








## MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS: EXTENSIONIST ACTIONS

### PROMOÇÃO DA SAÚDE MENTAL DE JOVENS E ADULTOS: AÇÕES EXTENSIONISTAS

### PROMOCIÓN DE SALUD MENTAL PARA JÓVENES Y ADULTOS: ACCIONES EXTENSIONISTAS

*Fellipe Batista de Oliveira<sup>1</sup>, Alexia Lins Costa<sup>2</sup>, Dinah Alencar Melo Araujo<sup>3</sup>, Jessica Anjos Ramos de Carvalho<sup>4</sup>, Marina Martins Soares da Silva<sup>5</sup>, Priscila da Silva<sup>6</sup>, Ana Larissa Gomes Machado<sup>7</sup>*

---

#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to report extension actions aimed at promoting the mental health of young people and adults. **Method:** this is a descriptive experience report about the extensionist experiences of members of a Tutorial Education Program (PET in Portuguese), carried out in public schools that offer the Education Program for Young people and Adults (EJA in Portuguese). **Results:** four educational actions were carried out addressing the following themes: anxiety, depression, and foods that help in the prevention and treatment of disorders, with the participation of 70 students. By clarifying the definition, etiology, clinical signs, and diagnosis of depression and anxiety, we have raised interest in the subject, so that, after sharing knowledge, students' social interaction was encouraged, and they were more empathetic and supportive of the situations experienced by colleagues and willing to seek and offer help when necessary. **Conclusion:** the implementation of interventional activities in the school environment had a significant impact on the promotion of the mental health of the students who make up the EJA program.

**Descriptors:** Community Relation; Education; High School; Mental Health; Adolescent; Adult.

---

#### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** relatar ações extensionistas voltadas à promoção da saúde mental de jovens e adultos. **Método:** trata-se de um estudo descritivo, tipo relato de experiência acerca das vivências extensionistas dos integrantes de um grupo do Programa de Educação Tutorial (PET) em escolas públicas que oferecem o programa de educação para jovens e adultos (EJA). **Resultados:** realizaram-se quatro ações educativas, abordando os seguintes temas: ansiedade, depressão e alimentos que auxiliam na prevenção e tratamento dos transtornos, com a participação de 70 estudantes. Por meio do esclarecimento da definição, etiologia, sinais clínicos, diagnóstico dos quadros de depressão e ansiedade, alcançando o interesse no assunto, de modo que, após o compartilhamento dos conhecimentos, a interação social dos estudantes foi

encorajada e os mesmos mostraram-se mais empáticos e solidários com as situações vivenciadas pelos colegas e dispostos a buscar e oferecer ajuda quando necessário. **Conclusão:** a execução de atividades intervencionistas no âmbito escolar representou um impacto significativo na promoção da saúde mental dos estudantes que compõem o programa EJA. **Descritores:** Extensão Comunitária; Educação; Ensino Médio; Saúde Mental; Adolescente; Adulto.


---




## RESUMEN


**Objetivo:** informar sobre acciones de extensión orientadas a promover la salud mental de jóvenes y adultos. **Método:** se trata de un relato de experiencia descriptivo sobre las experiencias extensionistas de miembros de un Programa de Educación Tutorial (PET), realizado en escuelas públicas que ofrecen el Programa de Educación para Jóvenes y Adultos (EJA en portugués). **Resultados:** se realizaron cuatro acciones educativas sobre los siguientes temas: ansiedad, depresión y alimentos que ayudan en la prevención y tratamiento de trastornos, con la participación de 70 estudiantes. Al aclarar la definición, etiología, signos clínicos y diagnóstico de depresión y ansiedad, hemos despertado el interés en el tema, por lo que, luego de compartir conocimientos, se incentivó la interacción social de los estudiantes, y fueron más empáticos y solidarios con las situaciones vividas por colegas y dispuestos a buscar y ofrecer ayuda cuando sea necesario. **Conclusión:** la implementación de actividades intervencionistas en el ámbito escolar tuvo un impacto significativo en la promoción de la salud mental de los estudiantes que integran el programa EJA.

