SOCIAL SUPPORT AS A "BUFFER EFFECT" AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF TEACHER TRAINING[1]

A SATISFAÇÃO COM O SUPORTE SOCIAL E SUA IMPORTÂNCIA NO CONTEXTO DO ESTÁGIO SUPERVISIONADO EM EDUCAÇÃO

LA SATISFACCIÓN DEL APOYO SOCIAL Y SU IMPORTANCIA EN EL CONTEXTO DE LAS PRÁCTICAS EDUCATIVAS

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ABSTRACT: Supervised internship constitutes a period of complexity in higher education as it encompasses new challenges that gradually increase students' perception of stress. Satisfaction with social support is considered a protective and adaptive factor, and therefore, this article aims to assess satisfaction with social backing and analyze sociodemographic and academic variables of students in the context of teacher training internships. The sample consisted of 966 interns (476 from Portugal and 490 from Brazil) from 8 higher education institutions. The "Satisfaction Scale" with social support by Pais Ribeiro (1999) was applied. The results demonstrate that social support based on friendship and intimacy is the most utilized, and the Portuguese population shows higher satisfaction with social backing than Brazilians. Satisfaction with social support and supervisors enhances satisfaction with internships.

KEYWORDS: Supervised Internship. Academics. Social Support. Teacher Training. Stress.

RESUMO: *O estágio supervisionado configura-se como o período de complexidade na formação superior por integrar novos desafios que desencadeiam um gradativo aumento na sensação de estresse no estudante. A satisfação com o suporte social é considerada como um fator de proteção e adaptação e, portanto, o presente artigo pretende avaliar a satisfação com o suporte social e analisar as variáveis sociodemográficas e académicas de estudantes em contexto de práticas na formação de professores. A amostra contou com 966 estagiários (476 Portugal e 490 Brasil) de 8 instituições de ensino superior. Se aplicou a "Escala de satisfação" com o suporte social de Pais Ribeiro (1999). Os resultados evidenciam que o suporte social com base na amizade e na intimidade são os mais utilizados e que a população portuguesa apresenta maior satisfação com o suporte social que os brasileiros. A satisfação com o suporte social e com os supervisores aumenta a satisfação com as práticas.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Estágio Supervisionado. Acadêmicos. Suporte Social. Formação de Professores. Estresse.*

RESUMEN: *El período de prácticas es un período de complejidad en la educación superior, pues integra nuevos desafíos que desencadenan un aumento paulatino de la sensación de estrés del estudiante. La satisfacción con el apoyo social se considera un factor de protección y adaptación y, por lo tanto, este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar la satisfacción con el apoyo social y analizar variables sociodemográficas y académicas de los estudiantes en el contexto de prácticas en formación docente. La muestra contó con 966 pasantes (476 Portugal y 490 Brasil) de 8 instituciones de educación superior. Se aplicó la "Escala de satisfacción" con el apoyo social de País Ribeiro (1999). Los resultados muestran que el apoyo social basado en la amistad y la intimidad son los más utilizados y que la población portuguesa está más satisfecha con el apoyo social que los brasileños. La satisfacción con el apoyo social y con los supervisores aumenta la satisfacción con las prácticas.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Prácticum. Académicos. Apoyo Social. Formación del Profesorado. Estrés.*

Introduction

The ability to live in society is one of the essential human skills, and knowing how to use this social support as a tool to assist in stressful situations has been increasingly studied among scholars, constituting an integral part of research in the field of health psychology (DUNBAR; FORD AND HUNT, 1998; PAIS RIBEIRO, 1999; PEREIRA *et al*., 2006).

Researchers' interest in the social support construct began in the 1970s due to several factors, such as the relationship between social support and indicators of the presence/absence of various diseases and the association of social support with predictions of health, prognosis, and individual recovery, having studied its relationship with self-concept and self-esteem (RIGOTTO, 2006), quality of life, the health-disease process (VALLA; GUIMARÃES; LAC, 2006), physical and psychological well-being, among others. However, as a rule, it is strongly associated with studies that relate social support to factors that reduce the impact caused by stressful events (ANTUNES; FONTAINE, 2005; FRANCISCO; PEREIRA; PEREIRA, 2006; PEREIRA *et al.,* 2006) since from this perspective, perceived social support is seen as an extremely significant resource in stress reduction and the improvement of the individual's quality of life. These good interpersonal relationships are presumed to affect the prevention and reduction of the severity of organic and psychological disorders resulting from aversive situations (FUSTER, 1997; DUNBAR; FORD; HUNT, 1998).

Stress is largely responsible for the imbalance in the psychological well-being of teaching professionals and various authors (LIPP, 2005; ESTEVES, 1997; KYRIACOU, 2003; FRANCISCO, 2010; REINHOLD, 2003; NUNES SOBRINHO, 2006) among others, highlight teaching as a source of stress due to different factors: low salary, workload overload, working conditions, poor interpersonal relationships, excessive noise in the classroom, different roles and positions of the teacher, inadequate school administration and management, etc. The accumulation of these stressful events results in low work engagement among employees, which compromises the quality of education.

