



Article

Socio-Demographic Differences in Positive Youth Development in Spanish Undergraduates

Diego Gomez-Baya ^{1,*}, Maria Muñoz-Parralo ¹, Antonio David Martin-Barrado ¹, Elizabeth Trejos-Castillo ², Margarida Gaspar de Matos ³ and Nora Wiium ⁴

- ¹ Department of Social, Developmental and Educational Psychology, Universidad de Huelva, 21007 Huelva, Spain; maria.munoz988@alu.uhu.es (M.M.-P.); antoniodavid.martin@dpee.uhu.es (A.D.M.-B.)
² Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-1230, USA; elizabeth.trejos@ttu.edu
³ Faculty of Human Sciences, Portuguese Catholic University, 1649-023 Lisbon, Portugal; margarida.gaspardematos@gmail.com
⁴ Department of Psychosocial Science, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen, Christies Gate 12, 5020 Bergen, Norway; nora.wiium@uib.no
* Correspondence: diego.gomez@dpee.uhu.es

Abstract: The positive youth development (PYD) model is a strength-based conceptualization of the transition to adulthood, in which the relationships that individuals establish within this context are essential. These adaptive contextual–individual interactions allow youths to acquire better psychological adjustment and greater social participation. The PYD model differentiates five areas to be nurtured (the 5Cs) in young people: confidence, competence, connection, caring, and character. The present work aimed to examine differences in overall PYD and its respective 5Cs among Spanish university students based on their socio-demographic characteristics. A cross-sectional study with 1038 students between 18 and 28 years old from 11 Spanish universities was conducted. In order to assess the 5Cs, the Spanish adaptation of the 5Cs of the PYD Short Form was used. When analyzing the variability of the 5Cs according to socio-demographic variables, some relevant differences were found, though with small effect sizes. Students with better scores on the 5Cs included those who were living in the countryside or big cities, studied Social Sciences, were enrolled in small universities, had parents with a high education level, and those who reported high socio-economic status. Women presented higher scores in terms of connection, caring, and character, whereas men reported more perceived competence and confidence, which may be due to gender socialization during adolescence and youth. Families with parents with a higher level of education and of a higher socio-economic level may offer more resources and support greater positive youth development. These social inequalities in PYD may suggest the need for the promotion of equal opportunities in education, health promotion, and social participation, which may allow young people from all backgrounds to develop their individual potential.

Keywords: positive youth development; socio-demographic; youth; cross-sectional; Spain

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1. Introduction

The present study follows the perspective proposed using the positive youth development (PYD) model, a theoretical model that describes adolescence as a stage where strengths and skills are developed, focusing on a bidirectional relationship between young people and the context they are within. This relationship can be beneficial or unfavorable to the individual (Lerner et al. 2011). Lerner and colleagues proposed this model and five indicators of PYD, called the 5Cs: confidence, competence, connection, caring, and character. Confidence is the acceptance and satisfaction of personal characteristics. Competence refers to perceived self-efficacy in social, academic, or professional

situations. Connection includes having good relationships and feeling useful and supported in the family, community, and within educational contexts. Caring refers to the tendency to feel empathy and sympathy for others. Finally, character refers to the coherence between one's own behavior, personal beliefs, and social norms in order to construct a better society (Phelps et al. 2009).

Linked to the PYD model, the concept of developmental assets was described in the relational developmental systems theory by Scales and Laffert (Scales and Laffert 1999) regarding the personal, familial, educational, and community resources that promote positive development. The analysis of assets and their influence on the personal development of children and adolescents has stimulated changes in research on young people, progressively becoming less focused on risks and more oriented towards the analysis of resources and strengths (Lerner et al. 2005). An increasing number of studies have provided robust evidence on the decisive role that developmental assets play in terms of subjective well-being (Lerner et al. 2005), self-esteem, and perceived social support in adolescents aged between 12 and 18 (Gutiérrez and Gonçalves 2013), mostly in the USA, but in other countries globally as well.

As the environment plays a key role in youth development, the relevance of developmental context has been studied by other theorists; thus, the PYD approach can be supported by the ecological perspective proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1977. This theory underlines the interactive influences of contexts in individual development by differentiating the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1977). Demographic and socio-economic characteristics are important determinants of youth development and can be located in the exosystem. The literature on the effects of socio-demographics on adolescent development has indicated differences by gender, ethnic and cultural background, parental education level, place of residence and neighborhood, parental occupation, and family status, as indicated by a study with adolescents aged 12–18 in Israel (Etzion and Romi 2015). Other studies aiming to determine the potential risk status of young people have examined variables such as resilience skills, healthcare resources, and some socio-demographic characteristics (Sanders et al. 2015). For instance, a study conducted with Portuguese undergraduates analyzed PYD according to gender and found a greater influence of psychosocial variables on overall PYD among women, also highlighting the role of these variables as determinants of mental health and the importance of equality (Gaspar de Matos et al. 2018).

