

**THE MENTAL HEALTH INTERDISCIPLINARY LEAGUE AND ITS
CONTRIBUTIONS IN TIMES OF COVID-19**

***A LIGA INTERDISCIPLINAR EM SAÚDE MENTAL E SUAS CONTRIBUIÇÕES EM
TEMPOS DE COVID-19***

***LA LIGA INTERDISCIPLINARIA EN SALUD MENTAL Y SUS CONTRIBUCIONES
EN TIEMPOS DE COVID-19***

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ABSTRACT: The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared in January 2020 that the outbreak caused by Coronavirus infections constituted a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, the highest warning level of the Organization, as predicted in the International Sanitary Regulation. The mental health of a population, during a great magnitude pandemic such as this, implies in a psychosocial disorder which can exceed the confrontation capacity of the affected population. This article aims to report the experience of the Mental Health Interdisciplinary League (MHIL) from Vale do Acaraú State University, during the new coronavirus pandemic. By promoting extension actions during the pandemic and by committing itself to sustain its social value, the university shows itself to be attentive to this delicate world-historical moment. This report is constituted in three sections: creation, function, and perspectives; the league's contribution during the pandemic; and researching is necessary. By developing extension activities during the pandemic, it provided its members with a fertile space for learning in the field of teaching, research and extension, contributing to the formation of professionals with a sense of social responsibility and commitment to citizenship.

KEYWORDS: Mental health. Community-institutional Relations. Higher education. COVID-19. Pandemic.

RESUMO: A Organização Mundial da Saúde (OMS) declarou, em janeiro de 2020, que o surto da doença causada pelo novo coronavírus constituiu uma Emergência de Saúde Pública de Importância Internacional, o mais alto nível de alerta da Organização, conforme previsto no Regulamento Sanitário Internacional. A saúde mental da população durante uma pandemia de grande magnitude como esta implica em uma perturbação psicossocial que pode ultrapassar a capacidade de enfrentamento da população afetada. Este artigo possui

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como objetivo relatar a experiência da Liga Interdisciplinar em Saúde Mental (LISAM) da Universidade Estadual Vale do Acaraú, durante a pandemia do novo coronavírus. A Universidade, ao desenvolver ações de extensão durante a pandemia, compromete-se em sustentar seu valor social e mostrar-se atenta para o delicado momento histórico mundial. O relato está constituído de três sessões: criação, função e perspectivas; contribuições da liga durante a pandemia e pesquisar é preciso. Ao desenvolver atividades de extensão durante a pandemia, oportunizou aos seus integrantes um espaço fértil de aprendizagem no âmbito do ensino, pesquisa e extensão, contribuindo para a formação de profissionais com senso de responsabilidade social e compromisso com a cidadania.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Saúde Mental. Extensão Comunitária. Educação Superior. COVID-19. Pandemia.*

RESUMEN: *La Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS) declaró, en enero de 2020, que el brote de la enfermedad causada por el COVID-19 constituye una Emergencia de Salud Pública de Importancia Internacional, el nivel más alto de alerta de la Organización, conforme lo previsto en el Reglamento Sanitario Internacional. La salud mental de la población durante una pandemia de gran magnitud como esta conlleva una perturbación psicosocial que puede superar la capacidad de enfrentamiento de la población afectada. Este artículo tiene como objetivo relatar la experiencia de la Liga Interdisciplinaria en Salud Mental (LISAM) de la Universidad Estadual Vale de Acaraú, durante la pandemia del nuevo coronavirus. La Universidad al desarrollar acciones de extensión durante la pandemia, se compromete a sustentar su valor social y muestra su preocupación con el delicado momento histórico mundial. El relato está constituido por tres sesiones: creación, función y perspectivas; contribuciones de la liga durante la pandemia e investigar es necesario. Al desarrollar actividades de extensión durante la pandemia, proporcionó a sus integrantes un espacio fértil de aprendizaje en el ámbito de la enseñanza, investigación y extensión, contribuyendo para la formación de profesionales con sentido de responsabilidad social y compromiso con la ciudadanía.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Salud mental. Extensión comunitaria. Educación superior. COVID-19. Pandemia*

Introduction

The world has changed since December 2019. The new coronavirus pandemic has triggered international institutions, governments, professionals and populations to institute containment strategies, since displacements accelerate or slow the growth of cases of infections (DARSIE; WEBER, 2020). We are going through the biggest health crisis ever experienced so far. In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) made official the existence of the disease caused by COVID-19 and declared the State of Emergency in Public Health of International Importance (ORGANIZAÇÃO MUNDIAL DA SAÚDE, 2020; ORGANIZAÇÃO PAN-AMERICANA DE SAÚDE, 2020).

