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## SUICIDE PREVENTION AND MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION: GIRASSÓIS PROJECT

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**Abstract:** Suicidal behavior is a phenomenon with multifactorial etiology and considered a public health problem. Suicide was, in 2019, the fourth leading cause of death among young people aged 15-29. In this scenario, the creation of the university extension of ``Girassóis project``, in 2020, aimed at developing interdisciplinary actions to raise awareness about suicide prevention and promotion of mental health in contexts of social vulnerability.

**Keywords:** university extension; suicidal behavior; mental health.

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic generated a global crisis, changing interpersonal relationships and generating conditions that worsen mental health, especially that of adolescents and children, increasing risk situations, such as absence from school, increased screen time and social isolation. Although global scientific studies are still needed to confirm the effects of the pandemic on suicidal behavior, this continues to be a public health problem, as suicide rates have been on the rise in the last 10 years in all age groups (BRAZIL, 2021). Among adolescents, the suicide mortality rate in 2019 was 81% higher than that of 2010 and, among children under 14 years of age, there was an increase of 113% in relation to the rates obtained from 2010 to 2013 (BRASIL, 2021).

In this scenario, the Girassóis Project was created at ``Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas`` - a university extension project that has 20 volunteer students from various undergraduate areas (multidisciplinary team), carrying out awareness actions on suicide prevention with audiences of different ages

and different contexts, under the guidance of a responsible teacher. Between 2020 and 2021, the actions took place predominantly remotely, at the university itself and in a state public school, parish and social assistance reference center, located in peripheral regions of the city of Campinas-SP and the metropolitan region. Between 2022 and 2023, the actions expanded, encompassing other state public education and social assistance institutions (CRAS and Civil Society Organizations) in vulnerable communities.

The Girassóis Project aims to develop university extension actions that allow the construction and sharing of knowledge for qualified mental health care for vulnerable populations, especially in raising awareness of the importance of preventing suicide, violence and mental disorders.

Promoting mental health involves reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors. Thus, the Project is a conscious contribution by the University in its task of democratizing knowledge and building it within the community through actions developed together.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Between 2020 and 2022, the actions of this project were carried out in two municipalities in the metropolitan region of Campinas and focused on different community contexts, such as state public schools, parishes, social assistance reference centers, in addition to the university itself. The procedures carried out were, namely, gatekeeper training; awareness events in the 'Yellow September Campaign'; production of informative materials; storytelling and 'Emotional First Aid' workshops; in addition to conversation circles, online and in person.

Elementary and secondary school teachers participated in the activities; professionals and graduates in the areas of social assistance,

health and education; pastoral agents and families who attended the parish; University students; children and adolescents, as well as parents/guardians and employees from different sectors of the schools.

The formats and content of the activities were adapted to ensure better understanding of the different target audiences, as well as their health security during the pandemic period. It is noteworthy that gatekeeper training is one of the main intervention practices recommended by the WHO to support the prevention of suicidal behavior in community contexts and is based on the qualification of skills for adequate risk recognition, sensitive and qualified listening and guidance to care specialized in suicidal behavior.

Gatekeeper training was developed through eight group meetings lasting approximately one hour and 30 minutes, offered to adults from each group in different communities, with an average number of 10 participants, aiming to increase community awareness about the importance of prevention of suicide and violence.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Girassóis Project is a university extension work plan developed by ‘Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas’, currently composed of a responsible teacher and 20 volunteer students from various undergraduate areas (multidisciplinary team), carrying out awareness actions on suicide prevention with audiences of all age groups and diverse contexts. It is a way of responding to a Brazilian social reality in which the increase in suicide cases is notable, affecting all ages, but more dramatically among teenagers and young adults.

