



# Social Support as a Mediator of the Relationship between Identity Fusion and Psychological Well-Being in South—South Migrant Populations

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## Abstract

The present study provides evidence of how perceived social support is a mechanism by which identity fusion with the country of origin is associated with psychological well-being in a migrant population. The study design was cross-sectional. We use intentional sampling based on the accessibility of the participants and using the snowball strategy through an online survey. This study included 323 Venezuelan migrants, of whom 176 (54.5%) were women, all residents of the city of Santiago, Chile. The variables assessed were perceived social support, identity fusion, and psychological well-being. Structural equation modeling was used to estimate the proposed mediation model. The estimation method used was robust weighted least squares estimation. The estimated models indicated that perceived social support has a mediating effect on the positive relationship between identity fusion and psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants residing in Chile. According to these results, feeling a sense of fusion with the country of origin and the perception of having sources of care and protection are factors that may help to improve the psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants living in Chile. Implications and limitations of these results are discussed.

**Keywords** Social support · Identity fusion · Psychological well-being · Immigrants · Venezuelan

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## Introduction

By 2020, the number of international migrants amounted to more than 272 million people, that is, approximately 3.5% of the world's population (IOM, 2020). In the case of Chile, it is estimated that more than 1.4 million international migrants currently live in the country, representing about 7.8% of the country's total population. Of these, 77% correspond to south-south migrants, i.e., of South American origin (INE, 2021).

Despite the increase in this phenomenon, making the decision to migrate is not easy. Although the context provides the conditions that promote this decision, the potential migrant must reflect on the costs and benefits of leaving his or her country of origin, given that moving implies different processes of change, which may mean leaving behind family members, friends, support networks, interpersonal relationships, economic resources, culture, and customs (Arancibia et al., 2021; Zarza & Prados, 2007), making it a complex experience that can increase individual vulnerability (Okumura et al., 2021). The migrant population is exposed to face obstacles within the host country, such as language and communication barriers, sociocultural change, social exclusion, economic difficulties, difficulties in accessing health, educational and social services, and loss of support networks and social articulation, among others, which could negatively affect the physical and mental health of migrant populations (Soto et al., 2019). For this reason, the social integration process is particularly important when the migrant arrives in the host country, functioning as a protective factor against the negative experiences that migrants usually go through (Herrero et al., 2012).

There is abundant evidence of how factors such as prejudice, discrimination, or stress negatively affect the health, quality of life, and well-being of migrants (Firat & Noels, 2021; Giuliani et al., 2018; Halim et al., 2017; Kader et al., 2020; Lincoln et al., 2021; Mera-Lemp et al., 2019; Otiniano & Gee, 2012; Sevillano et al., 2014; Siddiqi et al., 2017; Tonsing et al., 2016; Urzúa et al., 2018, 2020). However, research aimed at identifying protective factors that improve the well-being of the migrant population is rather scarce (Urzúa & Cabieses, 2018). Despite this, and according to the literature reviewed, several variables that are positively associated with the well-being of migrants have been accounted for, such as, for example, acculturation strategies, individual and collective self-esteem, self-concept, group identification, ethnic identity, and national identity, among others (Arancibia et al., 2021; Balidemaj & Small, 2019; Berry, 2005; Berry & Sabatier, 2011; Berry et al., 2006; Urzúa & Cabieses, 2018). The identity variables associated with migration processes are relevant in migration studies, since migrants, upon settling in the host country and belonging to a minority population, often redefine their identity, due to the fact that nationality, language, idioms, traits, and culture become salient, entering into a daily dynamic of inter-group interaction with the exogroup, which influences this constant reordering of their own identity (Álvarez-Benavides, 2020; Phinney et al., 2001). The literature indicates that maintaining cultural and identity elements of the country of origin or adopting cultural and identity elements of the host country positively favors

the well-being and adaptive adjustment of migrants (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Mera-Lemp et al., 2020; Phinney et al., 2001). On the contrary, not feeling close to or belonging to either culture (neither of origin nor of host) has been associated with worse levels of well-being and psychological adjustment (Berry, 2005; Berry & Sabatier, 2011; Berry et al., 2006). For this reason, within migration studies, it is important to examine these factors that are inescapable for understanding the identity processes of migrants as they may be elemental in improving and increasing their well-being (Balidemaj & Small, 2019; Haslam et al., 2009). On the other hand, social support has also been found to be a factor that is positively related to the well-being of migrants (Harandi et al., 2017; Simich et al., 2005), since having a greater social support network in a new context can significantly reduce the acculturative stress that migrants go through upon arrival in the host country (Safdar et al., 2009; Urzúa et al., 2017a; Urzúa et al., 2021c). In addition, social support can reinforce feelings of belonging and rootedness, increasing the sense of predictability, stability, and control of the environment (Veiel & Bauman, 1992). It is for this reason that we believe that the mere fact of feeling belonging to the group (of the country of origin or of the host country) is not sufficient to explain the well-being of migrants, but that it is social support that functions as the glue in the relationship between feelings of belonging to a group and the well-being of migrants.

## Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being, born in the eudaemonic aspect of well-being, is associated with the psychological harmony and completeness of people (Rodríguez-Carvajal et al., 2010), which is experienced through good living, personal growth, and development (Díaz et al., 2006). For Ryff (1989), psychological well-being is composed of six dimensions, which are self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purposes in life, and personal growth. All these dimensions would reflect a healthy and positive psychological functioning, manifesting as a whole the general psychological well-being of individuals.

Regarding migration studies that have addressed psychological well-being, there is evidence that identity variables could be fundamental to promote and improve the well-being of migrants (Balidemaj & Small, 2019; Brittian et al., 2015; Cobb et al., 2019; Espinosa & Tapia, 2011; Espinosa et al., 2015; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Phinney, 1992; Phinney et al., 2001; Smith & Silva, 2011; Urzúa et al., 2021b). In Colombian migrants based in Chile, Henríquez et al. (2021) examined the relationship between multiple identity indicators and psychological well-being, finding that both ethnic identity, collective self-esteem, and identity fusion are related to at least some dimension of psychological well-being, providing evidence that maintaining a positive identification and developing part of the culture of the country of origin in the host country could help maintain and improve the psychological well-being of migrants (Berry & Hou, 2021; Berry et al., 2006; Koydemir, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2010; Silva et al., 2016).

## Identity Fusion

This is defined as a visceral feeling of union between the personal self (characteristics of individuals that make them unique) and the social self (characteristics of individuals that link them to a group; Gómez & Vázquez, 2015; Swann et al., 2009). The demarcation separating the two identities becomes indistinguishable for individuals fused to a group (Gómez & Vázquez, 2015; Swann et al., 2012). Highly fused individuals tend to develop feelings of connectedness and reciprocal strength with group members (Gómez et al., 2011). Feelings of connectedness is the perception of feeling powerfully bonded with the group (Swann et al., 2012), while reciprocal strength is the conviction that oneself and the group are mutually reinforcing (Gómez & Vázquez, 2015). Thus, highly fused individuals maintain both relational ties (i.e., feelings towards individual group members) and collective ties (i.e., feelings towards the group as a whole; Gómez et al., 2011, 2019) to the group to which they are fused, which maintain and reinforce the perceived connection and reciprocal strength between personal identity and group identity (Besta, 2018; Gómez et al., 2011).

Identity fusion has been shown to be related to positive indicators of well-being such as quality of life (Jaśkiewicz & Besta, 2014), life satisfaction (Grinde et al., 2018), psychological adjustment (Kiang et al., 2020), mental well-being (Cohen et al., 2022), personal well-being (Zabala et al., 2020), social well-being (Zabala et al., 2020; Zumeta et al., 2020), and psychological well-being (Henríquez et al., 2021; Kiang et al., 2020; Tunçgenç et al., 2022). A possible explanation for this is that identity fusion would facilitate perceptions of similarity and trust with their group, fostering mutually supportive bonds that positively affect people's psychological well-being by being able to fulfill psychological needs, such as the need to belong or the need for a meaningful existence, which are fundamental for maintaining healthy and positive psychological functioning (Greenaway et al., 2016; Henríquez et al., 2021). Fused individuals would share a close bond with their group, so in migratory contexts, it would help to offset some negative effects of perceiving one's group as a minority within the host country (Kiang et al., 2020; Zabala et al., 2020). Similarly, identity fusion has not only been related to some indicators of well-being, but it has also been found that fused individuals tend to provide more support towards their group when they feel attached to it, thus predicting both help given and also help requested (Semnani-Azad et al., 2012). Fused individuals would be highly oriented to group support and commitment (e.g., Buhrmester et al., 2015; Howard & Magee, 2013; Newson et al., 2016; Sheikh et al., 2014), thus creating strong relational bonds through feelings, affect, and emotions towards the group (e.g., Páez et al., 2015; Pizarro et al., 2021).

## Social Support

Perceived social support refers to social interactions that the person perceives as sources of protection, care, appreciation, and affection, along with a sense of belonging to a network of available interpersonal relationships (e.g., community, social

networks, trusted peers) and with whom he or she feels protected and supported in times of need (Dalmasso et al., 2018; Hashemi et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2017). Support can come from many sources, such as family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, or other people important to the person's life (Zimet et al., 1988).

