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Ciranda between Education and Health: Aspects of Adolescent Mental Health in School Context in Times of Pandemic

Ciranda entre educación y salud: aspectos de la salud mental de los adolescentes en el contexto escolar en tiempos de pandemia

Ciranda entre Educação e Saúde: Aspectos da Saúde Mental do Adolescente em Contexto Escolar em Tempos de Pandemia

ABSTRACT

The school context and adolescent public were greatly impacted by the new pandemic scenario. Objective: To analyze which factors resulting from the pandemic have had an impact on the mental health of adolescents in the school context, as well as to investigate the main strategies that promote mental health in the school context in times of pandemic. Method: This is an experience report of multiprofessional practices in the school context, involving the areas of psychology and nursing with high school students from a philanthropic school in the city of Teresina - PI. Results: Demands related to adolescent health were identified and, based on the practices of the respective professionals, it was possible to create strategies to promote their health. Conclusion: It was evident that even in the face of the pandemic situation and the adversities, the concern with the students' health and well-being is unique and boosted the development of new actions within the school.

DESCRIPTORS: Adolescent; Mental health; Coronavirus infections; Academic institutions.

RESUMEN

El contexto escolar y el público adolescente se vieron muy afectados por el nuevo escenario pandémico. Objetivo: Analizar qué factores resultantes de la pandemia han impactado en la salud mental de los adolescentes en el contexto escolar, así como conocer las principales estrategias que promueven en la salud mental en el contexto escolar en tiempos de pandemia. Método: Se trata de un relato de experiencia de prácticas multiprofesionales en el contexto escolar, involucrando las áreas de psicología y enfermería con estudiantes de secundaria de una escuela filantrópica de la ciudad de Teresina - PI. Resultados: Se identificaron las demandas relacionadas con la salud de los adolescentes y, a partir de las prácticas de los respectivos profesionales, fue posible generar estrategias para promover su salud. Conclusión: Se evidenció que aún frente a la situación pandémica y las adversidades, la preocupación por la salud y el bienestar de los estudiantes es única e impulsó el desarrollo de nuevas acciones dentro de la escuela.

DESCRIPTORES: Adolescente; Salud mental; Infecciones por coronavirus; Instituciones académicas.

RESUMO

O contexto escolar e o público adolescente foram bastante impactados pelo novo cenário de pandemia. Objetivo: Analisar quais fatores decorrentes da pandemia tem repercutido na saúde mental dos adolescentes em contexto escolar, bem como averiguar as principais estratégias promotoras de saúde mental no contexto escolar em tempos de pandemia. Método: Trata-se de um relato de experiência de práticas multiprofissionais no contexto escolar, envolvendo as áreas da psicologia e da enfermagem com os alunos do ensino médio de uma escola filantrópica da cidade de Teresina - PI. Resultados: Foram identificadas demandas relacionadas à saúde do adolescente e a partir das práticas dos respectivos profissionais foi possível oportunizar estratégias de promoção à saúde dos mesmos. Conclusão: Ficou evidente que mesmo diante da situação pandêmica e das adversidades, a preocupação com a saúde e bem estar dos alunos é única e impulsionou para o desenvolvimento de novas ações dentro da escola.

DESCRIPTORES: Adolescente; Saúde Mental; Infecções por coronavírus; Instituições acadêmicas.

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INTRODUCTION

The school is configured as a space for social interaction, which promotes education, building values, civic education, as well as the development of socio-emotional skills and self-knowledge. It is in this living organism that one can see the daily weaving in the formation of the subject, little by little, drawn through critical thinking, the acquisition of knowledge and emotional expressiveness.

The Common National Curriculum Base understands that the educational process goes beyond knowledge and scientific propagation, requiring the development of skills and abilities that contribute to the formation of attitudes and values of individuals within the school community. As a result, the BNCC (Base Nacional Comum Curricular) proposes

in its eighth competence a relevant aspect for the promotion of the subject's physical and mental health: Knowing, appreciating and taking care of their physical and emotional health, understanding human diversity and recognizing their emotions and those of others, with self-criticism and the ability to deal with them.¹

Given the context presented, it is understood that there is a circle¹ between school, education and health, understanding that the more there is communication between these elements, the more benefits can be perceived in the school community, thus going against the perspective of the integral development of the student proposed in the BNCC.

Good levels of education, which involve a better understanding of the content, can be seen in healthier individuals.² As a result, the school must be understood as a health promoter, through interdisci-

plinary and multidisciplinary practices, intervening in the most diverse contexts of student life.