Unfavorable socio-economic conditions have been found to have adverse effects on physical and psychological development in youth (Kim et al. 2018). That is, exposure to a socio-economically disadvantaged environment has been linked to increased behavioral problems during childhood (Blair and Raver 2012), a higher probability of suffering psychopathology in adolescence (e.g., depression or substance abuse) (Doan et al. 2012), lower productivity at work, and higher rates of crime and mental illness in adulthood (Duncan et al. 2010). Other studies on the impact of socio-economic status on youth development have found that beyond a direct influence, the subjective perception of social status plays a key role (Kim et al. 2018). For instance, a study conducted in China examined differences in PYD based on the subjective socio-economic status of a sample of students aged between 12 and 14. Greater material and social resources were linked to better overall PYD scores. In this study, young adolescents with a higher perceived socio-economic status were more likely to establish positive relationships with their teachers and peers, consequently contributing to more positive development because they had greater social and emotional support as well as more effective academic guidance (Ye et al. 2009).

Furthermore, other studies have indicated that contextual risk factors appear to interact with individual risk variables throughout development. Evidence has shown that young people who live in a more unfavorable context also present a higher number of individual risk factors, such as depressive symptoms or behavioral problems. It was reported that, over time, young people aged 12–17 in New Zealand with more risk factors in their context would experience increased risk factors at the individual level, too

(Sanders et al. 2015). Furthermore, evidence on the implementation of PYD programs in low- and middle-income countries has indicated an improvement in youth well-being indicators, such as a reduction in substance abuse and other risk behaviors (Catalano et al. 2019). In addition, studies including vulnerable young people have found that those who used psychosocial services following the positive youth development approach showed increased resilience and better well-being, underlining the relevance of the quality of resources rather than the quantity of them (Sanders et al. 2015).

To date, an increased number of PYD studies have been performed in the US, Europe, and other regions around the world, with only a handful of studies being conducted in Spain. Moreover, the few studies that have been performed in Spain mainly investigated the age range of 13–16, despite the fact that youths represent around 15% of the overall Spanish population (Instituto de la Juventud [INJUVE] 2020). According to statistics published by the Spanish Youth Institute (INJUVE), Spain has more than ten million young people aged 15–29 (50.5% male), but this is the second lowest rate of young people in the European Union (EU). Around a third of the youth population live in provincial capitals, and just 5% live in small towns (with a population under 2000). The number of foreign residents in Spain has increased from the 3% level it was at two decades ago to 14.3% presently. Some worrying statistics have underscored the importance of developing social policies to improve youth quality of life. In total, 81% of young people continue to live in their parental home. Moreover, the unemployment rate is higher than 27% in the 15–24 age group and 17% in the 25–29 group, some of the highest rates in the EU. It has been found that women youths suffer more job insecurity and often work temporary contracts. Furthermore, these statistics published by the Spanish Youth Institute also show low youth participation in politics (with only nearly 30% of young people showing interest) and low interest in and commitment to the environment (just 47% of the sample was very interested).

It is important to note that these studies with Spanish youths were performed before the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the one conducted by Gómez-Baya et al. (2022a), but no additional studies have been conducted since this point. Additionally, these studies did not examine the socio-demographic differences in PYD, and these factors, as shown in the related literature focused on adolescent and youth well-being, may play an important role. Moreover, most existing research was conducted with adolescent samples, meaning that more research is needed with emerging adults in Spain. Thus, the identification of socio-demographic and socio-economic profiles may help in the design of specific and evidence-based actions to promote PYD in Spanish youths in a university context. Research with emerging adult samples should address the identification of risk factors and associated characteristics to discover the most decisive factors, in turn promoting positive resources across developmental contexts. In summary, the aim of this study was to examine the differences in the overall score in PYD and the scores in the respective 5Cs in socio-demographic factors in a sample of Spanish undergraduates.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. General Design of the Study and Participants

A cross-sectional study was conducted with a sample of Spanish undergraduates. Participants were enrolled at 11 Spanish universities. They were invited to fill in an anonymous online self-report form. The universities were selected following geographical criteria, with institutions being selected from the north, south, east, and west, as well as from the islands. The selected universities were, namely, the University of Huelva ($n = 220$), Loyola University (Sevilla and Cordoba campuses, $n = 232$), the Complutense University of Madrid ($n = 188$), the University of Granada ($n = 40$), the University of Salamanca ($n = 74$), the University of La Laguna ($n = 49$), the University of Zaragoza ($n = 38$), the University of Santiago ($n = 59$), the Polytechnic University of Valencia ($n = 17$), the University of Valencia ($n = 47$), and the University of Oviedo ($n = 74$). Within each university, a random

selection was made of teachers of different degree subjects; these teachers were asked to invite their students to participate in this study. Finally, a sample of 1038 Spanish undergraduates was obtained, aged between 18 and 28 years old ($M = 20.47$, $SD = 3.08$; 75.5% female; 27.1% 1st Year, 28.7% 2nd Year, 23% 3rd Year, and 21.1% 4th–6th Year). Concerning nationality, 95.2% of the sample were Spanish, 4.2% were of other nationalities, and 0.6% had dual nationality.

2.2. Instrument

For the purposes of the present research, an online questionnaire with two parts was developed: one part collected the participants' socio-demographic information, and the other measured the 5Cs of PYD.

PYD. The Spanish adaptation, by Gómez-Baya et al. (2022b), of the 5Cs of the PYD Short Form created by Geldhof et al. (2014) was used. This test is composed of 34 items that measure the five areas of PYD: confidence, competence, connection, caring, and character. The responses to the items were Likert-type, and the participants had to score from 1 to 5 according to their grade of agreement or similarity following these response options: 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, 1 = not at all important and 5 = very important, or 1 = not at all like me and 5 = very like me. Finally, an overall PYD score was calculated from the average score in the 5Cs.

