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Introduction: Several studies have pointed to the relevance of a positive attitude and optimism in people's lives. Optimism promotes mental and physical health, especially in coping with stressful situations, and may aid in improving cognitive and contextual resources, and coping that promote better mental health, such as fewer depressive symptoms. Optimists tend to perform better than pessimists in school, sports and work. The satisfaction of life plays an important role in healthy development. The positive affects attenuate the negative aspects of stressful life events and act as protective factors in the development of psychological and behavioral problems.

Objective: To investigate mental health indicators in Brazilian children and adolescents.

Aims: Investigate differences between boys and girls regarding the positive and negative affect, life satisfaction, satisfaction with school, family, self and friendship, and optimism.

Material and Methods: This is a quantitative cross-section study with data collected from 730 children and adolescents with 6-16 years old (mean = 10.6 years, SD = 3.3) from Porto Alegre and Montenegro, southern Brazil. Instruments used: Predictive of Optimism Tasks for Children (TAPOC); Youth Life Orientation Test (YLOT), Multidimensional Scale of Life Satisfaction for Children and Adolescents; Scale Positive and Negative Affects.

Results: The results show good levels of life satisfaction, positive affect and optimism and lower levels of negative affect. The results were substantial even for children under seven.

Conclusion: Young children already have a capacity of expression on their own well-being. The correlations between variables indicate the relevance of indicators of psychological health throughout development.