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PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN NEW UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

First-year university students often face challenges adapting to higher education methodologies, which are linked to psychosocial, personal, familial, academic, and social factors that can affect their academic performance. Objective to analyse the relationships between these psychosocial factors and academic performance in students enrolled in the first semester at a public university in the Cesar department, Colombia. Methodology the study followed a quantitative, correlational approach with a non-experimental cross-sectional design, involving a sample of 460 students enrolled in semester 2025-1. The "Psychosocial Risk Factors in University Students" questionnaire was administered, and academic averages were obtained from institutional databases. Results correlations were analysed using Spearman's Rho coefficient through SPSS. The results showed that only academic risk factors were significantly correlated with academic average ($\rho = -0.127$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that higher academic risk is associated with lower performance, likely due to poor study habits, inadequate planning, or insufficient mastery of essential skills. In contrast, personal, familial, and social factors did not show a direct relationship with academic performance, although significant correlations were observed among these factors themselves ($\rho = 0.548$ and 0.43), suggesting they constitute a systemic environment that may indirectly influence academic outcomes. Conclusion although only academic risk factors directly impact performance, the interaction among personal, familial, and social factors suggests an indirect influence that could affect long-term academic success.

KEYWORDS: Psychosocial Factors, Academic Performance, University Students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic performance is regarded as the level of achievement a student attains in relation to their academic goals. According to Ramírez Vázquez et al. (2020), it can be defined as the student's ability to meet the objectives of the curriculum, in accordance with the guidelines established within the context of higher education. During this process, various factors relating to both the student and the university environment come into play. The education system insists on associating academic performance solely with numbers (Ariza et al., 2018), such that some universities establish a scale from zero (0) to five (5), where a mark of 2.9 or below implies a fail and a result of 3.0 or above equates to a pass; furthermore, the closer the mark is to five (5), the more it is considered excellent in terms of results. For other authors, academic performance is a grade that transcends the quantitative to the qualitative; it is a mark which, if consistent and valid, reflects learning and the achievement of established goals (Ruiz Recéndiz et al., 2019).

In a university setting, it is easier to monitor this phenomenon from the early stages and at different points throughout a student's academic journey (Gutiérrez-Monsalve et al., 2021). In particular, new students face multiple difficulties in adapting to the demands of university life, which are linked to various psychosocial, personal, family, academic and social factors that may affect their performance (Gutiérrez-Monsalve et al., 2021). This phenomenon is significant because successful adaptation and good performance during the first semester can prevent greater risks such as university dropout, which affects retention and educational quality (Costa, 2018); in Colombia, the system for the prevention of dropout in higher education (SPADIES) indicates that there is a 3:1 ratio; that is, for every three (3) students enrolled at university, one (1) drops out and fails to graduate (MEN, 2025). It is therefore essential to examine the various psychosocial factors that may influence the outcome of this teaching-learning dynamic, particularly at university level for new students.

According to some authors, academic performance depends on intrinsic and extrinsic factors experienced by the student; the former include their ability to work, dedication, level of study, personal characteristics, retention capacity and degree of motivation, whilst the latter include socio-demographic conditions, emotional and financial support from the family, and the student's social skills and participation in cultural and sporting activities (Real-Delor et al., 2024). Academic

performance is influenced by multiple interacting variables, notably socio-economic, social, psychological, pedagogical and biological factors. Furthermore, the family context and economic situation play a significant role in the presence of emotional support and cultural capital that promote performance, whilst financial difficulties or family conflicts can have a negative impact (Muñoz-Benavides, 2025).

Previous research into this phenomenon shows that among the psychosocial factors linked to academic performance are: academic results achieved during secondary school, which reflect the student's prior abilities; the support perceived from their social environment, particularly from their family; and their self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy (De Besa Gutiérrez et al., 2019). Other factors that have an impact include whether the student is a scholarship holder, the repeated failure of subjects, and the withdrawal from courses during the semester (Gutiérrez-Monsalve et al., 2021), the level of commitment to study, perseverance, motivation to learn, career guidance, participation in sporting activities, and experiences accumulated throughout the university student's educational journey (Ramírez Lemus et al., 2023).

