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RESILIENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT NETWORKS, ORGANIZATION, AND LEARNING STRATEGIES IN FACE-TO-FACE AND DISTANCE LEARNING CONTEXTS

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Abstract: Resilience has been widely studied as a psychological construct associated with positive adaptation to situations of adversity and stress, assuming particular relevance in the context of mental health. This article aims to analyze the concept of resilience, its theoretical evolution, and its relationship with the promotion of mental health in educational contexts, with a special focus on higher education. Initially explored in other areas of knowledge, the concept was integrated into psychology to explain the adaptive processes of individuals exposed to potentially traumatic experiences, progressively moving away from the notion of invulnerability. Throughout the article, resilience is discussed as a dynamic and multidimensional process, influenced by individual, family, social, institutional, and cultural factors. Empirical evidence demonstrating the relationship between resilience, social support, and mental health is analyzed, highlighting the role of support networks, self-efficacy, time management, and learning strategies as protective factors in the academic journey. The article also addresses the specificities of distance learning, emphasizing the importance of self-regulation, individual responsibility, and institutional support in academic adaptation. The analysis developed in this article shows that promoting resilience in educational environments is a fundamental strategy for promoting the psychological well-being and academic success of higher education students.

Keywords: Resilience; Mental Health; Higher Education; Social Support Networks; Academic Adaptation; Distance Learning

Introduction

The growing attention devoted to mental health in the educational context reflects the recognition of the impact that academic, social, and emotional demands have on students' psychological well-being. The transition to higher education is a particularly challenging period, marked by the need to adapt to new learning contexts, manage time independently, build social networks, and meet academic and family expectations. These challenges can lead to high levels of stress and psychological vulnerability, making it important to analyze protective factors that promote adaptation and emotional balance.

In this context, resilience plays a central role as a psychological construct associated with the ability to adapt positively in the face of adversity. Understood as a dynamic and multidimensional process, resilience involves the interaction between individual, family, social, and institutional factors, allowing individuals to mobilize resources that promote mental health and academic success. The literature shows that resilience does not imply the absence of suffering, but rather the ability to manage stressful experiences in an adaptive and constructive way.

This is a theoretical article based on a narrative review of national and international scientific literature, which aims to integrate classical and contemporary contributions on the concept of resilience and its relationship with mental health in educational contexts. Thus, this article aims to analyze the concept of resilience and its theoretical evolution, as well as to discuss its relationship with the promotion of mental health in educational contexts, with a spe-

cial focus on higher education. It also aims to identify individual and institutional strategies that contribute to strengthening resilience, namely through the development of social support networks, the promotion of self-efficacy, time management, task management, and the use of appropriate learning strategies. In addition, the article reflects on the specificities of distance learning, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that this model poses for the promotion of students' psychological well-being and academic adaptation.

By articulating these objectives, the article seeks to contribute to an integrated understanding of resilience as an essential resource in promoting mental health and developing healthier and more sustainable academic paths.

Resilience

The concept of resilience was developed many years ago, with records dating from antiquity to the present day. The first record dates back about two thousand years (Saladini, 2021). Cardoso (2011) adds that the term derives from the Latin *resiliens*, which means "to jump back, return, be propelled, retreat, shrink, break."

Resilience has multiple definitions, and there is a range of divergent views on this concept in the literature. However, there is consistency in the fact that the concept is linked to the active movement to break a set of behaviors and situations that lead to the immobilization of the individual, as well as to traumatic experiences with damage to mental health. The term has been used in a wide variety of fields, such as physics and engineering, since approximately 1807. In these fields of study, the term is associated

with tension and, consequently, the ability of materials to absorb impacts without suffering permanent deformation (Nascimento, et al, 2020).

In the field of psychology, the term *resilience* began to be used systematically in the 1970s, in the context of longitudinal studies that sought to understand why some children and adults exposed to significant adversity did not develop psychological disorders or health problems, contrary to expectations based on risk models. This pioneering research led to a conceptual shift, with resilience coming to be understood not as an exceptional characteristic, but as a dynamic adaptive process (Masten, 2018). Resilience can thus be understood as an individual's ability to adapt after a challenging situation.