Socio-demographic variables. These constructs were measured using the following questions: "What is your gender?" (female or male); "What is your birthdate?"; "What is your nationality?" (Spanish or other); "Where do you live?" (city with more than 300,000 inhabitants; city with 50,001 to 300,000 inhabitants; in a town/city with 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants; in a village with less than 10,000 inhabitants; in the countryside; or other); "Do you have a partner? (yes or no); "What degree are you studying?"; "What is your degree field?" (Arts and Humanities, Sciences, Health Sciences, Social and Legal Sciences, or Engineering and Architecture); "What studies does your mother have?" (she has no studies; she went to school for some years; she is a high school graduate; she underwent intermediate professional training; she underwent higher professional training; she has a baccalaureate; she has a university degree; she has other studies; I do not know what studies my mother has; or I do not have a mother)—the same question with the same options was used to collect information on fathers' educational levels—and finally, "How rich do you think your family is?" (very rich, fairly rich, normal, fairly poor, or very poor). A university's size variable was calculated using official information for conducting a classification of three categories (up to 10,000 students, 10,000–30,000 students, more than 30,000 students).

This questionnaire was constructed based on a pilot study carried out in 2017 by Gómez-Baya et al. (2022b) to adapt the PYD questionnaire for Spanish adolescents and youths. The procedure followed the "The Cross-National Project on Positive Youth Development (CN-PYD)" guidelines, which is the international project in which this Spanish study is integrated. In that pilot study, the Spanish adaptation of the PYD Short Form created by Geldhof et al. (2014) was administered to 768 Spanish students and undergraduates aged between 11 and 29 years old ($M = 19.50$, $SD = 2.27$) from 10 different educational institutions in Andalusia, Spain. In the Spanish adaptation, it was observed that the scale has good psychometric properties. In the present study, good reliability was observed in the overall PYD scale ($\alpha = 0.88$, $\omega = 0.86$), as well as in four of the Cs (perceived competence: $\alpha = 0.73$, $\omega = 0.73$; confidence: $\alpha = 0.77$, $\omega = 0.81$; connection: $\alpha = 0.77$, $\omega = 0.77$; caring: $\alpha = 0.82$, $\omega = 0.82$). The character subscale showed less internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.59$, $\omega = 0.56$).

2.3. Data Analysis

First, normality assumption was assessed by conducting the Shapiro–Wilk test. The result of this normality test for the PYD variable was $W(989) = 0.993$, $p < 0.001$. Because the assumption of normality was not met, non-parametric tests were performed. First,

Kruskal–Wallis tests were conducted to examine the bivariate associations between each socio-demographic variable (i.e., gender, age, nationality, habitat/city size, if they had a partner, degree area, university size, maternal educational level, paternal educational level, and perceived socio-economic status) and the scores in the overall PYD and separate 5Cs. If significant differences were found, the effect size and post hoc analyses were calculated with Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner pairwise comparisons tests. Second, generalized linear model analyses were performed to explain the overall score in terms of PYD and the scores in the 5Cs based on all the socio-demographic variables. Standardized coefficients and partial eta squared were reported in these regression analyses. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was used for all statistical tests. For the analyses, Jamovi Software version 2.2.5 was used (The Jamovi Project 2023).

3. Results

3.1. Bivariate Analyses

Table 1 presents the differences in the 5Cs and in the overall PYD score when analyzing gender differences. Significant differences were found in competence, caring, and character. Women had the highest scores in caring and in character. Men scored higher in perceived competence. After the Kruskal–Wallis tests, significant differences with small effect sizes were found between the female and male groups in terms of competence ($H(1) = 12.5, p < 0.001, \varepsilon^2 = 0.013$), caring ($H(1) = 51.7, p < 0.001, \varepsilon^2 = 0.052$), and character ($H(1) = 17.4, p < 0.001, \varepsilon^2 = 0.017$). There were no significant gender differences in confidence and connection, nor in the overall score. Concerning age differences, no significant results were observed concerning nationality, but small differences were detected in character, $H(1) = 6.32, p = 0.012, \varepsilon^2 = 0.005$, so Spanish participants showed lower scores compared to their non-Spanish counterparts. Regarding differences in PYD based on having a partner or not, no significant results were found. No effect was observed in the overall score, nor in the 5Cs (Table 1).

Table 1. Differences by gender in the 5Cs and in the overall PYD score.

	Women	Men		
	M(SD)	M(SD)	H	<i>p</i>
Confidence	3.62(0.70)	3.71(0.68)	3.47	0.063
Competence	2.96(0.69)	3.14(0.78)	12.5	<0.001
Connection	3.63(0.6)	3.56(0.65)	2.54	0.11
Caring	4.39(0.55)	4.08(0.64)	51.74	<0.001
Character	4.04(0.41)	3.90(0.46)	17.44	<0.001
Overall PYD	3.73(0.41)	3.67(0.45)	2.05	0.152

Table 2 shows the differences in PYD of the students according to fathers' education level. Significant differences were found in competence and in the overall PYD score. The students with a father with a high education level, medium education level, or university education, presented the highest scores in competence and in the overall PYD score. Significant differences were observed in competence ($H(4) = 20.7, p < 0.001, \varepsilon^2 = 0.021$) between participants with a father without studies and those with a father with a medium level of education ($W = 4.59, p = 0.01$), between those participants with fathers without studies and those with a father with a university education ($W = 5.51, p < 0.001$), and between participants with fathers with basic studies and participants with fathers with a university education ($W = 4.26, p = 0.022$). In the overall PYD score, significant differences ($H(4) = 9.92, p = 0.042, \varepsilon^2 = 0.010$) of a small effect size were also found; although, in the post hoc analysis, no significant differences were found between any group.

