

From a student's view, emotional and physical distress induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pedro Henrique Andrade ^a, Antonio Vitor Gullo de Oliveira Ribeiro ^b, Isabela Barroso Assuf ^c, Lucas Carraro Serra Gomes da Silva ^d

^a Medicina, Faculdade Técnico-Educacional Souza Marques in Rio de Janeiro- Brazil, pteixeiraandrade@gmail.com

^b Medicina, Faculdade Técnico-Educacional Souza Marques in Rio de Janeiro- Brazil, avgor2002@gmail.com

^c Medicina, Faculdade Técnico-Educacional Souza Marques in Rio de Janeiro- Brazil, isabelaassuf@gmail.com

^d Medicina, Faculdade Técnico-Educacional Souza Marques in Rio de Janeiro- Brazil, lucas.carraro100@gmail.com

Abstract. Social structures were challenged and reshaped with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The educational institutions to be assessed in this article, high school, and college, as structures for primary and higher education, respectively, were also affected. However, Brazil's longstanding social inequalities did not impact any other area as directly as education. Distance Learning, in Portuguese “Ensino à Distância” (EAD), the principal teaching tool used at the time, confronts socioeconomic barriers. Thus, the mental and physical complications that arose in students, as a direct byproduct of forced isolation, span various areas, including the inability to cope with the expectations created by themselves and their families during the tumultuous period of completing high school and taking entrance exams. Therefore, students need to be listened to, as a matter of utmost importance, so we, as a society, can understand the origins of their stress, considering that during the pandemic period, over 48 million students ceased attending the regular face-to-face activities of the pre-pandemic period (GRANDSIOLI et al, 2020) [1].

Keywords: COVID-19 education, distance learning, emotional distress, physical distress.

1. Introduction

The pandemic posed a massive challenge in the realm of education. Amidst this predicament, students and teachers were through a new universe of unprecedented events that posed new, but yet challenging situations. The entire status quo of prevailing education, up until the pre-pandemic period, was abruptly called into question. Hence, the era referred to as the “new normal” has normalized the role of the student as both teacher and learner, considering the boundaries of educational institutions have been erased. Therefore, the adaptability of each individual largely reflects the traits of this relatively new disease, characterized by social isolation. Even though today's society possesses every means of communication, it was common at the time for feelings such as loneliness, despair, and uncertainty to echo the zeitgeist, or spirit of the time, of that era. As such, concern for students' mental health was belittled in favor of ensuring the educational calendar's continuity, which reveals a longstanding debt of the country's education system regarding mental health.

Historically, the power dynamics within the educational space have been broadly addressed. Within the micro-

physics of power, the school stands out as a place for producing individuals fit to inhabit a pragmatic adult life. That is, schools operate as a mechanism responsible for producing a particular type of individual (FOUCAULT,1995) [2]. Also notable is the stark discrepancy in the impact of remote teaching in different educational worlds. Undoubtedly, public education was more profoundly affected, as a large majority of its students have limited access to technology. Even though the 1988 Federal Constitution prescribes education as a right, the historical social inequalities underscore that, for some students, being in an educational institution, already, signifies an act of resistance with countless challenges. (CUNHA et al., 2020) [3].

This article aims, therefore, to highlight how students, mostly aged 17 to 21, coped with social pressures imposed by themselves and society during a period of uncertainty about the future. This uncertainty encompasses choices that will dictate their professional paths and the omnipresence of COVID-19, which, was responsible for over 500,000 deaths in Brazil. Many of these deaths disrupted the family structures, which, in many cases, served as a haven for these young students. After all, even if the family appeared seemingly divided or internally eroded by inequality, it was wholly integrated within the household (DAMATTA, 1997)[4]. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that this paper seeks, above all, to demonstrate through various mechanisms - whether it be art, sociology, or medicine itself - to reiterate that, as challenging as the current situation seems, it is transitory. As such, those individuals who have been going through a period of a lot of doubts and uncertainties suffered even more due to the pandemic.

