

The relevance of the development of work in high schools about mental health care, training students and educators to identify and deal with emotions



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Julyanna Arruda de Oliveira

Specialist in Eating Behavior from the Institute of Graduate Studies in Health (IPGS). Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: julyanna_arruda@hotmail.com

Walisson Dodo

Doctor in Linguistics from the Federal University of Ceará (UFC). Teacher of the State Education Network of Ceará – SEDUC – CE. Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: walissondodo@hotmail.com

Amanda Hannah Cunha Almeida

Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: amandahannah95@gmail.com

Cristina Lima

Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: cristinanara@hotmail.com

Caroline Diniz

Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: cdiniz0santos@gmail.com

Maria Aurineide Vasconcelos da Cruz

Specialist in Human Resources Management from Vale do Acaraú State University (UEVA). Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: aurivc@gmail.com

Márcia Milena Ribeiro da Silva

Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: milenaribeiroacd@gmail.com

Maria Lavinia do Nascimento Silva

Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: mlavinia60@gmail.com

Marina Cavalcante Aguiar

Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: marina.cavalcante@gmail.com

Rafaele Silva de Sousa

Graduated in Hospital Management from Faculdade Metropolitana de Fortaleza (FAMETRO). Student of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: rafaeles3@gmail.com

Denise Alves de Neiva

Psychologist. Master's degree in Psychology from the Federal University of Ceará (UFC). Professor of Psychology at the Maurício de Nassau University Center (UNINASSAU).

E-mail: deniseaneiva@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The objective of this text is to present the results of a field research that is part of the discipline of Interdisciplinary Practical Activities of Extension I, as a requirement to obtain approval at the end of the 2023.2 semester. The research focused on mental health in high school students, focusing on emotions. In the methodology, we conducted a field research, focusing on a qualitative analysis of the data in which we observed the daily life of students from a high school through a field diary and semi-structured interviews. To support our study theoretically and methodologically, we used the contributions of (DORSA, 2020), (SILVA; ALBUQUERQUE, 2021), TEIXEIRA; PACÍFICO; BARROS, 2023), (GUAZI, 2021), (FREITAS; SANTOS; PRADO, 2020), (PESSOA; CRUSOÉ, 2022), (BRITO ET AL, 2021), (PAPALIA; FELDMAN; MARTORELL, 2012), (BOCK, 2008), as well as normative documents of Brazilian education. The study revealed that most students: 1) face difficulties in understanding their emotions; and 2) they face difficulties in administering them in a balanced and healthy manner. In addition, the research allowed us to conclude that there is still a need to strengthen ties between family and school, there is a lack of training and qualification for teachers on the subject and that schools need a more



frequent presence of psychologists in the day-to-day routine of institutions.

Keywords: Mental Health, Emotions, Youth, High School Students.

1 INTRODUCTION

This text is the result of a research that was carried out in the discipline of Interdisciplinary Practical Activities of Extension I¹. The discipline consisted of a field research of an observational nature, mainly, and of a possible intervention. To obtain the grade of the course, we had to create a research project. The study would have to contemplate the theme "Mental health and youth in the context of High School".

Thus, this text is an unfolding of the research project we produced for the discipline. Our objective with this report is to present the main findings of our field research that was carried out in a public high school.

The general objective of the research project we carried out was to:

- ✓ to investigate the mental health of young high school students in order to identify their main demands and needs related to their emotions. And to achieve this end, we have proposed the following specific objectives:
- ✓ investigate how high school students identify and understand their emotions;
- ✓ present emotions and develop emotional awareness;
- ✓ To emphasize the need to develop work in the school context about the mental health of adolescents.

For this reason, in order to understand the theme and carry out our analysis, we call for contributions from theorists who deal with mental health, youth and how these first two are understood within the current school context.

Our text is, therefore, structured as follows: we present our methodology, based on the studies of theorists: (DORSA, 2020), (SILVA; ALBUQUERQUE, 2021), (TEIXEIRA; PACIFIC; BARROS, 2023), (GUAZI, 2021), (FREITAS; SANTOS; PRADO, 2020), (PESSOA; CRUSOÉ, 2022).