Studies have already demonstrated important impacts on the mental health of the world population. According to Schmidt *et al.* (2020), the rapid spread of the new coronavirus throughout the world, uncertainties about how to control the disease and its severity, as well as the unpredictability about the duration of the pandemic and its consequences are characterized as health risk factors mental health of the general population. Oliveira (2020), on the other hand, emphasizes the possibility of psychological suffering and the appearance of mental disorders. In this sense, much needs to be done. In addition to the emergency work fronts during and after the pandemic.

What are the university's contributions in a situation of health crisis in the Brazilian scenario? It is exactly at this moment that the Interdisciplinary League on Mental Health of the State University Vale do Acaraú (UVA) is reorganizing itself and brings its contributions to face the adverse situations caused by the pandemic of the new coronavirus. Thus, university extension is presented as one of the viable ways to support and support the needs arising from society (HUNGER *et al.*, 2014).

For Oliveira *et al.* (2020), this health crisis will contribute to the search for new challenges and learnings, enabling reflection on the weaknesses hitherto unrecognized. And this is exactly the opportunity that universities will have to demonstrate their role in research, extension, and teaching.

For Araújo *et al.* (2019), Academic Leagues are characterized by their potential for transforming the scenario of health practices into various scenarios and points in the health care network. They create real possibilities for the implementation of teaching, research, extension at the university and consolidate the dialogue with society.

In the context of university extension, the Academic Leagues (AL) are included, whose objective is to bring the students closer to the practice of health care, to promote the inseparability of the formation tripod (teaching, research, extension), to offer a diversity of practice scenarios, formation for health, learning to do and learning to care for others (SILVA; FLORES, 2015).

The National University Extension Plan, launched by the Ministry of Education, recognizes extension as an educational process that enables the transforming relationship between university and society, articulating with teaching and research. The document is strengthened by Resolution No. 7, of 18 December 2018, which Establishes the Guidelines for Extension in Brazilian Higher Education and regulates the provisions of Goal 12.7 of Law No. 13,005/2014 which approves the National Education Plan PNE 2014 - 2024 (BRASIL, 2018).

Institutions must guarantee their role with society, which must be attentive to this new social conjecture that was formed during this time of the pandemic. University extension could be the way to promote human and environmental development within this new reality (SILVA, 2020).

It is worth mentioning that University Extension must consider an exceptional and emergency scenario in which we have been living due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The moment demands surveillance, health care and prophylactic measures. Social isolation restricted our coming and going, that is, a barrier was set up on free movement and social interaction. This new scenario has profoundly changed the way we will operate in society. The pandemic phenomenon also evokes the consequent creation of new paradigms of collective action that directly affect extension activities (SERRÃO, 2020).

Some authors consider university extension as a pedagogical innovation for establishing a dialogical relationship between the university and society, through student leadership, the reconstruction of knowledge, the decolonization of curricula, the creative practices of teaching and the epistemological democratization of institutions of higher education (SILVA; CAMPANI; NEGREIROS, 2020).

With this perspective, this article has the following objective: to report the experience of the Interdisciplinary League in Mental Health during the pandemic of the new coronavirus.

Creation, function and perspectives

The Interdisciplinary League on Mental Health (LISAM), linked to the Vale do Acaraú State University (UVA), started its activities in 2017. The process of Implementation and development of LISAM was attended by students of the Nursing Course at this institution, with mobilization for the construction of the entire initial process provided for in the institutional procedures, such as: collective construction of the statute and its approval by the Dean of Extension and Culture (PROEX) of UVA, as well as preparation and execution of the first selection notice (OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2019).

