

Mental Health in Times of Pandemic: an Internal Communication Program for Server Health Care at the Federal University of Goiás

Saúde Mental em Tempos de Pandemia: um Programa de Comunicação Interna de Atenção à Saúde do Servidor da Universidade Federal de Goiás

Salud Mental en Tiempos de Pandemia: un Programa de Comunicación Interna para la Atención a la Salud del Servidor de la Universidad Federal de Goiás

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Abstract

In conjunction with emergency public health actions to control the new coronavirus pandemic, there are several efforts to reduce the negative impact on workers' mental health. The objective of the research is to understand if there is an impact relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and the mental health of the servers of the Federal University of Goiás. Through the case study, a descriptive analysis, frequency distribution and correspondence analysis were performed using the Sphinx® system, for variables with the same categories of secondary data responses, from an institutional survey carried out by UFG. The study shows that there is an impact relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and the mental health of servers, in addition, the work regime, which placed most servers in remote work, was a catalyst for mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and others. Communication presents itself as a problem and some groups of servers felt the impact at a higher level such as the elderly, professionals who have children, especially female individuals, and outsourced workers. Finally, an internal communication program for the health care of the UFG server is presented.

Keywords: Covid-1; Mental health; Communication; Education; Public sector.

Introduction

The novel coronavirus pandemic emerged in China in 2019 and rapidly spread across the world in early 2020. In conjunction with emergency public health actions to control the pandemic, China proposed emergency efforts to reduce the negative impact on public mental health population (Dong; Bouey, 2020; Stawicki *et al.*, 2020). These efforts were considered essential in emergency public health plans (Hammerschmidt; Santana, 2020; Kopelovich *et al.*, 2021).

The severity of the pandemic led some governments to adopt strict measures to control the disease, such as lockdown and social distancing (Nabuco; Oliveira; Afonso, 2020; Sarti *et al.*, 2020). Despite being essential measures, such actions affected the routine and emotional and behavioral self-regulation of individuals. Furthermore, the circulation of false information associated with measures to control the Covid-19 pandemic was also a stressful agent that caused insecurity, panic, and fear in the population (Moreira, 2021). There is evidence that mental illness was greater than the Covid-19 infection itself. (Enumo; Linhares, 2020).

In the context of education, the pandemic imposed social isolation as a preventive measure, since educational environments have a high flow of people and, as a result, are places with a greater probability of contamination. In this scenario, most schools and universities around the world had to suspend in-person classes and adopted measures for emergency remote teaching to occur, in order to contain the spread of the virus. In addition to teaching, administrative activities to support education also entered the teleworking or home office regime (Silva *et al.*, 2020).

The pandemic and its consequences impacted the routine of the 4,346 employees, including teachers, administrative technicians, professional scholarship holders¹ and outsourced workers at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG), a public higher education institution. Based on the above, it is assumed that there was an impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of employees and that there is a relationship between organizational communication and the mental health of workers. When presenting communication as a path that can positively impact people and their health, productivity and the institutional image of an organization, the question arises: how can communication contribute to reducing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health of UFG employees?

The objective of this research is to propose an internal communication program for health care for UFG employees. Specifically, the aim is to characterize the psychological suffering of employees at that institution during the pandemic. Based on this, the aim is to propose communication strategies designed to caring for the mental health of the professional academic community, which helps in caring for university staff and reflecting on the important work done by these people in the context of the Covid pandemic. -19.

Health in times of pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has globally threatened the mental health structure, well-being, and quality of life of the entire population. Quickly, expectations of safety, hope and individual and social efficacy were shaken with social isolation, which was adopted in several countries as a primary measure to combat the disease (Bierman *et al.*, 2021; Bogucki *et al.*, 2021; Deng *et al.* al., 2021; Rodriguez-Quintana *et al.*, 2021), in addition to causing dramatic changes in all aspects of the daily lives of children, adolescents, young people, adults and the elderly (Maalouf *et al.*, 2021; Tull *et al.*, 2020).