Araiza Lozano (2021) points out that, in addition to academic background, socio-economic status, parents' level of education and occupation are factors that enhance university students' academic performance; the more qualified the parents are, the better their financial situation and intellectual abilities to support their children as they embark on higher education. Another psychosocial factor, albeit of an individual or personal nature, is career guidance. Students who have not undergone an assessment of their aptitudes and interests prior to entering university may enrol in degree programmes which, once they begin, fail to meet their expectations; this situation can place them in a vulnerable position in terms of their adaptation, academic performance and retention (Costa, 2018).

Among these individual psychosocial factors, mental health conditions also stand out; disorders associated with depression, anxiety and stress are the most commonly reported among university students, and studies indicate that the link between anxiety and academic performance is more prevalent than that with other variables (Trunce Morales et al., 2020). Entering university represents the experience of an unfamiliar environment, which introduces a new methodology and dynamics within an educational system that can influence the manifestation of mental health symptoms, thereby

limiting the potential of new students in social, personal and academic spheres (Cancino-Cedeño et al., 2024). likewise, protective variables such as self-concept, self-esteem and motivation have been shown to promote academic achievement (Pendones Fernández, 2022).

In the context of mental health, protective psychological characteristics such as self-concept, self-esteem and motivation can also be linked. Predictive studies have established that, in women, high levels of these three variables are associated with academic achievement, with self-esteem in particular identified as the most influential factor, as lower self-esteem is associated with poorer academic performance. In summary, it can be stated that self-esteem, self-concept and motivation are interconnected within the learning process, and that students with strong psychological resilience tend to achieve better academic performance (Pendones Fernández, 2022).

Another factor that influences the academic performance of first-year university students and which can be observed in both contexts (as a protective factor and/or a source of academic risk) is what are known as 'good practices', which involve collaborative work, time management and active learning; studies reveal that those students, particularly women, who find it easier to interact with peers and lecturers achieve higher scores compared to the average and lower performance of other university students (Gozalo Delgado et al., 2022)

Given all this background, which highlights a problem affecting higher education and which involves the process of adapting to teaching methods, student retention, the risk of dropout and, consequently, the quality of education, this study aims primarily to analyse the relationships between these psychosocial factors and academic performance among students who completed their first semester at a public university in the department of Cesar, Colombia, so that, based on its results and conclusions, prevention and intervention strategies may be proposed to help address the issues identified.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Type of Research

This study employed a quantitative methodology with a correlational focus, primarily aimed at estimating the degree of association between psychosocial risk factors and academic performance among first-year students. The variable 'psychosocial risk factors' encompassed dimensions such as

personal, family, social and academic factors, whilst academic performance was measured using the semester's grade point average. The design of this study was non-experimental – cross-sectional, as variables were not manipulated and were measured only during a single period of the 2025-1 academic semester.

It is important to note that the analytical model used focused on estimating associations by establishing a multiple regression model for initially exploratory purposes, recognizing that the dependent variable of academic performance is in itself a complex and multifactorial phenomenon. It should be noted that the model was limited to psychosocial variables without taking into account valid predictors such as academic motivation, self-efficacy, learning strategies, and institutional factors, among others.

For this reason, it should be noted that the explanatory scope of the model is intentionally limited; this methodological constraint allows the results to be interpreted in terms of partial contributions within a broader system of potential determinants of student performance.

2.2. Population

The participants in this study were first-semester students enrolled in the 2025-1 academic term. The measurement instruments were administered to a sample of 460 students selected using non-probabilistic convenience sampling, ensuring the participation of students from different academic programmes. The sample size is adequate for correlational analysis, exceeding the minimum recommended for detecting small associations ($r \approx 0.10$) with a statistical power of ≥ 0.80 . The students' age range was between 16 and 28 years. The mean age was 23.4 years with a standard deviation of 1.7. 67.7% of the participants were male and 33.3% female.