**Descriptores:** Extensión a la Comunidad; Educación; Educación Secundaria; Salud Mental; Adolescente; Adulto.


---

<sup>1</sup>Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte/UFRN. Natal (RN), Brazil. <sup>1</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3012-6937>

<sup>2,4,7</sup>Federal University of Piauí/UFPI/CSHNB. Picos (PI), Brazil. <sup>2</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0220-1776> <sup>4</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2237-0144> <sup>7</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7937-6996>

<sup>3</sup>Federal University of Piauí/UFPI. Teresina (PI), Brazil. <sup>3</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0922-349X>

<sup>5</sup>Pernambuco Health Department. Recife (PE), Brazil. <sup>5</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7891-4097>

<sup>6</sup>Federal University of Vale do São Francisco/UNIVASF. Petrolina (PE), Brazil. <sup>6</sup><https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8741-7663>

\* Experience report from the extension project entitled: "Petiano in the community". Federal University of Piauí/UFPI, 2019.

**How to cite this article**

Oliveira FB de, Costa AL, Araujo DAM, Carvalho JAR de, Silva MMS da, Silva P da, *et al.* Mental health promotion for young people and adults: extensionist actions. J Nurs UFPE on line. 2021;15:e247775 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5205/1981-8963.2021.247775>

**INTRODUCTION**

The importance of physical and mental well-being for the full development of daily activities, whether collective or individual, is undeniable. On the other hand, mental health is defined as the individual's full capacity to carry out his/her competencies collaborating with the society in which he/she is inserted, besides being able to deal with everyday stressors.<sup>1-2</sup>

Promoting mental health is one of the priorities of the contemporary world and is listed among the goals of sustainable development. Recent studies indicate that disorders such as depression, generalized anxiety, and social phobia are public health problems in Brazil, directly impacting the country's economy.<sup>3-4</sup>

The promotion of mental health in adolescents between 10 and 19 years of age is crucial for a healthy adult life. In this phase, significant changes occur, including anatomical, physiological, and biopsychosocial changes. Such changes can provoke behaviors in adolescents that generate physical and mental conflicts, thus affecting their health.<sup>5</sup> During adulthood, factors such as income and type of occupation are considered risk factor for some mental disorders.<sup>6-7</sup>

Health education stands out as an effective and timely strategy to promote mental health because it is a tool that brings together scientific and empirical knowledge, promotes the autonomy of individuals and the community, and favors quality of life.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the school becomes a favorable environment for the applicability of health education specifically focused on mental health. Thus, extension actions at the school environment are essential to ensure comprehensive care for students including the promotion of mental health.<sup>9-10</sup>

In this scenario, university extension actions aim to impact and transform society and act as an articulator between research and teaching. These three university pillars can collaborate with alternatives that help meeting the community's demands.<sup>11</sup>

In this sense, the union of health education and extension actions implies a method of learning with a sociocultural character, going beyond the construction and modification of knowledge, making the meetings with the community more productive, allowing participants to address mental health issues, and verbalize their coping strategies in crises. In this way, the importance of dynamically addressing serious and relevant content, consistent with the reality of young students in public education, is reinforced.

**OBJECTIVE**

To report extension actions aimed at promoting the mental health of young people and adults.

## METHOD

This is a descriptive experience report about extensionist experiences of the members of a group of students, who are also members of the Tutorial Education Program (PET). The experiences were carried out in public schools that offer the Education Program for Youth and Adults (EJA) in the municipality of Picos (PI), Brazil. Four meetings were held between September and November 2019, based on prior contact with the school manager to define a time frame between classes to develop the actions.

The choice of the theme was made based on the need to discuss mental health with the student population, since the experiences during the formation of PET students compelled for reflections on this theme. Bibliographic studies were sought in the literature to provide scientific knowledge on the subject and to address mental health with young and adult audiences.

The planning of the extension activities consisted of five moments: I - A visit to the school was made, to approach the principals and teachers responsible for each institution to inform about the extensionist action, defining the dates and times for the activity, in addition to become familiar with the students; II - During the meeting, each PET student did specific activities regarding the central theme of "mental health", consistent with their undergraduate nursing curricula. Descriptively, with the help of a slide presentation previously prepared, the PET students of the Nursing program presented a summary about the most prevalent mental disorders, with a focus on anxiety and depression; III - PET students of the Nutrition program, in turn, made dietary recommendations that can assist in the prevention and treatment of these disorders; IV - After the initial moment, participants were offered a test with questions that assess the level of anxiety, depression and stress, and those who agreed to participate were offered a copy of the questionnaire and a ballpoint pen; V - At the end of the meeting, all PET students applied a group-dynamic activity with those present, encouraging the search for support and help.

