

University Extension Project as a Health Promotion Instrument during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Patrícia Costa dos Santos da Silva

College professor, Graduate Nursing Course - Medical school, University of Uberlandia.
Uberlandia, Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9643-1865>

Email: patriciacosta@ufu.br

Lívia Ferreira Oliveira

College professor, Graduate Nursing Course - Medical school, University of Uberlandia.
Uberlandia, Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1978-7889>

Email: liviaenfermg@ufu.br

Mariana Ramos

Graduate student, Graduate Nursing Course - Medical school, University of Uberlandia.
Uberlandia, Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3230-8424>

Email: mari.ramos2009@hotmail.com

Michele Aparecida Silva Maciel

Graduate student, Graduate Nursing Course - Medical school, University of Uberlandia.
Uberlandia, Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3230-8424>

Email: michele_unitri@hotmail.com

Luana Araújo Macedo Scalia (Corresponding author)

College professor, Graduate Nursing Course - Medical school, University of Uberlandia.
Uberlandia, Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1000-8738>

Email: luanascaliam@ufu.br

Efigênia Aparecida Maciel de Freitas

College professor, Graduate Nursing Course - Medical school, University of Uberlandia.
Uberlandia, Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4434-7762>

Email: efigenia@ufu.br

Andréa Mara Bernardes da Silva

College professor, Graduate Nursing Course - Medical school, University of Uberlandia.
Uberlandia, Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5126-1110>

Email: andrea-bernardes@hotmail.com

Suely Amorim de Araújo

College professor, Graduate Nursing Course - Medical school, University of Uberlandia.
Uberlandia, Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9234-166X>

Email: profasuelyamorim@ufu.br

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the reality, made social isolation urgent aiming at reducing the contagion of the disease and, as a consequence, had to interrupt the classes and actions of extension projects in person. In this aspect, the Internet has become a possibility of interaction between teachers, nursing students and the community in an extension project university entitled: "Aromatherapy as a tool for coping in times of pandemic. Thus, the present study is a report of the authors' experience in the project of aromatherapy as an activity for health promotion in times of pandemic by COVID-19. A descriptive qualitative report was carried out on the experiences of the authors with the use of a virtual platform as an alternative informative content on the subject, during this period. The project was carried out in five weeks, with three synchronous meetings, the programmatic content was guided by scientific evidence, with guidelines of great importance to the public assisted with the aim of promoting health and be a tool for coping in times of pandemic. Thus, access to health promotion and exchange of knowledge of the target audience of the extension project was expanded.

Keywords: Health Promotion, Aromatherapy, Covid-19

1. Introduction

In a moment of great technological and scientific advances, with data being processed at an extraordinary speed, an increasing demand for worrying information has become part of people's routine, among which is the news of a serious disease that is still not understood by the medical and scientific community. However, despite the obscurity surrounding this disease, it is known that it is contagious and has no specific curative treatment; in some more susceptible people, it causes a severe acute pneumonia, which can be fatal (Bai et al., 2020).

A global alert was issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) in January 2020, through a statement inferring that a disease caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), is a public health emergency of international significance (Paho, 2020). Despite this, as soon as December

2019, the world was already hearing news of Covid-19 cases generated from the global epicenter in Wuhan, China (Kiplin Guy et al., 2020).

Faced with this scenario, several sectors have joined efforts, especially the public health services, aiming to ensure an adequate provision of equipment and beds in intensive care units (ICU). In this sense, the health authorities and rulers of all countries, especially those most affected by the pandemic, recommended and decreed, to a greater or lesser degree, duration and territorial extent, quarantine measures and social distancing (Brooks, et al., 2020; Ornell, et al., 2020).

However, the proposition of these measures for the control of the pandemic generated consequences in various aspects of life and health conditions and, among them, significantly, in the area of mental health. Psychic suffering, the presence of mental disorders and changes in the quality of sleep have negative effects on the routine and quality of health and life of individuals, contributing to an important percentage of years lived with disabilities (Whiteford, et al., 2013; Barros, et al., 2019). In periods of epidemics and social isolation, the incidence or worsening of these conditions tends to increase.