2. Research Methods

The target population consists of students, ranging in age from under 17 to over 22, with a median age in the 19 to 21 range, who graduated high school, during the triennium 2019- 2021, and subsequently entered college. Since the ultimate goal of this study is to address the psychological and physical effects imposed on students during the period of mandatory isolation, this article, using the Google Forms platform, aims to gather reports from the students themselves. The data retrieved was based on a question, with a plentitude of answers that interviewees This data collection was based on a series of questions that will address, in the most general way possible, the physical and mental implications of stress that arose as a byproduct of this period of uncertainty. Students who wish to participate in the research will receive an informed and voluntary consent form containing all the necessary information about the study, ensuring anonymity and the confidential nature of the information provided to the researcher. Thus, if they agree to the terms, they will receive a copy to keep, and if they have any questions about the form at any point, they can seek clarification by asking any questions they may have. The questionnaire was sent in portuguese, since it's our native tongue, so, translations will occur through the analysis of it.

3. Results

Was it possible to notice behavioral changes in your routine? If yes, witch one(s)?

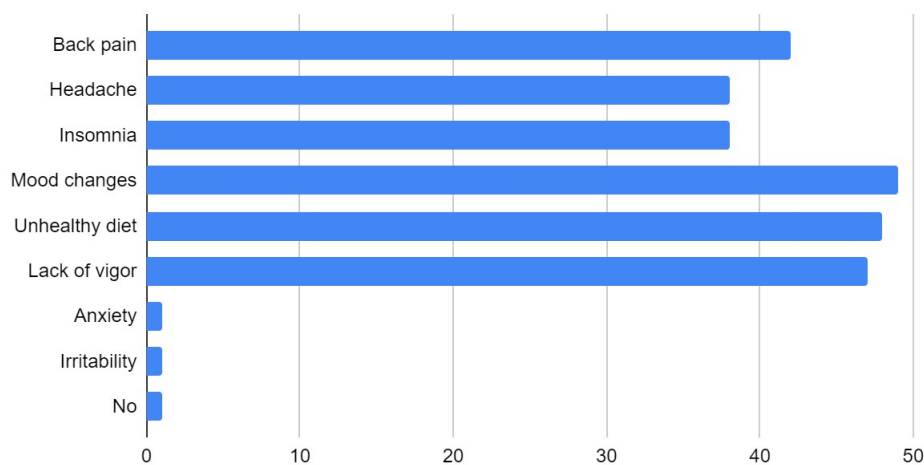


Fig 1: Was it possible to notice behavioral changes in your routine? If yes, which one(s)?

The question above, "was it possible to notice behavioral changes in your routine" allowed students to select more than one option, since the events stemming from the pandemic extend beyond the academic realm and, in such manner, influenced various aspects of the student's life. From this perspective, we sent a questionnaire to 64 students, and received a total of 265 responses, so it's easy to say that many students marked more than one answer. Mood swings (49=76,6%), was the most prevalent answer, followed by Unregulated eating (48=75%), . Lack of Vigor (47=73,4%), Back pain (42=65,6%), Headache (38=59,4%), Insomnia (38=59,4%) , Anxiety, No changes and Anger all with 1 answer each (1,6%).

4. Discussion

When combining the information reported by MIRANDA (2021)[5], BERG and collaborators (2020)[6], and CIPRIANO & ALMEIDA (2020) [7], the association of physical and mental stress promoted by the coronavirus pandemic is understandable, COVID-19, undoubtedly, affected several areas, in this paper the focus was the performance in the last few years of school life and the beginning of collegial life. From that assumption, students felt overwhelmed by a lot of changes that happened in a different environment than the one before, so the inability to express themselves formed the imbroglia, reported throughout the text. Moreover, taking away the platform from those who are at the top of the academic structure and providing insights from the student's point of view, not only reiterates the construction of a horizontal discourse, without the predominance of the teaching staff's vision but also makes it impossible to form an open dialogue that includes both parties and not a panopticism plan, whose main objectives would be to discipline and punish (FOUCAULT, 1995)[2] those unable to obey the school calendar guidelines, even though several students reported difficulties emotions and technologies for the full use of education.

Furthermore, it is worth reflecting on all the factors that go beyond the classroom, for example, the social isolation promoted by the restraining of the disease, one of the many effects on the mental and physical health of, students, regardless of socioeconomic level. From this perspective, when asked, students, through the questionnaire, said that the main changes in their daily routine, were mood swings and unregulated eating, both portraits of a

instability of mental faculties, even if they do not correspond to aggressive manifestations, can confirm mental instability.