The test used in the fourth moment of the intervention was the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21), and its main function is to measure the severity of the main symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. When filling out the DASS-21 instrument, the participants indicated the degree to which they experienced each of the symptoms described in the items during the last week, marking options between zero and three, in which zero indicates "does not apply to me" and three "applies to me most of the time". Scores for depression, anxiety, and stress are determined by the sum of the scores of the 21 items. A high score indicates that the person may have a great chance of developing some of the disorders above. However, the purpose of the action with this test was not the diagnosis, but, rather, the demonstration of the signs and symptoms that young people and adults may present.

The test has statements such as "I am unable to experience any positivity in my life"; "I tend to overreact to situations"; and "I feel that life is meaningless", among others. The result was presented individually for each student and used only to demonstrate the signs/symptoms and to warn them about the need to seek professional help in case of high scoring.

## RESULTS

Students regularly enrolled in the EJA (night shift) participated in the action. The activity developed was introduced by the PET students of the Nursing program. They initially sought to investigate the participants' level of knowledge about the theme, resulting in the lack of knowledge and lack of information regarding the conceptualization of anxiety and depression and the differentiation of symptoms.

For the content explanation, a simple and objective language was adopted, through the presentation of digital content in slide format, supporting the transfer of the information regarding the definition, etiology, clinical signs, diagnosis, and treatment of the two main pathologies affecting mental health. In this way, basic knowledge was offered to help the participants and those around them to recognize and cope with situations that refer to such diseases.

At that moment, moments of sharing were conducted for the personal exposure for the public, thus providing the creation of a bond of trust between those present. There was a noticeable resistance on the part of the participants because the theme requires a sharing of thoughts and experiences about their lives. However, with the development of the action, trust was established, and the students started to show interest, presenting their doubts, and expressing their opinions.

Subsequently, the PET students of the Nutrition program explained the beneficial foods for controlling anxiety and depression, which provide the release of specific hormones and favor the nervous and immune system. They also mentioned the foods that aggravate the pathological conditions. In this context, there was emphatic attention from the participants, making their willingness to adopt a healthy diet to improve the quality of life and reduce stress levels, explicitly.

After sharing knowledge, social interaction was encouraged with a ludic activity, facilitating the fixing of the content approached through practice, in which the participants created fictitious affective bonds with each other and, after exposing the objective of the group-dynamic, were more empathic and solidary with the situations experienced by colleagues and willing to seek and offer help when necessary.

## DISCUSSION

The target audience in question was mostly composed of young people between 15 and 28 years of age. Research has shown that the profile of EJA students is marked mostly by students of diverse age groups, parents, workers, homemakers, teenagers, young people, and the disa-

bled. They are people who have left school due to social, economic, political, or cultural factors.<sup>12,13</sup>

This type of program works mostly at night or has a greater demand for this shift because most of the attendants work during the day. A research carried out intending to verify the prevalence of depressive symptoms and anxiety in young people who were finishing high school in a public school found that, in students of the night shift, there was a greater presence of mild depressive manifestations (22.5%) and severe (2.5%), while students on the day shift had mild manifestations (10%) and no severe symptoms. It was also possible to verify that the students of the night shift, in terms of anxiety, presented a higher percentage of mild (20%), moderate (17.5%), and severe symptoms (10%), while the adolescents of the day shift had 10% mild, 10% moderate and no serious anxiety scores.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, the school is a place to discuss and propose actions on health determinants, mainly concerning the control and prevention of illness, risk situations, and diseases through epidemiological and health surveillance and clinical and therapeutic assistance.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, schools are a strategic place to implement public health policies that address mental health and to discuss and prevent mental disorders.<sup>16</sup>

The health system itself defends integrality as a qualifier of care, provided by qualified listening and welcoming reception, that must interact with the educational system seeking to identify the social and health determinants that make up the daily lives of people.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, through qualified listening, it was possible to notice that the participants lacked information about mental health. Failing to identify mental problems is one of the main obstacles to promote access to effective care, as it prevents early admission to necessary care by young people.<sup>18</sup>

In this context, the need to create and implement preventive and interventionist projects to increase knowledge about the symptoms and concepts associated with mental health is being carried out not only by professionals in the health system but also by teachers and the academic community.