Thus, between 2020 and 2021, the actions took place in a public state school, parish and social assistance reference center located in peripheral regions of the city of Campinas-

SP and metropolitan region, in addition to the college’s internal public, through the Cooperative Experience Group and Solidarity of PUC-Campinas (GVCS). Between 2022 and 2023, the actions reached the University’s internal audience and expanded to educational contexts at different levels of public education and social assistance (CRAS and Civil Society Organizations) in vulnerable communities in Campinas and the region. In all environments, a safe and responsible environment was built to support awareness about the importance of suicide prevention.

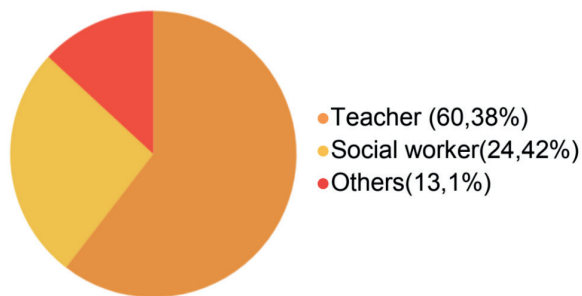
At school and community levels, it is necessary to build a culture of mental health and this initially involves working on the topic with leaders (teachers, coordinators). This strategy, suggested by Fukumitsu, was considered by the author as an ‘analogy of the airplane oxygen mask’, justifying the sequence of people benefiting from suicide prevention and postvention actions, starting with self-care, self-understanding, recognition of their own vulnerabilities so that, then, welcoming other individuals and communities is promoted (FUKUMITSU, 2019).

In 2020 and 2021, the Project reached around 1500 people, directly or indirectly. In 2022, it contributed more than 300 people. Furthermore, several activities have already been carried out: ‘Gatekeeper Training’, Storytelling, (A)Live Event: Yellow September Campaign, ‘Avatars’ Project: healthy use of screens, Emotional ‘First Aid’ Workshop, creation of informative materials, booklets, workshops, podcasts, applications and lectures.

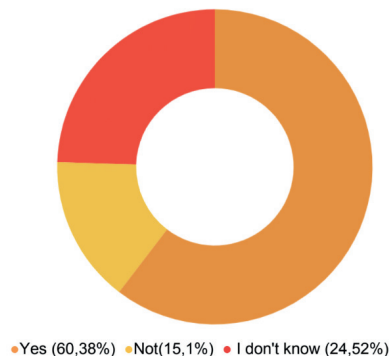
The ‘Gatekeeper Training’ carried out by the Project consists of a psychoeducation proposal in weekly contact with the communities and, based on a situational and infrastructural diagnosis of the territory, listing priority themes to work on and better awareness-raising and training strategies, according

to with the age range and conditions of the participants.

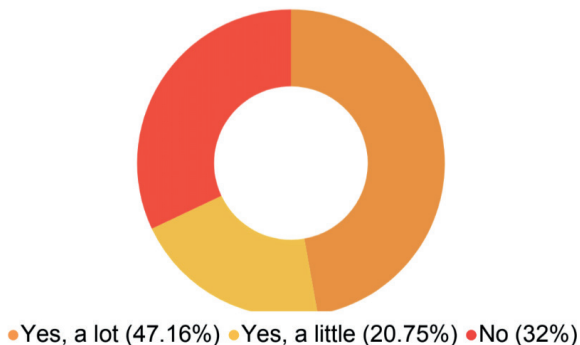
In 2022, this strategy was carried out at CRAS Hortolândia, SOS Rua (a civil society organization that aims to help homeless individuals), GVCS at PUC-Campinas and three State Schools (one in Hortolândia and two in Campinas). Using an electronic form, applied in the first training meeting (except for the GVCS), a needs assessment and characterization of the target audience began, and, from all the trained teams, 72 people responded. It was observed that the majority of the public was: female (71.7% - graph 1), white (52.83% - graph 2) and teachers (60.38% - graph 3). Regarding the phenomenon of suicide, 60.38% of participants said they had already had contact with someone who was at risk of suicide (graph 4), however, only 32% of these had no difficulty in handling the situation (graph 5).