Table 2. Differences according to fathers' education level in the 5Cs and in the overall PYD score.

	Without Edu- cation	Basic Educa- tion	Medium-Level Ed- ucation	University Ed- ucation	Do Not Know		
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	H	<i>p</i>
Confidence	3.50(0.71)	3.64(0.68)	3.67(0.69)	3.67(0.71)	3.65(0.56)	5.67	0.225
Competence	2.79(0.71)	2.94(0.70)	3.07(0.70)	3.10(0.73)	3.04(0.60)	20.72	<0.001
Connection	3.45(0.68)	3.59(0.57)	3.68(0.58)	3.66(0.63)	3.58(0.65)	8.82	0.066
Caring	4.41(0.59)	4.30(0.55)	4.33(0.61)	4.32(0.60)	4.31(0.65)	4.94	0.294
Character	3.95(0.45)	3.99(0.40)	4.05(0.41)	4.01(0.43)	3.98(0.40)	4.27	0.371
Overall PYD	3.62(0.46)	3.69(0.40)	3.76(0.43)	3.75(0.41)	3.71(0.33)	9.92	0.042

Table 3 shows the results when analyzing differences in terms of mothers' education level. Significant differences were found in competence, connection, and in the overall PYD score. As with the fathers, students with a mother with a high education level presented higher scores in competence, connection, and in the overall PYD score. Regarding competence, significant differences were found between participants with mothers with basic studies and those with mothers with a university education ($H(4) = 20.8, p < 0.001, \epsilon^2 = 0.021; W = 5.49, p < 0.001$). In terms of connection, significant differences were also found between youths with mothers with basic studies and youths with mothers with a university education ($H(4) = 13.2, p = 0.010, \epsilon^2 = 0.013; W = 4.56, p = 0.011$). Finally, significant differences were also observed between the same two categories of maternal education in terms of the overall PYD score ($H(4) = 13, p = 0.011, \epsilon^2 = 0.013; W = 4.22, p = 0.024$). All these reported differences showed a small effect size.

Table 3. Differences according to mothers' education level in the 5Cs and in the overall PYD score.

	Without Edu- cation	Basic Educa- tion	Medium-Level Ed- ucation	University Ed- ucation	Do Not Know		
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	H	<i>p</i>
Confidence	3.60(0.66)	3.56(0.71)	3.68(0.69)	3.69(0.69)	3.60(0.71)	7.17	0.127
Competence	2.86(0.74)	2.87(0.69)	3.09(0.71)	3.09(0.71)	2.94(0.68)	20.82	<0.001
Connection	3.50(0.63)	3.53(0.57)	3.65(0.60)	3.67(0.63)	3.63(0.70)	13.16	0.010
Caring	4.36(0.63)	4.35(0.54)	4.29(0.57)	4.33(0.60)	3.98(0.83)	5.80	0.214
Character	4.06(0.42)	3.99(0.41)	4.02(0.41)	4.01(0.44)	3.98(0.42)	0.99	0.911
Overall PYD	3.67(0.46)	3.66(0.41)	3.75(0.42)	3.75(0.42)	3.62(0.43)	13.01	0.011

Table 4 summarizes the differences in PYD in terms of perceived socio-economic level. Significant differences were observed in confidence, competence, connection, and in the overall PYD score. First, the higher the perceived socio-economic level was, the higher the confidence score was. Similarly, a higher perceived socio-economic level was associated with a higher score in terms of competence. The same results were observed in terms of connection and in the overall PYD score. No significant socio-economic differences were observed for caring and character. After the Kruskal–Wallis test, in terms of confidence, significant differences ($H(4) = 13, p = 0.011, \epsilon^2 = 0.013$) were observed between those who perceived themselves as quite poor and those who were quite rich ($W = 4.65, p = 0.009$). Regarding competence, significant differences ($H(4) = 21.8, p < 0.001, \epsilon^2 = 0.022$) were found between those who perceived themselves as quite poor and normal ($W = 4.56, p = 0.011$), between the levels of quite poor and quite rich ($W = 6.26, p < 0.001$), and between the levels of normal and quite rich ($W = 4.16, p = 0.027$). When comparing connection, significant differences ($H(4) = 21.4, p < 0.001, \epsilon^2 = 0.022$) were found between participants who perceived themselves to be of quite poor SES and those with medium SES ($W = 5.14, p = 0.003$), as well as between youths with quite poor SES and those with quite rich SES ($W = 5.19, p = 0.002$). Finally, in terms of the overall PYD score, significant differences ($H(4)$)

= 9.53, $p = 0.049$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.010$) were detected between the quite poor and quite rich groups ($W = 4.09$, $p = 0.031$). All these effects presented a small effect size.

Table 4. Differences according to the perceived socio-economic level in the 5Cs and in the overall PYD score.