In its first year of creation, LISAM had only students from UVA, from the Nursing, Pedagogy and Physical Education courses. In view of its interdisciplinary essence, there is a need for the participation of other courses. Thus, in the second year, it becomes more powerful with the inclusion of the Federal University of Ceará (UFC) and is made up of students from the following courses: nursing, physical education, psychology, law and pedagogy, which strengthened the interdisciplinary characteristic (OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2019).

In this perspective, it is understood that interdisciplinarity involves a new way of thinking about reality, which results in exchange, reciprocity and integration between different areas of knowledge, as well as the opportunity for the production of new knowledge and the resolution of problems, globally and comprehensive (SANTOS; VIEIRA, 2011).

LISAM currently presents the following structure: a professor coordinating supervisor, a president, a vice president, a financial director, a director of education, research and extension, an administrative director, a director of information technology and marketing, five professional tutors and ten students/leaguers. This constituted format is provided for in the bylaws, in addition to the principles that guide actions, the requirements for admission and exclusion of members, rights and duties, the functioning of the League, the conditions for rules of procedure and dissolution and the form of administrative management. With this perspective, it tries to develop its mission with the goal of the principle of inseparability between teaching, research and extension; assume an extracurricular and complementary character; and their actions are of a theoretical and practical nature. The activities are developed looking for the articulation between teaching, research and extension (CASTRO; ALVES, 2017).

Thus, interdisciplinarity, as a principle of extension activities in the health area, aims to promote the mobilization and articulation of all the material and human conditions necessary to guarantee the advancement of teaching processes, oriented towards a more effective formation of the student, in a way to contribute to making all of them capable of adequately facing the challenges imposed by the labor market and the needs of the globalized society (SANTOS; VIEIRA, 2011).

LISAM assumed in its statute the commitment to develop activities to strengthen the strategies promoting mental health, in view of local vulnerabilities; proposes the construction of interdisciplinary practices, guided by the principle of universality and equity and aims to involve students in activities within the scope of the population's Mental Health. The main mission is to promote community mental health (OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2019).

League contributions during the pandemic

The phenomenon of the coronavirus pandemic has affected the entire social fabric, including practically all areas of collective or individual life, with repercussions in the sphere of mental health. In health crises, the number of individuals psychologically affected may be greater than that of people affected by the infection, and it is estimated that from one third to

half the population may have psychological and psychiatric consequences if they do not receive adequate care (LIMA, 2020).

It is understood that the pandemic of the new coronavirus could contribute to the improvement of mental health practice and research in situations of crisis, emergency and major disasters (OLIVEIRA, 2020).

According to Silva (2020), university extension can and should promote human development in this new reality, as opportunities overcome challenges. The previous challenges were of a computational-technological nature, but now we are in the era of information in real time, the technologies are already developed and accessible and the computational resources are in our hands.

Chart 1 – Presentation of videos constructed and published on social networks during the new coronavirus pandemic

THEME	OBJECTIVE
Self-care	Encourage few cares that people can take with themselves, showing the importance of self-care, in view of the difficult time that we are experiencing.
Food and mental health	Stimulate the habit of healthy eating, highlighting some foods that are proven to benefit physical and mental health.
Stress and anxiety	Inform about the characteristics of stress and anxiety and their harmful effects on the body. And warn about its appearance in the period of social isolation and quarantine.
Self-esteem	Stimulate the critical analysis of the nature of self-esteem, in the individual, by presenting the definition of the term, its relevance to mental health.
Physical activity and mental health	Highlight the relevance of physical activity for physical and mental health, especially during social isolation and quarantine.
Self-knowledge	To instigate the search for self-knowledge, by promoting understanding of the term and its importance for mental health.

Source: Devised by the authors

The themes of the videos were chosen based on the main needs of the population with the abrupt arrival of the health crisis brought by the new coronavirus. During a pandemic, it is expected that we are often on the alert, worried, confused, stressed and with a feeling of lack of control in the face of the uncertainties of the moment. There is an estimate that between one third and half of the population exposed to an epidemic may suffer some psychopathological manifestation, especially if no psychosocial care intervention is carried out. The factors that influence the psychosocial impact are related to the magnitude of the epidemic and the degree of vulnerability in which the person is currently (FIOCRUZ, 2020a).