Inclusion criteria

- Sign the informed consent form
- Be active in the institutional database
- Complete the assessment forms in full.

Exclusion criteria

- Instruments with a high percentage of missing data

2.3. Instruments

The measurement instrument used for this study was a structured self-report questionnaire comprising 36 Likert-type items designed to measure the risk factors associated with student retention among new entrants. In constructing the

measurement instrument, account was taken of the guidelines established at national level for retention and graduation in higher education, particularly those set out in the System for the Prevention of Dropout in Higher Education (SPADIES), thereby ensuring the assessment of risk factors within the Colombian context.

The questionnaire measures seven dimensions: economic factors, family factors, vocational factors, emotional factors, teacher support, institutional support and academic skills. The Likert-type questions were answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree'.

The instrument was evaluated by five experts to ensure its content validity; the evaluators analysed semantic clarity, theoretical relevance, internal consistency and appropriateness. Finally, the instrument used enabled the scores obtained for the items and dimensions to be converted into quantitative indicators, which facilitated the performance of statistical analyses. Following the analysis of internal consistency, the test yielded a Cronbach's α ranging from 0.72 to 0.84 across all dimensions.

2.4. Procedure

This research project began with institutional approval and operational coordination, during which authorisation was obtained to administer the questionnaire and access students' academic averages for academic purposes. First-year students were then informed of the study's purpose, how the information would be handled, and the guarantees of confidentiality regarding their participation. Subsequently, informed consent forms were completed and the assessment tools were administered. Finally, following the consolidation of the database, the data was cross-referenced with the academic average to ensure its validity, and a descriptive and inferential analysis of the results was then carried out.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

The analyses in this study were carried out in

phases. In phase 1, a descriptive analysis was performed, in which risk levels were established by dimension for the categorical variables, whilst for the quantitative variables an analysis was carried out using measures of variability and central tendency.

In the second phase, the distribution of the variables was verified. Following the application of the normality test, Spearman's rho coefficient was established to perform the correlations.

Subsequently, correlations were carried out between the dimensions of the psychosocial risk factors and academic performance. Rho (ρ) and p-values were reported at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, supplemented by an interpretation of magnitude (weak/moderate/high) and direction. Finally, linear regression was performed with the aim of establishing a predictive model for the mean of the dependent variable.

3.1. Ethical Considerations

This study poses minimal risk to participants as there was no clinical intervention or manipulation of variables. The ethical considerations included the provisions of Resolution 8430 of 1993 issued by the Ministry of Health, as well as the provisions of Law 1090, which guarantees the confidentiality of information, full safeguards, voluntary withdrawal and non-maleficence.

4. RESULTS

About the results, the dimensions of the psychosocial factors and their respective levels are initially presented, as shown in Table 1. Furthermore, means above 0.50 are observed across all dimensions of psychosocial risk, indicating that the sample is predominantly concentrated at intermediate levels of vulnerability. The dimension with the highest average score was academic risk ($M = 0.58$; $SD = 0.16$), followed by social risk ($M = 0.54$; $SD = 0.13$), personal risk ($M = 0.53$; $SD = 0.14$) and family risk ($M = 0.52$; $SD = 0.14$); however, a significant proportion of students were found to be at high risk, primarily in the academic dimension (28%), followed by the family, personal and social factors (23%–24%).

Table 1: Results of the questionnaire on 'Psychosocial Risk Factors among University Students'.