	Very Poor	Quite Poor	Normal	Quite Rich	Very Rich	H	<i>p</i>
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Confidence	3.50(0.17)	3.45(0.83)	3.64(0.68)	3.84(0.65)	3.71(0.97)	13.04	0.011
Competence	3.28(0.48)	2.71(0.69)	3.01(0.70)	3.23(0.72)	3.50(1.08)	21.84	<0.001
Connection	2.64(0.75)	3.32(0.69)	3.63(0.60)	3.71(0.58)	4.06(1.11)	21.38	<0.001
Caring	4.05(0.25)	4.32(0.67)	4.33(0.58)	4.25(0.61)	4.46(0.87)	3.76	0.440
Character	4.31(0.34)	4.03(0.45)	4.00(0.42)	3.98(0.41)	4.06(0.65)	2.66	0.617
Overall PYD	3.56(0.37)	3.57(0.49)	3.72(0.41)	3.80(0.38)	3.96(0.76)	9.53	0.049

Table 5 presents differences in PYD based on the participants' area of study. Significant differences with a small effect size were found in terms of competence, connection, caring, and character. Students enrolled in Social and Law Sciences degree programs showed higher scores in competence, connection, and character. Health Sciences students presented the highest scores in terms of caring. Engineering and Architecture students scored the lowest in connection, caring, and character. Humanities students had the lowest scores in perceived competence. After the Kruskal–Wallis test, regarding competence, significant differences ($H(3) = 15.1$, $p = 0.002$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.015$) were found between Arts and Humanities students and Social and Law Sciences students ($W = 5.07$, $p = 0.002$). Concerning connection, significant differences ($H(3) = 19.2$, $p < 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.020$) were found between Engineering and Architecture students and Social and Law Sciences students ($W = 5.93$, $p < 0.001$). Regarding caring, significant differences ($H(3) = 25.4$, $p < 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.026$) were found, specifically when comparing Engineering and Architecture students with Arts and Humanities students ($W = -5.06$, $p = 0.002$), with Social and Law Sciences students ($W = 6.35$, $p < 0.001$), and with Health Sciences students ($W = 6.21$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, significant differences ($H(3) = 10.20$, $p = 0.017$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.011$) were detected in terms of character between Engineering and Architecture students and Social and Law Sciences students ($W = 4.45$, $p = 0.009$).

Table 5. Differences according to area of study in the 5Cs and in the overall PYD score.

	Arts and Humanities	Sciences/Engineering and Architecture	Health Sciences	Social and Law Sciences	H	<i>p</i>
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Confidence	3.61(0.74)	3.55(0.71)	3.64(0.70)	3.69(0.67)	4.27	0.234
Competence	2.84(0.70)	2.93(0.77)	3.02(0.70)	3.09(0.68)	15.11	0.002
Connection	3.55(0.62)	3.47(0.65)	3.61(0.60)	3.70(0.59)	19.24	<0.001
Caring	4.38(0.50)	4.12(0.66)	4.39(0.51)	4.36(0.59)	25.40	<0.001
Character	3.99(0.45)	3.92(0.43)	4.02(0.40)	4.04(0.42)	10.23	0.017
Overall PYD	3.68(0.41)	3.60(0.44)	3.74(0.41)	3.77(0.41)	25.52	<0.001

Figure 1 shows the differences in PYD in terms of university size. Significant differences were found in confidence, competence, connection, caring, character, and in the overall PYD score. Students from the smallest universities (up to 10,000 students) presented higher scores in all 5Cs and the PYD overall score. Medium-size universities (10,000–30,000 students) presented the lowest scores in confidence, competence, caring, character, and in the overall PYD score. Students from the largest universities (more than 30,000 students) had the lowest scores in terms of connection. After the Kruskal–Wallis test, in confidence, significant differences ($H(2) = 8.43$, $p = 0.015$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.008$) were found

between small-size universities and medium-size universities ($W = -3.93, p = 0.015$). Regarding competence, significant differences ($H(2) = 11, p = 0.004, \epsilon^2 = 0.011$) were found between the smallest and medium-size universities ($W = -4.22, p = 0.008$), and between the smallest and largest universities ($W = -3.50, p = 0.035$). When analyzing connection, significant differences ($H(2) = 28.6, p < 0.001, \epsilon^2 = 0.029$) were found between small- and medium-size universities ($W = -6.46, p < 0.001$), and between small- and large-size ones ($W = -6.17, p < 0.001$). In terms of caring, significant differences ($H(2) = 9.8, p = 0.007, \epsilon^2 = 0.010$) were detected between small- and medium-size universities ($W = -3.97, p = 0.014$) and between small- and large-size universities ($W = -3.36, p = 0.046$). In character, significant differences ($H(2) = 9.02, p = 0.011, \epsilon^2 = 0.009$) were observed when comparing the smallest institutions with medium-size ones ($W = -4.28, p = 0.007$). Finally, in terms of the overall PYD score, significant differences ($H(2) = 23.6, p < 0.001, \epsilon^2 = 0.024$) were observed between small- and medium-size universities ($W = -6.37, p < 0.001$), and between the smallest and largest universities ($W = -4.92, p = 0.001$). For these results, the effect size was also small.

