equanimity	10.888	4	0.028
	Feel good alone	3.667	4	0.453
	Self-confidence	0.269	2	0.874
	Perseverance	12.919	4	0.012
	Satisfaction	11.997	4	0.017
	Equanimity	1.390	4	0.846

<b>México</b>	Feel good alone	0.772	2	0.680
	Self-confidence	21.524	4	0.000
	Perseverance	0.883	2	0.643
	Satisfaction	1.631	4	0.803

## Discussion

Students from both countries have developed acceptable levels of resilience during the time of confinement due to COVID-19, which confirms the reports of Sibalde, Sibalde, da Silva, Scorsolini-Comin, Brandão, & Meirelles (2020), who point out that the School is a protective factor for adolescents because it is a conducive space for social interactions, the construction of lasting friendships, and above all, for the biological, psychological, and social development of the adolescent (González, 2018). In addition, the presence of a significant figure in the school, such as a teacher or mentor (Abukari & Laser, 2013) contributes to developing their personality, well-being, awareness, openness, extraversion and emotional stability (Backmann, Weiss, Schippers & Hoegl, 2019). But students also learn to develop a set of resources and strategies for adequate coping with stress and overcoming adverse emotions (Compas, 1987), which may include emotions related to the fear of the pandemic.

Precisely, in the case of students from Peru, it is evident that they are more afraid of being infected by COVID-19, unlike students from Mexico. However, this difference is disputed because this trend is not due to the rate of cases and deaths in each country, since at the time the data were collected, both countries had similar rates of contagion and deaths from COVID-19. What is known is that, according to the general results, fear is generated mainly by the knowledge gap that persists in the minds of children and adolescents despite the fact that there is a large amount of scientific and unscientific information about the coronavirus (Muñoz, 2020). This type of fear is more common in preadolescents and adolescents (Beltrán, 2014). These results are similar to the finding of Ahorsu et al. (2020), and from the Institute of Peruvian Studies (2020) in which the participants point out that they are afraid of contagion: 85% are very afraid for their relatives, 80% for themselves, and 75% for the possibility of giving the disease to others. That means that last year, emotions and negative thoughts were more frequent, not only in children, but also in people of all ages (Duan y Zhu, 2020), which can trigger a variety of mental health problems (Furman, Griffiths, Pakpour & Simkin, 2020; Rajkumar, 2020).

Regarding the level of resilience according to the parental figure that influences the child – both parents, only the mother, only the father, or a guardian, students present a very good resilient attitude, which supports statements made by different authors (Pan American Health Organization and World, Health Organization, 2020; Ramírez, Rodríguez & Bécquer, 2020; Saavedra, 2020; Sibalde, Sibalde, da Silva, Scorsolini-Comin, Brandão, & Meirelles,

2020) regarding the fact that a stable and responsible family provides security, support, establishes adequate routines and favorable conditions to promote resilient attitudes, and by doing that, it increases the quality of life of children and adolescents (Simón-Saiz, Fuentes-Chacón, Garrido-Abejar, Serrano-Parra, Larrañaga-Rubio & Yubero-Jiménez, 2018). Resilience also helps with the adaptability to new experiences (Accounts, Arias Gallegos, Calcina, & Ceballos Canaza, 2019). In addition, within the protective factors of resilience, it is enough for the child to have one parental figure that makes him or her feel the courage to move on successfully. However, living in adverse family conditions affects the development of resilience in adolescents (Chulakarn, & Chaimongkol, 2021), which could also be creating stereotypes related to vulnerable families, chauvinist behaviors (i.e., *machismo*), and the social benefits of family support for adolescents (Matos, da Cruz, dos Santos & Silva, 2018; Yunes, Garcia, & Albuquerque, 2007).

Regarding the level of fear of contagion by COVID-19 that students present, both samples present a regular level of fear regardless of whether they live with both parents, only with the mother, only with the father or with a guardian. This suggests that living with someone does not minimize the fear of children and adolescents toward the consequences of the pandemic, because it is an automatic response, or a basic emotion that is reinforced when it is induced by a set of threatening stimuli; in this case, contagion, the disease, and death from COVID-19 (Gómez et al., 2020). All this, at the same time triggers other emotional and behavioral states such as: panic, stress, anxiety, sadness, emotional imbalance, isolation, loneliness, etc., (Mejía et al., 2020; Pinchak, 2020).

