



Well-being and Health During COVID-19 Pandemic

Flavia ARRIGONI¹, José I. NAVARRO GUZMÁN², Esperanza MARCHENA CONSEJERO³

¹*Prof. Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina & Phd Student Department of Psychology, University of Cádiz*

Email: flavia.arrigoni@uca.es

Orcid Id: 0000-0001-5664-6167

²*Prof. Dr. Education Faculty, Department of Psychology, University of Cádiz*

Email: jose.navarro@uca.es

Orcid Id: 0000-0002-0738-2641

³*Prof. Dr. Education Faculty, Department of Psychology, University of Cádiz*

Email: esperanza.marchena@uca.es

Orcid Id: 0000-0002-2043-029X

Plagiarism Rate: 0%

Abstract

The fast spreading of the COVID-19 virus led WHO to consider it as a pandemic. All over the world the entire population of different nations was lockdown. From the Psychological and Psychopedagogical Counseling Service (SAP) at the University of Cádiz, a health promotion program called “Well-being and Health” was designed and implemented. Participants belonged to two different groups considered as “at risk” in the context of health alert: students from the Elderly University Program of University of Cádiz and women with a breast cancer diagnosis. The program aimed to promote the well-being of participants during lockdown due to the pandemic; and to evaluate the effectiveness of an online health promotion program based in relaxation and meditation techniques, the principles of positive psychology and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. It is possible to conclude that participating in an on line group health promotion program, with an emphasis on a healthy lifestyle, training in relaxation and meditation techniques, and based in the positive Psychology perspective, protected people from the impact of stress associated with lockdown.

Keywords: Online education, lockdown, well-being, online treatment, COVID-19

Introduction

Due to the worldwide spread of the new disease generated by COVID-19, on March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization (2020) declared the SARS-CoV-2 / COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic. Disasters such as earthquakes, terrorist attacks, plane crashes, among others, have in common their potential becoming a trigger for a "disaster shock or trauma", due to "the emotional stress that adults as well as children may experience after a disaster" (Gerrard et al, 2020: 10).

Ensuring a healthy lifestyle and promoting well-being for all at all ages is the third Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) proposed by the United Nations (UN, 2015). Health psychology is concerned with people's well-being and from the perspective of the health promotion, the need to give a comprehensive response to health problems and highlight the health potential of individuals and communities is emphasized.

In Spain, on March 14, 2020, the state of alarm was declared (Royal Decree 463, 2020) and the social, preventive and compulsory lockdown of the entire population was ordered. This measure was maintained for 99 days. As a community and massive emergency, the pandemic impacts everybody's lives. However, such impact could be higher if person belongs to a risk group, considered as such the elderly or those who have a diagnosis of a chronic pathology. It would increase the chances that they develop some type of behavioral or emotional imbalance (Gerrard et al, 2020; Urzúa, Vera-Villarreal, Caqueo-Urizar & Polanco-Carrasco, 2020).



Isolation implied the separation of relatives and affections, a restriction on the usual sources of individual and social reinforcement, a disruption in the normal course of daily life, so stress, fear, sadness, and uncertainty may settle in some people. Anxiety increases psychological discomfort (low mood, irritability and sadness) and decreases positive emotions (joy, hope) affecting people's well-being (General Council of Psychology of Spain, 2020a).

Due to the growing boom of the internet and new information and communication technologies (ICT), the Official College of Psychology of Madrid, in collaboration with the Center for Applied Psychology of the Autonomous University of Madrid, published the Guide for Intervention in Tele-psychology (De la Torre Martí & Pardo Cebrián, 2018), to regulate the offer of psychological services through ICT. Some on line interventions are self-guided web programs, videoconferences, therapy, follow-up, counseling and evaluation or screening tasks.

The European Federation of Psychologist's Association (EFPA) established that, during lockdown, consultations, especially through video chat, are a viable alternative for offering psychological therapy. It recommended the need to agree with the client the web tool they will be using to have the meeting, to have a private space to protect the privacy during it, and not to use public computer (Consejo General de la Psicología de España, 2020b).

In Spain, as a result of the state of alarm, all educational institutions nationwide were forced to close their doors and, therefore, immediately put an end to face-to-face classes. This implied the need of a huge and rapid reorganization process to guarantee the continuity of the classes in an on line basis. On April 10 it was decided not to return to face-to-face classes at the universities until next September 2020 (Royal Decree 487, 2020). The state of alarm was maintained until June 21, 2020 (Royal Decree 555, 2020) completing a total of 99 days of it in the country.