From this perspective, educational methodologies should prioritize the participation and interaction of school actors. Thus, understanding that the concept of health configures a set of skills, such as autonomy and decision-making, it is necessary to encourage them in individuals, favoring healthier attitudes such as co-responsibility and coping with situations.³

Thus, given the pandemic scenario in which the school context is experiencing a complete change in the routine and structure experienced so far, this study becomes relevant as it seeks to understand the various factors that affect the mental health of adolescents, making a rescue of the essential relationship between health and school, taking into account the stages of human development

¹ Ciranda: Represents an interaction, that is, a link between the elements that compose it and that complement each other.

and the teaching-learning process of each individual.

As a result, school practices evidenced the need to seek new theoretical contributions to expand knowledge and diversify interventions that can significantly contribute to the strengthening of this subject with regard to facing the challenges posed by the new coronavirus pandemic (SARS-CoV -2) in the school context. Among these challenges, we find the beginning of online activities that were once infrequent at school, such as access to educational videos on digital platforms, synchronous and asynchronous online activities, taking online tests and using far-reaching social media, like WhatsApp. Such changes were guided by the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the National Education Council (CNE - Conselho Nacional de Educação).

From this perspective, this study aims to analyze which factors resulting from the pandemic have had an impact on the mental health of adolescents in the school context, with the following specific objectives: to investigate the impact of the new coronavirus pandemic on the mental health of adolescents and to investigate the main strategies for promoting mental health in the school context in times of pandemic.

METHODS

The respective work is an experience report in the field of educational school psychology after the beginning of the pandemic (COVID-19) in the context of high school in a philanthropic school in the city of Teresina/PI. The work has a qualitative approach, in which the scientist is at the same time the subject and object of his research. Thus, having the nature of an applied research, which aims to generate knowledge for practical application, aimed at solving specific problems. It also has an explanatory purpose, as it explains why things happen through the results offered.⁴

The three classes of each grade in the aforementioned segment were included in the experience report, which work in

the afternoon, totaling an average of one hundred students. Practices in the grades of Kindergarten, Elementary, early years and final years were not part of the respective report. The experience report covers the academic period from January 2020 (start of the pandemic) to March 2021 (current pandemic context). In early April 2020, when the pandemic began, classes were held asynchronously and later took place through the Google Meet platform. In 2021, there was a transition in the format of these classes, which were offered in the hybrid model.

As a result, one of the multiple functions of the school psychologist is that of a mediating agent for reflection and awareness of the relationships that exist in this context.

Classroom meetings with the psychology team take place once a week and last for 45 minutes. The resources used as a subsidy for the discussion of themes in the classroom are: slides, videos and dynamics. To support the interventions, theoretical references are used that address the demands experienced, found in periodical articles, in PDF format and with open access, as well as printed books in that area, namely: *The Power of Habit* (Charles Duhigg); *The Courage to be Imperfect* (Brené Brown); *Emotional Intelligence: The Revolutionary Theory That Redefines*

What It Is To Be Smart (Daniel Goleman); *Focus: attention and its fundamental role for success* (Daniel Goleman); *The Path of Self-Transformation* (Eva Pierrakos) and *On Death and Dying* (Elisabeth Kubler-Ross). It is important to emphasize that the interventions carried out in the classroom are still ongoing.

Thus, the main practices performed by the psychology and nursing service at the school in this time interval and in these series mentioned were reported. Subsequent dialogue with the studies that deal with the practices described in a categorized way was carried out.

RESULTS

Doing in high school

School Psychology is defined as an area of activity in Psychology that, among other attributions, assumes a theoretical and practical commitment to issues related to the school and its processes, dynamics, results and agents.⁵ As a result, one of the multiple functions of the school psychologist is that of a mediating agent for reflection and awareness of the relationships that exist in this context.

Therefore, given the explanation, the psychology sector at the school has been operating for thirteen years, carrying out practices with the entire community. These actions involve interventions at a preventive and remedial level based on the demands that emerge in everyday life. In high school, the main strategies developed by the ESP (Educational School Psychologist - PEE Psicólogo Escolar Educacional) are related to the development of a Socio-emotional Intelligence program in the 1st and 2nd year grades of the respective segment. In the 3rd year class, activities related to the project entitled "Vocational Professional Guidance" (OPV - Orientação Profissional Vocacional) are developed, with the objective of offering a space of support and expression that contributes to the strengthening of these young people in the face of the demands present in their process of building their professional identity.

In addition to these practices already mentioned, monthly lectures called "Inspiring Stories" are offered, which aim to motivate students through the guests' reports of overcoming difficulties faced throughout their lives, which serve as a learning curve for these young people. Furthermore, there are also lectures entitled "Round Table of Professions", which are moments of clarification about the professions of interest to students, as well as an update on the changes that are taking place in the professions in the pandemic context. Regarding the latter, these lectures are part of the activities related to the project "Vocational Professional Guidance" mentioned above, developing activities that favor the recognition of the young person's internal potential, in addition to facilitating an understanding of their skills associated with professional choice.