Scientific research on this topic, combined with psychology, is often associated with the study of disasters, where the ability of individuals to adapt to a given situation considered difficult is analyzed. An example of this is the longitudinal study conducted by Emmy Werner on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, between 1955 and 1995, which showed that individuals exposed to adverse contexts can exhibit adaptive developmental trajectories and an absence of significant negative consequences in terms of mental health and behavior, reinforcing the relevance of the concept of resilience (Nascimento et al., 2020). With the advancement of the study on the subject, more recent studies add that the idea of invulnerability should not be directly associated with the concept. In these studies, it was noticeable that individuals who experienced stressful situations suffered damage that was intensely recorded in their life course, but they were able to manage their emotional resources, achieving positive adaptation and subjective

strengthening and adaptation in the face of stressful situations (Chaves, Alexandre, Andriola, de Araújo Cavalcante, & de Freitas, 2020; Rutter, 1993; Yunes, 2003 cited in Gianfelice, et al, 2024).

Resilience can be understood as a continuous adaptive process, which is built over time through the interaction between personal characteristics and relational and institutional contexts. Far from representing invulnerability or the absence of suffering, this process reflects the individual's ability to reorganize internal and external resources in order to respond functionally to situations of adversity and prolonged stress (Masten, 2018).

Following studies on the subject, the concept of informational resilience has emerged, adding further value to this concept, developed by theorist Lloyd (2014), which focuses on the study of information transition in subjects who experience challenges and stressful experiences. According to the author, informational resilience refers to an individual's ability to assign new meanings to a given situation in the face of new information and experiences. For this to occur, it is important to have emotional resources, facilitating the construction of new emotional scenarios and allowing the transition from a stressful experience to a process of adaptation and change (Brasileiro, 2020).

The study of resilience is also often associated with the study of childhood and adolescent psychopathology. Resilience associated with these studies has made it possible to describe the characteristics that prevent individuals from becoming socially dysfunctional, despite the characteristics and difficulties of the environment in which they developed. Resilience is thus used to outline an individual's ability to adapt to ad-

verse circumstances while maintaining their balance and functionality (Oh & Chag, 2014).

Resilience can also be interpreted as a mechanism that leads to adaptation and adjustment, leading to a process where there is a focus on change in the face of uncertainty and stressful moments (Blay et al., 2020).

In this sense, understanding resilience as an adaptive process becomes particularly relevant in the context of mental health promotion, especially in educational settings, where individuals are often confronted with significant cognitive, emotional, and social demands.

Strategies for promoting mental health and resilience in educational environments

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease. Subsequently, in 1998, it was added that religiosity/spirituality should be included as an integral part of this concept. Souza et al. (2019) define the concept of health as the combination of various elements that influence the individual, both external and internal, such as culture, education, economic status, dietary conditions, employment, leisure, among others.

The beginning of the academic journey in higher education is a significant milestone in the lives of individuals, characterized by a period of multiple challenges, involving not only the acquisition of new knowledge, but also the building of emotional and professional bonds. In addition to these demands, it is a phase marked by the need to respond to academic requirements

and manage family expectations, particularly in terms of developing skills, increasing autonomy, and preparing for integration into professional life (Geirdal, Nerdum, & Bonsaksen, 2019; Murrell, Jackson, Lester, & Hulsey, 2017, cited in Rosendo et al., 2022).

The challenges inherent in entering a new social environment can be experienced positively by some students; however, for others, these challenges can be perceived as negative experiences, including those who previously performed well academically. Several contextual factors can contribute to this phase being experienced in a more demanding way, such as financial difficulties, physical and emotional distance from family and friends, family pressure, intensive academic demands in a short period of time, frustration with the content taught, unmet expectations, excessive consumption of alcohol and other substances, as well as a highly competitive atmosphere among students (Akeman et al., 2020).

Certain areas of training are particularly susceptible to these difficulties, as their academic nature and future professional practice require high levels of emotional control, resulting from frequent contact with situations of loss, **illness**, and human suffering associated with physical and mental conditions. (Andrade et al., 2016 cited in Rosendo et al., 2022).