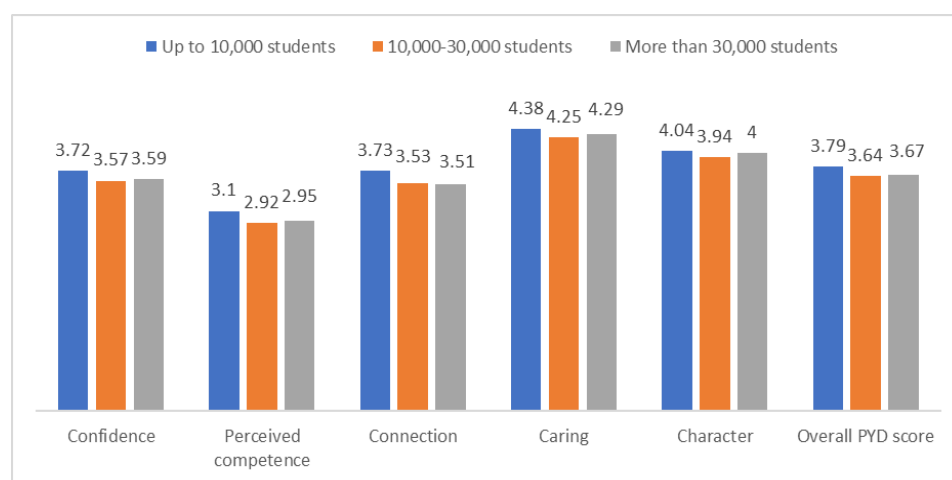


Figure 1. Differences by university size in the 5Cs and in the overall PYD score.

Table 6 shows the differences in PYD in terms of place of residence. Significant differences were found in terms of competence, connection, and in the overall PYD score. Students living in large cities (more than 300,000 inhabitants) scored higher in terms of perceived competence. Students living in the countryside scored higher in terms of connection. Furthermore, a higher overall PYD score was detected in participants who lived in the countryside or in large cities. After the Kruskal–Wallis test, significant differences in terms of competence ($H(3) = 20.1, p < 0.001, \epsilon^2 = 0.020$) were found when comparing large cities with medium–large cities ($W = -4.710, p = 0.005$), with medium–small cities (10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants) ($W = -4.97, p = 0.003$), and with small cities (up to 10,000 inhabitants) ($W = -4.83, p = 0.004$). In terms of connection, significant differences ($H(4) = 9.93, p = 0.042, \epsilon^2 = 0.010$) appeared; although, in the post hoc analysis, no significant differences were found between any group regarding place of residence. In terms of overall PYD score, significant differences ($H(4) = 10.3, p = 0.036, \epsilon^2 = 0.011$) were found between large and medium–large cities ($W = -4.25, p = 0.022$). In terms of the 5Cs, significant differences were not found. All these differences showed a small effect size.

Table 6. Differences according to place of residence in the 5Cs and in the overall PYD score.

	Countryside	Small City	Small–Medium City	Medium–Large City	Large City	H	p
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
Confidence	3.59(0.99)	3.63(0.72)	3.62(0.65)	3.59(0.68)	3.72(0.71)	8.99	0.061
Competence	2.67(0.70)	2.93(0.74)	2.94(0.62)	2.95(0.75)	3.15(0.70)	22.35	<0.001
Connection	3.74(0.75)	3.59(0.62)	3.66(0.55)	3.54(0.60)	3.67(0.63)	9.93	0.042

Caring	4.70(0.33)	4.31(0.61)	4.35(0.55)	4.30(0.59)	4.31(0.59)	7.31	0.120
Character	4.16(0.31)	3.97(0.43)	4.02(0.43)	3.97(0.42)	4.03(0.43)	5.27	0.260
Overall PYD	3.77(0.44)	3.69(0.45)	3.72(0.39)	3.67(0.42)	3.77(0.42)	10.25	0.036

3.2. Multivariate Analyses

Table 7 presents the results of the linear regression analyses to explain the overall PYD score and the respective 5Cs based on the socio-demographic variables. Concerning overall PYD, the analyses revealed significant effects on PYD by perceived SES, degree area of study, and university size. Thus, higher perceived SES, studying Health or Social sciences, and being enrolled in a small university were associated with higher PYD.

Table 7. Linear regression analyses of the effects of socio-demographic variables on PYD and the 5Cs.

	Overall PYD		Competence		Confidence		Connection		Caring		Character	
	B	Wald χ^2	B	Wald χ^2	B	Wald χ^2	B	Wald χ^2	B	Wald χ^2	B	Wald χ^2
Gender	-0.05	2.48	0.16	9.02 **	0.09	2.92	-0.09	3.84	-0.30	46.25 ***	-0.11	12.93 ***
Age	-0.01	0.03	0.02	0.59	0.01	0.15	-0.01	0.10	-0.03	1.83	-0.01	0.06
Nationality	0.05	0.77	-0.04	0.23	0.14	2.32	-0.05	0.31	0.04	0.27	0.11	3.98 *
Partner	-0.03	1.42	-0.10	5.79 *	-0.07	2.55	0.05	1.95	-0.02	0.35	-0.01	0.25
Paternal education	0.02	2.03	0.05	3.84	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.69	0.02	0.79	0.03	2.64
Maternal education	0.01	0.52	0.03	1.34	0.03	0.84	0.04	2.29	-0.03	1.46	-0.01	0.26
Perceived SES	0.08	5.32 *	0.11	4.19 *	0.14	6.24 *	0.15	9.55 **	0.01	0.03	-0.03	1.00
Degree area of study	0.03	6.34 *	0.07	11.04 **	0.02	1.15	0.04	3.98 *	0.02	0.80	0.02	1.68
Size of university	-0.05	7.99 **	-0.05	2.75	-0.05	3.42	-0.09	12.85 ***	-0.04	2.83	-0.02	1.04
Habitat	-0.02	1.50	-0.06	6.59*	-0.02	0.70	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.06	-0.01	0.76