In migrants, given that migration is a life event that often involves major changes that affect people's lifestyle and surrounding environment (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2018; Hashemi et al., 2020), social support may be important for their well-being, as it could generate positive emotional experiences, thus reducing the negative effects of stress due to the cultural changes that migrants undergo (Urzúa et al., 2017a). For this reason, social support has been recognized as one of the factors that best predicts future success in the process of adaptation to the host culture or country (Dalmasso et al., 2018), associated with lower levels of psychological distress and a better assessment of life satisfaction (Khatiwada et al., 2021). In addition, social support plays a buffering role against the effect of perceived discrimination on subjective well-being (Hashemi et al., 2020), related to the development of positive emotional regulation strategies (Okumura et al., 2021). García-Cid et al. (2017), in a study with 1094 immigrants residing in Spain, showed that social support was related to life satisfaction of migrants. On the other hand, a systematic review of 85 studies on factors associated with psychological distress in migrant population concluded that lack of social support, living alone, or away from family, among other factors (e.g., perceived discrimination, region of origin, irregular migration), was strongly associated with a higher probability of presenting higher levels of psychological distress and common mental disorders (Jurado et al., 2017). In addition, some studies have pointed out that the perception of social support is more relevant in Latin American immigrant populations (Panchang et al., 2016), since this type of diaspora is characterized by maintaining collectivist and horizontal customs, promoting sociability among equals, which is an advantage in migratory contexts (García-Cid et al., 2017; Shavitt et al., 2016). Finally, in the Chilean context, it has been found that perceived social support functions as a mediator of the relationship between acculturation stress and general health in Latin American migrants (Urzúa et al., 2017b).

## The Current Research

The present research is framed within the south-south migration processes, specifically Venezuelan migration, given that in the last 5 years they have become the first majority of migrants living in Chile (DEM, 2021). One possible cause of this migration to Chile is because Venezuelans have the perception that Chile is an economically stable country, with flexible migration policies and where they could find family networks or friendships that serve as support for newcomers to the country (Gandini et al., 2020; Salgado et al., 2018). Several research have pointed out that the break in the life trajectory of the person when migrating, the separation with their culture, and the obstacles to be able to adapt adequately to the host country condition the psychological well-being of migrants (Arancibia et al., 2021; Aycan & Berry, 1996; Bobowik et al., 2014; Mera-Lemp et al., 2019).

It is for this reason that it is important to identify which elements can help maintain and improve the well-being of migrants in the context of the new country they arrive in (Arancibia & Cárdenas, 2022). As we have seen previously, several studies have shown that identity fusion is positively related to several indicators of well-being (Grinde et al, 2018; Henríquez et al., 2021; Jaśkiewicz & Besta, 2014; Kiang et al., 2020; Zabala et al., 2020; Zumeta et al., 2020). However, it is still unclear which mechanisms could explain this relationship. People highly fused with their group have a powerful feeling of unity (feelings of connectedness) and the belief that they and the group strengthen each other (reciprocal strength). It is for this reason that we believe that people highly fused with their group could develop higher levels of perceived social support, since by presenting feelings of connectedness and reciprocal strength with their group, this would favor a sense of belonging to a network of interpersonal relationships available as sources of protection and care, which would positively impact the migrants' levels of psychological well-being. With this background, we propose that perceived social support is a mechanism that could explain the relationship between identity fusion with the country of origin and the psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants living in Chile. The proposed model can be seen in Fig. 1.

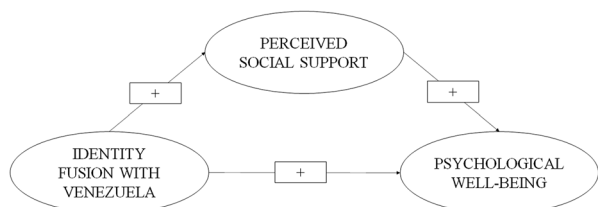
## Method

### Design and Participants

The study is correlational, non-experimental, and transversal (Ato et al., 2013). A purposive sampling was carried out based on the accessibility of the participants and using the snowball strategy to recruit them (Leighton et al., 2021). The inclusion criteria were Venezuelan nationality and being over 18 years of age.

The sample consisted of 323 Venezuelan migrants, of whom 147 (45.5%) were men and 176 (54.5%) were women, ranging in age from 18 to 69 years (ME = 32.61; SD = 9.36). The participants were residents of the city of Santiago, Chile. Phenotypically, participants defined themselves as White ( $n = 68$ ; 21.1%), Indigenous ( $n = 3$ ; 0.9%), Mestizo ( $n = 50$ ; 15.5%), Afro-descendant ( $n = 14$ ; 4.3%), Mulattos ( $n = 177$ ; 54.8%), and other groups ( $n = 11$ ; 3.4%). Most migrants arrived in the country within the last decade ( $n = 300$ ; 92.9%).

**Fig. 1** The direct effects of the proposed model are presented



## Instruments

### Identity Fusion

To measure this variable, an adaptation of the verbal identity fusion scale (IFVS) in its 7-item Spanish version (e.g., “Soy uno con Venezuela”) created by Gómez et al. (2011) was used. The instrument has presented valid and reliable scores in migrant population in Chile (Henríquez et al., 2019). It was answered in a Likert-type response format, with options ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Higher scores reflect a higher degree of identity fusion with the country of origin (Venezuela). In the present study, the scale presents a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.95.

### Perceived Social Support

To measure this variable, we used the multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) created by Zimet et al. (1988), in its 12-item Spanish version (López-Angulo et al., 2021). The scale is made up of three dimensions: family (e.g., “My family gives me the help and emotional support I need”), friends (e.g., “I trust my friends to try to support me”), and significant others (e.g., “When I have difficulties, I have someone to support me”). It was answered in a Likert-type response format, with options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores represent greater perceived social support. In the present study, the scale presents acceptable Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for all its dimensions (whole scale,  $\alpha = 0.96$ ; family,  $\alpha = 0.93$ ; friends,  $\alpha = 0.93$ ; significant others,  $\alpha = 0.93$ ).