Next, we present the analysis and discussion of the results, but first, we make an introductory theoretical discussion about our theme, bringing the studies of (BRITO ET AL, 2021), (PAPALIA; FELDMAN; MARTORELL, 2012), (BOCK, 2008), among others. Then, we present the reports of the three visits, to show the results found in the interviews.

In the end, we resume our findings in the field research, reinforcing the importance of possible developments of this study and its relevance both for us, psychology students, and for the members who make up the school community in educational institutions.

¹ The discipline was taught by Prof. Master: Denise Alves de Neiva, who is also part of the production of this text.



2 METHODOLOGY

As we have seen, the objective of this study is to investigate the mental health of young people, high school students, in order to identify their main demands and needs related to their emotions and, therefore, an intervention was carried out in the discipline of Interdisciplinary Practical Activities of Extension I, in the axis of Mental Health of the Youth of Ceará. In the first stage of this investigation, a literature review was necessary *a priori*, which, as DORSA (2020) explains, constitutes a line of reasoning that conducts the researchers' investigation and seeks to answer what was produced by other researchers on the researched topic.

After the literature review, the first insertion in the field of adolescent students was carried out, with the objective of knowing the functioning of the school and capturing the needs of these young people. To this end, we conducted a participant observation which, according to Campos, Silva and Albuquerque (2021), is a method used within a qualitative research approach, in which the observer is not just a listener. The researcher joins the observed to record what happens in the environment, allowing them to obtain information through the practice experienced. It is essential that the participant observer is welcomed in the research environment, acquiring the trust of the observed group.

During participant observation, we used field diaries and semi-structured interviews with the coordinator of the Nursing Technician course and with² the professors of different disciplines of the school involved in the research. The field diary, as Teixeira, Pacífico and Barros (2023) point out, is a record document, essential in qualitative research, which describes relevant results ascertained from careful observation. Journal entries can also help in defining the research problem.

The observation process was divided into sectors: coordination, teachers' room and classroom. The semi-structured interview is a form of data collection that, according to Guazi (2021), is composed of predetermined open questions, built in advance, and complementary questions that arise from the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. The complementary questions aim to collect additional or more detailed information to clarify some relevant data in the interviewee's report.

This study complies with the norms according to Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council on research with human beings. Thus, school staff were invited to participate in the research; those who chose to contribute signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF).

In the second stage of the project, there was another insertion in the field so that we, the researchers of this study, could verify whether the data collected correspond to the reality captured in the interviews, in the field observation and in the field diaries. The analysis of data from interviews and field diaries occurred through narrative analysis. Freitas, Santos, and Prado (2020) explain that

² The school that participated in the research is a model of vocational schools in the State of Ceará, that is, students who study in this category of school, take their high school and a concomitant technical course. And the Nursing course is one of the technical courses offered at this school institution. The school participating in the research is called: Paul VI State School of Professional Education.



narratives give meaning to certain events in people's lives, and can encourage them to tell their stories, especially when the subject concerns something relevant to them. The authors also talk about the importance of writing during data collection, emphasizing that starting this process in advance facilitates the construction of ideas about what the data points to, how we can analyze them and, especially, the meanings they carry.

As for data collection, it began from the first visit to the school, with the coordination of the Nursing Technician course, based on a semi-structured interview, with pre-selected questions about the students' needs related to their mental health and about the difficulties encountered by educators to welcome, identify, manage and refer students to an adequate follow-up.

In the second moment, a semi-structured interview was conducted with some teachers who teach subjects that are part of the curriculum called "Life Project" and "Citizenship Training", which allow students to talk about their demands related to school difficulties, internships related to vocational training and other demands that may arise.

In the classroom, in order to achieve the objective of investigating the mental health of young high school students, in order to identify their main demands and needs related to their emotions, we used cards that had two simple questions, with which we could identify if and how these young people deal with their emotions and know where to seek help. These cards were answered anonymously and without any identification, all collected in sealed boxes.

The target audience in question was high school students, all enrolled in the public institution, in which we visually analyzed and with precise notes the behavior of young people, seeking to understand the issues and deficiencies to be worked on and improved within the available resources we found³.

