



EARLY DETECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

DETECCIÓN TEMPRANA DE PROBLEMAS DE SALUD MENTAL EN UNIVERSITARIOS

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Dear Editor:

Due to community transmission and the rising number of cases during the COVID-19 pandemic, preventive measures had to be adopted. These included social isolation and quarantine, which have had effects on people's mental health. The restriction of free movement, the discontinuity of routines, the decrease in social interaction, the lack of traditional learning methods, and the new academic, technological, and psychological demands have generated an increase in tension, stress, and anxiety in young people.

Stress is a state in which a person suffers from various emotional and behavioral disorders, produced by poor adaptation to the social environment, which can be complicated by continuous tension states, in which the organism responds with a series of physiological and psychological disorders⁽¹⁾. University life represents a stage where many students are adolescents or young adults, with new social responsibilities and greater psychosocial pressures, which may imply greater vulnerability to psychosocial disorders⁽²⁾. Moreover, university students not only face stress caused by quarantine and virtual education but also must adapt to the change from their usual place of coexistence, so adjusting to the new context will depend on whom they live with and the degree of emotional closeness with their parents, friends, children, partner, or people in their care⁽³⁾.

This implies that the student has to adapt to other norms that do not allow them to freely decide aspects of daily life⁽³⁾. The most common psychopathological disorders, along with stress, are anxiety and depression, accompanied by fears, anguish, and doubts, causing anxiety and depression levels to be high, constant, and persistent over time⁽⁴⁾.

University students are currently struggling against various symptoms of severe psychological stress and the greatest fear of academic instability after a devastating outbreak of COVID-19⁽⁵⁾. It was identified that they manifest transient emotional conditions in various academic situations, among which were identified: the beginning of pre-professional practices, presentations, and thesis preparation⁽⁶⁾. Even in a Peruvian study, it was found that students were characterized by presenting high levels of academic stress, due to certain stress factors that generated physical, psychological, and behavioral symptomatology, and given that they possessed limited coping strategies⁽⁷⁾.

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Cite as: Espinoza García A. Early detection of mental health problems in university students. Rev Fac Med Hum. 2024;24(1):213-214.
[doi 10.25176/RFMH.v24i1.6080](https://doi.org/10.25176/RFMH.v24i1.6080)

Journal home page: <http://revistas.urp.edu.pe/index.php/RFMH>

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With all these determinants, the impacts on the mental health of university students generate more stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, anger, depression, and disillusionment, which can range from moderate to severe levels⁽⁸⁾ and, above all, can affect performance during face-to-face classes, decreasing

student academic performance, for which it is recommended that academic entities be able to implement a mental health program for students, so that signs and symptoms of mental health can be identified early, achieving prompt recovery and reintegration into the academic field.

Authorship Contribution: The author participated in conceptualization, research, review, and writing of the original draft.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding: Self-funded.

Received: December 02, 2023.

Approved: March 27, 2024.

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