### Psychological Well-Being

For this variable, the psychological well-being scales (SPWB, Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), in its Spanish version of 28 items, were used (Díaz et al., 2006). This scale measures 6 dimensions: self-acceptance, which refers to maintaining positive attitudes and feelings towards oneself, knowing, and accepting the aspects of the life one has lived (e.g., “When I look back over the history of my life, I am happy with how things have turned out”). Positive relationships refers to the maintenance of warm, satisfying, and trusting interpersonal relationships (e.g., “I feel that my friendships bring me many things”). Autonomy refers to self-determination, independence, and self-regulation of one’s own behavior, being able to stand on one’s own convictions without being coerced by external social pressures (e.g., “I am afraid to express my opinions, even if they are contrary to what most people think”). Environmental mastery refers to the ability to create or prefer favorable environments to satisfy personal needs and desires, being able to effectively control the context, knowing how to make good use of the opportunities presented by the environment. Purpose in life refers to the ability to set goals that give meaning to one’s existence (e.g., “I have been able to build a home and a way of life to my liking”). Personal growth refers to the conviction of continuous personal development, growth, and expansion through openness to new experiences, which help to

maximize the individual's capabilities (e.g., "Overall, over time I feel I continue to learn more about myself"). This instrument has presented valid and reliable scores in migrant population in Chile (Henríquez et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2016).

In the present study, the scale presented acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all its dimensions (whole scale,  $\alpha=0.93$ ; self-acceptance,  $\alpha=0.91$ ; positive relationships,  $\alpha=0.88$ ; autonomy,  $\alpha=0.86$ ; environmental mastery,  $\alpha=0.76$ ; purpose in life,  $\alpha=0.91$ ; personal growth,  $\alpha=0.89$ ).

## Procedure

Participants were recruited online, given that at the time of sampling there were strict restrictions on physical contact due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was developed in the Google Forms platform and then posted and shared in multiple Facebook and Instagram groups oriented towards the migrant population living in Chile (e.g., "Migrants in Chile," "Venezuelan Community in Chile," "Work for Venezuelans in Chile"). The inclusion criteria to participate in the study were to be over 18 years old and to be a Venezuelan migrant living in Chile. Users who were interested in participating and clicked on the published link were taken to an informed consent page. If they accepted the consent, they were redirected to the main study questionnaire. The snowball sampling technique was used, where each participant who had completed the questionnaire was asked if he or she knew of any other migrant who was willing to participate in the study. The questionnaires of people who responded very quickly (i.e., who finished answering before 8 min) were eliminated, since it is very likely that they had not paid enough attention to each of the items. The instruments and informed consents were known and approved by the ethics committee of the first author's university.

## Data Analysis

First, the measurement models were tested and adjusted through confirmatory factor analysis for each of the variables used in the study. Once the measurement models were estimated, four structural equation models were tested. First, the effect of identity fusion with Venezuela on the psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants residing in Chile (M1) was estimated. Second, a mediation model was performed to estimate the indirect effect of perceived social support on the relationship between identity fusion with Venezuela and psychological well-being as a general second-order factor (M2). Third, the effect of identity fusion with Venezuela on the dimensions of psychological well-being as specific factors (M3) was estimated. Finally, a mediation model was performed to estimate the indirect effect of perceived social support on the relationship between identity fusion with Venezuela and the dimensions of psychological well-being as specific factors (M4). Goodness-of-fit of the models was estimated using Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) values, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). According to standards recommended by the literature (e.g., Schreiber,



2017), RMSEA values  $\leq 0.08$ , CFI  $\geq 0.95$ , and TLI  $\geq 0.95$  are considered adequate and indicative of good fit. The robust weighted least squares (WLSMV) estimation method was used, which is robust with non-normal ordinal variables (Beauducel & Herzberg, 2006). The statistical packages used were SPSS v. 24 and MPlus v. 8.2. The effects of age, sex, year of arrival, and self-defined phenotype were controlled for in all analyses.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows some descriptive statistics ( $n$ , ME, and SD) of all the variables included in the model.

### Measurements Models

Table 2 shows the goodness-of-fit indices of the analyzed measurement models. Both the identity fusion scale with Venezuela and the multidimensional scale of perceived social support presented goodness-of-fit indicators close to the standards recommended by the literature (Schreiber, 2017). However, the psychological well-being scales presented lower adjusted indices than expected, so it was decided to iteratively debug the initial model, eliminating the inverse items, since these could be forcing an artificial dimension by wording effect (e.g., Marsh, 1996). Once the inversely worded items were removed, the refined measurement model was shown to fit the data adequately, presenting acceptable goodness-of-fit indices (see Table 2).

### Structural Equations Models

Once the measurement models were estimated and adjusted, we proceeded to examine the effect of identity fusion with Venezuela on the psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants in Chile (M1).