Resilience and mental health in academic environments is a topic that has been the subject of numerous studies in recent years (Andrade et al., 2016; Bantjes et al., 2019; Graner & Cerqueira, 2019; Park, Choi, & Lee, 2019; Saraiva & Quixadá, 2010; Torre et al., 2019 cited in Rosendo et al., 2022). These studies have shown that the development of social skills and compe-

tencies, as well as the creation of adaptive strategies, are effective ways of developing resilience, minimizing the impact that challenges and negative experiences have on the mental health of university students and facilitating their adaptation.

The development of resilience is an essential skill in the university student's journey, contributing significantly to the promotion of mental health, self-efficacy, and creativity (Ferrández-Martínez et al., 2017, cited in Rosendo et al., 2022). Evidence from the literature also indicates that higher levels of resilience are associated with more positive academic outcomes, reflected in improved school performance, increased motivation, and reduced absenteeism and academic failure.

It is therefore important that higher education institutions have the capacity to use techniques to promote positive coping strategies and stress management, helping to increase social support networks and consequently improving students' resilience. Farquhar et al. (2018) add that social support should be a pillar to be developed in an academic context, as there is a direct relationship with students' levels of resilience. They also add that the development of attitudes towards collaborative activities is particularly important in developing resilience and promoting the mental health of students in higher education.

In the academic context, several studies point to high levels of stress and a perception of time scarcity, factors often experienced by students that can compromise an individual's psychological balance and overall health. In addition, significant transitions, such as leaving the parental home and entering the labor market, can intensify these demands, producing negative impacts

on health, particularly mental health. In this context, the promotion of mental health and the development of resilience take on central importance, as they contribute to a biopsychosocial model of health oriented towards the healthy, adaptive, and integrated functioning of human beings (Straub, 2014).

Mental health should therefore be characterized by each person's individual circumstances, combined with their capacity for resilience, enabling them to cope with stressful events while maintaining their productive capacity and regulating their behavior and health in the broadest sense.

The social contexts in which individuals find themselves can contribute positively or negatively to the development of resilience. In order to develop positively, it is necessary for the social environment to foster tools that contribute to this transformation. Thus, the development of resilience is a dynamic process in which family, community, school, church, and all social interactions are of great importance (Gianfelice, et al, 2020).

Developing resilience while maintaining mental health means being able to face adversity, frustration, and pressures typical of the academic journey without compromising your mental health or performance.

One of the most effective ways to develop resilience is through self-awareness. Students who recognize their emotions, understand their reactions to challenging situations, and identify their strengths and weaknesses have more resources to act adaptively. Another essential component is social and emotional support. Having trusting relationships with peers, teachers, and family members helps students cope with difficult-

ties. Educational institutions that cultivate a culture of acceptance, active listening, and respect for differences strengthen bonds and, consequently, the resilience of their students (Alliprandini et al, 2014).

In addition, the development of autonomy and self-responsibility strengthens the ability to deal with failures and learn from them. When students understand that mistakes are part of the learning process, they become more tolerant of frustration and more willing to persevere. Finally, activities that promote a balance between personal and academic life, such as sports, mindfulness, leisure, and adequate sleep, contribute to a more stable emotional foundation and favor the development of resilience.

The promotion and prevention of mental health, especially in the academic community, has been debated by various professionals, with the concept of prevention referring to health promotion as a specific area of prevention, leading to the recognition of the importance of integrating prevention, promotion, and treatment factors (Abreu, 2012). The focus of health promotion is based on the development of skills that enable the combating and management of individual and environmental vulnerabilities. Prevention aims to reduce the emergence of problems or disorders (Weisz, Sandler, Durlak & Anton, 2005).

In the field of health sciences, mental health has been progressively conceptualized as a dynamic state of psychological and social balance, in which the individual is able to cope with the demands of everyday life, maintain functional relationships, and participate productively in their life contexts. This perspective goes beyond an approach focused on the absence of pathology, emphasizing instead adaptive functioning, sub-

jective well-being, and quality of life (World Health Organization, 2004).