At this stage of the investigation carried out with the students, the interviews and the answers to the boxes were analyzed according to Bardin's Content Analysis method, which, as detailed by Pessoa and Crusoe (2022), divides the analysis into three phases: pre-analysis; exploration of the material and treatment of the results; inference and interpretation. In the pre-analysis, the planning, the organization of the material and the structuring of the first ideas obtained are carried out. It is at this stage that the most frequent subjects for the elaboration of the objectives that will guide the research are found. In the exploration phase of the material, the information contained in the material that

³ In short, the moment of the visit took place in stages: in the first, we presented ourselves at the school and talked to the school management and the coordination of the technical nursing course, which were the classes that participated in the research (students from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd years, totaling 120 students). In the second stage, our investigation took place with the teachers. And, in the third stage, we conducted an interview with the aforementioned students.



responds to the objectives of the research is analyzed. The third phase works on the results, which are analyzed, detailed, and interpreted in order to carry out a possible intervention⁴.

3 THE EXPERIENCE REPORT: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the data of our research, it is appropriate to bring a brief theoretical discussion that helped us to understand the relationship between mental health and high school students, with a focus on emotions⁵.

Adolescence (10 to 19 years old) is the phase that prepares young people for adulthood. The mental health of young people depends on physical, *emotional* and social factors. Exposure to risky situations, such as abuse and violence, can affect cognition, self-esteem and autonomy of adolescents, and these complications can extend into adulthood.

It is estimated that half of adolescent mental health problems occur around the age of 14 and that 10% to 20% of adolescents worldwide have mental health problems, but few of them are identified, making treatment impossible. In Brazil, it is estimated that one in six adolescents has a mental disorder, increasing the risk of depression, self-mutilation, suicide attempts, and completed suicide (WHO, 2023; UNICEF, 2023; PAPAPOLY; FELDMAN; MARTORELL, 2012).

Depression in adolescents can occur due to the influence of biological changes such as puberty and hormonal changes - a period in which there is *mood instability and* intensity of emotions -, by chronic diseases, body changes or even by external stressors, such as bullying at school and family neglect. It is more common for depression in young people to appear as irritability or difficulty feeling pleasure.

In adolescence, most cases of self-harm occur in girls and women, because this gender is the one that suffers the most from sexual violence, mistreatment, and abandonment, in addition to the discrimination experienced by women worldwide. The most used means of self-harm among women is poisoning; among men, it is body strength (BRITO et al, 2021; PAPAPOLY; FELDMAN; MARTORELL, 2012).

It is necessary to understand that these problems happen, since our young people have not learned to deal with their emotions in a balanced way. Therefore, it is necessary to work more strongly on this theme in the daily life of the school. Of course, the school doesn't have to be alone in this process, nor should it. But, yes, we reiterate: this theme needs to appear more forcefully in the school routine.

⁴ Although, in our research, we carried out an intervention, which took place on our fourth visit, we decided, in this report, to present only the first three stages, since our main objective with this text is to disseminate the demands and needs of the students who participated in the research in relation to emotions and how they deal with this theme.

⁵ For reasons of space and because it is not our objective here, we will not present the studies that deal with emotion vs. feeling. However, we clarify that the following theorists were read so that we could carry out our research: (REEVE, 2006) and (PISANI et al, 1990).



The difficulty in identifying mental health problems in young people hinders referral to appropriate treatment, and the school environment is a place that can favor this process, avoiding harm in the learning and development of these young people. Therefore, it is essential to create psychoeducational programs that train teachers to identify and refer students with mental health problems for treatment, in addition to reducing the feeling of overload regarding the difficulty of meeting the needs of these young people.

In this sense, working on mental health, focusing on the emotions of young students, is a necessary task. Therefore, it is important that educational institutions are sensitive to this agenda, considering the student in all its spheres.

Considering this, the entire school community, managers and teachers, needs to understand that the function of the school should not be emptied in teaching practices only, since we are dealing with people in the teaching and learning process. For this reason, mental health in youth should be part of the agenda of public policies for education, ensuring financial assistance for training programs, as well as the inclusion of topics on general mental health in the teachers' curriculum (BRITO et al, 2014).

The development of public policies aimed at young people is also essential to ensure the process of renewal of society through opportunities and rights, such as inclusion in the labor market and the development of intervention projects for personal and professional growth. The absence of well-established public policies for youth generates unemployment, inequality and difficulties in the pedagogical sphere (BOCK, 2008).

