

THE INFLUENCE OF LEISURE PRACTICES ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF THE BRAZILIAN POPULATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Received on: January 10, 2024

Passed on: March 01, 2024

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*Ellen Jane Barbosa dos Santos*¹
Faculdade de Americana (FAM)
Americana – SP – Brazil
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5142-423X>

*Nícolas Rocha*²
Faculdade de Americana (FAM)
Americana – SP – Brazil
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7496-8471>

*Simone Thiemi Kishimoto*³
Faculdade de Americana (FAM)
Americana – SP – Brazil
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7181-0279>

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ABSTRACT: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people in different ways. Several changes have occurred in work and leisure activities, impacting physical and mental health. This literature review study analyzed the adaptations regarding active and social leisure practices that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and their influence on the mental health of the Brazilian population. The most relevant articles that were published in the last 4 years (2020- 2023) were selected. The results showed that leisure practices during the pandemic period were adapted to small spaces, and that people who already practiced some type of activity previously have a better ability to adapt to adversities. Access to the internet and entertainment platforms increased considerably and social leisure practices were replaced by artistic, virtual, manual and intellectual leisure.

KEYWORDS: Physical activity. Pandemic. Leisure activities. Mental health.

¹ Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education by Faculdade de Americana (FAM).

² Bachelor's Degree in Physical Education from Faculdade de Americana (FAM).

³ Ph.D. in Sciences by Medical Sciences School (Unicamp) and professor of the program of Physical Education from Faculdade de Americana (FAM).

A INFLUÊNCIA DAS PRÁTICAS DE LAZER NA SAÚDE MENTAL DA POPULAÇÃO BRASILEIRA DURANTE A PANDEMIA DA COVID-19

RESUMO: A pandemia da COVID-19 afetou as pessoas de diferentes maneiras. Diversas mudanças aconteceram nas atividades de trabalho e de lazer, impactando na saúde física e mental. Este estudo de revisão bibliográfica analisou as adaptações referente às práticas de lazer ativo e social que ocorreram durante a pandemia da COVID-19 e sua influência na saúde mental da população brasileira. Foram selecionados os artigos mais relevantes que foram publicados nos últimos 4 anos (2020-2023). Os resultados apresentaram que as práticas de lazer durante o período pandêmico foram adaptadas aos pequenos espaços, e que pessoas que já praticavam algum tipo de atividade anteriormente possuem melhor capacidade de adaptação as adversidades. O acesso a internet e as plataformas de entretenimento aumentaram consideravelmente e as práticas de lazer social foram substituídas pelo lazer artístico, virtual, manual e intelectual.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Atividade física. Pandemia. Atividades de lazer. Saúde mental.

Introduction

The beginning of 2020 was marked by the Covid-19 pandemic that impacted the entire world (WHO, 2020). The name Covid-19 comes from the English meaning “Corona Virus Disease” or “Coronavirus Disease” and the number 19 refers to the year 2019 where the first case was detected in China (WHO, 2020).

The first confirmation of contamination in national territory took place on February 26, 2020, and as of Ordinance No. 454, of March 20, 2020, the Ministry of Health declared the state of community contamination of the new coronavirus (BRAZIL, 2020b; PRESS NATIONAL, 2020).

Caused by the SARS-CoV coronavirus, when infected, the individual develops an infectious disease that mainly attacks the respiratory function (WHO, 2020). According to the Scientific Department of Infectious Diseases (2020), the disease acts differently in people who are infected, while some are asymptomatic and others end up developing the most serious form of the disease. Virus contamination

occurs through particles that can be emitted through sneezes, coughs, nasal secretions and saliva from the infected person (WHO, 2020).

The pandemic had a major impact on people's daily lives due to the process of isolation and social distancing, which was determined as a measure to contain the spread of the virus (TAVARES et al., 2020). Such measures resulted in limitations on various activities, mainly those related to work and leisure, negatively impacting the physical and mental health of several people, causing significant impacts on their quality of life (ORNELL et al., 2020).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Mental Health as “a state of well-being” in which a person is able to carry out their daily activities, dealing with everyday stresses, as well as being productive within the work environment. ; and not just the absence of mental illnesses (WHO, 2020).

Studies carried out during some epidemics that have occurred throughout history have shown that the number of people whose mental health is affected generally tends to be greater than the number of people infected (REARDON, 2015; ORNELL et al., 2020). Feelings such as fear, worry and anxiety were very common due to uncertainty about the situation and end of the pandemic; Thus, diseases such as anxiety disorders, depression, panic syndrome have increased considerably worldwide, becoming a public health problem (RAIOL, 2020).

With social isolation, leisure activities were one of the most affected with the closure of clubs, gyms, parks and other public spaces (CLEMENTE & STOPPA, 2020). Sedentary behavior, due to isolation, has become very present in people's daily lives (RAIOL, 2020). Several studies show that practicing physical activities is essential for treating and improving mental health (OLIVEIRA et al., 2011; RAIOL, 2020).