The investigation by Fernandes *et al.* (2012) shows that, from the initial training of teachers, especially during educational practices, stress manifests itself moderately and severely among university students, and social support functions as a "buffer effect" for the perceived stress during this period.

The experience of pursuing higher education is a significant challenge for many, as it requires new academic learning and a range of social and relational skills that are not universally prepared for. In this regard, this research aimed to assess satisfaction with social

support and analyze the relationship between social support and the sociodemographic and academic variables of students in the context of internships in Portugal and Brazil.

The important role of social support as a "buffer effect" for stress

With the growing interest in research on the subject, several studies already indicate a relationship between social support and health levels, scientifically proving that the presence of social support acts as a protective agent against the risk of stress-induced diseases. Researchers have observed that patients with various illnesses often report the absence of a social network or the presence of a significant loss of social ties (MATSKURA *et al.,* 2002; RIGOTTO, 2006). Thus, as Rodin and Salovey (1989) mentioned, social support functions as a relief in times of crisis, potentially inhibiting the development of diseases and positively contributing to the restoration of the individual's well-being.

Authors such as Dunbar, Ford, and Hunt (1998) describe three hypotheses that explain why social support is associated with distress and discomfort. The first is based on the mobilization of support hypothesis, interpreting the relationship between received support and psychological discomfort as positive, with both variables being associated with a third variable, stressful life events. The second inequality hypothesis maintains that individuals prefer to maintain balanced social relationships, as both parties would experience stress if an imbalance occurred, meaning that one side was giving or donating more than the other. In this case, the stress would persist until the balance was restored. The third hypothesis called a threat to self-esteem, argues that both the presence and absence of social support are stressors that impact self-esteem.

Given the events, difficulties, and limitations, it is natural for individuals to turn first to their social network, which represents social support, whether it is emotional or practical support obtained from family and friends in the form of companionship, affection, assistance, and training, making the individual feel valued, cared for, loved, and secure (ANTUNES; FONTAINE, 2005). We can receive these supports under challenging situations that constitute emotional, material, or informational resources within a social structure that allows us to meet needs in everyday situations and crises.

To deal with stressful events healthily and effectively, individuals respond to stress differently, which are considered essential points for study. Understanding and identifying the coping strategies used by individuals, such as seeking social support, religiosity, and distraction

(VALLA; GUIMARÃES; LAC, 2006; SANTOS; ALVES JUNIOR, 2007), are crucial for understanding the different coping strategies used by individuals and how their social networks influence their ability to respond to everyday challenges.

Some research has shown social support as a "buffer" against the impact of stress on health, associated with the reduction of well-being or exacerbation of the effects of stressors. There are various concepts and models to evaluate social support (DUNBAR; FORD; HUNT, 1998; COSTA; LEAL, 2004), with the consensus that this issue is, as Ribeiro (1999) states, multidimensional and that different aspects of social support have different impacts on individuals or groups. However, there is no consensus on the subdivisions of dimensions developed and presented by scholars. Therefore, a concise foundation for understanding the object of study will be provided, avoiding an excessive theoretical burden in analyzing the phenomenon under study.

According to Dunst and Trivette (1990), two sources of social support can be distinguished: informal (family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and others) and formal (clubs, churches, associations, and others). The first network includes individuals and social groups that can provide support in daily activities, while the second, which encompasses both formal social organizations (hospitals, government programs, health services) and professionals (doctors, social workers, psychologists, and others), are organized to provide assistance or help in times of need.

Multiple types of social support can be distinguished within social support, including material, emotional, and affective support. Psychological support refers to providing information, while non-psychological support refers to the support perceived by the individual.

Seidl *et al*. (2005) present three groups regarding the main sources of social support. The first consists of family members or other significant individuals in the social network (friends and neighbors), the second includes professionals or volunteers involved in caregiving, and the last refers to religion as it pertains to members of the religious community and even divine entities as sources of support. Costa and Leal (2004) conclude that feeling loved and having close friends enables lower anxiety levels, prevents depression and somatization, and mitigates the effects of stressful life events. Simão, Caetano, and Flores (2005) divide social support into emotional, instrumental or tangible, and informational support. Dunst and Trivette (1990) consider 11 dimensions of social support fundamental to individual well-being:

1. The number of individuals who are part of the social network;

2. The existence of social relationships at both individual levels (marriage, family, etc.)

and general level (clubs, associations, etc.);