The health alert situation brought the urgency to design intervention programs promoting people's health in an on line format during lockdown, and, even though its quality of on line, facilitate the establishment of close interpersonal relationships, so necessary and protective in that particular situation. Universities around the world began to use the on line format to offer different psychological or pedagogical services for students. It was necessary to implement this kind of intervention to promote social interaction and learning experiences preserving the care of everyone's health. From the Psychological and Psychopedagogical Attention Service of the University of Cádiz (SAP), a specific course was designed to groups considered at risk: students of the Elderly University Program of University of Cádiz. Due to circumstances derived from research agreements between institutions, the proposal was extended to members of an association of women with a diagnosis of breast cancer. Both groups were offered the online intervention program called "Well-being and Health", which was designed considering topics of interest to these groups and the unprecedented situation.

Mental health prevention and promotion interventions enhance the development of individual, social and environmental conditions to improve the person's quality of life and they "are effective and have brought benefits for health and also for society" (Jané-Llopis, 2004:67).

Barlow et al, (2019) consider that people use emotional regulation strategies that, as a paradox, contribute to the maintenance or deterioration of the symptoms that they intend to eradicate: "everyone can benefit from learning healthy ways to respond to their emotions" (p .25). The authors suggest the acquisition of new and healthier ways of coping with emotions when they interfere with one's well-being, and they emphasize the active role of the person in restoring its own health and well-being.



Several contributions were considered for the design of the online intervention program to promote health and well-being called “Well-being and health” during lockdown. First of all, some principles of the Unified Protocol for the Transdiagnostic treatment of Emotional Disorders (Barlow et al, 2019) were considered. This Protocol aims to improve the emotional regulation of the participants, to increase their positive emotions and well-being, and emphasized the role of the person in restoring its own well-being.

Also the Live with Vitality Program (Fernández-Ballesteros, Caprara & García, 2004) was taken into account. It addresses certain domains in which the elderly person can experience greater control over actions that can contribute to his well-being and a better personal adjustment (Caprara, Fernández - Ballesteros & Alessandri, 2016). Gutiérrez, Tomás & Calatayud (2018) consider that certain aspects related to health and life satisfaction are directly related to better aging.

Due to the pandemic, the psychological guideline against isolation and principles for mental health care during emergency scenarios provided by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2012), the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2020), the reference group on psychosocial support at WHO, were also considered.

Facing a pandemic could imply a multitude of physical and mental health problems, so “an individual can take care of his health as much as possible to prevent a fall out later onwards. Yoga intervention can be a crucial remedial factor that aids the individual to become physically as well as mentally capable of functioning” (Giri et al, 2020:886).

The general objectives were to promote the well-being of elderly people who make up the educational community of the University of Cádiz or who form an Association of women with a diagnosis of breast cancer, during confinement and to evaluate the effectiveness of an online health promotion program.

Program Overview

Since April 2020, the “Wellbeing and Health” Program was developed. It consists in eight on line group sessions, held weekly that last two hours. The theme of each meeting are: 1st) Psychological orientations against isolation, 2nd) Healthy lifestyle, 3rd) Positive Psychology, 4th) Cognitive flexibility, 5th) Sleep hygiene, 6th) Cognitive training, 7th) Active aging and 8th) Sharing my own experience during lockdown. Different task were assigned in between sessions such as self-recording of emotions or regular relaxation practice.

The program emphasized the regular practice or the relaxation techniques that have verified to be effective in managing anxiety (Weekly, Walker, Beck, Akers & Weaver, 2018). Relaxation as well as meditation practice in yoga are positively associated with mental health (Birdee et al, 2017), that is why yoga practices can be considered as a mind-body practice which produces positive effects on health as well as on the quality of life. Research suggests that providing yoga practices “[...] may be an effective way to help students develop self-regulation, mind-body awareness and physical fitness, which may, in turn, foster [...] positive student outcomes such as improved behaviors, mental state, health and performance” (Butzer et al, 2020, p.3). Yoga practices should produce positive effects on health, behavior and emotions (Butzer et al., 2016; Guerra & Rovetto, 2020).