Thus, during the pandemic period, factors such as social distancing contributed to the lack of active leisure options to be carried out within domestic environments, further enhancing the effects of the pandemic on the mental health of the population in different age groups (ALMEIDA et al. , 2020; MENEZES, 2021; ORNEL et al., 2020).

Social leisure was greatly affected by distancing and isolation, as it consists of activities that involve several individuals in community contexts, promoting interaction between them. Physical leisure was an option during the pandemic, being defined as any physical activity that takes the individual out of their state of rest (ALMEIDA et al., 2020; MENEZES, 2021).

Given this scenario, this literature review study aimed to verify the adaptations regarding active and social leisure practices that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and their influence on the mental health of the Brazilian population.

Methodology

To conduct this literature review research, the most relevant articles within this topic that were published in the last 4 years (2020- 2023) were selected. The following databases were used: *Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)*, *Pubmed/Medline*, *Lilacs*, *Journals Capes* and *Google Scholar*. The searches were carried out using the keywords: “leisure and pandemic”, “leisure and mental health” and “recreation and pandemic”, “recreation and mental health”, “physical inactivity and pandemic”, in Portuguese and English. The exclusion criteria were: review articles, duplicate articles, conference abstracts, articles carried out outside Brazil and number of participants

below 100.

Leisure: Historical Context and Characterization

Leisure practices began to become known in the 19th century, through people considered "social thinkers" who understood the importance and saw how necessary it was for society. After the Industrial Revolution, several discussions arose about non-work time, which caused society to change its thinking in relation to work (MARCELLINO, 2012).

In Europe, in 1880 the first demonstration emerged through a political pamphlet, entitled "The Right To Be Lazy", led by the militant Lafargue. At this time, working hours exceeded 12 hours and reports asked readers about the concept of laziness and the worker's right to leisure time (MARCELLINO, 2011).

Marcellino (2012) defines leisure as a practice with a disinterested character, with culture understood in its broadest sense, experienced (practiced or enjoyed) in the available non-work time. The word comes from the Latin "licere" which means to be permitted, lawful. Leisure practices can be influenced by political, economic, cultural and social factors (MARCELLINO, 2012).

Leisure activities can be divided into 5 categories: manual, physical, artistic, intellectual, social; and can be enjoyed actively or passively. Physical leisure is characterized by bodily movement practices (sports, dances, gymnastics, etc.). Artistic leisure has a predominance of aesthetics, imagery, emotions and feelings (playing instruments, theater, etc.). Manual leisure can be classified by manipulation activities (knitting, painting, crochet, etc.). Intellectual leisure can be exemplified by lectures and courses. Finally, social leisure occurs during group activities (DUMAZEDIER, 1980).

More recently, two more categories were added: tourist leisure (travel) and virtual (internet) (SCHWARTZ, 2003).

Leisure practices involve the individual interests of each person, being pleasurable for those who practice them, providing rest, fun and personal development (MARCELLINO, 2007). It is extremely important that government bodies provide leisure activities for the entire community in an accessible and free of charges, since every citizen has the right to leisure activities (MARCELLINO, 2012).

Results

In total, 83 articles were identified, and 5 articles related to the topic were selected according to the exclusion criteria for more detailed analysis. For better understanding the data, it will be presented in the table below:

Table 1: Articles selected for the study

Authors, year	Title	Purpose	Methodology	Main findings
Tavares <i>et al.</i> , 2020	Leisure-time physical inactivity during the COVID-19 pandemic among university students in Minas Gerais	To analyze the prevalence of physical inactivity during leisure time and the practice of PA in children and adolescents inside and outside the school context	1126 undergraduate students Questionnaire: health and quality of life indicator in academics (ISAQ-A)	The results show that PA carried out during leisure time during childhood and adolescence can influence the maintenance of the practice even in adverse situations, such as social distancing caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
Ribeiro <i>et al.</i> , 2020	The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the leisure of adults and the elderly	Verify the leisure activities experienced before and during the pandemic, and the importance of leisure in the lives of the elderly interviewed	539 people Questionnaire previously prepared by the researchers, about leisure habits	Participants significantly changed their leisure habits, especially with regard to social, physical-sporting and tourist interests. Practicing artistic activities online, manual, virtual and intellectual activities
Pina <i>et al.</i> , 2021	Home as a space for leisure during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil	Reflect on residential spaces for leisure experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic period	1067 people Online questionnaire with questions related to: personal data, work, leisure practices	Results showed that domestic environments allowed leisure experiences such as: games, games and physical exercise
Cembranel <i>et al.</i> , 2021	Leisure and quality of life in times of pandemic	Understanding leisure practices since the beginning of the COVID-19	127 people Questionnaire prepared by researchers with questions	The results show that most leisure practices were carried out within the family and consisted of: staying outside, going to parks

		pandemic	related to leisure practices	or hiking; always take due care
Marra; Gonçalves and Conceição, 2021	Leisure and mental and social well-being of university professors during the COVID-19 pandemic	Analyze the social and mental well-being of university professors and their possible relationships with leisure time before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.	339 teachers Online questionnaire previously prepared about leisure, work and well-being	The demand for work increased and leisure time decreased, impacting mental and social well-being, reverberating in psychological disorders and negative emotions.