3. The frequency with which the individual establishes contact with social network members;

4. The need for support to establish contact with the network;

5. The type and amount of support individuals provide in the existing social networks;

6. Congruence refers to the extent to which the available social support matches the individual's needs;

7. Use, refers to the extent to which the individual utilizes social networks when necessary;

8. Dependence, expresses the degree to which the individual can rely on social support networks when needed;

9. Reciprocity expresses the balance between received social support and the support provided;

10. Proximity, which expresses the perceived closeness to network members;

11. Satisfaction and pleasure are derived from social support.

The studies by Singer and Lord (1984) on the relationship between social support and health present four major categories: in the first, social support is understood as a protector, as a mediator or moderator of stress against stress-induced disorders, as it prevents stress from negatively affecting the individual, while the second states that stress affects all individuals, with reduced effects in cases where there is social support. In the second category, the absence of social support is recognized as a source of stress in the individual's life. Third, the loss of social support becomes a source of stress. And finally, the fourth and last category recognizes social support as beneficial in that it makes individuals more resilient and better able to cope with life's adversities. This is a somewhat contradictory perspective, as social support functions as an important resource in the presence and absence of stress.

Social support: Implications in the university context

Regarding the social support provided by parents and the impact of this intervention on their children, several researchers explain that there is a strong relationship between parenting styles and children's performance in terms of their behavior and social adjustment (AUNOLA; STATTIN; NURMI, 2000), as well as academic achievement (CHEN; LIU; LI, 2000; CONNELL; PRINZ, 2002).

In the field of School Psychology, several studies have been relating students' academic performance to social competence and have concluded that students with learning difficulties are generally assessed as less cooperative, less popular, and more rejected by their peers (WANSON; MALONE, 1992; KAVALE; FORNESS, 1996). They also demonstrate low empathy, limited verbal and nonverbal communication skills (WANSON; MALONE, 1992; KAVALE; FORNESS, 1996), and exhibit reduced capacity behaviors during interpersonal relationships (MARTURANO *et al.*, 1997; BERNARDES-DA-ROSA *et al.,* 2000). In this context, there is a significant amount of research on the association between low social competence and learning difficulties in students. In this regard, some authors (KAVALE; FORNESS, 1996; DEL PRETTE; DEL PRETTE, 2003) emphasize the need to understand how academic performance relates to social skills and vice versa.

Once the importance and categories of social support have been recognized as influential factors in individuals' different phases and behaviors, it is crucial to consider how the individual perceives this network, as it is useless. For it to have any significance, the individual must perceive and recognize it as important for personal and social development.

Rigotto (2006) demonstrates that when social support is perceived, the likelihood of dysfunctional behaviors decreases, as individuals who perceive social and family support as satisfactory exhibit positive characteristics such as sympathy, honesty, sociability, flexibility, maturity, ease in expressing feelings, responsibility, and others. Perceived social support can be distinguished as what the individual perceives as available when needed and received social support. This makes it clear that the perception of support is a determinant in behavior influenced by such support.

The breadth of studies that allow for correlating social support with other variables demonstrates the importance of this construct for the development of individuals' perceptions and how their relationship with the world interferes with their way of being.

The internship period is the most complex stage of higher education as it integrates a series of new challenges that gradually trigger an increased sense of student stress. Since satisfaction with social support is a protective and adaptive factor, this research analyzes the following problem: What type of social support do interns use as coping strategies for perceived stress during their internship? And to what extent do sociodemographic variables (age, gender, etc.) and independent variables related to internships (distance traveled, workload, etc.) influence the levels and satisfaction with social support among students in Portugal and Brazil?

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Method

This work is the result of an inter- and multicultural investigation of a cross-sectional and comparative nature between Portugal and Brazil, carried out to understand the stress factors experienced by academics during the period of supervised internships, as well as analyze the types of social support among students and the relationship between social support and stress experienced in these educational contexts.

The research involved two Portuguese-speaking countries: Portugal and Brazil, and the research population consisted of academics in the phase of Educational Practices from 8 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In Portugal, students from the University of Aveiro, the Higher School (ESSE) of Coimbra, Leiria, and Viseu participated, while in Brazil, students from Pontifical Catholic University of Goiás (PUC Goiás), Federal University of Goiás (UFG), Standard College (FP), and Araguaia College (FA) participated. The corresponding protocols for authorization and analysis by the Ethics Council of each country were applied.

This research is based on the conceptions and representations of the subjects, and given its broad field of application, the use of the questionnaire-survey as a data collection technique is justified, as it allows the researcher to access these perceptions and representations (RAMOS; NARANJO, 2014), thus reaching a large number of subjects, "even if dispersed over a large geographical area, as the questionnaire can be sent by mail" (GIL, 1995, p. 125, our translation).

Participants

This study involved 966 interns, 476 Portuguese and 490 Brazilian, with 162 (16.8%) males and 805 (83.2%) females distributed between the countries. The predominance of females in a sample of students in education-related courses has been more evident, confirming data that characterize teaching as a profession with a marked feminization (MOTA CARDOSO *et al.*, 2002).