Individual monitoring of students and families also takes place, in addition to the production of their reports, when requested by external professionals. These activities, linked to the adolescents' life project, contribute to the development of an emotional coping repertoire, in view of the focus on the abilities and skills that young people have to follow the path of their personal and professional self-fulfillment, having been essential for facing the perceived adversities resulting from the transformations caused by COVID-19. It is then noticeable that some practices already carried out before the pandemic were maintained, but with the new demands, new practices needed to compose the making of the ESP in high school.

Demands related to students' mental health during the pandemic

On March 16, 2020, classes were suspended in the state of Piauí, due to the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). After the collective vacation period, classes returned in April, initially with asynchronous classes and later using the hybrid teaching model. From this period to the present moment, there has been an increase in demands related to the mental

health of adolescents, including: fear, anxiety, grief, changes in sleep, eating habits, lack of motivation and emotional instability. The above demands were identified in three ways with high school students: through a socio-emotional diagnosis, carried out through an online questionnaire, in addition to the active search of students by the Psychology Service and during classes held where the students could express their emotions.

Health promotion strategies

Adolescence is a period marked by profound cognitive, physical, psychological and social changes, which guide the young person in the development of autonomy. Hormonal changes, closer relationships with the group of friends, search for self-knowledge and the ability to develop critical perceptions of situations, reinforce the importance of promoting strategies that favor the mental health of young students.⁶

In this scenario, actions were planned that would lead to reflections on relevant themes, as well as socialization among peers, being mediated by school psychologists. The moments of listening and guidance took place online and individually, with specific demands and subsequent referral for external psychotherapeutic follow-up, if necessary. In addition, listening was also carried out with groups of students who had similar issues, aiming to guide and consolidate the support network.

Lectures and dynamics were also developed, covering topics such as: neuroscience and learning, routine organization, sleep regulation, self-image, grief, resilience, fear and anxiety, procrastination, expectations and hope, inspiring stories, constitutional law in schools and round tables of professions. All activities designed had the main objective of understanding the behavior of the students, identifying the feelings experienced, in addition to keeping the young people motivated and focused on their life project, even in the face of the current crisis. Another relevant moment was the pre-

sentation of the activity "citizenship and sanitary protocols", which was carried out in partnership with the school's nursing service.

Nursing service strategies

Faced with the demand for mental health and especially for care in the face of the new coronavirus pandemic (SARS-CoV-2), nurses are required to develop specific skills by establishing professional standards, creating mechanisms to ensure quality of care and expanding necessary knowledge and skills.⁷

The health protocols adopted at the school are based on studies and research carried out by the World Health Organization - WHO, as well as guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health, National Health Surveillance Agency - ANVISA, Piauí State Department of Health - SESAPI and the Committee of Emergency Operations - COE. All procedures discussed in the aforementioned bodies and entities are brought into the school environment and put into practice with strict quality control.

One of the procedures adopted is the division of the school environment into zones (green, yellow, red) that indicate the biological risk that exists there and the number of people who can circulate in these spaces, as well as the length of stay. The division in colors is the same adopted in the hospital environment, being red for high risk, yellow for medium risk and the green color is indicative of low risk of contamination.

Notwithstanding this, lectures and guidance are given to students who are attending the school in the available modalities (hybrid/remote). In the guidelines given to students by the nursing staff, the importance of obeying the sanitary protocols adopted at the school is exposed in an accessible and didactic way, as well as the proper use of mandatory safety equipment that everyone must have, such as masks and alcohol for hand hygiene and personal items.

The nursing staff, when faced with a student with symptoms suggestive of

SARS-CoV-2, makes contact with the adolescent's family so that the person responsible can attend the school and take the student for a more detailed medical evaluation about their health status.

After that, the nursing sector is monitoring the case daily, collecting information from the adolescent's family so that they can have updated information on their health condition. It should be noted, however, that as a precaution, the student is immediately placed in remote education until any possibility of infection by SARS-CoV-2 is ruled out.

DISCUSSION

The impact of the new coronavirus pandemic on the mental health of adolescents

The new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) caused a global crisis that caused a series of changes and adaptations, affecting the most diverse sectors. In the educational context, the impact that the pandemic had on adolescents is noticeable, who felt insecure in the face of this readjustment of educational models. In this sense, it is important to clarify the concept of adolescence, which corresponds to the stage of development that occurs between childhood and adulthood.⁸

It is noteworthy that it is at this stage that the individuation process is intensified, a period of questioning of values and an important period related to social relations and friendship is normally expected.⁹ As a result, it is common for adolescents not to separate from their closest friends, generating emotional security. Parallel to this, the sanitary measures of social isolation made it impossible for young people to have a physical relationship with their peers, in addition to imposing an excess of contact with the family, favoring the absence of privacy.¹⁰

Thus, adolescents experience a process of interruption in their natural search for an identity, in addition to other factors such as insecurity in learning, changes in sleep and intense exposure to information, which contribute to their illness.