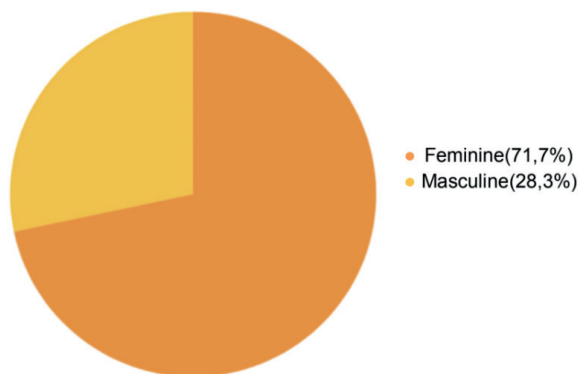
Graph 3: Profession



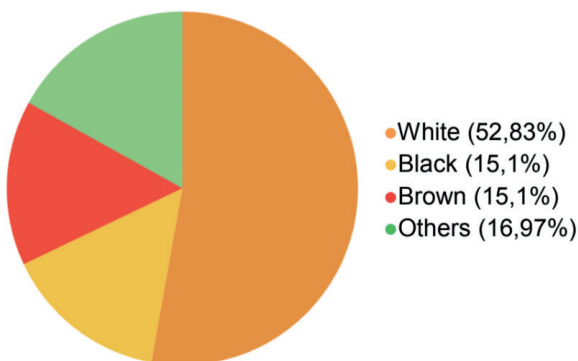
Graaph 4: Have you ever been in contact with someone who was at risk of suicide?



Graph 5: Did you have difficulty managing the situation?



Graph 1: Gender



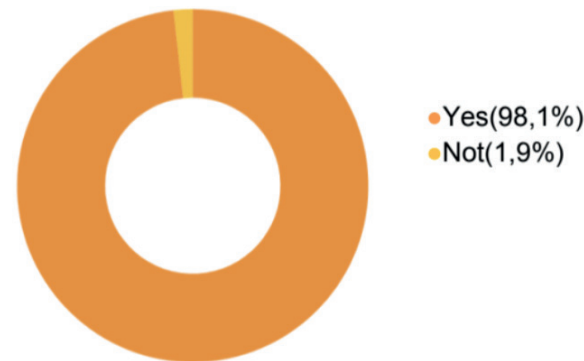
Graph 2: Ethnicity

Based on the same form, in accordance with public demand, the priority topics to be worked on at the meetings were identified. Thus, the actions were aimed at discussing and sharing experiences about: prevention (57%), the role of the teacher (53%), signs of risk (47%), support networks (40%), management (37%), self-injurious behavior (34%), definition of suicidal behavior (30%),

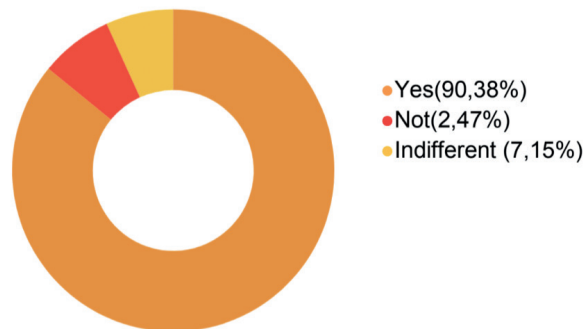
suicide prevention (27%), role of media and social networks (26%) and impact on the community (22%).

At the end of the meetings, a new electronic form was applied with the aim of evaluating participants' satisfaction with the training, which was answered by 120 individuals.