In this context, several problems emerged such as the risk of psychosis and loneliness (Lee *et al.*, 2021), family income shocks and depression (Donnelly; Farina, 2021), persistent anguish (Daly; Robinson, 2021), voluntary absenteeism (Matsumoto *et al.*, 2021), irritability and feelings of abandonment (Grey *et al.*, 2020) and an increase in the suicide rate among individuals with a positive/suspected diagnosis of Covid-19 (Sripad *et al.*, 2021). These assessments were considered for the most diverse samples, predicting variables such as culture, isolation time, pandemic period, age, profession, workers vs unemployed and even minority groups (Bukuluki *et al.*, 2020).

The main problems related to people's mental health, reported during the period 2019–2021, were stress and anxiety (Meda *et al.*, 2021), loss of sleep (Olaseni *et al.*, 2020), as well as repetitive thoughts and hallucinations (Bortolon *et al.*, 2021). There is strong evidence that many of these problems associated with psychological illnesses were already present in individuals before this time window but became chronic during the pandemic (Bierman *et al.*, 2021), when a slow response from a significant portion of the authorities prevailed to address this situation of vulnerability, not only physically, but also mentally (Sciortino; Saini, 2020).

Mental health and organizational communication

The concept of mental health has been expanded and considers, in addition to psychopathologies, issues such as quality of life, social, psychological, and emotional well-being of individuals (Scorsolini-Comin, 2015). In this sense, care and attention to mental health become essential to avoid the prolongation of psychological suffering and prevent the worsening of disorders that amplified or emerged during the pandemic (Moreira, 2021).

The excessive use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) during and outside working hours in remote work harmed interpersonal family relationships and the mental health of workers (Maeneja; Abreu, 2020). In possible cases, in addition to changing the work regime, the routine of individuals in the context of the pandemic took place mostly through digital means and this involved work activities, study, guidance on physical activities, leisure, entertainment through streaming platforms, lives, virtual games, meeting friends and family. All these activities are examples of digital mediation and aimed to alleviate the stressful effects of social distancing (Deslandes; Coutinho, 2020).

It is unthinkable not to consider communication and its role in human relationships and in building

¹ Professional scholarship holder is a category of university employees who have specific training, provide services, and are remunerated through a scholarship. Therefore, they do not have an established employment relationship.

the organizational climate (Portela *et al.*, 2020). The organizational climate has a direct link with the physical and mental health of workers and can both provide a quality environment for work development and can also trigger mental disorders. In this organizational context, it is unthinkable not to consider communication and its role in human relations and in the construction of the organizational climate (Portela *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to having a direct impact on the quality of organizational environments, internal communication is a planned area responsible for enabling interaction between the internal public and the organization, in addition to having a direct impact on the quality of organizational environments, it also reduces noise in communication (Kunsch, 1986). Strong internal communication can provide a good working environment, which contributes to greater productivity, satisfaction, and appreciation of people, therefore causing a positive impact on mental health. It is communication that generates involvement, commitment and motivation and these aspects are only maintained by the communication process itself.

On the other hand, communication failures in organizations cause psychological suffering and harm the organizational climate, creating interpersonal relationship problems and even verbal violence (Monteiro *et al.*, 2020).

As a measure to combat the pandemic, in addition to sanitary measures to prevent the spread of the disease, health communication was widely used strategically by several countries and even by the World Health Organization (WHO), which created specific channels to disseminate and publicize information about the disease and the progress of the pandemic, in addition to providing guidelines for psychological assistance to the general population and health professionals (Moreira, 2021). One of the immediate effects on organizational communication already noticed in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic was the establishment of more humanized communication on the part of organizations (ABCE, 2020).

Internal communication and public administration

Communication is widely present in organizational studies in administration, since the communication process is essential and builds social reality in organizations. In this sense, the study of communication in the context of the public sector not only has scientific value, but also social value in the application of practices in public organizations (Kochmann, 2012).

In 2019, UFG created and approved the UFG Communication Policy, an instrument that offers guidelines for the university's communication. In the document, the various communication channels used by the university are listed, but there is no specific communication channel listed aimed at internal communication that guarantees dialogue, the strengthening of the institutional image and internal cohesion between the extensive and dispersed public in the various bodies, academic units and the UFG campus.