The themes of the videos produced and published on social networks were intended to alleviate some negative effects caused by social isolation and quarantine. According to Fiocruz (2020a), some behavioral reactions most present at this moment are: changes or disturbances in appetite (lack of appetite or excess appetite); sleep changes or disturbances (insomnia, difficulty sleeping or excessive sleep, recurring nightmares); interpersonal conflicts (with family members, work teams...) and recurring thoughts related to death and dying.

Chart 2 – Presentation of the theoretical cycle developed by LISAM during the pandemic of the new coronavirus

THEME	OBJECTIVE
The consumption of alcohol and other drugs during social isolation	Discuss the extent to which social isolation and quarantine can influence the increase or reduction of psychoactive substances.
Domestic violence during social isolation	Debate the mental health of individuals, in the face of social isolation, in addition to reflect on the changes, adaptations and consequences on the physical and mental health of the population.
Mental health in times of pandemic	Present epidemiological and psychosocial characteristics and their interfaces with the pandemic and mental health
“The malaise in civilization in Freud” discussing mental health today.	Dialogue with the work of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, "the malaise in civilization", with the current context experienced. To reflect and understand the presence of negative feelings.
National drug policy: characteristics in pandemic times of the new coronavirus	Talk about the national harm reduction policy and its characteristics and reframing during social isolation
Anxiety in times of pandemic	Reflect on the main reasons that can generate anxiety during the pandemic. Clarify the signs and symptoms and inform the main protective measures

Source: Devised by the authors

With the beginning of the pandemic, the activities of the teaching axis had to be reorganized, in view of the need for new knowledge, skills and competences. In this perspective, for Cavalcante *et al.* (2018), the main contributions of the leagues to health formation are the promotion of formation in line with the reality in which these professionals will work. So, the need for knowledge involving the pandemic context was instituted to accompany the psychosocial demands and epidemiology brought about by the pandemic. In this way, it contributes to the technical-scientific and humanistic formation of the members, with the goal of promoting the mental health of the population (SILVA *et al.*, 2020).

The health and humanitarian crisis caused by COVID-19 significantly affects many people and imposes new rules and social behaviors hitherto unexperienced (DUARTE *et al.*, 2020). New knowledge must be produced to face current demands.

Academic leagues are potentially beneficial for students in formation and for society in general, as they are a source of knowledge and consequently of actions in favor of individuals, families, and communities (QUEIROZ *et al.*, 2014).

Chart 3 – Presentation of social media posts during the new coronavirus pandemic

THEMES PUBLISHED IN LISAM'S INSTAGRAM	OBJECTIVE
Indications of articles relevant to mental health amid social isolation.	Pass on knowledge about social isolation and psychic care strategies in a pandemic situation with the dissemination of relevant articles.
Relevant text on mental health during the pandemic	Deal with tips on how to decrease anxiety. With the help of pages on Instagram that have techniques that reduce anxiety.
Text on procrastination	Clarify the definition of procrastination, how it can present itself in daily life and tips to contain it.
Text on the excessive self-demand	Describe how excessive self-demand can present in the routine and tips on how to curb it.
Article relevant to social isolation	Indicate relevant articles on social isolation and display a flowchart of social and psychological support for both people in crisis and health professionals.
Psychological support channel tips	Inform about the various channels of psychological support that one can have amid social isolation, via internet and telephone, with qualified listening.
Text on social stigma	Address social stigma, its definition, how it can present itself and tips to avoid it.

Source: Devised by the authors

The posting of relevant issues on social networks is one of LISAM's work strategies to face the repercussions of the pandemic on people's lives. In this sense, activities in the field of mental health are aligned with the central axis proposed in the league's statute: promotion of community mental health.

Social networks are platforms with high speed in the generation of data, with posts made all the time. With the pandemic and thousands of people in various forms of isolation, there is a greater use of social networks. With the popularization of internet access, social networks are among the main forms of current communication (STATISTA, 2020).

Social networks were the main mobilization site for LISAM. In the scenario instituted by the pandemic, in which the widespread use of information technology can be highlighted

as a fundamental approach to deal with the crisis, the use of social media can bring people together and make communication more effective (SHIOZAWA; UCHIDA, 2020) .

Some studies are showing pictures with the following signs and symptoms: stress, fear, panic, anxiety, guilt, and sadness that generate psychological distress. In certain individuals it can cause the appearance of panic disorders and anxiety disorders (PEREIRA *et al.*, 2020; SOUADKA *et al.*, 2020).