At this juncture, it is necessary to understand that education is a right of all, therefore it must be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, aiming at the full development of the person, his preparation for the exercise of citizenship and his qualification for work (BRASIL, 1988, chap. III, art. 205). However, this goal can only be achieved when care for students' mental health is an inherent agenda of all educational institutions.

Thus, situating youth in the context of the New High School implies understanding the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC)⁶ and its importance in structuring and configuring this new perspective of thinking about teaching and learning and how youth are contemplated in this process.

Ten general competencies are advocated that unify the rights of learning and development of young people, guiding them in the formation of a fair, democratic and inclusive collectivity.

In the pedagogical scope, some important premises are considered, such as the focus on the development of skills, defining essential learning beyond the minimum content taught; the commitment to integral education, breaking with discrimination and prejudice, strengthening respect for diversity;

⁶ The BNCC is a normative document that defines the organic and progressive set of essential learning that all students must develop throughout the stages and modalities of Basic Education, so that their learning and development rights are assured (BRASIL, 2018).



and the development of curricula and pedagogical proposals that consider the needs and interests of the student, clearly understanding their differences (BRASIL, 2018).

From this perspective, young people should be considered diverse, dynamic and active in their education process; therefore, their insertion in the world in an autonomous and critical way should be ensured. It is, therefore, up to high schools to contribute to the training of young people so that they are able to make informed decisions and with responsibility, providing experiences that guarantee them learning and respect for their rights. This new structure values, therefore, youth protagonism, as it enables academic deepening and professional technical training; and ratifies the organization of High School by areas of knowledge (BRASIL, 2018).

Therefore, the school will be guided by this perspective and will be preparing the student to know how to deal with different emotions in a balanced and healthy way.

So far, we have presented our methodology and our theme, based on the contributions of scholars. Now, let's dive into the analysis of our data. However, it is pertinent to first contextualize the place where the research is conducted and its target audience.

History of the School	The building where the school now operates was once an animal slaughterhouse, after it became the Paul VI School. Fifty-eight years ago, it was a regular school with a very bad reputation in the neighborhood, as it received repeat students from other schools. Since 2008, the school has become a professional model and has been changing the social perception of the community. Today, the school is sought after by students from all neighborhoods of Fortaleza and the metropolitan region.
Number of students by age group and grade	Currently, the school has 461 students, aged between 14 and 18 years, who are divided into 12 classes, full-time, with 3 classes (with an average of 40 students per class) per course. The courses available at the school are: Nursing Technician, Accommodation Technician, Computer Network Technician and Occupational Safety Technician.
School Sectors	Intended for students, there are 12 classrooms, 4 laboratories for technical courses, 1 computer lab, 1 science lab, 1 library, 1 training itinerary room for the disciplines of the diversified base, 1 sports court, 1 student council room and 1 auditorium, the student bathrooms (male and female) and the school staff bathroom. In addition, there are the teachers' planning rooms, the class director teacher's management room, the coordination room, the principal's room, the secretary's office, the kitchen and the cafeteria.
Dropout and approval rates	According to data from the school's pedagogical coordination, the dropout rate is zero, but there are students who are transferred to other schools for various reasons. The approval rate is 100%, since the philosophy of the vocational school is to spare no effort so that the student succeeds at the end of the three years of training.
How does this index rank when compared to other schools?	Compared to regular schools, vocational education schools live a very different reality, with high performance rates, including students participating in knowledge olympiads, high employability rates, and good rates of insertion in higher education. There are no major problems related to violence or indiscipline.
What activities are currently developed by the students?	Students stay in school full-time, attending 9 classes a day from the subjects of the common national base, the subjects of the technical base, and the subjects of the diversified base. Some students participate in practices of the school's sports teams at the end of class time, another group of students is part of a team of protagonists who help during class breaks. All 3rd year students are in curricular supervised internship in the afternoon. There are students who are part of a German language project at school. In the first semester, students in the 3rd year of the Nursing Course develop a 200-hour social project aimed at the community. During the school year, students also participate in some projects such as Culture Fair, SIPAT, etc.



After contextualizing our field of research, we will present below the report of the visits and our impressions of the information obtained.