On the other hand, strategic people management in the public sector still requires rapprochement with other sectors, such as the area of communication. The use of communication tools focusing on the organizational climate is still very restricted in the public sphere and when they are used, there is no segmentation and targeting of employees (Ferreira; Costa; Santos, 2012). Furthermore, there is a need for direct involvement and understanding on the part of senior management that the continuity of an organization depends on the recognition and appreciation of its workers (Terabe; Bergue, 2014).

Methodological procedures

The Federal University of Goiás (UFG) developed and applied the institutional research "Stay well at home, UFG" carried out in 2020, by the Secretariat of Communication (Secom) and the Dean of People Management (Propessoas), UFG bodies, on the impact of quarantine/isolation on the routine and health of UFG employees. This information was used as secondary data for analysis of this study. The sample comprises all active employees of the institution. UFG sent the questionnaire to 4346 employees with active employment and 890 responses were obtained, which represents 20.49% of the total number of employees at the institution. The largest number of respondents declared themselves to be female (56.7%), male (43%) and 0.2% did not wish to declare. Regarding the categories of servers, 49.5% of respondents are administrative technicians; 43.8% professors; 4.7% outsourced and 2.1% professional scholarship holders. The most representative age group is 31 to 49 years old (54.5%), followed by 50 and 70 years old (27%) and finally, between 18 and 30 years old (18.5%).

The data collection instrument used by UFG was a questionnaire prepared in Google Forms, disseminated through the university's social networks, institutional website and via email marketing to all

servers registered in the Human Resources Management System (SIGRH), with questions from previous health surveys about the socioeconomic profile and factors associated with the impact of the pandemic on the employees' routine.

The data collection period was from June 24th to July 3rd, 2020 and a sample with 890 responses was obtained. To obtain access to the data, an authorization form was prepared and sent to Secom, the sector responsible for the research, requesting access to the research data. After access to UFG's institutional research data was made available on the Google Forms platform, the data was exported in .xls format (Excel).

To begin the tabulation process, the data obtained was adjusted so that each line represented a response, and each column indicated a variable. In this format, it was possible to import the completed questionnaires into the Sphinx® system, a tool for analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to process univariate, multivariate, and cross-tabulations analyses. In the questionnaire, there was only a single open and non-obligatory question in order to collect suggestions and comments from participants. These responses were exported to a spreadsheet in xls format. (Excel). It was established as a criterion for the relevance of the comments, to list only those with content relevant to the study, that is, that addressed aspects of the public servant's health during the pandemic, excluding reports on subjects that were outside the objective of the research.

The methodology adopted to analyze the empirical object will be the case study, which consists of using techniques for collecting and analyzing information from multiple sources of evidence with the aim of delving deeper into the issues of a single group, in this case, UFG employees (Marconi; Lakatos, 2001).

To analyze the data, univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyzes were performed. To characterize the sample, demographic questions were indicated (gender, age, employment relationship, level of education and employment body/sector). Next, a tabulation plan was developed to cross-reference some variables, such as variables that have the same analysis category (partially agree, totally agree, partially disagree, totally disagree and indifferent). These same variables were used as categories to classify and analyze the answers to the only open question in the questionnaire, with the aim of thoroughly understanding the data presented by the research and complementing the analysis of the health status of the employees.

After the preliminary descriptive analysis, a correspondence analysis (CA) was developed, involving all variables related to the use of the Likert scale. Correspondence analysis (CA) is a multivariate technique used to facilitate understanding between the relationships of categorical variables in a contingency table (Jobson, 1992). In distance measurements, CA condenses a set of data and analyzes the geometric proximity that indicates the level of association between categories (row and column), with the greater the proximity, the greater the degree of association and the greater the distance, the greater repulsion (Bendixen, 1996).

Analysis results and discussion

Work

Regarding the work regime, 70.1% of the participants stated that they were working remotely, 21.8% were working semi-presential with alternating rotation shifts, which represents alternating shifts between in-person and remote work, and only 8.1% were working in person (see table 1).