There is a great psychosocial burden caused by COVID-19. Infection control and prevention measures are responsible for various behaviors and attitudes. Efforts to respond to these mental health needs provide researchers with an important opportunity to develop what we know and to achieve global mental health goals (KOLA, 2020).

Researching is necessary

The activities are developed seeking the articulation between teaching, research, and extension, taking into account the inseparability between them. The constitutional principle of this inseparability is an interdisciplinary educational, cultural, scientific, and political process that promotes transformative interaction between universities and other sectors of society (BEGO; SILVA, 2018).

The health and epidemiological situation triggered by the new corona virus pandemic spurred the initiative that culminated in the development of the study entitled: *Repercursões da pandemia do novo coronavírus na saúde mental de estudantes do Ensino superior* (Repercussions of the new corona virus pandemic on the mental health of university students). With the following main objective: to analyze the mental health situation of higher education students in the state of Ceará during the new corona virus pandemic.

The research presents the guiding questions: how is the mental health of university students who have had their routines drastically changed? What are the main problems faced by these students during social isolation? To what extent is the pandemic and the need for social isolation impacting their mental health?

A questionnaire of the sociodemographic and situational profile in relation to the pandemic and social isolation is used. The main instrument is the Mental Health Inventory (MHI), developed for epidemiological investigation by several researchers in the scope of Rand Corporation's Health Insurance Study. It aims to assess mental health in the general population, or in specific population groups, in a two-dimensional perspective, including positive and negative aspects (RIBEIRO, 2011).

The MHI is relevant to assess mental health from the person's health experiences, differentiating levels of positive or negative functioning, and this discriminating capacity is essential to distinguish people in need of help. The instrument contains 38 items distributed in five scales, which are grouped into two major dimensions: Psychological Distress (negative), which includes traditional negative indicators of psychological distress or negative emotional and mental states. Contains the Anxiety (10 items), Depression (5 items), Loss of Emotional and Behavioral Control (9 items) scales; Psychological Well-Being (positive), which contains the contemporary tonic in positive mental health or positive states that include the General Positive Affection (11 items) and Emotional Ties (3 items) scales.

The MHI is evaluated using a Likert-type ordinal scale, which varies between five and six possibilities. The result of each positive and negative dimension derives from the gross sum of the items that correspond to it. The sum of the two dimensions provides the Mental Health Index. The higher values correspond to better levels of mental health (RIBEIRO, 2011).

In view of the atypical scenario, with the obligation of social isolation and the closing of classroom classes, the identification and approach of participants will take place through social networks. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter will be the initial bases of contact with the research target audience. The data collection technique used will be Snowball.

According to Flick (2009), this data collection technique is like that of a good reporter who tracks 'clues' from one person to another. Initially, the researcher specifies the characteristics that the sample members should have, then identifies a person or a group of people congruent with the necessary data, then presents the study proposal and, after obtaining/registering such data, requests that research participant(s) to indicate another person(s) belonging to the same target population. Flick (2009) explains that, in the Snowball technique, the researcher asks the participant for reference to new informants who have the desired characteristics. This process continues until the metrics established in advance for data collection, such as the collection deadline or maximum number of respondents, are reached or theoretical saturation occurs, that is, when new information does not appear in the collected data.

Final considerations

Higher education institutions must play an important role by not exempting themselves from the responsibility of contributing to the Brazilian response to the COVID-19 confrontation. There are several possibilities for action in this crisis scenario.

Academic Leagues play an important role in formation. Students can make choices in an active and free way, to have innovative initiatives. When dealing with the pandemic, their extension practice incorporates knowledge and practices that are in harmony with the needs imposed by the problems experienced by society.

The University, when developing extension actions during the pandemic, is committed to sustaining its social value, being attentive to the delicate historical moment in the world. Thus, it will contribute to the promotion of social development, both in the current reality and in the future in the post-pandemic.

When developing extension activities during the pandemic, LISAM has provided its members with a fertile space for learning in teaching, research and extension, contributing to the formation of ethical, reflective and critical professionals, with a sense of social responsibility and commitment to citizenship, capable of perceiving and welcoming the diverse community demands. Thus, having a focus on promoting mental health.

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