Therefore, it is not possible to forget the alternatives to alleviate mental stress and physical conditions imposed by mandatory social isolation, especially in the school environment, whereas his absence intensifies the lack of contact with classmates, which can further accentuate the loneliness caused by COVID-19. Therefore, just as reiterated by DIAS & PINTO (2020)[8], "The prolonged duration of confinement, the lack of personal contact with classmates, the fear of being infected, the lack of space in their house – makes the student less physically active than if they were at school." In that sense, an active lifestyle and regular practice of physical activities, present themselves as effective methods for reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, as well as obtaining psychological benefits. Among these, we can mention the control of stress and anxiety levels and the reduction of depressive states (VEIGA & GONÇALVES)[9].

Even though the pandemic isn't a huge concern nowadays, the academic environment suffered immensely. So, its rigid structure needs to be redesigned to be able to cope with the adversities that may come, having technology as an ally, not a foe, is just an example of how, in the future, it will be easier to deal with these kinds of situations. Nonetheless, students have to be seen as a part of the academic body, as important as the teaching staff, because the vertical composition is one of the origins of this problem, therefore, it must be substituted for a horizontal arrangement, in which, everyone is capable of expressing their beliefs, trust, insecurities, etc.

5. Conclusion

From the observation of data obtained directly (through the implementation of a closed questionnaire) and indirectly (using information, knowledge, and data collected by other researchers in previous studies), five central conclusions can be assessed.

The educational system has deep roots in solid structures, which sustain themselves by belittling the voice of the student body. There is a glaring communication gap between both parts of the educational structure, which hinders action aimed at a more empathetic treatment of difficulties reported by the students themselves.

Students find themselves compelled to deal with an entirely new situation individually, even though they report having a hard time using new platforms.

Emotional skills are also undervalued by society as a superstructure, given the low number of respondents who have this type of support. Although many students report resorting to physical exercises, often individual, as a possible relief for various behavioral changes, as reported by themselves, there is, undoubtedly, a clear elitism in the perception of the importance of subjects in the curriculum, as already explained throughout the text. This issue is of paramount urgency to be addressed, in case of directives to be assigned to review the shortcomings of the school structure after the pandemic period.

Thus, this research observed that, generally, the studied sample successfully matched the expectations set before the questionnaire was sent out. Given this, the relevance of further research in this field becomes evident, considering many variables exist, and most of them are out of the students' reach. Therefore, the issues pointed out by the volunteers, mostly from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, seem elitist and do not address the complex reality of the country. Therefore, it should be emphasized that this research did not aim to establish definitive conclusions, but merely to give a platform to the majority of the educational social structure, the students. Even though they constitute the majority, their representation is often limited.

6. Acknowledgement

We would like to thank interviewees for their answers, and all medical students in 2023 academic year at Faculdade Técnico- Científica Souza Marques for their support.

7. References

- [1] Grandisoli et al., Educar para a sustentabilidade; visões de presente e futuros. 2020
- [2] Foucault, M. Surveiller et Punir. 1987; p 219-221,
- [3] CUNHA et al., Pandemia da COVID-19: maior desafio do século XXI. 2020
- [4] DAMATTA, A casa e a rua: espaço, cidadania, mulher e morte no Brasil. 199; p 145-155
- [5] MIRANDA, G.B.S. Fatores Associados ao Estresse em Isolamento Social durante a Pandemia de COVID-19. 2021; 1 ed., p.11-14,
- [6] BERG, J. et al. Pandemia 2020 e educação. 1 ed., Revista brasileira de educação ambiental, 2020; p 470-487, p.3,5-7.
- [7] CIPRIANO, J. A. & ALMEIDA, L. C. C. S. Educação em tempos de Pandemia: análises e implicações na saúde mental do professor e aluno. 1 ed., Educação como (re)Existência: mudanças, conscientização e conhecimentos. p 1-2, p 5, 2020.
- [8] DIAS, E. & PINTO, F. C. F. A Educação e a Covid-19. 1 ed., Ensaio: aval. pol. públ. Educ., Rio de Janeiro, v.28, n.108.2020, p 2-3.
- [9] VEIGAS, J. & GONÇALVES, M. A Influência do Exercício Físico na Ansiedade, Depressão e Stress. O portal dos psicólogos.2009., p 4-8