There was also a notorious resistance on the part of the participants regarding the willingness to interact and communicate during the group-dynamic approach. This difficulty must be worked on continuously since communication encourages autonomy, opening opportunities to exercise resilience.<sup>19</sup>

Talking about mental health is a huge challenge due to the complexity of the topic, and the difficulty people have in expressing their feelings, whether due to subjective reasons or lack of knowledge to differentiate certain emotions, thus making self-knowledge difficult. The lack of control over these issues leads to a delay in the diagnosis of mental disorders due to the delay in

seeking specialized services, which can negatively influence educational, work, personal, and productive lives.

As mental health is a difficult subject to be approached, strategies must be created to overcome these barriers, and one of the ways is the use of recreational activities. In this study, this methodology provided a personal development expressed through empathy and solidarity, thus having a positive effect. The development of the playful aspect facilitates learning, personal, social, and cultural development, collaborates with good mental health, and prepares for a fertile state, thus facilitating the processes of communication, expression, construction of knowledge, and socialization.<sup>20</sup>

Given the above, we can highlight as a limitation of the study the reduced number of meetings held with the students given the difficulty in reconciling the dates and times of classes for the meetings that make up the corpus of the extensionist project, due to the application of tests or activities previously planned in schools.

**CONCLUSION**

The performance of interventional activities in the school environment represents a significant impact on promoting the mental health of students who participate in the EJA program, a fact found from the performance of a brief analysis about possible symptoms related to anxiety and depression in these individuals.

The execution of extension activities for the promotion of students' mental health contributed to the academic training of PET students since they shared knowledge with the population, acquired more resourcefulness in the organization of educational interventions, and contributed to the development of the community.

When promoting education and health in the school environment, it is understood that both are places for the production and application of knowledge attributed to the development and well-being of individuals. Thus, the importance of looking at all the biases found in the school environment is reinforced, focusing on education itself and promoting health education aiming at physical and mental health.

It is suggested, then, to carry out new studies on mental health involving both EJA students and teaching staff of this teaching modality so that the new extension actions are directed to the demands of the students. The present study contributes to raising the awareness of school attendants about the inclusion of educational activities in mental health in the teaching of young people and adults, as well as to seek to expand the development of extensions focused on this aspect, in addition to a greater approach in research that subsidizes this theme. The process for developing self-care in students is facilitated through access to information and understanding of mental health issues.



## CONTRIBUTIONS

It is informed that all authors contributed equally in the design of the research project, collection, analysis and discussion of data, as well as in the writing and critical review of the content with intellectual contribution and in the approval of the final version of the study.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Nothing to declare.

## REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. Mental health: strengthening our response [Internet]. Geneva: WHO, 2018 [cited 2020 Apr 21]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>
2. World Health Organization. Mental health [Internet]. Geneva: WHO, 2019 [cited 2020 Apr 21]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/mental-health>
3. Lee BX, Kjaerulf F, Turner S, Cohen L, Donnelly PD, Muggah R, et al. Transforming our world: implementing the 2030 agenda through sustainable development goal indicators. J Public Health Policy. 2016 Sep;37(1):13-31. DOI: 10.1057/s41271-016-0002-7
4. Orellana JDY, Ribeiro MRC, Barbieri MA, Saraiva MC da, Cardoso VC, Bettiol H, et al. Transtornos mentais em adolescentes, jovens e adultos do Consórcio de Coortes de Nascimento brasileiras RPS (Ribeirão Preto, Pelotas e São Luís). Cad Saúde Pública. 2020 Jan; 36(2):e00154319. DOI: 10.1590/0102-311X00154319
5. Brito US, Rocha EMB. Percepção de jovens e adolescentes sobre saúde e qualidade de vida. Rev Bras Promoç Saúde. 2019 July;32:8933. DOI: 10.5020/18061230.2019.8933
6. Ministério da Saúde (BR). Saúde do Homem: promoção e prevenção à saúde integral do homem [Internet]. Brasília: Ministério da Saúde; 2020 [cited 2020 Apr 22]. Available from: <https://saude.gov.br/saude-de-a-z/saude-do-homem>
7. Hiany N, Vieira MA, Gusmão ROM, Barbosa SFA. Perfil Epidemiológico dos Transtornos Mentais na População Adulta no Brasil: uma revisão integrativa. Rev Enferm Atual In Derme [Internet]. 2018 Apr;86(24):1-11. DOI: 10.31011/reaid-2018-v.86-n.24-art.676
8. Brusamarello T, Maftum MA, Mantovani MF de, Alcantara CB de, Educação em saúde e pesquisa-ação: instrumentos de cuidado de enfermagem na saúde mental. Saúde (Santa Maria). 2018 Aug;44(2):1-11. DOI: 10.5902/2236583427664
9. Guedes EAA, Mendes MLM, Messias CMBO. Práticas interdisciplinares de educação em saúde e meio ambiente na educação de jovens e adultos: percepção dos alunos. Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação. 2019 July/Sept;14(3):1030-1048. DOI: 10.21723/riae.v14i3.10064