Regarding the association between the variables, considering the entire sample of students from both countries, the results show that there is an association between resilient attitudes and the fear of contagion of COVID 19. These results agree with the findings of Zager Kocjan, Kavčič, & Avsec, (2021) who point out that resilience is an important protective factor for individuals in stressful situations such as the pandemic and confinement, and also the search for sensations in the face of trauma (McKay, Skues, & Williams, 2018). Therefore, it is recommended to work and strengthen these resilient capacities from the schools, as suggested by Lozano-Díaz, Canosa, Fernández-Prados, & Martínez (2020). However, considering the students separately according to the country, it is evidenced that in Peruvian students, the existence of an association between resilient attitudes and fear of contagion by COVID-19 is confirmed, while in the Mexican sample, there is no association between the study variables. One of the main differentiating factors could be culture, according to Skevington, Bartos, Bomnicvato, Fleck, Fang, Kamel, ... The WHOQOL SRPB Group (2020). Culture forms suitable models of resilience development by identifying suitable member of the community; in some cases, it can cover people`s inner strength and hope. Thus, the Peruvian sample is more dispersed. The participants are from different parts of the country with multiple traditions and cultural legacies (Marín and Uribe, 2017), as opposed to the Mexican sample, which is more homogeneous and mainly in an urban area.

Regarding the association of the dimensions of resilience, with the fear of contagion by COVID 19, it is observed that, in Peruvian students the fear of contagion is associated with three resilience factors; equanimity, perseverance and satisfaction, while in Mexican students the fear of contagion by COVID 19 is only associated with the factor of self-confidence. In this sense, it is clear that the pandemic has affected people's mental health in various ways (Duan and Zhu, 2020; Furman, Griffiths, Pakpour & Simkin, 2020; Pedreira Massa, 2020; Seitz, Bertsch & Herpertz, 2021), and resilience is a key ability to overcome adversity of any kind in life (Backmann, Weiss, Schippers & Hoegl, 2019), but it also develops according to culture (Skevington, Bartos, Bonicato, Fleck, Fang, Kamel,...The WHOQOL SRPB Group, 2020), and personality (Zager Kocjan, Kavčič & Avsec, 2021). In this sense, the Peruvian sample – in order to deal with the stress generated by the pandemic – take into consideration a broader set of factor to understand the purpose of their lives and not to react with extreme measures (equanimity); that is to say, they look for a variety of different resources, styles, and strategies of coping so that they can adapt to the current conditions successfully (Compas, 1987), and since there are multiple – and sometimes unexpected – ways toward resilience (Bonanno, 2004), they would also remain engaged to continue fighting in spite of adversities (perseverance). For that matter, self-confidence and personal commitment are very important to minimize the impact of fear of contagion (Chulakarn & Chaimongkol, 2021), and they also try to find meaning in life or vital satisfaction (personal satisfaction) in spite of living in a context of confinement. In order to move on and remain positive, even in conditions of adversity, resilience has a fundamental role (Lozano-Díaz, Canosa, Fernández-Prados & Martínez, 2020).

Meanwhile, in the Mexican sample, fear of COVID-19 was associated with a single dimension of resilience, which is self-confidence; that is, these students believe more in their own abilities than their Peruvian peers. They point out that getting out of this situation depends on themselves, for which it would be important to recognize their own strengths and limitations well. This goes according to the reports by Gutman & Midgley (2000), who point out that students who believe themselves to be more self-effective perform better than others, and resilience is the ability that people have to overcome challenges, recover from adversity, and experience healthy adaptation to new contexts (Backmann, Weiss, Schippers & Hoegl, 2019).

## Conclusions

The global pandemic generated by COVID-19 has caused multiple problems for people around the world. The most affected groups were specifically children and adolescents who Pedreira-Massa (2020) pointed out as being the most silenced group of this pandemic, and this is due to the lack of concern on the part of government authorities to provide them with physical and psychological care. Covid-19 has disrupted the mental health of these children and adolescents with multiple consequences. Among these we can consider stress, anxiety, sadness, loneliness due to mandatory isolation, lack of interaction with their peers, free play, among others. All these consequences can be reversed and reinforced through joint efforts based on resilience, which has been shown to be an effective ability to overcome and recover

from various adverse factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and to come out stronger from those negative experiences.

This paper presents results of an investigation on the relationship between fear of contagion by COVID-19 and resilience in adolescents in Peru and Mexico. It shows evidence that the association between these variables is positive, which in turn helps us to conclude that it would be necessary to invest in the teaching of resilience to children and adolescents during the schooling process as we continue being affected by the pandemic. This would have a positive impact on the students' general well-being. In addition, teachers and especially families must promote resilient attitudes in children and adolescents through social interaction, for which media venues such as social networks, video games among peers, communication through text messages with friends, or collaborative work, could be utilized. By doing this, we could minimize negative emotions – such as fear, stress, anxiety, among others – generated by the pandemic, and ultimately have positive effects on the general well-being of people.

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