In terms of age, it ranged from 19 to 49 years in Portugal, with a mean of 23.75 years, and in Brazil, it ranged from 18 to 57 years, with a mean of 27.25 years. Considering another age analysis as a parameter, using the criterion of being under 23 years old, attending higher education immediately after completing high school/professional training, or being over 23 years old, students who returned to studies later or took longer to complete their undergraduate degree, we found a discrepancy in our sample. In Portugal, 68.5% of the students are under 23 years old, and 31.5% are over 23 years old, while in Brazil, 47.9% are under 23 years old, and

the majority, 52.1%, are students over 23 years old.

Regarding marital status, we found that in Portugal, the majority of students, 86.8%, are single, 12.6% are married, and 0.6% are divorced. In Brazil, we found larger discrepancies, with 63.3% being single, 22.9% being married/cohabiting, 2.1% being divorced, and 0.2% being widowed. As for having children, it was found that 8.2% of Portuguese interns have children, while in Brazil, 35.1% have children, of which 14.5% have more than two children.

Next, data on the sample distribution across different HEIs, courses, and student information are presented (Table 1).

Table 1 - Distribution of Academic Characteristics of Interns

Variables	Groups		Total*
	Portugal (n=476)	Brazil (n=490)	
Institution of study			
Aveiro - UA	109(22,9%)	-	109 (11,3%)
ESE Viseu - ESEV	**191**(40,1%)	-	191 (19,8%)
ESE Coimbra - ESEC	65(13,7%)	-	65 (6,7%)
ESE Leiria - ESEL	111(23,3%)	-	111 (11,5%)
Federal University of Goiás - UFG	-	143 (29,2%)	143 (15,4%)
Pontifical Catholic University - PUCGO	-	**149** (30,4%)	149 (14,8%)
Standard College - FP	-	138 (28,2%)	138 (14,3%)
Anhanguera University	-	60 (12,2%)	60 (6,2%)
Program of study			
Early Childhood	**239** (50,2%)	-	239 (24,7%)
Education Primary	140 (29,4%)	-	140 (14,5%)
Education Pedagogy	-	**384** (58,0%)	384 (29,4%)
Physical Education	41 (8,6%)	42 (8,6%)	83 (8,6%)
Physics/Chemistry	21 (4,4%)		21 (2,2%)
Biology/Geology	11 (2,3%)	38 (7,8%)	49 (5,1%)
Mathematics	8 (1,7%)	35 (7,1%)	43 (4,5%)
Music	12 (2,5%)	30 (6,1%)	42 (4,3%)
Literature	4 (0,9%)	20 (4,1%)	24 (2,5%)
Geography/History	-	41 (8,3%)	41 (4,2%)
Level of Education			
University	109 (22,9%)	**292** (59,6%)	401 (41,5%)
Polytechnic/College	**367** (77,1%)	198 (40,4%)	565 (58,5%)
Type of the institution of study			
Public	**476** (100%)	194 (39,6%)	670 (69,4%)
Private		**296** (60,4%)	296 (39,6%)
Working and studying at the same time			
Yes	67 (14,1%)	**337** (68,8%)	404 (41,8%)
No	**409** (85,9%)	133 (31,2%)	562 (58,2%)

* Note: The percentages in the column refer to the categories of this variable, excluding the group.

Source: Fernandes (2011, p. 181)

Procedure

To collect the data, various approaches were taken, as the authorization for the application of the instruments differed for each of the investigated IES, which we will summarize below.

At the University of Aveiro, we received assistance from the Integrated Center for Teacher Training (CIFOP) and the Department of Education (DE) for data collection in Portugal. Based on the list of information provided by CIFOP and with financial support from the Department of Education, we opted to send a letter containing the questionnaire and a prepaid return envelope to the schools where the interns were enrolled in the Supervised Pedagogical Practice/Internship course. This approach was chosen because the majority of students in this period spent more time in the field schools than at the university.

At the Schools of Higher Education (ESE) in Coimbra, Leiria, and Viseu, after obtaining the necessary authorizations and information regarding the number of students in each practice group, the pedagogical team was suggested to apply the questionnaire protocol. To facilitate this, blocks of questionnaires were organized for each group of classes, along with a guide containing the necessary instructions for proper administration.

In Brazil, since students, even during their internships, attend theoretical classes at the university, it was allowed to administer the questionnaire during these theoretical classes at the university.

Instrument

Considering the specificity of the study and its suitability for the target population, it was most appropriate to apply a quantitative methodology using a questionnaire that allows for statistical analysis of the data. As stated by Gil, a questionnaire can be defined as "a research technique consisting of a relatively large number of questions presented in writing to individuals to assess opinions, beliefs, feelings, interests, expectations, lived situations, etc." (GIL, 1995, p. 124, our translation).