Note. Overall PYD: $\chi^2(10) = 44.52, p < 0.001$. Competence: $\chi^2(10) = 68.11, p < 0.001$. Confidence: $\chi^2(10) = 27.26, p = 0.002$. Connection: $\chi^2(10) = 53.32, p < 0.001$. Caring: $\chi^2(10) = 61.25, p < 0.001$. Character: $\chi^2(10) = 28.80, p = 0.001$. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

More significant effects were observed in terms of perceived competence. The results indicated that gender, having a partner, perceived SES, degree area of study, and habitat had significant effects. Thus, more perceived competence was presented in male participants and those with a partner, higher perceived SES, studying Social Sciences, and living in a big city. In terms of both confidence and connection, perceived SES showed a significant positive effect. In connection, degree area of study and university size had significant effects, so being enrolled at a small university and studying Social Sciences were associated with higher scores. Concerning caring, only gender differences were observed, with females scoring higher. Finally, the results pointed out significant effects in terms of gender and nationality on character. Thus, more character was observed in female and non-Spanish participants.

In all the regression models examined, the results indicated that the size of the coefficients was low. Thus, socio-demographic factors did not have a salient role in determining PYD scores.

4. Discussion

This present study aimed to analyze the differences in the 5Cs and the overall PYD score in Spanish undergraduates in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics. Some significant differences were found in terms of gender, place of residence, university size, field of study, father/mother education level, and perceived socio-economic level.

Regarding gender differences, women were found to score higher in terms of caring and character. On the other hand, men scored higher in terms of competence. This

suggests that gendered socialization may have influenced PYD dimensions. Gender stereotypes guide the development of young people; for instance, there may be cultural factors that guide men's self-esteem, autonomy, and personal success, while women are expected to take a more altruistic role and be more sensitive to others. Those socio-cultural expectations may offer a potential explanation for gender differences in the 5Cs, so that a bigger focus on personal achievements in males may explain their higher scores in competence, and a greater focus on others' needs in females may explain their higher scores in terms of caring (John et al. 2017).

When examining differences by socio-economic status and parents' education level, students with a high economic status and students with parents with a high educational level showed greater scores in terms of PYD. These results are consistent with the results of other studies, where higher socio-economic status and higher parents' education level are linked to higher perceived competence (Oliva et al. 2011). In the previous literature on at-risk youth, some socio-demographic factors, for example family structure, parental occupation, or socio-economic status, were found as significant predictors of risk level (Etzion and Romi 2015). A higher socio-economic status may offer greater access to a greater amount of material and personal resources, which may confer greater resilience in young people against challenges and difficulties (Berzin 2010).

When analyzing the field of studies, it was found that Social and Law Sciences students presented a higher overall PYD score. A study conducted with Spanish social workers found an association between studying or practicing this profession and having higher levels of resilience (Palmas-García and Hombrados-Mendieta 2015). At the same time, Sanders et al. (2015) found that working with youths from the PYD perspective is linked with resilience promotion. Positive youth development is linked with showing high levels of resilience, a personality characteristic that could be common to workers in the field of Social Sciences, so these relations can be a possible explanation of the study results.

Concerning place of residence, students that were living in large cities and in the countryside showed the highest PYD scores. Living in a large city can offer a larger number of developmental resources, for example, after-school programs or activities that contribute to their development (Oliva et al. 2011). In addition, living in a smaller place may allow children to grow up in a more close-knit environment, with a wider sense of trust and community, another factor that can also contribute to better development (Oliva et al. 2012). It seems that closer proximity and smaller residential environments can better favor development.

This present study may contribute to describing the socio-demographic characteristics associated with more positive development, profiles that are important to consider when designing development promotion programs. At the same time, special attention should be paid to undergraduates of a low socio-economic level, those with parents with low educational levels, those who study at medium and large universities, especially Engineering students, and those who live in medium-size cities because they are most likely to present lower PYD levels. It is important to identify these groups that can be at risk to design more precise intervention programs.

4.1. Limitations and Future Research Lines

Some potential limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. First, a possible limitation could be misreporting. The data collection was conducted online, with a self-report questionnaire being filled out by each student at home. The instructions told them to fill in the questionnaire at an appropriate time and in a quiet space, but it is possible that some participants did not fill out the form in these conditions. Another limitation may be the fact that the data collection was performed during one of the COVID-19 lockdowns. There have been studies conducted during the pandemic that have confirmed an increase in signs of anxiety among younger people in this period (Gómez-Baya et al. 2022a), so assessing students' well-being in these special circumstances may have biased the data. Another limitation may derive from the study design. Because a cross-sectional design was

followed, only bivariate associations could be concluded. Prospective studies are highly recommended in order to examine the directionality of the associations between socio-demographic factors and PYD. Moreover, there was just one single question used to collect information about socio-economic status, where participants had to report their perception about socio-economic status among five categories. Perhaps this information about perceived socio-economic status should be collected jointly with other objective measures, for example, asking about parental income. More information should be collected about nationality in order to examine possible cultural differences and the influence of migrant status. Furthermore, although significant differences were found, it is important to highlight that they had small effect sizes. This may suggest that the socio-demographic circumstances may not be strong determinants of PYD, as reflected in some of the results. This result encourages the design and implementation of universal interventions to foster PYD in undergraduates from different socio-demographic profiles.