Table 1 - Work regime for UFG employees in 2020

REGIME	FREQUENCY	%
In person	72	8.1%
Semi-presential with alternating rotation shifts	194	21.8%
Home Office	624	70.1%
TOTAL	890	100%

source: the authors

Still regarding the work regime, when asked whether they preferred the current regime to the regime prior to the pandemic, 39.9% said they preferred the previous work regime, which was completely in-person and 35.1% said they preferred the work regime current regime (remote or blended/semi-presential work) and 25.1% were undecided and stated that they might prefer the current regime (see table 2). In the reports, it is clear that some servers have adapted better to remote work by stating that "home office work is being much

more productive” [participant 1]; “this period served to evaluate remote work” [participant 2]; “I know that this is not everyone’s reality, but for me it has been a good experience” [participant 3], and with suggestions so that this work regime can be considered as an option “I make the appeal to analyze the possibility of extend it in this way after the pandemic, as far as possible” [participant 4].

Table 2 - Preference for the work regime of UFG employees in 2020

WORK REGIME	FREQUENCY	%
No. I prefer my previous work regime	355	39.9%
Yes. I like my current regime	312	35.1%
Maybe	223	25.1%
TOTAL	890	100%

source: the authors

Individuals who perceived remote work as a better work alternative also reported that they felt that the time spent commuting, for example, could be used in other ways by adopting hobbies that could positively impact their quality of life: “cooking has made me more energetic because it helps me de-stress” [participant 1]; “I discovered new hobbies, like renovating upholstery and caring for plants [...]. Working at home [...] has been really good because I’ve been making better use of my time with my partner and my cat” [participant 2]. At the same time, this group of individuals also points out that some problems, such as remote working hours that need to be resolved so that remote work is more efficient and takes into account the server’s health: “home office is productive, but guidelines must be established regarding opening hours” [participant 3].

On the other hand, there is a group with greater difficulties in working remotely, and this ends up impacting productivity and consequently the health of the server. “The feeling I have at the moment is that nothing I do is done well: I don’t dedicate myself to my children and husband, nor to work, nor to studies and much less to my home as I should and would like” [participant 5]; “remote work is double work, combining family aspects (children) and home” [participant 6]. Furthermore, there are reports that demonstrate that aspects of social interaction, common to the in-person work environment, are needed and can positively impact the employee’s mental health “[...] keeping work 100% remote... I don’t consider it healthy. It demands a lot from us, and I miss interacting with colleagues and the work environment” [participant 7]. Working in a routine mediated by screens all the time also proves to be a challenge for health and productivity at work: “(staying) all day at the computer is very tiring and ends up causing circulatory illnesses, among others. I’m exhausted from following and meeting all the demands of this time – lives, events, among others” [participant 8].

There are also employees who, due to the nature of the activity they perform, were unable to carry out their work remotely and, as a result, there was emotional exhaustion that involved fear of the virus contagion, in addition to the need to demonstrate efficiency in relation to other sectors of the sector of the university: “we are feeling internal and external pressure, as our remote work activities are very limited and we cannot take turns, as our activity requires adjustments that have not yet been met” [participant 9]. The nature of the activity carried out by the server can also affect the level of anxiety. “I feel that my daily stress and anxiety is mainly due to my work [...] which is customer service and checking documents” [participant 10].

Furthermore, there are individuals who defend the hybrid system that mixes face-to-face work with remote work, when possible: “maybe once or twice a month, I can do work from home, but every day is not healthy” [participant 11]; “when we return to normal, [...] working from home a few days a week could be an option for different sectors of UFG, saving energy and water, for example” [participant 12], are aspects presented by the participants of the research.

In the financial aspect of work, 88.4% of participants have the university as their exclusive source of income and only 11.6% have another work activity that complements their employment at UFG. It should be noted that some benefits linked to employees’ income were suspended during the pandemic period and that this may have impacted family income to some extent: “benefits such as transportation vouchers should be maintained even when working remotely. It is a salary reduction, but we are using our resources at home (energy, internet, telephone)” [participant 13].