In this aspect, Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (ICPS), which have been achieving visibility worldwide, mainly because the World Health Organization (WHO) itself reinforces its potential, can be an important instrument to face the pandemic. In Brazil, such practices have also been reaching prominence, obtaining legal support from SUS through Ordinance No. 971, which regulates and proposes the use of these practices in state, municipal and federal care units (Gnatta, et al., 2011). Thus, the ICPS act as an important light technology for health promotion, disease prevention, and minimization of clinical signs and symptoms already installed.

Among these practices, aromatherapy can be mentioned as an important tool that has been used in dealing with stress and contributing to the improvement of quality of life (Son, et al., 2019).

Therefore, aromatherapy can be understood as a complementary practice proposed as a instrument for the relief of health aggravations, with several international and national studies pointing out the benefits of the use of essential oils reflecting positively on health, well-being and quality of life (Nasiri & Mahmodi, 2018; Souza Dias, et al., 2019; Yang, et al., 2020; Yap, et al., 2019).

In this context, this study proposes to report the experience of a university extension project that used aromatherapy as an activity to promote health in times of pandemic by COVID-19.

2. Methodology

This is a descriptive study, of the type of experience report, referring to university extension activities, which can be understood as a social and scientific movement of an interdisciplinary and educational character that enables the interaction, communication and the exchange of knowledge between actors of society and the university. This exchange is essential for the extension to perform three crucial functions: : the academic, based on theoretical-methodological knowledge; the social, enabling the organization and construction of citizenship; and the articulator, which occurs through the actions carried out (Serrano, 2006). The actions were carried out by a group of nursing course teachers during the months of May and June 2021, in order to promote health and provide a strategy to deal with Covid-19 through health education based on aromatherapy activities, a calendar of activities was developed according to figure 1

Extension: Aromatherapy as a instrument for coping in times of pandemic

Audience: internal and external community –Total workload: 20 hours

Start: 04/05/2021 and End: 01/06/2021

Figure 1 - Chronogram of the developed activities, Uberlândia - MG, 2021

| Modality | Date | Activities |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Synchronous | 5/04 | Online activity using the Mconf platform Reading of scientific articles and educational videos and evaluation of the activity through questions. |
| Asynchronous | 5/11 | ading of scientific articles and educational videos and evaluation of the activity through questions. |
| Synchronous | 5/18 | Online activity using the Mconf platform. Reading of scientific articles and educational videos and evaluation of the activity through questions. |
| Asynchronous | 5/25 | Reading scientific articles and educational videos and evaluation of the activity through questions. |
| Synchronous | 6/01 | Online activity using the Mconf platform Reading of scientific articles and educational videos and evaluation of the activity through questions. |

Font: The authors

The university extension project was carried out through of the Mconf Web Conference Platform, which allows real-time communication, and is disseminated on social networks and WhatsApp® groups. Participated in this project 43 people, of both genders. As for the students who participated as moderators of the project, we had two undergraduate nursing students. This experience report is the product of a university extension project, entitled: "*Aromatherapy as a tool for coping in times of pandemic* " which was approved by the Coordination of Extension (COEXT) of the Medical School of the Federal University of Uberlândia .

The extension project had an organizational script, exposed in Figure2. The activities were developed in five weeks, with a total workload of 20 hours, divided into four hours/week. In three weeks, as shown in figure 1, online meetings took place in real time on the Mconf platform, which took place on Tuesdays, from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM. In addition to this synchronous activity, it was made available by e-mail and through a group on WhatsApp®, didactic material about aromatherapy. This material was composed of scientific papers on aromatherapy, after reading, the participants had to answer ten questions using a form on Google forms. The participants who had 50 percent of correct answers to the questions and 75 percent of attendance in the proposed activities were entitled to a certificate of participation in the university extension project.

The following learning objectives were established for this extension project:

- To learn about the use of aromatherapy, as a instrument for coping in times of pandemic;
- To establish a simple knowledge base for the use of essential oils by creating a space for dialogue;
- Reflect on guiding questions about holistic self-care and the natural way to keep the self and its family healthy.