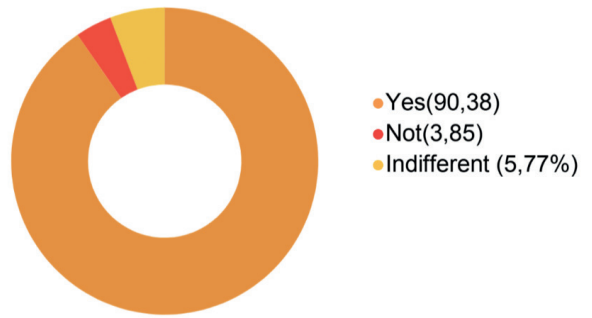
According to information, sentinel training favored reflection on stigmas and taboos (96.15% - graph 6) and awareness regarding the relevance of prevention (98.1% - graph 7) of suicidal behavior. Furthermore, 90.38% felt better able to identify warning signs (graph 8), as well as considering that the training improved their knowledge about the available care networks (graph 9). Finally, 71.15% (graph 10) stated that, after the training, they felt motivated to do something concrete in the community about preventing suicidal behavior.



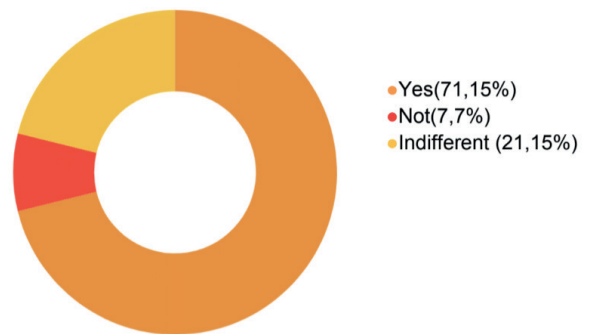
Graph 7: Did sentinel training contribute to your awareness of the relevance of preventing suicidal behavior?



Graph 8: After training, do you feel better able to identify warning signs of suicidal behavior?



Graph 9: After training, did your knowledge about the care network for people at risk improve?



Graph 10: After the training, do you feel more motivated to do something concrete in the community about suicide prevention?

## CONCLUSION

Suicide is a multifactorial and social phenomenon, as it involves several aspects in its determination, and must be understood as an important public health problem. Unlike other countries that have committed themselves to organizing public policies with the aim of reducing the growing suicide mortality rates in the population and, thus, achieving a decrease in deaths due to this phenomenon, Brazil has carried out few effective measures to mitigate these rates, being Recent data showed an increase in mortality rates between 2010 and 2019 in the country.

In view of the above, it is believed that carrying out suicide prevention actions are the main existing resource to reduce the mortality rate of this phenomenon; which can

be done through campaigns such as 'Yellow September', lectures, events, information materials. However, prevention is not enough; health conditions and healthy relationships are necessary in any cycle and social context, since suicidal behavior requires acceptance and care.

Thus, it is concluded that the Girassóis Project, by carrying out different actions in different community contexts, achieved the objective of increasing community awareness about the importance of suicide prevention. This conclusion is based on the self-assessment of individuals who participated in the psychoeducation actions carried out, when they recognized and stated that there was an increase in understanding/awareness on the topic; reduction of stigma and taboos arising from common sense; greater awareness of the importance of preventing suicidal behavior and promoting mental health; and interest in multiplying, in the community in which they are inserted, the knowledge acquired.

However, it is worth highlighting the limitations of everyday life that hinder the

favorable impacts of the activities carried out by the project, such as the presence of common-sense beliefs and taboos and religious beliefs about suicide; in addition to difficulty on the part of the population in getting in touch with the topic, language and workload impossibility for project participants, lack of institutional flow for cases of attempted suicides, among others.

Therefore, despite the knowledge of the limitations of the scope of the actions carried out are identified, the Girassóis Project was able to carry out strategic health promotion actions, valuing the social, mental and physical well-being of the community, promoting socio-educational activities to care for safely and responsibly. Expanding the scope of actions also depends on the qualification of public policies, integration of the suicidal person and other support measures that go beyond the objectives of extension actions and require the involvement of other social actors, institutions, managers and governments, in addition to society as one all.

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