The model (M1) presented goodness-of-fit indices close to the criteria recommended by the literature (see Table 3). Figure 2 (M1) shows that identity fusion with Venezuela has a statistically significant positive effect of moderate magnitude ( $b > 0.30$ ; Cohen, 1988) on the psychological well-being of migrants.

After having estimated the relationship between identity fusion and psychological well-being (M1), the second structural model (M2) was tested. The first mediation model presented acceptable goodness-of-fit indices and within the criteria recommended by the literature (see Table 3). Figure 3 (M2) shows that identity fusion with Venezuela only has a statistically significant positive effect of moderate magnitude ( $b > 0.30$ ; Cohen, 1988) on perceived social support, but not on psychological well-being. In turn, it can also be observed that perceived social support has a statistically significant positive effect of large magnitude ( $b > 0.50$ ; Cohen, 1988) on the psychological well-being of migrants (Fig. 3). Finally, perceived social support presents

**Table 1** Scores and correlations of the variables included in the model

Variables	<i>n</i>	<i>ME</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>PSS</i>	<i>PSS<sub>FAM</sub></i>	<i>PSS<sub>FRI</sub></i>	<i>PSS<sub>SG</sub></i>	<i>PWB</i>	<i>PWB<sub>SA</sub></i>	<i>PWB<sub>PR</sub></i>	<i>PWB<sub>AU</sub></i>	<i>PWB<sub>EM</sub></i>	<i>PWB<sub>PL</sub></i>	<i>PWB<sub>PG</sub></i>
Identity fusion with Venezuela	323	3.63	1.03	0.42*	0.35*	0.42*	0.40*	0.34*	0.29*	0.37*	0.08	0.33*	0.31*	0.26*
Perceived social support	323	4.08	0.86		0.90*	0.92*	0.95*	0.60*	0.56*	0.65*	0.17*	0.46*	0.55*	0.51*
Family	323	4.06	0.94			0.72*	0.81*	0.53*	0.52*	0.55*	0.13*	0.41*	0.51*	0.47*
Friends	323	4.01	0.96				0.85*	0.55*	0.47*	0.67*	0.19*	0.39*	0.47*	0.44*
Significant others	323	4.15	0.88					0.59*	0.56*	0.60*	0.17*	0.47*	0.55*	0.51*
Psychological well-being	323	4.00	0.68						0.92*	0.84*	0.43*	0.82*	0.92*	0.85*
Self-acceptance	323	4.13	0.84							0.78*	0.14*	0.83*	0.94*	0.86*
Positive relationships	323	3.92	0.88								0.14*	0.69*	0.79*	0.74*
Autonomy	323	3.73	1.00									0.07	0.15*	0.08
Environmental mastery	323	4.00	0.88										0.82*	0.76*
Purpose in life	323	4.12	0.82											0.85*
Personal growth	323	4.18	0.85											

*Note:* *IF<sub>VEN</sub>*, identity fusion with Venezuela; *PSS*, perceived social support; *PSS<sub>FAM</sub>*, family; *PSS<sub>FRI</sub>*, friends; *PSS<sub>SG</sub>*, significant others; *PWB*, psychological well-being; *PWB<sub>SA</sub>*, self-acceptance; *PWB<sub>PR</sub>*, positive relationships; *PWB<sub>AU</sub>*, autonomy; *PWB<sub>EM</sub>*, environmental mastery; *PWB<sub>PL</sub>*, purpose in life; *PWB<sub>PG</sub>*, personal growth  
*p* < 0.05\*

**Table 2** Indicators of global adjustment of the measurement models

Models	Parameters	$\chi^2$	DF	<i>p</i>	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSEA IC 90%	
								Lower	Upper
IFVS	21	33.623	14	.00	.978	.967	.066	.037	.095
MSPSS	63	164.004	51	.00	.997	.996	.083	.069	.097
SPWB	151	5264.042	371	.00	.813	.795	.202	.197	.207
SPWB*	126	538.965	246	.00	.987	.986	.061	.054	.068

Note: IFVS, identity fusion verbal scale; MSPSS, multidimensional scale of perceived social support; SPWB, scales of psychological well-being

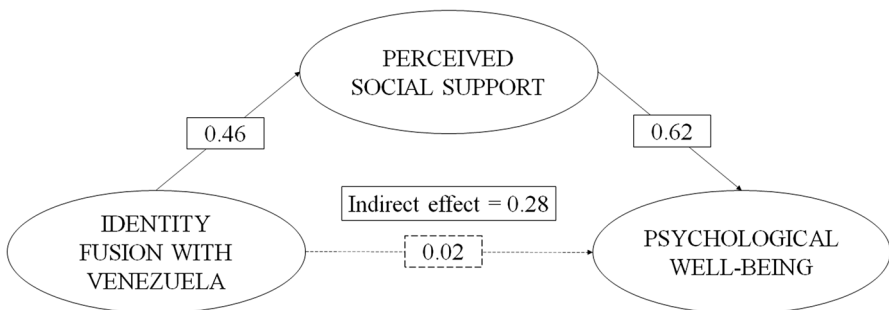
\*Refined model

**Table 3** Global fit indicators for structural equation models

Models	Parameters	$\chi^2$	DF	<i>p</i>	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSEA IC 90%	
								Lower	Upper
M1	166	958.274	547	.00	.986	.985	.048	.043	.053
M2	231	1911.297	1016	.00	.982	.981	.052	.049	.056
M3	200	913.603	513	.00	.986	.984	.049	.044	.054
M4	270	1672.725	977	.00	.986	.984	.047	.043	.051