It is therefore important to develop strategies to promote mental health and resilience through actions that promote the pillars of behavioral change, lifestyle and health, conditions, and quality of life (Heidmann et al., 2006). Among these strategies, strengthening social support networks plays a central role, as it is an essential resource in promoting psychological well-being, preventing isolation, and developing the ability to adapt to academic demands.

Social support networks

Among the main strategies for promoting mental health and resilience is the strengthening of social support networks. Maintaining ties with colleagues, teachers, counselors, and family members contributes to a sense of belonging and reduces feelings of isolation. Spaces for sharing and listening, such as support groups or peer support, are important resources for coping with academic pressure. Regarding the importance of social support networks, it is also worth adding that “the existence of informal support networks is essential to ensure autonomy, positive self-assessment, better mental health, and life satisfaction” (Paúl, 2014, p.37).

Several recent studies indicate that social and family support acts as a crucial facilitator of resilience and is associated with better mental health outcomes, including lower levels of anxiety and depression. Eckenrode states that support from social networks acts simultaneously as a mitigating and preventive factor for stress (Fonseca, 2011).

Social relationships are recognized as essential to people's health and happiness,

and social support, loneliness, and social isolation are concepts that prove their importance. The social relationships we establish are essential for individual development, forming a fundamental basis for human needs, enabling communication and the development of interpersonal relationships (Rodrigues, 2018 cited in Jantara et al, 2020).

Human beings are, by nature, social beings, and interaction and the establishment of relationships are fundamental elements of their development. In this context, the literature distinguishes two complementary dimensions of social relationships: the **social network**, which concerns the structure of established relationships (density, duration, reciprocity, and homogeneity), and **social support**, understood as the functional aspect of these relationships, related to the emotional, instrumental, and informational resources made available to individuals (Berkman & Glass, 2000; House, 1981; Vaux, 1988).

According to Scherer et al., 2019, the reactions established in social support networks consist of various relationships, including kinship, affinity, support, mobilization, and neighborhood, among others. In this way, it is possible to distinguish between closer and more distant relationships, each of which plays a predominant role in the individual's life. Closer relationships are classified by some authors () as “micro-networks” and those that encompass the community in a more general way as “macro-networks.” (cited in Jantara et al., 2020)

The importance of social support networks in the journey of higher education students is widely recognized, and it is essential to emphasize that the way in which individuals build, establish, and maintain these networks directly influences their pro-

cesses of adaptation to the academic context. Social support networks play a central role in emotional regulation and psychosocial adaptation, functioning as resources that cushion the impact of academic and personal demands. The perception of support availability, as well as the quality of social interactions established, has been associated with lower levels of perceived stress, greater psychological well-being, and greater coping skills in transitional contexts, such as entering and remaining in higher education (Ledo & Antunes, 2024). The presence of functional support networks contributes to reducing levels of stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation, promoting mental health and psychological well-being. At the same time, these networks enhance academic engagement, motivation, and persistence in studies, playing an important role in academic success and preventing school dropout.

The way individuals view their social relationships incorporates three concepts: the support they understand themselves to have, with their interpretations and symbolism; the existing support network as a form of assistance in their lives and in the pursuit of goals; and supportive behavior, understood as the set of attitudes and behaviors that reflect the individual's willingness to offer support to others, as well as their ability to request and use social help in times of emotional distress or adversity (Vaux & Chwalisz, 2000, cited in Ledo, 2024).

Thus, these dimensions are particularly relevant in the field of mental health, since the perception of support and the quality of social networks are psychosocial protective factors associated with the reduction of symptoms of anxiety, stress, and social isolation. The ability to recognize, activate, and use appropriate support networks

contributes to strengthening psychological well-being and developing adaptive coping strategies, especially in contexts of transition and high demand, such as higher education.

The development of good social support and its promotion in an academic context is an ally of possible strategies for promoting mental health and resilience in educational environments. The existence of support from parents, colleagues, friends, teachers, or other figures during this phase of an individual's life is directly linked to higher levels of resilience (Dawson & Pooley, 2013).

The existence of these support figures is a factor that facilitates adaptation to this stage of life, as well as mitigating more stressful experiences. It is therefore essential to create strong social relationships in an academic context, thereby reducing the negative effects of pressure at this stage of life (Oliveira et al, 2023).