10. Prado AL, Bressan RA. O estigma da mente: transformando o medo em conhecimento. Rev Psicopedag [Internet]. 2016 Mar [cited 2020 Apr 22];33(100):103-9. Available from: <http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/pdf/psicoped/v33n100/12.pdf>
11. De Deus SFB. A extensão universitária e o futuro da universidade. Revista Espaço Pedagógico. 2018 Sept/Dec;25(3):624-633. DOI: 10.5335/rep.v25i3.8567
12. Hochmann E, Mello ARC. O Perfil dos Estudantes da Educação de Jovens e Adultos de Sinop-Mato Grosso. Revista Eletrônica de Educação do Norte de Mato Grosso [Internet]. 2020 June [cited 2021 Apr 24];4(1):369-382. Available from: <http://www.cefaprosinop.com.br/site/periodicos/index.php/reenoma/article/view/286/219>
13. Gomes JA, Lima RVG. O perfil dos estudantes da EJA do 3º segmento e os fatores de permanência na escola. Revista Outras Palavras [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2021 Apr 24];16(1):66-80. Available from: <http://revista.faculdadeprojecao.edu.br/index.php/Projecao5/article/view/1388>
14. Grolli V, Wagner MF, Dalbosco SNP. Sintomas depressivos e de ansiedade em adolescentes do ensino médio. Revista de Psicologia da IMED. 2017 Jan/June;9(1):87-103. DOI: 10.18256/2175-5027.2017.v9i1.2123
15. Silva CS, Bodstein RCA. Referencial teórico sobre práticas intersetoriais em Promoção da Saúde na Escola. Ciência & Saúde Coletiva. 2016;21(6):1777-88. DOI: 10.1590/1413-81232015216.08522016
16. Lima ALO, Santos BFT, Almeida GL, Ferreira HW, Mota CP, Messias CM, et al. Educação em saúde mental no ambiente escolar: relato de caso. SaudColetiv (Barueri) [Internet]. 2019 May [cited 2020 Apr 27];9(50):1784-88. Available from: <http://revistas.mpmcomunicacao.com.br/index.php/saudecoletiva/article/view/158>
17. Luz RT, Coelho EAC, Teixeira MA, Barros AR, Carvalho MFAA, Almeida MS. Saúde mental como dimensão para o cuidado de adolescentes. Rev Bras Enferm [Internet]. 2018 Nov; 71(suppl5):S2212-2219. DOI: 10.1590/0034-7167-2016-0192
18. Gómez-Restrepo C, Malagón RN, Eslava-Schmalbach J, Ruiz R, Gilb JF. Factores asociados al reconocimiento de trastornos y problemas mentales en adolescentes en la Encuesta Nacional de Salud Mental, Colombia. Revista Colombiana de Psiquiatria. 2021 Jan/Mar;50(1):3-10. DOI: 10.1016/j.rcp.2019.09.002
19. Vieira AG, Aerts DRGC, Câmara S, Schubert C, Gedrat DC, Alves GG. A escola enquanto espaço produtor da saúde de seus alunos. Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação. 2017 Apr/June;12(2):916-932. DOI: 10.21723/riaee.v12.n2.8492
20. Fonseca NP, Pereira DD. A importância da ludicidade na prática pedagógica na educação de jovens e adultos–EJA. Formação@ Docente. 2019 Jan/June;11(1):81-94. DOI: 10.15601/f@d.v11i1.1713

## Correspondence

Fellipe Batista de Oliveira

E-mail: fellipeoliveira98@hotmail.com

Submission: 13/08/2020

Accepted: 19/04/2021

Copyright© 2021 Journal of Nursing UFPE on line/JNUOL.



This is an open access article distributed under the CC BY 4.0 assignment Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, which allows others to distribute, remix, adapt and create from their work, even for commercial purposes, as long as they give it due credit for the original creation. It is recommended to maximize the dissemination and use of licensed materials.