Before the start of the pandemic, one in five students had one or more diagnosable mental disorders worldwide. During this period, with the closing of schools and the abrupt interruption of the school semester, students also began to experience anguish and fear, which has aggravated mental health problems among young people.¹¹

The main mental health promoting strategies in the school context in times of pandemic

Given the numerous impacts caused as a result of the pandemic, the importance of the school to strengthen attention to the mental health of the community is notorious, especially to adolescents, who, as mentioned above, naturally experience a phase of profound biopsychosocial changes. It is necessary that schools prioritize two health promotion interventions in this pandemic period, namely, the development of strategies to guarantee access to mental health services and the intentional expansion of this service to students in special circumstances.¹² In this sense, although most institutions offer some counseling and support services, it is necessary to adapt and innovate to meet the specific needs of students, such as the practices described above that were carried out by the ESP and the nursing service.

It is important to emphasize that during this creative process related to the adjustment of the functions mentioned above, interventions related to health services are essential for the treatment of adolescents with psychological distress prior to the pandemic, avoiding new crises, as well as working preventively.¹⁰ It is during this period that the young person has to deal with several stressful phenomena, and some of them can deal effectively with these changes, while others cannot deal, favoring the emergence of some mental health demands.¹³

In view of this circumstance, the prevalence of mental disorders is greater in the population between 16 and 24 years of age than in other periods of life, affect-

ing 10% to 20% of young people worldwide.¹⁴ One of the conditions that naturally potentiate the onset of mental illness during this age group is related to school stress that generally causes psychological reactions such as anxiety, anger, depression and confusion among high school students, which were exacerbated in the face of the Covid pandemic -19.¹⁶

Students were forced to stay at home and face new study pressures, as well as changes in the environment and teaching style. Faced with so many demands that have emerged and are still emerging, it is essential to use strategies aimed at emotional self-regulation and learning. In this sense, educators need to be aware of the subjective demands of these students, especially those of an emotional nature, and it is important to discuss topics such as "resilience", which increase their ability to cope.

Likewise, schools can offer virtual group experiences, which can be an affordable and scalable resource. While evidence of its effectiveness is limited, as this was not a widely adopted format prior to Covid-19, some early observations show its promise. These strategies are consistent with broader national trends after the Covid-19 outbreak. In addition, it is important that educators are aware of individual possibilities, as well as of each family sphere.¹³

It is essential that teachers reinvent and prioritize emotional health, reformulating ways to teach school content. In addition, other possible interventions are linked to remote individual follow-ups and maintenance of telephone contact with the teenager and family.¹⁶ Furthermore, art, culture and physical activities are crucial in promoting mental health, especially among adolescents. Activities that favor imagination and creativity, which contribute to the young student's perception of the feeling of belonging to groups, can favor their healthy development at that time.¹⁷

Therefore, it appears that the strategies related to health promotion in the school context, especially in the current

crisis scenario, involve an even more intense surveillance on aspects related to the subjectivity of adolescents, in a preventive and remedial way, being necessary to work on related themes to the personal strengthening of these, such as resilience, a sense of belonging and the recognition of their potential in the face of the challenges presented.

Furthermore, campaigns related to physical and mental health and clarification to adolescents about the sanitary measures adopted by the school in partnership with the nursing sector, can promote a greater sense of trust and security within the institution, which minimize potentially harmful feelings, such as: anxiety, insecurity and fear.

CONCLUSION

Based on what was exposed in the experience report, it was observed that the

objectives were achieved. It was evident that even in the face of the pandemic situation and the adversities in relation to social and economic issues, the concern with the health and well-being of students is unique and encouraged the development of new actions.

Activities that promote mental health in the school context are of paramount importance. It is noticed over time that the school space is no longer an environment merely for cognitive improvement, also contemplating the formation of citizens and the development of socio-emotional skills, based on the multidimensional understanding that each individual presents. In this way, the student is no longer seen as a mere reproducer of knowledge and has become the protagonist of his learning, among other things. The school environment offers him autonomy, encouraging him to seek information, work on his emo-

tional aspect and build knowledge walking on his own two feet.

Finally, working on such relevant topics with adolescents immersed in this new reality caused by the pandemic would demand greater physical organization work and, perhaps, would have less face-to-face participation. Thus, it was observed that, in addition to dedicated time, there was a differentiated and humanized look at the demands exposed. And it evidenced the relevance of a multiprofessional practice within the school, adding knowledge of psychology and nursing in favor of health promotion within the school context.

However, it is understood that such strategies have their limitations, especially in view of the routine changes caused by the current scenario and by perceiving the individual as this historical-cultural being, thus evidencing the importance of further studies on the problem described in the respective work. ■

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