3.1 FIRST VISIT: THE MANAGEMENT'S VIEW OF THE THEME OF HEALTH, METAL AND YOUTH

On the first visit, the whole group was introduced to the two coordinators of the Paul VI School, the General Coordination and the Coordination of the Technical Nursing Course. The coordinator of the course brought us several demands aimed at the mental health of both educators and students.

The need for training of educators to identify and manage the needs of students regarding their educational, professional and social anxieties was raised, as well as the need for a more frequent presence of psychology professionals to deal with the high rate of students, who have diverse psychopathologies and great mental suffering, and these are welcomed, in most cases, by health educators, such as nursing technicians, but they are found in smaller numbers.

We also collected information about the class schedule so that we could take action, based on our brief knowledge. We were presented with the class options of the "Life Project", which is part of the discipline of the diversified base, and the "Citizenship Training", which is part of the conversation circle in which educators welcome and try to manage the students' needs about school, internships and the social.

Classes are divided into classes (1st, 2nd and 3rd years), days and times distributed throughout the week. The next steps were defined by the group, in a meeting, where we discussed the intervention to be carried out, the distribution of activities and the scheduling of the next visits.

3.2 SECOND VISIT: THE TEACHERS' VIEW OF THE STUDENTS' NEEDS

Based on the information obtained directly from the teachers, important questions arose. They don't have the right knowledge to deal with the situation involving the mental health of young people. According to teachers, students report that they face physical and verbal assaults, anxiety attacks, and even rape, but teachers are completely unprepared to help students as best they can and prevent further trauma.

Even without in-depth knowledge of the subject or a systematic approach, teachers report that they identify something is wrong through sudden changes in young people's behavior. They often watch for warning signs, such as sudden onset of crying, distress, or rapid breathing. The pandemic has intensified the sudden changes in young people's emotional reactions to distracting screen devices (PC, Mobile) and are associated with a variety of adverse effects on physical and mental health.

Surprisingly, the partnership between the school and the families is almost non-existent in this context. The lack of mutual interest makes it clear that there is no space for effective dialogue. The



school, lacking adequate qualifications, finds itself unable to conduct essential conversations that could address these mental health issues. The request for behavioral reports by families is a rarity, they are requested only in extreme cases, such as for the identification of disorders, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD).

The teachers proposed sensitive topics for discussion, such as drugs, relationships, respect, and nonviolent communication. However, one of the most complex issues is the issue of gender identity, since many reflective students are in the process of becoming aware of their identity.

Also, the question arose as to whether teachers came together to address these unusual incidents with students and find effective solutions. However, the teachers noticed that most of these meetings focused on problem solving and were limited to the exchange of experiences and feelings among themselves.

The unanimous complaint was that the psychologists of the Department of Education (Seduc) did not provide effective support and supervision in schools. Access to mental health professionals appears to be available only in extreme cases, after rigorous screening, which unfortunately leaves many students at the mercy of their emotional and psychological needs.

It can be seen, therefore, that this situation requires an urgent change in the approach and support given to young people in their educational and emotional journey.

3.3 THIRD VISIT: WHAT DO THE STUDENTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS TOPIC?

We carried out another observation visit. As we have already explained, the first one happened with the purpose of the group and the educational institution getting to know each other, so that, on the occasion, we could present the proposal of the discipline "Interdisciplinary Practical Activities of Extension I" to the school management, in addition to investigating the management's view with regard to the research theme.

Afterwards, the group carried out a visit in which the focus of observation was the teachers, so that we could diagnose possible needs of the school, considering the teacher's point of view. In this third visit, the focus of the observation fell on the figure of the students, since our objective, with another visit, was to identify what the students' needs were, considering the student's own point of view. Below, we report on how our visit was structured and organized.

This third visit took place in two moments: part of the group was in the morning; The other part of the group went in the afternoon.

The group that went in the morning was responsible for talking to the school management about how the visit would take place. The initial idea was to divide ourselves by class, so that we could observe at least one hour/class.



However, the school's coordination made some considerations, which restructured the visit: before, our idea was to make a box with questions related to emotions; We would enter the classrooms, introduce ourselves, talk about the methodology of the little box, and then remain in the room, just observing phenomena and happenings and writing down pertinent points that were observed in class.