Positive psychology is focused in promotion of positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits and positive institutions, in few words, it is interested in everything that improves the quality of life and prevents the appearance of pathologies. It highlights the characteristics that make life worth living, such as hope, creativity, courage, responsibility and optimism (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The PERMA’s model by Seligman (IEPP, 2020) was also considered. This author emphasized the importance of the enhancing of positive emotions, interpersonal relationships, a sense of meaning and personal accomplishment for the person’s own well-being.



Some principles of the positive psychology were taken into account, such as the consideration of the capacity of positive emotions to contribute to enhance people to be more creative, socially integrated and healthy (Fredrickson, 2002). Baños et al. (2017) proved that the ICT can be used to promote and train positive emotions, to improve the quality of the personal experience and to increase the person's well-being. A group based program was designed, as there is enough evidence that has proven its effectiveness to increase the experience of positive emotions (De Ornelas Nardi & Cardoso, 2015; Coto-Lesmes, Fernández-Rodríguez & González-Fernández, 2020). The sense of humor is considered as a useful tool to mitigate stress and to strengthen the person's immune system (Lefcourt, 2002), that is why recreational activities were included for the group of participants in each session.

The program was also nourished by the contributions of Walsh (2011) related to its proposal of the eight therapeutic lifestyles changes (TLC) which promote the acquisition of healthy lifestyle habits such as physical exercise, adequate nutrition, relaxation, close interpersonal relationships, recreation and pleasant activities, to name some of them, due to the highly positive effects of the TLC on people's physical and mental health.

Conclusions

The main objective of this paper was to share the characteristics of a specific program for the promotion of health and well-being designed and developed during lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants reported an increasing in subjective well-being and positive emotions as well as a decreasing in discomfort.

Due to the fact that the proposal was completely online and developed during lockdown, results are suggestive in regards to the implementation of an online health promotion program: "Psychological treatments delivered through the Internet represent an emerging model to improve access to evidence-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapies" (Sandín et al, 2020, p. 197).

From the Positive Psychology perspective for the treatment of mental health problems, it is considered that psychiatric as well as psychological practices should promote positive psychosocial factors that have proved to enhance the improvement of people's well-being from a cognitive behavioral framework (Rosen, Gilld & Salvador-Carulla, 2020). Optimism, expectations of self-efficacy and social commitment should be promoted (Jeste & Palmer, 2015). The program promoted mental health because "not only work, but also contribute to a greater mental well-being and increasing the quality of life at the individual and community level" (Jané-Llopis, 2004, p. 74).

References

- American Psychological Association (2020). COVID-19 Pandemic. Free APA Publishing Resources.
<https://www.apa.org/>
- Baños, R., Carrillo, A., Etchemendy, E., & Botella, C. (2017). Positive technologies for understanding and promoting positive emotions. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 20, E50.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/sjp.2017.42>
- Barlow, D., Farchione, T., Sauer-Zavala, S., Murray Latin, H., Ellard, K., Bullis, J., Bentley, K., Boettcher, H. & Cassiello-Robbins, C. (2019). *Protocolo unificado para el tratamiento transdiagnóstico de los trastornos emocionales. Manual del paciente (2ª ed.) [Unified protocol for the transdiagnostic treatment of emotional disorders. Patient Manual (2nd ed.)]*. Madrid: Alianza.
- Birdee, G., Ayala, S. & Wallston, K. (2017). Cross-sectional analysis of health-related quality of life and elements of yoga practice. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 17(1),83.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12906-017-1599-1>
- Butzer, B., Bury, D., Telles, S. & Khalsa, S. (2020). Implementing yoga within the school curriculum: A scientific rationale for improving social-emotional learning and positive student outcomes. *Journal of Children's Services*, 11 (1), 3-24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCS-10-2014-0044>