To assess satisfaction with social support, the "Satisfaction Scale with Social Support (ESSS)" questionnaire developed by Pais Ribeiro (1999) was used. It consists of a self-report scale comprising 15 statements to assess the level of agreement with each question using a 4-subscale response spectrum: SA - Satisfaction with friendships; IN - Intimacy; SF - Satisfaction with family; AS - Social activities.

Through a Likert-type scale with five response options (A. "Strongly agree"; B. "Agree"; C. "Neither agree nor disagree"; D. "Disagree"; and E. "Strongly disagree"), it is possible to extract four dimensions or factors: "Satisfaction with friends (SA)"; "Intimacy (IN)"; "Satisfaction with family (SF)"; and finally, the factor "Social activities (AS)". These four factors explain "63.1% of the total variance of the questionnaire" (PAIS RIBEIRO, 1999, p. 552). In this scale (ESSS), a higher overall score corresponds to greater perceived satisfaction with social support.

Regarding the factor analysis, explained variance, and instrument consistency considering both countries, Cronbach's alpha presents average consistency values of .82 in Portugal and .80 in Brazil, demonstrating that the questionnaire's viability is high in both countries. These findings support the values obtained in a study conducted during an internship by Francisco, Pereira, and Pereira (2006), which reported a consistency of 0.85, as well as the author's study with an internal consistency of 0.85 (PAIS RIBEIRO, 1999). This scale has also been used with other populations of students and teachers, demonstrating identical metric properties to the original scale. This instrument includes five questions that need to be reverse-scored, as presented by Pais Ribeiro (1999).

Statistical Analysis

The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 24 was used for the statistical treatment of the collected data. This software facilitated the calculation of item and factor means from the questionnaire and the comparison of scores used, aiming to account for the samples from both countries. The research questions proposed in this study were addressed through statistical tests whenever possible. The t-test was used to compare means between two groups, and one-way ANOVA was used to analyze variances when comparing means among more than two groups. Pearson's correlation was used for correlating the instruments used, as well as the factors and items.

Results

A descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was conducted based on the total scale to analyze the relationship between Portuguese and Brazilian interns in terms of satisfaction with their social support. The results are presented below without further discussion for each result, given the comparative characteristics of the sample group and the differences in the

structure and organization of practices in each country. The discussion and conclusion highlight the different variations.

A more detailed initial analysis, based on the total scale score in both countries, revealed statistically significant differences (t = 3.400; p = .001), indicating that the overall mean obtained by Portuguese students (M = 50.96; SD = 9.85) is higher than that of Brazilians (M = 48.72; SD = 10.63). Table 2 presents the data on the overall item means per country.

Table 2 - Presentation of SSE items by country (Portugal (PT) and Brazil (BR))

Items	Description of items:	PT Average	DP	BR Average	DP	Total Average	DP
1	Sometimes I feel lonely in the world and without support	3.38	1.25	3.25	1.46	3.31	1.361
2	I don't go out with friends as often as I would like.	2,27	1,25	2,44	1,37	2,35	1,316
3	My friends don't reach out to me as often as I would like.	3.35	1.25	3.10	1.36	3.22	1.307
4	When I need to confide in someone, I can easily find friends with whom I can.	**3.92**	1.20	3.42	1.43	3.67	.345
5	Even in the most embarrassing situations, I have several people I can turn to if I need emergency assistance.	4.11	1.07	**3.77**	1.23	3.93	1.166
6	Sometimes, I miss having someone truly intimate who understands me and with whom I can discuss intimate matters.	3.40	1.50	3.00	1.64	3.20	1.585
7	I miss social activities that fulfill me.	2.76	1.21	2.70	1.40	2.73	1.310
8	I want to participate in organizational activities (sports clubs, scouts, political parties).	3.02	1.27	2.89	1.47	2.95	1.377
9	I am satisfied with how I relate to my family.	**4.26**	0.99	3.94	1.26	4.10	1.147
10	I am satisfied with the amount of time I spend with my family.	2.64	1.37	2.98	1.48	2.81	1.435
11	I am satisfied with what I do together with my family.	3.47	1.35	3.34	1.43	3.40	1.392
12	I am satisfied with the number of friends I have.	**3.93**	1.11	3.73	1.32	3.83	1.224
13	I am satisfied with the amount of time I spend with my friends.	2.86	1.27	2.89	1.38	2.87	1.326
14	I am satisfied with the activities and things I do with my friends.	3.41	1.21	3.18	1.35	3.30	1.285
15	I am satisfied with the type of friends I have	4.18	1.05	**4.08**	1.14	4.13	1.096

Source: Fernandes (2011, p. 222)

It appears that in terms of satisfaction with social support, items 15 and 9 ("I am satisfied with the type of friends I have" and "I am satisfied with how I relate to my family") were the items with the highest scores in both countries, respectively (M15 = 4.13; SD = 1.096 and M9 = 4.10; SD = 1.147).