The remote work infrastructure also presents itself as a catalyst for physical and mental health problems: “My house does not have the infrastructure for a home office, and I still have a 1-year-old baby who is very dependent on me. So, I have to work when she sleeps, which makes me more tired and irritable”

[participant 5]; “I’m exhausted from keeping up and meeting all the demands of this time [...], in addition to outdated equipment, bad internet connection” [participant 8]. “Remote work has been a great challenge [...] for planning and carrying out classes using ICDTs. But teachers need training and the number of students per class will need to decrease” [participant 7].

There is a perception that the actions developed at the institutional level do not include outsourced workers in their approaches, which leads to an understanding that there is disregard for this group. “The board’s lack of humanism towards outsourced workers [...] has been very annoying” [participant 14]. For some research participants, there is a segregation regarding outsourced workers, who are seen only as labor, but who are also part of the university and need care in terms of their physical and mental health: “[...] outsourced employees are unassisted within the institution. They do not have an apparatus like other bonds, resulting in a certain degree of segregation” [participant 15]; “[...] it would be extremely important to provide psychological support in the workplace for everyone, emphasizing outsourced workers who are always excluded. There should be a more humanized look and apparatus without distinction of bond” [participant 16].

A group that also needs special attention are the elderly, as 27% of survey participants are between the ages of 50 and 70. Since the beginning of the pandemic, this group was considered at risk and therefore suffered the immediate effects of social isolation. “I don’t feel good staying at home all day. So it doesn’t seem like retirement, I need to go work at UFG. I’ve been swimming since I was 17, I’m 62, now I haven’t swum for three months, my body feels bad” [participant 17]. “I’ve been thinking about retiring, I already receive a permanent allowance and I don’t know if I’m willing to face the challenge of teaching remotely. Online activities get me exhausted” [participant 18]. This group has also faced difficulties with remote work and the frequent use of ICTs, which can lead to early retirements of employees who can still contribute to the university.

Health

The questions that used the Likert scale assessed the health aspects of the participants and were analyzed cross-analyzed with the variables gender and work regime. Pessimistic thoughts were had by 58.2% of respondents and 41.9% disagreed or were indifferent. Women appear to be more pessimistic, in addition to individuals aged 31 to 60 years. Those who are working remotely were also more pessimistic than those who are working semi-presentially or in person. 68.2% agreed that the period triggered feelings of sadness, irritability, and fear more frequently and 31.7% were indifferent or did not agree with the statement and in these aspects, gender and work regime had no influence.

Anxiety was an aspect noticed by 71.4% of employees (see table 3) after the start of the pandemic, caused by several factors as seen in the reports, such as excessive work and increased demands. “The excess work required by the university has caused me fatigue and anxiety, with this demand for all face-to-face activities practically being transformed into remote ones [...] sometimes I feel overwhelmed and overcharged” [participant 7]. “Although face-to-face classes are not taking place, apparently the demands and demands have increased, which causes more anxiety” [participant 8].

Table 3 – Anxiety level of UFG employees in 2020

ANXIETY	FREQUENCY	%
Partially agree	312	35.1%
I totally agree	260	29.2%
Partially disagree	107	12.0%
Totally disagree	148	16.6%
Indifferent	63	7.1%
TOTAL	890	100%

source: the authors

Some individuals reported that in addition to the uncertainty of the global scenario and the disease, the pressures of their own work routine for productivity that was equal to or increasingly greater than to the moment before the pandemic were also catalysts for anxiety. “I feel very distressed because I am not able to carry out my production (research and writing articles) due to the amount of work I have to do. I feel more and more pressured to produce” [participant 19]. This pressure for productivity, reported by several

employees, also had affected their routine and concentration. “My difficulty is in setting and separating my rest times. Many times, the tendency is to work beyond the working hours” [participant 5]. “The work requires a lot of my reasoning and concentration. So, I get more anxious” [participant 6].

In the same sense, the feeling of lack of energy, boredom and demotivation were perceived by 58% of employees and 59.9% claimed that the pandemic also brought greater difficulties in concentrating on professional activities. The difficulty in maintaining a routine at home was a worrying factor for 50.1% of workers. 49.9% were indifferent or had no difficulties in organizing a new routine. People working remotely were more likely to have difficulty maintaining a routine at home than those working in-person or blended.