**Fig. 2** Relationship between the fusion of identity with Venezuela and psychological well-being. Note: The analysis controlled for the effects of years of stay, sex, age, and self-defined phenotype. Solid paths indicate significant relationships effects ( $p < .05$ )

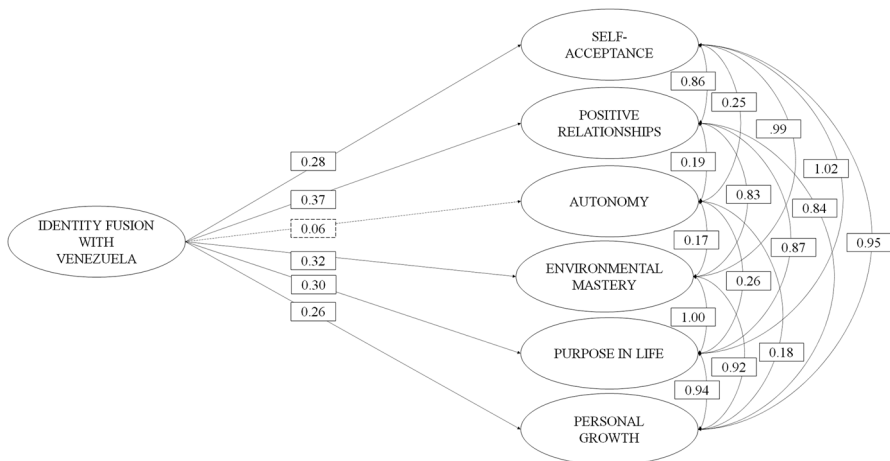


**Fig. 3** Mediating effect of perceived social support on the relationship between identity fusion with Venezuela and psychological well-being. Note: The analysis controlled for the effects of years of stay, sex, age, and self-defined phenotype. Solid paths indicate significant relationships effects ( $p < .05$ ). Non-significant paths are shown with dashed line

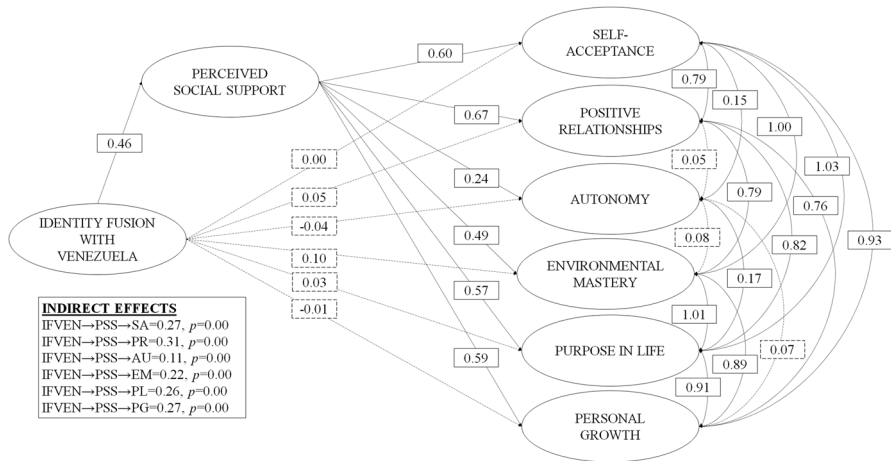
a statistically significant indirect effect on the relationship between identity fusion with Venezuela and migrants' psychological well-being, being a complete mediation (Ato and Vallejo, 2011).

Although the above mediation model shows the mediating role of social support on the relationship between identity fusion with Venezuela and migrants' psychological well-being, we do not know whether this indirect effect affects all dimensions of psychological well-being. For this reason, we decided to estimate two additional models using the dimensions of psychological well-being as specific factors. The first additional model (M3) estimated the relationship of identity fusion with Venezuela and the dimensions of psychological well-being. The second additional mediation model (M4) estimated the mediating role of perceived social support on the relationship between identity fusion with Venezuela and dimensions of psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants in Chile. The first additional model (M3) presented adequate goodness-of-fit indices (see Table 3). Figure 4 (M3) shows that the identity fusion with Venezuela presented statistically significant positive effects of moderate magnitude ( $b > 0.30$ ; Cohen, 1988) on the dimensions positive relationships, mastery of the environment and purposes in life, and small magnitude ( $b > 0.20$ ; Cohen, 1988) on the dimensions self-acceptance and personal growth. No statistically significant effect was detected between identity fusion and autonomy.

