

Effects of an Online Positive Psychology Program on Stress, Depression, and Anxiety Symptoms of Emerging Adults

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Abstract : Emerging adulthood occurs after adolescence in a period that maybe be marked by experimentation, identity reconfigurations, labor life demands, and insertion in the work environment, which tends to generate stress and emotional instability. Health promotion programs for the development of strengths and virtues, based on Positive Psychology, for emerging adults are sparse in Brazil. The aim of this study was to evaluate the preliminary effects of an online multi-component Positive Psychology program for the health promotion of emerging adults based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Positive Psychology. The program included six online (synchronous) weekly group sessions of approximately two hours each and homework (asynchronous) activities. The themes worked were Values and self-care/Prudence, Optimism, Empathy, Gratitude, Forgiveness, and Meaning of life and work. This study presents data from a longitudinal, pre-experimental design with pre (T1) and post-test (T2) evaluation in the intervention group. 47 individuals aged between 19-30 years old participated, mean age of 24.53 years (SD=3.13), 37 females (78.7%). 42 (89.4%) self-defined as heterosexual, four (8.5%) as homosexual, and one (2.5%) as bisexual. 33 (70.2%) had incomplete higher education, four (8.5%) completed higher education, and seven (14.9%) had a graduate level of education. 27 participants worked (57.4%), out of which 25 were health workers (53.2%). 14 (29.8%) were caregivers, 27 (57.4%) had a spiritual belief, 36 (76.6%) had access to leisure, and 38 (80.9%) had perceived social support. The instruments used were a sociodemographic questionnaire, the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale, and the 12-item General Health Questionnaire. The program was advertised on social networks and interested participants filled out the Consent Form and the evaluation protocol at T1 and T2 via Google Docs form. The main research was approved (CEP n.1,899,368; 4,143,219; CAAE: 61997516.5.0000.5334) and complied with sanitary and Ethics criteria in research with human beings. Wilcoxon statistics revealed significant improvements in indicators of perceived stress between T1 ($X=22.21$, $SD=6.79$) and T2 ($X=15.10$, $SD=5.82$); ($Z=-4.353$; $p=0.001$) as well as depression and anxiety symptoms (T1: $X=26.72$, $SD=8.84$; T2: $X=19.23$, $SD=4.68$); ($Z=-3.945$, $p=0.001$) of the emerging adults after their participation in the programme. The programme has an innovative character not only for presenting an online Positive Psychology approach but also for being based on an intervention developed, evaluated, and manualized in Brazil. By focusing on emerging adults, this study contributes to advancing research on a relatively new field in developmental studies. As a limitation, this is a pre-experimental and pilot study, requiring an increase in sample size for greater statistical robustness, also qualitative data analysis is crucial for methodological complementarity. The importance of investing efforts to accompany this age group and provide advances in longitudinal research in the area of health promotion and disease prevention is highlighted.

Keywords : emerging adults, disease prevention, health promotion, online program

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