The biggest difficulties highlighted by respondents indicate issues with a direct impact on physical and mental health, such as doing physical activity (19%), finding moments to relax (14.3%), maintaining a routine (9.9%), maintaining organized house (8.6%) and eating healthily (7%). When crossing the gender variable with the greatest difficulties during the pandemic period (see table 4), it is clear that these same difficulties, such as finding moments to relax, meditate, keep your routine and house organized, in addition to doing physical activity, are more pronounced when it comes to female individuals, as can be seen in the reports. “The pressure of having to be a mother, a playmate, a child’s teacher (I have a 5-year-old son), cleaning the house, washing, ironing, cooking, working 8 hours a day and not having a quiet space to do so is leaving me exhausted. [...] I’m more anxious and exhausted, making many mistakes in opinions and processes that I had never made before” [participant 20]; “[...] before there were working hours, time for socializing with the family, time for household routines, now everything is together and mixed, work goes beyond 8am and being a mother and working with a small child at home has been maddening” [participant 21].

Table 4 - Difficulties during the pandemic x gender of UFG employees in 2020

GENDER x DIFFICULTIES	FEMALE	MALE
Taking care of the family	53.4% (117)	46.7% (102)
Finding moments to relax	58.2% (265)	41.5% (189)
Doing some physical activity or stretching	57.3% (348)	42.7% (259)
Doing home office	57.3% (102)	42.7% (76)
Doing meditation	66.8% (177)	33.2% (88)
Keeping the house organized	68.5% (187)	31.5% (86)
Eating healthy	57.1% (120)	42.9% (90)
Taking initiative to maintain the routine	56.7% (179)	43% (136)

source: the authors

The women’s journey appears to be exhausting, given that, historically, family and household demands still fall, mostly, on women: “... I am carrying out a quadruple journey in a much more demanding way than normally, having to carry out the roles of mother, wife and housewife while I have to be available for professional activities. Often, in order to carry out the required workday, I have to neglect domestic responsibilities, which has caused certain family conflicts and emotional exhaustion” [participant 22]. This overload of activities that involve work, home, childcare, which includes support for studies, as children also had their classes suspended, is a catalyst for the physical and mental fatigue of employees who are mothers. “I have felt very tired physically and mentally [...], hence my overload: organizing the house, cooking, taking care of the children and school” [participant 23].

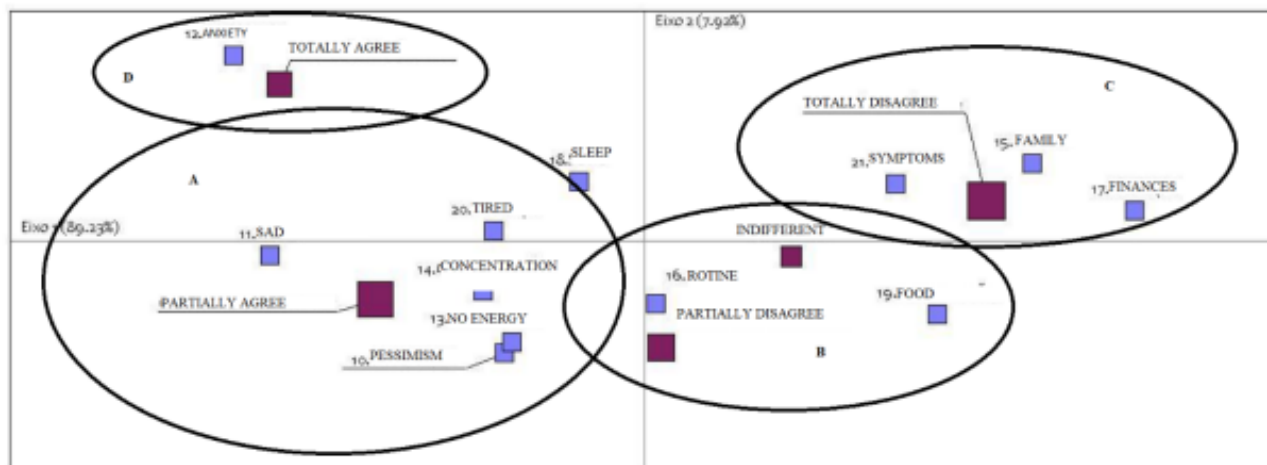
The low incidence of symptoms in physical health is an important factor in the analyses. Only physical fatigue has a high incidence in 61.3% of participants. While 55.2% of respondents have had difficulty sleeping, 44.8% did not report such a situation. Likewise, the group under study did not point to problems with eating, with 54.7% claiming to be eating well during the pandemic. Other physical symptoms such as headache, shortness of breath, nausea and dizziness were noticed by 41.9% of employees.