However, the coordinator's speech reoriented our intention and we had to change the format of our observation visit: it was then agreed that, after the students' break, we would enter the classrooms, make our presentation and explain the purpose of our visit, emphasizing the importance of their participation in the methodology of the question box. From the students' answers, we would have a panoramic view of their needs and the extent to which we could intervene.

By way of clarification, we explain below how we restructured our visit in order to correspond to the guidelines of the school coordination.

At the school, there are three classes of the Nursing course in the following years: 1st, 2nd and 3rd of High School (with 45 students, 42 students and 40 students, respectively). As there were four members of the group, we made the following division: for each room, we directed one member, and the fourth member tried to accompany the three students a little to be able to record the photos.

In order to standardize how our approach would be in the classroom, before addressing the classes that would receive our visit, we agreed that our speech would be structured in four moments:

- 1) greetings of welcome;
- 2) presentation of the group;
- 3) our goal with the visit to the school;
- 4) the methodology of the question box and the importance of the class's participation in the activity.

At the time, it was explained that the box would remain in the room all day, so that, as the students answered the questions, they would put their answers in the box, because, in the afternoon, the other members of the group would come to the school to pick up the box with the students' answers. We also explained that if their answers didn't fit on the paper we handed out, students could feel free to write on a larger paper. At the end of the approach, we gave a thank you to the classes, excused ourselves and met again in the coordination room.

In the afternoon, the school received a visit from the other members of the group who went to collect the boxes.

After these two moments, the group mobilized to appropriate the answers left in the box by the students. It is interesting to return here to the two questions asked to the students, which were:



QUESTION 1:

"How do you usually relate to your emotions and understand them?"

QUESTION 2:

"Do you have knowledge of how and where to find emotional support when you need it? Let us know."

The objective with these questions was to be able to identify the needs of the students of this school and the possible intervention actions, while considering how far we could intervene and how we could help in these demands.

After having access to the students' answers, we have listed numerous and diverse responses that, for reasons of space, we will present, in the report, the ones that were most repeated.

For question 1, it is relevant to highlight that the vast majority of students answered: 1) that they do not know how to deal with their emotions, having difficulty managing them; 2) others feel confused when dealing with their emotions or with certain emotions; 3) they don't know how to deal with them, sometimes depending on the moment, the situation, the emotion; 4) or who don't fully understand their emotions.

By analyzing the students' responses, we can identify that they face difficulties both in understanding their emotions and in managing them.

When it comes to question 2, there is also a variety of answers that we consider important to record, for example: although some answered that they go to therapy, or ask for help at CAPS or call 188, most students revealed that they keep the problems they face to themselves; others, in a mystical-religious bias, revealed that they usually vent to God, which does not fail to characterize a certain type of introspection.

The answers to the second question make us reflect on the need to learn how to deal with our emotions and feelings and to talk about the importance of seeking help whenever necessary.

Having carried out this moment of observation/listening to the different members of the school community (management, teacher and students) was important, because it confirmed our hypothesis that it is necessary to develop and strengthen work in schools that address the care of the mental health of young people and that, therefore, it is never too much to focus on this theme in the school context, since it has become more and more present as an urgent agenda that can never be ignored.

4 FINAL THOUGHTS

We saw that the main objective of this report was to disseminate the results of a field research, whose theme was emotions in the school context of high school students.



From the visits, we were able to contact that there is still much to be done in schools so that students feel supported and, thus, learn to deal with their emotions adequately, balanced and healthily, since most students face difficulties both to understand their emotions and to manage them.

The survey also revealed that the other members of the school feel the need for more education and training on mental health, in order to be able to deal with the subject, in addition to a more marked presence of psychologists to work in this context and a strengthening of the bonds between family and school.

For this reason, we believe that emotional awareness can teach teens and young adults that they are able to learn to identify and name their emotions, which is key to better communicating what they are feeling and seeking support when needed.

A possible outcome of this study is its resumption, with the objective of a more in-depth analysis of the responses, demands and difficulties that were perceived during the visits, to develop new studies based on these findings.

Finally, we also hope that, with this experience, this being our first insertion in the field of the psychologist profession, we can develop more technical skills with the young public.



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