4.2. Implications for Practice

The results of the present study may offer some practical implications. In the literature, it is possible to find evidence of programs where young people have been empowered to challenge social norms and to change cultural beliefs, and they have found a positive change in gender attitudes and behaviors (Jelicic et al. 2007). Educational institutions play an essential role in the development of competencies in young people. An educational institution that offers opportunities for growth and the development of personal skills is an important driver of change in society (Oliva et al. 2011). Spain is a country that is committed to providing accessible education for all. This study could be another argument in favor of providing all students with access to the same number of quality educational resources. Investing in public education and providing it with resources and developmental tools for students could result in a more positively developed youth and, consequently, a population with better psychological adjustment and well-being. As discussed in the Introduction, limited research on the relationships between PYD and socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics in young people exists, especially in Spanish populations. Thus, it is important to study these associations to design evidence-based programs, focusing on the factors that have been demonstrated to be important in this age range. This knowledge allows for specific actions to be taken which empower young people.

Some programs have been effective in PYD promotion in other countries that could provide salient guidelines for intervention in the Spanish context. The 4-H program is a good example in adolescents aged 10–11, which not only works to reduce risk behaviors or negative attitudes but also aims to increase positive behaviors and attitudes, focusing on encouraging students' potential (Jelicic et al. 2007). Evidence from this program emphasizes the importance of paying attention to socio-demographic variables, such as parental influence, for healthy development. It highlighted the importance of public investment in studies that investigate in which groups, environments, characteristics, and in which conditions is it most relevant to act. An interesting experience was also conducted similarly to this in China, namely the TKP P.A.T.H.S. Project, in adolescents aged 12–13. It was carried out by a group of developmental psychologists, social workers, and educational researchers, and they designed different activities for students in high schools. For example, in one of the activities, they worked on the value of the qualities that can be highlighted in each student. Some Chinese schools introduced the program in their curriculum, dedicating one or two hours each week to these activities, and they found good results at the end of the academic year (Zhu and Shek 2020). Another example is the Portuguese "Psychological Health and Well-Being Observatory: Monitoring and Action in Portuguese Schools" (Gaspar de Matos et al. 2023) for children and young adolescents, that recommended that an integrated strategy for the promotion of socio-emotional skills and psychological well-being from schools, based on scientific evidence, should be defined. Thus, PYD dimensions could be well connected with an explicit learning of socio-

emotional skills, within a transversal and longitudinal intervention. It is also important to promote student participation and proper training for students to acquire socio-emotional skills in teachers. Furthermore, some evidence has underlined the need to consider personality characteristics in the design of PYD programs (Anderson 2017). Concretely, following the five-factor personality model, program design should address individual differences in order to enhance positive experiences during leisure-time activities in youth samples. Finally, another example of PYD intervention was based on providing resources for well-being, justice, specialized education, or mental health in adolescents aged 12–17 in risky contexts (Sanders et al. 2015). Higher levels of resilience were observed as a result of the use of these services. This study also discusses the importance of studying socio-demographic factors, such as family, educational level, and community resources. Despite evidence of positive outcomes from programs to foster PYD in adolescent samples, more efforts are highly recommended to work with emerging adults in terms of the PYD framework. Only a few experiences have been performed to date. Evidence with undergraduates in the USA indicates that the 4-H program helps youths prepare for and succeed in college, assessing a sample of people around 19 years old (Ratkos and Knollenberg 2015). Another experience with North American undergraduates addressed character promotion in order to encourage stronger entrepreneurial and family-related goals (Johnson et al. 2014). Furthermore, the project WeCan is a corporate–community–university partnership initiative in Hong Kong which aims to promote positive development in university students through service-learning projects by integrating community service with clear educational goals (Shek et al. 2020). Although these initiatives have pointed out some promising results in undergraduate samples, more research is needed to implement and assess PYD programs from the university context. In Spain, the Spanish Network for Healthy Universities aims to facilitate initiatives to promote health and well-being in the university context (Sanchis-Soler et al. 2022). Based on the results of this present study, this network may integrate the 5Cs of PYD as valuable targets to promote youth well-being.

5 Conclusions

In conclusion, this present work has shown that positive youth development is linked to some socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics in Spanish youths. Concretely, students with better scores on the 5Cs included those living in the countryside or in big cities, who studied Social Sciences, were enrolled in small universities, had parents with a high education level, and those who reported high socio-economic status. Regarding gender differences, women presented higher scores in terms of connection, caring, and character, whereas men reported more perceived competence and confidence. There is little information available on this topic with this population; therefore, identifying these variables and how they influence PYD can be useful for planning and implementing intervention programs to help young Spanish people develop more positively.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Huelva on 10 January 2019 (UHU1259711) for studies involving humans.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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