Dimension	High level %	Intermediate level %	High level %
Personal Risk	3	74	23
Family Risk	4	72	24
Social Risk	0	77	23
Medium risk	3	69	28

Source: Our own measurement data.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed positive associations of moderate strength between the

dimensions of psychosocial risk. Table 2 shows that the only statistically significant correlation between

academic average and risk factors is with academic risk ($\rho = -0.127$, $p < 0.05$). Although this is a weak correlation, it is relevant because it suggests that the higher the level of academic risk, the lower the academic performance. This may be associated with difficulties such as a lack of study habits, poor planning, or a low level of proficiency in the skills necessary for learning.

Personal, family and social factors do not show a significant direct correlation with academic performance, which may indicate that these aspects, whilst important for the student's general well-being, do not directly influence their academic performance

in this specific sample. However, significant correlations are observed between these factors themselves, revealing a structural interaction that could have indirect effects on academic performance. For example, personal factors correlate significantly with family factors ($\rho = 0.548$) and social factors ($\rho = 0.43$), indicating that students with higher levels of personal risk also tend to face adverse family and social conditions. This systemic relationship may represent a risk environment which, whilst not immediately affecting grades, could have a negative influence in the long term if timely intervention is not provided.

Table 2: Correlations between academic performance and psychosocial factors.

	Average	Personal risk	Family risk	Social risk	Academic risk
Average	1.0	0.056	-0.029	-0.052	-0.127*
Personal risk	0.056	1.0	0.549*	0.43*	0.453*
Family risk	-0.029	0.548*	1.0	0.505*	0.398*
Social risk	-0.052	0.43*	0.505*	1.0	0.394*
Academic risk	-0.127*	0.453*	0.398*	0.394*	1.0

Source: Spearman's rho statistical analysis.

Linear regression was also used in the analysis, with the grade point average serving as the dependent variable and the dimensions of the psychosocial risk factors acting as predictors, as shown in Table 3. It was observed that the overall model was statistically significant ($F(4, 455) = 7.84$, $p < .001$), explaining 6.2% of the total variance in academic performance ($R^2 = .062$; adjusted $R^2 = .054$).

It is important to note that, of the predictors considered, only academic risk proved to be a significant predictor of academic average ($\beta = -0.18$,

$p < .01$), which may indicate that higher levels of academic risk are associated with lower levels of academic performance. It should be noted that the dimensions of personal, family and social risk did not show significant effects when the other variables were controlled for simultaneously ($p > .05$).

The analysis indicates that the VIF values ranged from 1.45 to 1.72; these values indicate the absence of problematic multicollinearity and, in turn, ensure the validity of the model's estimates.

Table 3: Multiple linear regression for predicting academic performance.

Predictor	B	T	P	IC95%	VIF
Personal risk	-0.05	-1.02	0.30	(-0.10; 0.03)	1.45
Family risk	-0.04	-0.89	0.37	(-0.09; 0.04)	1.63
Social risk	-0.06	-1.10	0.26	(-0.11; 0.03)	1.72
Academic risk	0.18	-3.42	0.001	(-0.24; -0.07)	1.51

Source: Our own measurement data.

It is essential to clarify that the low percentage of variance explained indicates that psychosocial factors have limited predictive power regarding academic performance in this sample of newly admitted students. This finding suggests that, while these factors do not exclusively serve as direct determinants of academic performance for students' well-being, they do underscore the need to incorporate cognitive, affective, pedagogical, and institutional variables.

5. DISCUSSION

The results show that, among the psychosocial

factors assessed, only academic risk factors were found to have a statistically significant negative correlation with academic performance, indicating that higher academic risk is associated with lower average grades. This finding is consistent with previous studies linking difficulties in maintaining study habits, poor planning and a lack of learning skills with low levels of performance (Ramírez Vázquez et al., 2020; Gutiérrez-Monsalve et al., 2021).

It is also worth noting that, although the correlation between academic risk and performance among first-year students is low, the consistency across both analyses suggests that difficulties relating

to academic skills, study habits and time management are a key factor in the performance of first-semester university students. This is consistent with the findings of studies by Vera Velázquez et al. (2025) and López Campos (2022), for whom self-regulatory skills and learning strategies are critical factors that can either facilitate or negatively impact the transition from secondary school to the university system.