Based on CA (see graph 1), associations that are arranged along axis 1 have a greater impact (83.23%) than associations along axis 2 (7.92%). In this sense, the variables “11. Sad”, “14. Concentration”, “17. Finance” and “20. Tired”, appear to be more relevant to the group studied.

Likert-type variables are arranged in each quadrant – totally agree, partially agree, totally disagree, and partially disagree. In this way, health variables are associated and graphically arranged according to correlation and incidence. The size of the squares in the graph indicates the relevance of the variables in

each quadrant, as it relates the number of citations of that variable in a group of individuals, who, as they have similar perceptions, can be grouped as follows: Cluster A – Group of individuals who agree that they felt sadness, tiredness, lack of energy, had pessimistic thoughts and problems with concentration and sleep; Cluster B – Indifferent or disagree that they had problems with their routine and diet; Cluster C – Indifferent to physical symptoms, family and financial problems; Cluster D – Completely agree that they felt anxious.

Graph 1 - Graphical representation of Correspondence Analysis



source: the authors

The central region of the CA graph represents an area of neutrality. Therefore, sleep, tiredness and routine are presented as categories of little importance for the context of the analysis. The quadrants also present an opposing relationship in agreement and disagreement. Therefore, the agreement presented in Cluster A is opposed to the disagreement in Cluster B, that is, individuals who felt sadness, tiredness, lack of energy, pessimistic thoughts and problems with concentration and sleep, did not have problems with their routine and diet. The agreement in Cluster D and the disagreement in Cluster C show that anxious individuals were indifferent to physical symptoms, family, and financial problems.

In graph 1, it was possible to see that the immediate impact of the change in routine caused by the pandemic mainly affects mental health, as employees appear more pessimistic, anxious, sad, less concentrated and without energy. On the other hand, issues such as finances, food, family, and routine itself are aspects that did not have a significant impact on the physical and mental health of employees.

Communication

Regarding information and communication, 84.5% said they seek content in the media to deal with the difficulties imposed by the pandemic, with digital media being the most used: internet with newspapers and specialized websites (27.8%), Instagram (12.6%), Facebook (6.5%) and Twitter (4.9%), in addition to podcasts (4.7%) on audio platforms. Whatsapp also proved to be an important tool through which servers seek information, an option for 12.1% of respondents. Traditional media outlets were also listed as a source of information, with 18.1% using television and 5.4% using radio. It is also worth highlighting the influence that friends and family (6.9%) exert as a source of information, despite the social distancing imposed by the pandemic.

Regarding contact with technology and communication channels in this context of work during the pandemic, there are several reports that show the considerable increase in the level of exchanges and the impact of this on the routine and health of participants, through different channels, such as emails: “[...] the demand has been resolved completely via email and this has led to an increase in the number of emails exchanged during the day. The average number of emails answered, just by me, is 20 to 30 emails per day” [participant 3]; by instant messaging applications such as Whatsapp: “[...] the use of WhatsApp as a communication tool between workers and the work team [...] was a major factor in anxiety and illness, because the notion of fulfilling the workload weekly hours are completely neglected and remote work is seen as if we were on call, because we have the ‘privilege’ of being at home” [participant 19]; and by meetings via web

conference: “[...] there are many meetings for those in management” [participant 8]; “[...] these meetings took place in the environment of our homes and this generated in me the deconstruction of the image of my home being a place of rest. This creates some type of psychological suffering in me” [participant 5].