Among Portuguese students, item 9 ("I am satisfied with how I relate to my family") had the highest mean (M = 4.26; SD = 0.99). As for the Brazilians, item 15 ("I am satisfied with the type of friends I have") had the highest mean (M = 4.08; SD = 1.14). It was also found that item 2 ("I don't go out with friends as much as I would like") had lower means in both countries (M/PT = 2.27; DP/PT = 1.25 and M/BR = 2.44; DP/BR = 1.37).

The analysis of ESSS was performed taking into account its four dimensions (friendship, intimacy, family activity, and social activity), and statistically significant differences were found (t = 2.614; p = .010) in terms of satisfaction with friendships, revealing that Portuguese students (M = 17.73; DP = 4.33) are more satisfied with their friendships than their Brazilian counterparts (M = 16.99; DP = 4.50). A statistically significant difference was also found (t = 6.014; p = 0.000) regarding the subscale of satisfaction with intimacy, with Portuguese students obtaining higher means (M = 14.81; DP = 3.35) than Brazilians (M = 13.45; DP = 3.75). (Table 3).

Table 3 - Comparative analysis of social support among interns from Portugal and Brazil

Social Support		PT		BR			
		M	**DP**	**M**	**DP**	**test t**	***P***
STUDENT INTERNS	Friendship	**17.73**	4.33	16.99	4.50	2.614	**.010****
	Privacy	**14.81**	3.35	13.43	3.75	6.016	**.000****
	Family	10.38	2.90	10.26	3.25	.580	.563
	Social activity	8.05	2.72	8.02	3.14	.170	.865

**p<.01; * p<.05
Source: Fernandes (2011, p. 267)

About the variable "gender", the analyses revealed statistically significant differences in social support across the subscales of satisfaction with friendship (t=2.071; p=0.040), satisfaction with family support (t=-2.337; p=0.020), and satisfaction with social activities (t=2.591; p=0.010).

The results indicate that male Portuguese students obtained higher means than their Brazilian counterparts in all items of the friendship subscale, with higher satisfaction in friendship (M=18.94; DP=4.05) and intimacy subscale (M=15.08; DP=3.51). According to the results presented in Table 4, Portuguese women also achieved higher results in 3 out of the four subscales (Friendship, Intimacy, and Social Activities), while Brazilian women only had higher scores in the Family subscale (M=10.45; DP=3.30).

However, it was observed that there were differences between Brazilian and Portuguese counterparts in terms of satisfaction with family social support, with the latter obtaining a higher mean (M=10.45; SD=3.30) (Table 4).

Table 4 - Comparative analysis of social support and gender by country

Social Support	Gender	Students Interns							
		PT				BR			
		M	**DP**	**test t**	***P***	**M**	**DP**	**test t**	***P***
Friendship	Male	18,94	4.05	2.071	. **040***	16.96	4.10	-.081	.955
	Female	17,59	4.35			16.99	4.61		
Privacy	Male	15,08	3.51	.606	.545	13.49	3.30	.188	.851
	Female	14,78	3.33			13.41	3.88		
Family	Male	10,18	3.04	-.490	.625	9.64	3.02	-2.337	**.020***
	Female	10,40	2.89			10.45	3.30		
Social activities	Male	9,00	2.35	2.591	**.010***	8.43	3.00	1.600	.100
	Female	7.94	2.74			7.90	3.17		

**p<.01; * p<.05
Source: Fernandes (2011, p. 267)

The analysis of Table 4 shows that in relation to the two age groups (<23 and >23), there were statistically significant differences ($t_{<23}$ = 3.068; p=0.002; $t_{>23}$ = 5.704; p=0.000) between Portuguese and Brazilian interns, only in the intimacy satisfaction subscale. It was also observed that Portuguese interns had higher means in both age levels ($M_{<23}$=14.63, DP=3.40; $M_{>23}$=15.19, DP=3.21).

Table 5 - Comparative analysis of social support by age and country

Social Support	Countries	Students Interns							
		Under than 23 years old				More than 23 yers old			
		M	DP	test t	***P***	M	DP	test t	***P***
Privacy	PT	14.63	3.40	3.068	**0.002**	15.19	3.21	5.704	**0.000**
	BR	13.70	3.70			13.18	3.79		

**p<.01; * p<.05
Source: Fernandes (2011, p. 268)

Analyses were also conducted between the subscales of social support satisfaction and sociodemographic and professional variables. Table 6 presents only the variables for which statistically significant differences were found.

Regarding marital status, statistically significant differences were observed in the single group, in the subscales of friendship (t = 2.322; p = 0.020) and intimacy (t = 4.998; p = 0.000). Portuguese single interns were more satisfied with their friendships and intimacy than their Brazilian counterparts. When comparing the two countries, differences (t=2.745; p=0.007)

related to intimacy satisfaction were found in the married/cohabiting group. In this group, Portuguese interns were more satisfied (M=14.80; DP=3.28) with their intimate relationships than their Brazilian counterparts (Table 6).