The second additional model (M4) presented adequate goodness-of-fit indices according to the recommended criteria (see Table 3). Figure 5 (M4) shows that identity fusion with Venezuela has a statistically significant positive effect of moderate magnitude ( $b > 0.30$ ; Cohen, 1988) on perceived social support. However, no statistically significant effects of identity fusion on any of the dimensions of migrants' psychological well-being are detected. On the other hand, it can be observed that social support has statistically significant positive and large magnitude ( $b > 0.50$ ;



**Fig. 4** Relationship between the fusion of identity with Venezuela and each of the dimensions of psychological well-being. *Note:* The analysis controlled for the effects of years of stay, sex, age, and self-defined phenotype. Solid paths indicate significant relationships effects ( $p < .05$ ). Non-significant paths are shown with dashed line



**Fig. 5** Mediating effect of perceived social support on the relationship between the fusion of identity with Venezuela and each of the dimensions of psychological well-being. IFVEN=Identity Fusion with Venezuela; PSS=Perceived Social Support; SA=Self-Acceptance; PR=Positive Relationships; AU=Autonomy; EM=Environmental Mastery; PL=Purpose in Life; PG=Personal Growth. Note: The analysis controlled for the effects of years of stay, sex, age, and self-defined phenotype. Solid paths indicate significant relationships effects ( $p < .05$ ). Non-significant paths are shown with dashed line.

Cohen, 1988) effects on self-acceptance, positive relationships, purposes in life, and personal growth; moderate magnitude ( $b > 0.30$ ; Cohen, 1988) effects on mastery of the environment; and small magnitude ( $b > 0.20$ ; Cohen, 1988) effects on autonomy. As for indirect effects, perceived social support presented statistically significant indirect effects on the relationship between identity fusion with Venezuela and all dimensions of migrants’ psychological well-being. The largest indirect effect was on the relationship between identity fusion and positive relationships, while the smallest indirect effect was on the relationship between identity fusion and autonomy.

According to the results, it appears that perceived social support is an important mechanism that explains the relationship between identity fusion with Venezuela and the psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants residing in Chile.

**Discussion**

In recent years, Venezuelans have become the first majority of south-south immigrants in the country. For Venezuelans, Chile is not only an attractive country due to its economic stability, but also a country where they can find support networks such as family or friends who can help them in their arrival in the country. Despite the fact that Venezuelans have become a majority migrant diaspora in Chile, few studies have investigated the psychological well-being of this population. The aim of the present study was to examine the mediating role of perceived social support on the relationship between identity fusion with the country of origin and the psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants eradicated in Chile. The results suggest that

perceived social support is one of the mechanisms by which identity fusion with Venezuela is related to the psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants.

First, we analyzed whether identity fusion was related to psychological well-being. The results indicated that identity fusion was associated with psychological well-being (as a general factor) and its dimensions (as specific factors), except for autonomy. These findings are consistent with other studies that have detected the association between identity fusion and psychological well-being. For example, Kiang et al. (2020) showed that in international students, identity fusion was negatively related to loneliness, but positively related to belongingness and psychological well-being, while, in a Latin American context, Henríquez et al. (2021) found that identity fusion, together with other identity indicators, was positively related to dimensions of psychological well-being in Colombian migrants living in Chile. In this sense, people who would be strongly fused with Venezuela would tend to maintain feelings of connectedness and reciprocal strength with their compatriots (Besta, 2018; Gómez et al., 2011), which in migratory contexts would allow compensating some negative effects of perceiving oneself as an immigrant within an unfamiliar country and culture (Henríquez et al., 2021; Kiang et al., 2020; Zabala et al., 2020). The fact that migrants share a close bond with the country of origin could also be since they seek to fulfill some psychological needs, such as the need to belong or the need for a meaningful existence (Henríquez et al., 2021), which are essential to preserve a healthy and positive psychological functioning (Greenaway et al., 2016). Furthermore, this link to the country of origin would allow them to develop and maintain their own culture within the host country (Berry & Hou, 2021; Berry et al., 2006), which has a positive impact on their psychological (Silva et al., 2016) and social well-being (Arancibia et al., 2021). This finding is also consistent with the proposal of acculturative orientations by Bourthis et al. (1997), which amplifies and includes a fifth acculturation orientation, individualism, which consists of the identification of the migrant not as a being belonging to a group, but as an individual who stands on his or her own. A recent study found that acculturative individualism is negatively associated with self-acceptance, positive relationships, mastery of the environment, and personal growth of Latin American migrants in the Chilean context (Mera-Lemp et al., 2020). In this sense, it is possible that a person who has low levels of identity fusion with his or her group presents an individualistic acculturation orientation, which could explain the inverse relationship between people with low levels of identity fusion with their country of origin and their psychological well-being.

Identity fusion with country of origin was positively related to psychological well-being. However, when the relationship between fusion and the dimensions of psychological well-being was tested, it was found that fusion was related to all dimensions of psychological well-being except the dimension of autonomy. This finding may be since migrants arriving in Chile often live in precarious conditions, which conditions their daily lives, so they often must support each other with other migrants or other local people, creating relationships of co-dependence and mutual aid, leaving aside personal autonomy (Henríquez et al., 2021).