An important point also noted is the communication between managers and their teams and the impact of this on workers. There is a feeling that some managers demand at all times, not respecting working hours, which causes a feeling of always being available for work and this causes frequent emotional exhaustion. “Managers forget that, when a certain time comes, the workday is over, and they send messages requesting new tasks. I have difficulty ignoring it” [participant 18]. “I believe that the biggest difficulty in carrying out remote work is for managers to understand that remote work does not mean that you are available 24 hours a day” [participant 17]. Furthermore, reports show that employees met their leaders’ demands out of fear of being branded irresponsible or negligent. “The most complicated thing about remote work is having to be available for official matters all the time and, if you don’t do so, being considered irresponsible in carrying out your activity” [participant 20].

The constant use of ICTs for several hours in daily work activities resulted in a feeling of tiredness and saturation of technologies for both professional and leisure activities. “After using them to work 11 to 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, I want to do something else - read printed books, listen to music, talk to my husband” [participant 11]. Despite the exhaustion due to mental fatigue due to excessive activities in front of screens, the servers pointed out that it was the best way to go in the context of the pandemic, but they make it clear that there is a need to establish standards. “The home office is productive; however, guidelines need to be established regarding opening hours” [participant 2].

Final considerations

Social isolation proved to be a fundamental measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Based on this study, it is clear that the work regime, as it placed the majority of UFG employees in remote work, also served as a catalyst for mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and others. It must also be considered that some groups of employees felt the effects of these measures to a greater extent, such as the elderly, professionals who have children, especially women, and outsourced workers.

In this context, communication proved to be a factor that also influences mental health, both in mediation by ICTs and in interpersonal dealings between leaders and followers. From the above, it was possible to realize that there is a relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and the mental health of university employees; and that communication presented itself as a problem that, if treated strategically, can contribute to reducing the impact of pandemic on the mental health of employees.

After analyzing the data, this study proposed an internal communication program with fifteen subprojects², which encompasses actions aimed at UFG employees, aiming to strengthen the institutional image, favor integration and reinforce the feeling of belonging to the institution through the promotion of a humanized management focused on people and that contributes to the construction of a good work environment, with a better quality of life and that has a positive impact on the employee’s mental health.

UFG’s internal communication program foresees actions to be carried out over a year, based on the calendar, an essential activity for planning the communication area. For each subproject of this program, the work team will define: the primary actions relevant to its execution; the performance indicators necessary for evaluation; the execution schedule; cost estimation and definition of necessary resources (physical, human, etc.).

Contingencies that can already be foreseen are linked to the fact that some actions may not be carried out at first because they depend on teams external to Secom and Propessoas, or they may be rearranged, given that the full execution of the suggested actions also depends on approval and development by the UFG communications team. To evaluate the actions, it is expected to recurrently apply assessments to monitor the mental health of UFG employees and measure the efficiency of communication at the university.

It is suggested that future studies be carried out to characterize in greater detail the psychological suffering of UFG employees, in addition to promoting strategies to promote mental health. With the return of in-person activities post-pandemic, this study becomes relevant by pointing out important strategies for developing programs and policies to care for employees effectively. This study also sets precedents for studies

² The Internal Communication Program can be accessed in its entirety in the author’s master’s thesis, available in the UFG Library System repository. Available at: <http://repositorio.bc.ufg.br/tede/handle/tede/11757>

that evaluate the health of employees who occupy management positions, in addition to the working conditions of teachers working remotely and specific groups such as the elderly, outsourced workers and employees who are parents.

The results cannot be generalized to other bodies and in a hypothetical scenario with another pandemic, as it cannot be said that the impact would be the same. It is important to consider the particularities of each individual and each organization in the context and that the data evaluated in this work reflects the situation of UFG employees in the Covid-19 pandemic. It is vital to emphasize that the internal communication program alone does not guarantee the well-being of the employee, and therefore, it is important that the actions are endorsed by senior management.

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