In addition to their role in adapting to higher education, social support networks also influence the development of academic self-regulation skills. Social support can facilitate time management and task management by sharing strategies, helping to set priorities, and structuring academic requirements, making these dimensions central to the process of adaptation and student well-being.

Time management and task management

Time management and task management play a central role in promoting mental health and resilience in an academic context, and are directly associated with an increased perception of control over academic demands, reduced stress levels, and de-

creased emotional overload resulting from the multiple demands inherent in higher education. The literature indicates that students with a greater ability to plan, prioritize, and monitor their activities tend to have better levels of academic adaptation and psychological well-being (Oliveira et al., 2023).

In this context, the concept of **self-efficacy** is particularly relevant as a mechanism for regulating behavior, motivation, and persistence in the face of academic demands (Bandura, 1986, cited in Casiraghi et al., 2020). Students who believe in their ability to organize their time and complete tasks demonstrate greater academic involvement, greater tolerance for frustration, and greater ability to adapt in the face of difficulties. Conversely, beliefs of ineffectiveness tend to be associated with procrastination, demotivation, and academic failure.

However, it is important to emphasize that the promotion of these skills cannot be understood exclusively as an individual responsibility. Institutional demands, curriculum overload, rigid deadlines, and the lack of adequate pedagogical support can significantly limit students' ability to manage their time effectively. Therefore, promoting self-efficacy and resilience requires an integrated approach that combines the development of individual skills with more flexible institutional practices geared toward monitoring and preventing academic stress.

Strategies in distance learning: challenges and limitations

In distance learning, time management, self-regulation, and individual responsibility take on added importance, as this teaching model requires greater autonomy and control of the learning process on the part of students. Learning strategies, particularly cognitive and metacognitive ones, play a key role in organizing study, monitoring comprehension, and adapting to academic demands (Alliprandini et al., 2014).

Although distance learning increases time flexibility and access to multiple resources, this model can also intensify existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. The centrality attributed to autonomy and self-regulation tends, in some contexts, to shift the responsibility for difficulties arising from structural limitations, such as unequal access to technological resources, the absence of consistent pedagogical monitoring, and the institutional organization of teaching-learning processes, to the student (Biesta, 2020; Czerniewicz et al., 2020).

It is also important to consider inequalities in access to technological resources, adequate study conditions, and institutional support, which can accentuate pre-existing vulnerabilities and limit the effectiveness of learning strategies (Czerniewicz et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021). In this sense, placing excessive responsibility on students, often associated with discourses of autonomy and self-regulation in distance learning, can mask structural weaknesses in education systems, transferring to individuals difficulties that are largely organizational and institutional in nature (Biesta, 2020; Williamson et al., 2020).

Thus, promoting resilience and mental health in distance learning requires not only the development of self-regulation skills, but also institutional investment in more humanized pedagogical models, with tutorial support, regular feedback, and practices that foster social interaction and a sense of belonging. The creation of inclusive and sustainable virtual environments is therefore a key element for students' academic success and psychological well-being.

Conclusion

This analysis shows that resilience is a central factor in promoting mental health and academic adaptation among higher education students. Understood as a dynamic and multidimensional process, resilience results from the interaction between individual and contextual resources, enabling students to cope with academic and personal adversity in an adaptive way, without compromising their psychological well-being.

The results of the literature reviewed indicate that strategies such as strengthening social support networks, developing self-efficacy, organizing time, and promoting self-regulated learning strategies act as protective factors, contributing to stress reduction and better academic outcomes. In the context of distance learning, these skills are particularly relevant, given the greater demand for autonomy and self-responsibility.

From a practical point of view, it is recommended that higher education institutions implement integrated programs to promote mental health and resilience, including psychological support, academic tutoring, development of social-emotional skills, training in time management, and learning strategies. The creation of welcoming, collabora-

tive educational environments that are sensitive to students' needs is an essential step towards the development of healthier, more sustainable, and successful academic paths. It should be noted that, as this is a theoretical study, future empirical research may further explore and test the models discussed here.

This framework contributes to an integrated understanding of mental health promotion in higher education, highlighting the need for coordinated and sustainable institutional approaches.

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