Although it could be shown that identity fusion with the country of origin had a positive relationship with the psychological well-being of migrants (Figs. 2 and

4), we did not know what mechanism might be explaining this relationship. Therefore, mediation analyses sought to determine whether perceived social support was a mechanism through which identity fusion was related to the psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants in Chile. The results indicated that identity fusion with Venezuela had positive effects on perceived social support and that the latter exerted positive effects on psychological well-being (as a general factor; Fig. 3) and its dimensions (as specific factors; Fig. 5). However, no direct effects of identity fusion on migrants' psychological well-being were detected. This being a mediation typified as complete mediation (Ato and Vallejo, 2011) or only indirect mediation (Zhao et al., 2010), which means that the identified mediator is consistent with the hypothesized theoretical framework, thus demonstrating that perceived social support is an important mechanism that would explain the relationship between identity fusion with country of origin and psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants in Chile. These results can be explained because individuals highly fused with their group create close relational ties with the group, where affections and emotions (e.g., Páez et al., 2015; Pizarro et al., 2021) could be motivating group commitment (e.g., Buhrmester et al., 2015; Howard & Magee, 2013; Newson et al., 2016; Sheikh et al., 2014) and feelings of mutual support and reciprocal strength could be reflecting through perceived social support (Semnani-Azad et al., 2012). For Venezuelans, the existence of supportive family or friend networks within the host country is one of the reasons why migration is facilitated and could buffer some negative effects of migration (Salgado et al., 2018). In a study on racism in multicultural neighborhoods in Chile, Bonhomme (2021) points out that some Venezuelan migrants, due to their precarious working conditions, would be forced to inhabit sublet housing (housing modified or divided to obtain a greater number of rents), that is, housing with little space, which has direct consequences on their daily practices. The author points out that in the neighborhoods she studied, migrants often went out into the street to sit and talk and share recreational activities, since they did not have enough space in their homes to carry out this type of activity. This would reinforce the union and perceived social support with the group, which would translate into greater psychological well-being for the migrants. Thus, Stefoni (2005) tells us that transnationality is born and maintained from the interpersonal ties that migrants maintain with other people in their own country. According to the social convoy model (Khan & Antonucci, 1980), migrants adapt their interpersonal ties as they insert themselves into the context of the new host country, to protect themselves from negative experiences and to be able to successfully develop their migratory process. In this sense, when immigrants arrive in the new country, they seek contact and support from other compatriots, but as they settle and integrate in the host country, they are likely to open to the experience of seeking contact and support from members of the local population (García-Cid et al., 2017). Expanding the social support network within the host country allows for the protection of mental health through coexistence, social emotional support, and satisfaction with such relationships (Herrero & Gracia, 2011). According to some authors, a strong endogroup identity and a close social support network serve to reduce the negative effects of unfavorable economic conditions (Franzini et al., 2001), which in the case of migrants would translate into greater social well-being (Bowden et al., 2016; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Migrants who

present higher levels of perceived social support develop healthier emotion regulation strategies (Okumura et al., 2021), while migrants who are more separated from their close social groups and demonstrate lower levels of perceived social support are more likely to show mental health problems, such as depression (Bogic et al., 2015; Hynie, 2018).

## Conclusion

Migration is currently a cross-cutting social process of great global relevance that affects multiple socio-cultural aspects of both the countries of origin and host countries. Migration, especially when it is due to a humanitarian and socio-political crisis, generates an impact on individuals, their primary group, and the receiving society (Okumura et al., 2021). It is for this reason that knowing the aspects that influence adaptation to a new host country could prevent or reduce the difficulties and adverse experiences that migrants go through in the migration process. As we have seen in our study, factors related to the perception of being part of a group and feeling supported by a social network have positive implications on the well-being of migrants. Our results show that perceived social support is a mechanism by which identity fusion with the country of origin is related to the psychological well-being of Venezuelan migrants living in Chile. We believe that designing interventions that consider these factors could help create or strengthen positive social support networks so that migrants can better cope with the difficulties that arise in the migration process, paying special attention to those migrants who lack social support networks (García-Cid et al., 2017). Consequently, this research sought to contribute to knowledge along these lines, exploring some identity aspects that could be relevant when analyzing in what terms the incorporation of migrants into the host country is taking place, and how coexistence between groups could be facilitated.

## Limitations

Although the present study may be of great relevance, it is important to point out some limitations of these results. First, it should be considered that the study was cross-sectional in nature, so that causal effects cannot be attributed to the observed relationships between variables. Second, the sample was biased towards Venezuelan migrants who wanted to participate in the study, so the conclusions that could be reached would only be plausible for a population such as the sample and could not be generalized to migrants from other countries. Finally, the present study only assessed perceived social support as a general factor. Future studies could assess perceived social support from different specific sources, for example, from the country of origin or from the host country. In this way it would be possible to know whether perceived social support is more relevant from significant others in the country of



origin, significant others in the host country, or whether both are indistinct sources of protection and support.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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