The subjects worked during the weeks were the following:

- 1- What is complementary integrative practice?
- 2- What is aromatherapy?
- 3- What are essential oils?
- 4- Techniques for the application of aromatherapy
- 5-Evolution of aromatherapy in history
- 6- Methods for the extraction of essential oils
- 7- Precautions for the use of essential oils
- 8-Care in the use of essential oils
- 9-Contraindications of essential oils
- 10-Scientific evidence on the main essential oils

In the first meeting there was a moment of welcome through a song, then the following guiding question was asked: How are you feeling now? After this welcoming moment, the proposed content followed, as in figure 1.

The second meeting also started with a song, and then the participants again had the opportunity to expose their emotions and feelings. Then, the content was presented as shown in figure 1.

In the closing, there was an opportunity for the participants to share their experiences, in an exchange of knowledge. To close the project's activities, a song with a message was also used.

3. Results and Discussion

The University Extension Project "Aromatherapy as a tool for coping in times of pandemic" was developed to adapt to the changes resulting from the pandemic of COVID-19. To promote the health of the community and of nursing students and other related courses, in order to minimize the impact that the social distance brought, as well as to continue contributing to the education of undergraduate and graduate students, the activities occurred remotely and with the dissemination in social networks Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp groups. In the social network, the posts were related to information about health promotion using aromatherapy. The publications were based on evidence-based practices (research articles or books), in order to provide greater knowledge about aromatherapy.

In this context, the university extension project was a unique experience that contributed as a strategy for coping in times of pandemic. The construction and effectiveness of the project faced difficulties and potentialities that are described in table 1, presented below:

Table 1. Describes the potential and difficulties presented in the development and implementation of the project and university extension "Aromatherapy as a tool for coping in times of pandemic. Uberlândia, MG, Brazil, 2021.

| POTENTIALITIES | DIFFICULTIES |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-Opportunity to expose feelings | 1- Difficulty with internet connection |
| 2- Space to exchange experiences | 2- Difficulty in accessing the platform |
| 3- Health promotion | 3-Lack of time |
| 4- Providing an opportunity for the students to experience the construction of a university extension project | 4-Excess of information through the virtual format |
| 5- Divulagation of aromatherapy as an ICPS | 5- Too many online activities, which paralyzes the person |

The context of the pandemic generated enormous suffering and scientific evidence shows the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 as a specific global human disaster. In this aspect, the university extension project, which was conducted through an online platform, sought to give participants an outlet to expose their feelings. The opening of the project was done with a song, which aimed to promote a warm welcome, and then the following guiding question was asked: How are you feeling now? This question allowed the participants to talk about their emotions. A study points out that the resources of mental health services in several countries around the world are limited and will be further hampered by the increased demand for mental health services due to the global pandemic of COVID-19 (Ćosić, et al., 2020). Thus, a new mental health service-based approach in online format is proposed in the face of lack of access to mental health services, which include artificial intelligence, telepsychiatry, and a range of new technologies, such as computer assisted mental health tools and services based on the internet (Ćosić, et al., 2020). These tools and means should be used as a relevant part of the whole package of measures to minimize the negative effects of the global coronavirus pandemic on mental health (Ćosić, et al., 2020). In this context, the university extension project, played an important role by digital means in minimizing stress and by promoting a virtual welcoming environment for the participants.

In general, the development of apps for mental health care is more effective when they can be customized to each patient's needs and care. The Croatian experience directs toward advances in the development of instruments and tools for emotion gauging, stress mitigation, and prevention of stress-related disorders (Torous, et al., 2020; Ćosi, et al., 2020).

The extension project also created a space for dialogue and exchange of experiences, teachers from different disciplines and nursing students who participated and interacted in an atmosphere of sharing knowledge and reflections.

Regarding health promotion, the extension project proposes to be one more tool to improve people's health care. In this aspect, the literature points out that there are still many doubts about the development and implementation of innovative tools in the online format in the health sector. On the other hand, the pandemic is revolutionizing this sector by imposing the urgency of new tools and the adequacy of the various sectors, among them, the health sector, to act in the face of the reality of social isolation (Celuppi,

et al., 2021).