On the other hand, personal, family and social factors did not show a significant direct relationship with academic performance, although they did show significant correlations with one another, suggesting a systemic environment that could indirectly influence performance. This finding supports the idea that students' overall well-being is underpinned by a complex interplay between multiple psychosocial dimensions, which, although they may not directly affect performance in the short term, could have a long-term impact if not adequately addressed (De Besa Gutiérrez et al., 2019; Pendones Fernández, 2022). Studies conducted in the university sector in Latin America show that psychosocial factors tend to exert a moderate or indirect influence on academic performance, particularly through mediating variables such as academic motivation, psychological well-being and commitment to learning (Salazar Barragán, 2025)

Furthermore, the prevalence of moderate and high levels of personal, family, social and academic risks in the sample studied highlights the need to design and implement institutional policies that strengthen psychological, academic and social support, fostering conditions that mitigate these risks and promote student retention and success (Araiza Lozano, 2021; Costa, 2018; Pérez-Briones et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the moderate correlations observed between personal and family factors, and between personal and social factors, suggest that students' psychological or emotional conditions may be strongly linked to their family and social environment, as demonstrated by Castro Ponce et al. (2024), for whom the emotional well-being of university students is influenced by perceived support, family stability and social integration within the university environment, resulting in a psychosocial climate that either facilitates or hinders the academic adaptation of new students.

As for the results of the predictive model, it explained only 6.2% of the variance in academic performance, which suggests that, although the psychosocial factors assessed do have some impact, there are other variables not taken into account that could explain a larger proportion of academic

performance. This finding contrasts with those of the study by Vera Velázquez et al. (2025), which suggests that variables such as academic self-efficacy, student engagement, academic resilience and the use of self-regulated learning strategies can account for much higher percentages of the variance in performance. This suggests that academic performance is a multifactorial phenomenon involving cognitive, emotional, institutional and pedagogical dimensions.

In summary, although academic risk is the factor most directly associated with performance, the interaction between personal, family and social factors constitutes a risk context that must be addressed through a comprehensive approach to ensure satisfactory academic results and a positive university experience.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Academic performance is tangible evidence of the teaching and learning dynamics within the university context. A first-year student faces various risks, ranging from difficulties in adapting to university teaching methods to the risk of dropping out, with a low grade point average serving as an indicator.

Research on this phenomenon highlights the influence of various psychosocial factors on university students' academic achievement, including personal characteristics, cognitive skills, vocational interests, self-esteem, self-concept, motivation, and mental health conditions such as symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. It also includes external factors such as financial and emotional support from the family and the student's social skills.

The descriptive results show high averages in the intermediate levels of personal, family, social and academic risks; across all four dimensions, high-risk levels barely exceed 20% of the student population, but these circumstances warrant intervention from the student welfare and retention departments.

As for correlations, although personal, family and social factors did not show a significant direct relationship with academic performance, the correlations found between these dimensions suggest that they form an interdependent psychosocial environment that may indirectly influence academic performance. In this regard, students' emotional well-being, family support and social integration can act as protective or vulnerability factors that influence adaptation to university life.

For its part, the predictive model explained a relatively low percentage of the variance in academic

performance, confirming that this phenomenon is multidimensional and also depends on other variables not analysed in this study, such as academic motivation, self-efficacy, resilience, learning strategies and institutional teaching practices.

It can be concluded that no significant and direct relationship with academic performance is observed, suggesting that these factors, whilst relevant to the student's overall well-being, do not directly affect their academic performance in this particular sample.

Finally, the results show that the psychosocial factors examined in the study, while relevant for understanding the well-being of newly admitted students, provide only a limited explanation of academic performance, as evidenced by the model's explained variance (6.2%). This finding confirms the multidimensional nature of academic performance and, consequently, suggests that the results should be interpreted with caution, avoiding broad generalizations.

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