Table 6 - Summary presentation of statistically significant data on social support with country variables (Portugal and Brazil)

| | | | Students Interns | | | | | |
| | | | PT | | BR | | | |
Variables	**Significant item**	**Social Support**	**M**	**DP**	**M**	**DP**	*test t*	**P**
Marital status	Bachelor	Friendship	**17,97**	4,35	17,20	4,41	2,322	.020*
		Privacy	**14,81**	3,37	13,47	3,73	4,998	.000**
	Married/Couple	Privacy	**14,80**	3,28	13,32	3,67	2,745	.007**
Have Children	Yes	Privacy	**15,05**	3,54	13,23	3,89	2,679	.008**
	No	Friendship	**17,91**	4,32	17,06	4,36	2,661	.008**
		Privacy	**14,78**	3,34	13,53	3,68	4,794	.000**
Number of Children	Only 1	Privacy	**15,14**	3,60	13,13	3,73	2,647	.004**
Intership Hours	1 to 6 hours	Friendship	**18,21**	4,31	17,03	4,59	2,762	.006**
		Privacy	**14,75**	3,20	13,34	3,82	4,407	.000**
	7 to 13 hours	Family	**10,98**	2,64	9,65	3,25	2,781	.006**
Working Student	Yes	Amizade	**14,83**	3,47	13,56	3,66	4,006	.000**
		Friendship	**19,32**	3,74	17,28	4,66	2,579	.011*
	No	Privacy	**14,52**	3,42	13,10	3,99	2,058	,041*
		Family	**11,43**	2,26	10,22	3,30	2,228	.027*
		Social Activity	**9,36**	2,29	7,98	3,13	2,647	.009**

**p<.01; * p<.05
Source: Fernandes (2011, p. 268)

The subscale of satisfaction with "Intimacy" is a social support measure in which Portuguese and Brazilian students with children show statistically significant differences (t=2.679; p=0.008). Here, it was also observed that the Portuguese had a higher mean (M = 15.05; DP = 3.54). The "No" group of the variable "Having children" has a higher mean of social support satisfaction among Portuguese interns in the subscales of "Friendship" (M = 17.91; DP = 4.32) and "Intimacy" (M = 14.78, DP = 3.34) compared to their counterparts in Brazil (Table 6).

The variable "Number of children" highlighted differences (t = 2.647; p = 0.004) only in the group of those who reported having only one child. In this group, the Portuguese expressed greater satisfaction with social support in "Intimacy" (M = 15.14; DP = 3.60) (Table 6).

Considering the internship hours, the "Friendship" and "Intimacy" subscales showed the most evident differences. The highest means ($M_{friendship}$=18,21; DP= 4,31 y $M_{intimacy}$=14,75;

DP= 3,20) were obtained among Portuguese interns who had 1 to 6 hours of internships. In the group of 7 to 13 hours, statistically significant differences were observed (t = 2.781; p = 0.006) in the family subscale, with a higher mean among Portuguese students (M = 10.98; DP = 2.64) (Table 6).

Regarding the variable "Worker-student" and in the "No" group, the Portuguese show statistically significant differences and higher means than Brazilians in all four subscales. Therefore, Portuguese interns are more satisfied with social support in terms of friendship (M = 19.32; DP = 3.74), intimacy (M = 14.52; DP = 3.42), family (M = 11.43; DP = 2.26), and social activities (M = 9.36; DP = 2.29) than Brazilians (Table 6).

The comparative analysis between the variable "Commute" and the full scale of satisfaction with social support showed the existence of statistically significant differences (F=3.408; p=0.001) only in the group of distances equal to or greater than 15 km, where Portuguese students obtained higher means (M=51.54; SD=9.68) (Table 7).

Table 7 - Comparative analysis of social support and commuting to the training center

Displacement	PT		BR		F	*P*
	Average	DP	Average	DP		
< 3 km	50,99	10,17	49,63	9,74	.916	.316
3 to 14 Km	50,81	9,62	50,17	11,12	.574	.566
>= 15 Km	**51,54**	9,68	47,54	10,23	3,408	**.001***

**p<.01; * p<.05
Source: Fernandes (2011, p. 270)

A correlational analysis was conducted to understand better the relationship between students' satisfaction with their internship and social support. This analysis revealed a direct, positive, and statistically significant relationship (r=0.289, p<0.01) between both variables (Table 8). This result indicates that increased satisfaction with social support will lead to higher satisfaction with the internship experience.

Furthermore, the relationship between satisfaction with other variables related to the internship (e.g., supervisors) was examined using correlation analysis (Table 8).

