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COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES: THE POSSIBILITIES OF INTERVENTIONS IN THE PROMOTION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AT UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: The article shares reflections on an excerpt from my master's thesis, completed in the Postgraduate Program in Education in the Professional Modality of ``Universidade de Brasília`` (2022). My considerations start from the understanding of the importance of dedicating attention to the mental health of higher education students, with an emphasis on promoting health and well-being and according to the student's perspective. From the perspective of university students, the research investigated the main themes that mobilize care and the issues that generate engagement in community activities that promote quality of life.

Keywords: Mental health. University life. Health promotion. Students.

PRESENTATION

According to the Socioeconomic Profile of University Students (ANDIFES, 2018) – 08 (eight) out of 10 (ten) students report suffering from anxiety and a feeling of hopelessness. At the ``Universidade de Brasília``, cases of psychological distress among students have demanded an institutional position on issues related to mental health, to the point that the institution created, in 2019, the Board of Health Care for the University Community (DASU).

In addition to initiatives aimed directly at the issue of mental health, UnB also has boards that deal with social guidelines that impact the quality of student life. These are directorates that intervene in issues related to social assistance, support for people with disabilities, the promotion and promotion of art, culture, sport and leisure. There are countless projects designed to welcome the university community: psychological care, community therapies, self-care activities, workshops and cultural projects, sports and leisure activities, among others. However, initiatives of this nature cannot rely solely on

the sensitivity of managers. It is important that they find support in the students' interest and that they become effective institutional values, nurturing a culture of community care and serving as a fundamental reference for programs and actions.

MENTAL HEALTH IN UNIVERSITY LIFE AND MAIN THEMES MOBILIZING CARE

Entering the university can put students in contact with specific stressors, such as fear, anxiety and insecurity generated by possible doubts and disappointments with the chosen career, acquisition of new and greater responsibilities, housing problems, distancing from the family, difficulty in establishing of affective relationship (CALAIS et al., 2007 apud GUIMARÃES, 2014).

In this qualitative research carried out between 2019 and 2020 at the ``Universidade de Brasília`` with undergraduate students, eight students who participated in some well-being promotion or community activity were individually interviewed. Then, a focus group was promoted with three of the eight interviewees in order to understand how the speech of recognition of the needs of health promoting actions is elaborated in the collective field. Both in the semi-structured individual interviews and in the focus group, questions were asked that sought to recognize: the relationship between academic life and mental health, the themes that mobilize care in the context of the university, as well as engagement in activities that promote quality of life within the educational institution.

In individual interviews, questions related to adapting to academic life and difficulties and insecurities regarding the course are the ones that most mobilize care according to the student perspective (themes chosen by 5 of the 8 interviewees). In the collective discourse, the issue most dear to the group

was the relationship between teacher and student. From the discussion, what can be seen is that the relationships developed in the university environment, whether with peers or with the faculty, in particular, have the potential to promote well-being, since the educational environment is not just a space for transmission of knowledge, but also of construction of subjectivity.

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In higher education institutions, the possibilities of relationships with peers go beyond classroom boundaries. The diversity of community-based activities, of countless natures such as arts, culture, sports, leisure, available in the university environment, is yet another way of guaranteeing affinity meeting between students and promoting exchanges of experiences and affections. When a culture of care and well-being aimed at the university community is created, inviting individuals to play a leading role in structuring the reflection on themes that are dear to them, health promotion assumes the aspect of creating spaces for citizenship, participation of the

subject and construction of their own health process (ARAÚJO et al., 2012).

However, when such initiatives, which demand time and involvement on the part of students, do not have a counterpart in the academic record, the chances of student engagement decrease. This is because the tendency is for students to choose an activity that brings academic repercussions, such as credits and certificates, to the detriment of another that does not offer the same advantages. Although these actions can bring you well-being and quality of life, your ultimate goal as a student is to complete the course to enter the job market.

Finally, it is understood that the involvement of the educational institution must go beyond making extra-curricular activities possible, but also stimulating the culture of community living with reservation of periods dedicated exclusively to such activities and provision of credits and certificates. They are a form of materializing the institutional policy for the promotion of mental health, jointly assuming with the student the responsibility of reserving part of their time to take care of their mental health.

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