The project was an opportunity for nursing students to experience the construction of a university extension project, which is consonant with a study that aimed to describe the use of digital platforms the remote teaching in a Higher Institution of São Paulo during the Covid-19 pandemic, which showed that one of the strengths of remote activities shared by students is the opportunity to develop skills and competencies extremely important in professional training: organization, discipline and autonomy (Ferreira, et al., 2020). The extension project was an important vehicle for the dissemination of aromatherapy as an ICP; in this direction, we highlight the relevance of aromatherapy in this current pandemic scenario. Aromatherapy is the aerosolization of essential oils derived from plants, such oils have aromatic properties, interact with the mucous membranes of the respiratory tract and affect the limbic system (Alschuler, et al., 2020). There are certain ways of using aromatherapy that may be beneficial in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Worth mentioning, lavender essential oil has potential therapeutic value due to its stress-reducing and anxiolytic effects (Alschuler, et al., 2020).

A study conducted in South Korea with nursing students identified the individual and combined effects of aromatherapy and music therapy on anxiety (Son, et al., 2019). Complementary alternative methods, including aromatherapy and music therapy, have effectively alleviated negative emotions among nursing students (Son, et al., 2019). The results of this study suggest that aromatherapy combined with music therapy may be effective in improving skill performance and reducing anxiety and stress among nursing students (Son, et al., 2019).

The difficulties encountered in the development of the extension project include internet connection problems, that is, in the middle of the pandemic, it was observed that the demand for internet was greatly increased, which caused the overload of access to many sites and platforms. In this sense, there is an urgent need for increased investment in digital health, which in turn will yield unprecedented access to high-quality mental health care (Torous, et al., 2020).

As regards the difficulty in accessing the Mconf platform, which was initially raised by some enrolled in the project, it was resolved by the organizing committee through the WhatsApp® application that helped enrollees to enter the platform and access it. Given this fact, the relevance of the consolidation of the digital health sector in the current context of both Brazil and the world is highlighted as a tool to improve the quality of care and expand access to health services through new platforms. In general, the various countries are experiencing a stage of reconstruction of the health area, with the incorporation of new technologies, aiming to simplify care and improve people's access to health information (Celuppi, et al., 2021).

As for the lack of time to participate in the activities proposed online, it can be considered a limiting factor for learning, in a way that affects both teachers and students, since both need dedication to teaching, both in the production of content and in the understanding and review of the subject. Studies have shown that the time spent on online activities eventually extrapolates the time spent on face-to-face activities (Pinheiro & Lima, 2016). In this sense, individuals need to use a longer break in the subject to be studied, a fact that can impact a personal mismanagement of task management, difficulty in reconciling cyber obligations with work and family commitments, and generate overwork (Mercado,2007). Therefore, commitment and engagement must be redoubled for an activity to be properly understood.

Another difficulty observed by the teachers responsible for the project was the excess of information

obtained through the virtual format, because many people still remain at home, work home office, children and adolescents frequent virtual classes, which makes them spend many hours on social networks, which often causes stress and exhaustion in front of so much information, leading to loss of interest in participating in proposals that can even act in health promotion as is this project. According to Sartório, et al., (2020) instruments that can give new meaning to the media communication at all levels, without underestimating its relevance in communication, however, bringing limits that can help maintain balance are welcome. In this sense, social networks bring people together and have the ability to prevent stress-related states arising from isolation/social distancing (Sartorio, et al., 2020). This tool can be important in its integrative, psycho-neuro-endocrine-immune aspect to combat discouragement and strengthen elements related particularly to immunity and well-being of the human being, which in turn promotes protection of the body in the face of biological threats (Sartório, et al., 2020).

4. Conclusion

The university extension project, through the remote performance of the teachers and students of the undergraduate nursing course at UFU, promoted the action entitled: "Aromatherapy as a instrument for coping in times of pandemic", consisting of distance actions through the institutional platform Mconf extending the promotion of people's health.

It was considered that to promote health and contribute to quality of life in times of pandemic, it is essential to collaborate and organize actions that make effective the new way of acting in health. Thus, it is necessary that the extension activities focus on health education actions, as well as on the development of social technologies aimed at building autonomy and empowerment, as well as on the articulation between them, stimulating the exchange of knowledge, available and able to contribute to the maintenance of emotional balance in the face of the challenges faced.

It is suggested that other higher education institutions promote interdisciplinary and shared actions involving different communities and replicate the social technologies presented here for other communities like confrontation strategy.

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