- Caprara, M., Fernández-Ballesteros, R. & Alessandri, G. (2016). Promoting aging well: evaluation of Vital-Aging-Multimedia Program in Madrid, Spain. *Health Promotion International*, 31, 515– 522. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dav014>
- Consejo General de la Psicología de España (2020a). *Recomendaciones dirigidas a la población para un afrontamiento eficaz ante el malestar psicológico generado por el brote de coronavirus-Covid-19. [Recommendations aimed at the population for effective coping with the psychological discomfort generated by the coronavirus-Covid-19 outbreak.] Infocoponline.* http://www.infocop.es/view_article.asp?id=8627
- Consejo General de la Psicología de España (2020b). El rol de los psicólogos en Europa frente al coronavirus-comunicado de la EFPA. *[The role of psychologists in Europe against the coronavirus-EFPA statement.] Infocoponline.* http://www.infocop.es/view_article.asp?id=8636
- Coto-Lesmes, R., Fernández-Rodríguez, C., & González-Fernández, S. (2020). Activación Conductual en formato grupal para ansiedad y depresión. Una revisión sistemática. *[Behavioral Activation in group format for anxiety and depression. A systematic review]* *Terapia Psicológica*, 38(1), 63- 84. <http://www.teps.cl/index.php/teps/article/view/271>
- De la Torre Martí, M. & Pardo Cebrián, R. (2018). Guía para la intervención en telepsicología. *[Guide for intervention in telepsychology]* Madrid: Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos de Madrid. <https://www.copmadrid.org/web/publicaciones/guia-para-la-intervencion-telepsicologica>
- De Ornelas, A., Nardi, A. & Cardoso, A. (2015). The utilization of unified protocols in behavioral cognitive therapy in transdiagnostic group subjects: A clinical trial. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 172, 179–183. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.09.023>
- Fernández-Ballesteros, R., Caprara, M. & García, L. (2004). Vivir con vitalidad-M®: Un programa europeo Multimedia. *[Live with vitality-M®: A European Multimedia program]. Intervención Psicosocial*, 13(1), 63-85.
- Fredrickson, B. (2002). Positive emotions. In C.R. Snyder & S.J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 120–134). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gerrard, B., Girault, E., Appleton, V., Giraudo, S., Shaffer, S., Gallegos-Lemos, D., Korzeniowski, C. & Norton, S. (2020). *En Tiempos de Desastre: ¿Cómo hacer frente al estrés emocional de una gran catástrofe? [In Times of Disaster: How to cope with the emotional stress of a great catastrophe?]* <https://www.disastercopingresources.com/disastershock-manual>
- Giri, A., Biswas, D. & Chatterjee, S. (2020). Measuring the effect of yoga-lifestyle on the employees of higher education institutions of west bengal through structure equation modelling (SEM): A new approach towards human resource management. *Studies in Computational Intelligence. Volume 863 SCI* (pp. 886-900). Conference paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Information Technology and Applied Mathematics, ICITAM 2019; Haldia; India. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34152-7_67
- Guerra, C. & Rovetto, M. (2020). Yoga en la escuela. Una experiencia en la ciudad de Rosario. *[Yoga at school. An experience in the city of Rosario]* *Praxis educativa*, 24(2), 1-20. <https://dx.doi.org/10.19137/praxiseducativa-2020-240211>
- Gutiérrez, M., Tomás, J., & Calatayud, P. (2018). Contributions of Psychosocial Factors and Physical Activity to Successful Aging. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 21, E26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sjp.2018.27>
- Instituto Europeo de Psicología Positiva. IEPP (2020). Modelo PERMA. *[PERMA model]*. <https://www.iepp.es/>
- Inter Agency Standing Committee (2020). Briefing note on addressing mental health and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak- Version 1.0. Reference group for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/>
- Jané-Llopis, E. (2004). La eficacia de la promoción de la salud mental y la prevención de los trastornos mentales *[The effectiveness of promoting mental health and preventing mental disorders]*. *Revista de la Asociación Española de Neuropsiquiatría*, 89, 67-77.
- Jeste, D. & Palmer, B. (2015). *Positive psychiatry: a clinical handbook*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric



Publication.

- Lefcourt, H. (2002). Humor. In C.R. Snyder & S.J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 619–631). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Organización de Naciones Unidas (2015). *Objetivos y metas de desarrollo sostenible*. [Sustainable development goals and objectives]. <https://www.un.org>
- Organización Mundial de la Salud (2012). Primera ayuda psicológica: Guía para trabajadores de campo. [Psychological First Aid: A Guide for Field Workers]. https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/es/
- Organización Mundial de la Salud (2020). ¿Qué es una pandemia? [What is a pandemic?] https://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/pandemic/es/
- Real Decreto 463/2020 [Royal Decree 463/2020]. <https://www.boe.es/> Real Decreto 487/2020 [Royal Decree 487/2020]. <https://www.boe.es/> Real Decreto 555/2020 [Royal Decree 555/2020]. <https://www.boe.es/>