Table 8 - Correlations between different variables and satisfaction with the internship

Variables	Satisfaction with the internship
Student satisfaction with the academic tutor	.397**
Student satisfaction with the professional tutor	**.508****
Stress experienced throughout the internship	-.083**
Satisfaction with social support	.289**

**p<.01; * p<.05

Source: Fernandes (2011, p. 270)

Analyzing the results, and although all variables were statistically significantly related, it is noteworthy that the variables satisfaction with the professional supervisor (r=0.508, p<0.01), satisfaction with the professional tutor (r=0.397, p<0.01), and social support (r=0.289, p<0.01) are positively and directly related to satisfaction with the internship, while perceived stress is negatively associated with satisfaction with the internship. Although the correlations are moderate to weak, the results indicate that increased satisfaction with the supervisor, tutors, or social support influences students' satisfaction with the internship, and a perception of high stress during the internship period leads to lower satisfaction. These findings are supported by studies such as Singer and Lord (1984), which provide evidence that family support and social support improve self-concept and satisfaction, as well as the study by Francisco, which confirms the positive relationship between satisfaction with tutors and the internship, highlighting the importance of tutors.

Discussion and Conclusion

The overall result of our study shows that social support contributes to an increase in personal satisfaction and satisfaction with the internship, and being satisfied with the mentors influences the degree of satisfaction with the internship.

Regarding satisfaction with social support, which is crucial for individual emotional development, it was possible to observe that, in general, Portuguese participants have higher averages than Brazilians, and this difference is statistically significant. It was also found that Portuguese men have higher averages in friendship and social activities sub-scales compared to Brazilians. However, Brazilian women have significantly higher averages when analyzing satisfaction with social support from family. Single Portuguese participants show statistically significant results and higher standards in friendship and intimacy than Brazilians. For married or in a stable relationship, the difference is significant in terms of intimacy, indicating that

"Intimacy" is social support where Portuguese and Brazilian students with children present statistically significant differences, with Portuguese students having higher averages.

The data also show that not having children in Portugal is associated with higher average satisfaction with social support based on Friendship and Intimacy. Having only one child in Portugal is significantly associated with satisfaction with social support in terms of Intimacy. Regarding being a working student, Portuguese participants have higher averages than Brazilians in terms of social support from Friendship. Overall, we observed that Portuguese participants have higher averages in intimacy, friendship, and social activities as social supports, as well as significant differences compared to Brazilian students. This can be explained by examining teacher training structure and internship organization differences.

In Portugal, the internship is carried out in the final year of the bachelor's degree, and the student completes the internship in the same school with the same tutors throughout the academic year. In Brazil, on the other hand, internships are conducted every quarter and can involve different centers and tutors for each internship period. There are even universities where starting from the second academic year, students have to go to the center twice a week while continuing with theoretical classes in various subjects at the university. Students must submit a practice report at the end of each internship period, increasing their workload. Furthermore, in Brazil, there is a higher number of working students compared to Portugal, which leads to a greater workload and naturally makes it more challenging to have a support network in their daily internship life. This low perception of social support may influence stress levels and satisfaction with the internship.

Similarly, Fernandes *et al.* (2012) state that the greater the perception of available social acceptance and unconditional acceptance from parents, friends, and family, as well as the perception of the social network, the more positive and satisfactory the academic experiences of university students. This also contributes to better adaptation to the course, institution, and academic trajectory, improved interpersonal relationships with peers and professors, and physical and psychological well-being perception.

Leal (2013) further asserts that for the psychological development of students, it is essential to have a supportive environment within the family, school, and group settings, providing reference models or a strong support network. Social support helps individuals become stronger and better equipped to face the vicissitudes of life (PAIS RIBEIRO, 1999).

In light of these results and the theoretical frameworks that support this study, it is suggested that educational institutions, especially universities, implement support measures for

diagnosing, intervening, and monitoring students with low social support. This is important for preventing risky behaviors that can be detrimental to their personal and academic lives, and it allows students to develop their abilities and potential. In coordination with other partners, measures should be taken to provide psychological and social support. In contexts where students are dissatisfied with their social support, supporting them in the multiple challenges they face during their journey in higher education is essential. Providing guidance and socio-educational support impacts their psychological and social well-being, particularly during internships.

It is essential to raise awareness among higher education students about social support's importance and influence in coping with adversities throughout their academic, personal, and family lives. The World Health Organization (WHO, 1996) has advocated for comprehensive educational actions and establishing social support networks and social skills programs in schools, reinforcing community actions that improve social relationships within the educational context (MATOS *et al*., 2005).

Therefore, the presence of satisfactory social support, as perceived by the individual, is a strong ally in maintaining adequate stress levels for a healthy life. Taking into account the comparative nature of our research between Portugal and Brazil, we have confirmed the importance of different dimensions or subscales of social support for the well-being of students during their internship period. The intimate, familial, and friendship relationships established form this network of satisfactory social support for students.

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