Source: prepared by the authors.

Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in several protective measures to prevent the spread of the disease. Government bodies determined the adoption of quarantine, determining social isolation and with only essential activities such as hospitals, supermarkets, pharmacies, etc. operating. The impacts of such restrictive measures resulted in adaptations in work relationships, social life and consequently in leisure activities practiced by the population, which were restricted to the domestic environment (RIBEIRO *et al.*, 2020; CEMBRANEL *et al.*, 2021).

Activities such as shows, cinemas, trips, clubs, museums, get-togethers, among others, had to be replaced by practices that could be carried out at home (PINA *et al.*, 2021). There was a very significant increase in access to digital platforms (Netflix, YouTube, etc.), internet and time spent watching television (PINA *et al.*, 2021).

As provided in a study conducted by Ribeiro *et al.* (2020), with 539 people, showed that physical-sporting, social and tourist activities were replaced by artistic, manual, virtual and intellectual leisure activities, all carried out via the internet. People who continued to practice active leisure activities sought information on the internet or hired professionals to help them, adapting activities to small spaces with stretching, strength and muscular resistance exercises. Some reported having purchased equipment online, such as elastic bands and weights (RIBEIRO *et al.*, 2020).

Family activities among people living in the same environment also increased, as social gatherings were not allowed. The time spent and activities in the backyard and apartment balcony increased considerably, and after the reduction of restrictive measures; walks in open areas such as parks and trails also became more frequent, always with due precautions such as the use of masks (CEMBRANEL *et al.*, 2021).

Marra, Gonçalves and Conceição (2021) interviewed 339 university professors and identified that with online work, the number of hours worked exceeded the period before the pandemic, reducing leisure activities and negatively impacting mental and social health. Anxiety, depression and psychological disorders have become very common, increasing the demand for health professionals such as psychologists and psychiatrists (MARRA; GONÇALVES and CONCEAÇÃO, 2021).

Social restrictions and domestic isolation during the pandemic period further highlighted the population's socioeconomic problems. Accessibility to the internet and electronic equipment that allowed some type of leisure was restricted to middle and upper class families; while lower class people were even more limited in relation to leisure practices (TAVARES et al., 2020; PINA et al., 2021).

Social differences became more evident, since a large part of the low-income population works in the third sector (commerce) and in informal work (unregistered, street commerce, etc.), which was drastically affected by the quarantine. The lack of income, stress and worry greatly affected the mental health of this population group; Furthermore, there was a significant increase in the number of homeless people and many young people and adolescents dropping out of school (TAVARES et al., 2020; PINA et al., 2021).

Physical exercise acts as a complementary treatment for mental health problems. Maintaining the practice, even in adverse conditions such as the pandemic, was essential for maintaining quality of life. A study by Tavares *et al.* (2020) showed that people who have practiced physical activities since they were children/young people have a greater tendency to continue practicing them as adults, becoming evident during the period of isolation. The most practiced types of active leisure were: games, games and physical

exercises that can be carried out in small environments to maintain physical conditioning (PINA *et al.*, 2021).

Recommendation for Physical Activity and Exercise During the Pandemic

Physical activity is defined as any bodily movement that results in energy expenditure greater than the resting level, which can be exemplified by domestic activities, commuting, free/leisure time and work/study (WHO, 2020). Physical exercise is defined as a planned and structured activity with pre-defined objectives for maintaining or improving physical fitness (WHO, 2020).

During the pandemic, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), the Ministry of Health and the Regional Council of Physical Education (CREF) launched a guide with guidance on practicing physical activities. Maintaining the practice during the period of social isolation provides psychological benefits, a feeling of well-being and maintenance of cognitive functions (ACSM, 2020; BRASIL, 2020a; CREF, 2020).

For adults, moderate and vigorous intensity activities are recommended, which can be carried out outdoors or during household chores. For people who work from home, it is recommended that they move around the house every 30 minutes, in addition to walking or cycling to the supermarket or pharmacy. Stretching, strengthening and muscular resistance exercises are recommended, always adapting the activities to the small spaces and equipment available, such as: dancing, jumping rope, exercises with elastic bands, getting in and out of a chair, etc. (ACSM, 2020; BRASIL, 2020; CREF, 2020).

For the elderly, who are the group with the greatest attention to isolation, exercises of all intensities are recommended, always respecting the limits of their own body. Simple stretching and muscle strengthening exercises are highly recommended

(climbing stairs, squatting to pick up objects, etc.) (ACSM, 2020; BRASIL, 2020; CREF, 2020).

The recommendation for sedentary adults and elderly people is to always start with a light intensity, in addition to keeping the body hydrated and avoiding sitting for more than 30 minutes continuously (ACSM, 2020; BRASIL, 2020; CREF, 2020).

Some necessary precautions for carrying out physical activities at home (ACSM, 2020; BRASIL, 2020; CREF, 2020):

- Increasing the intensity gradually;
- Adapting activities, but always staying active, even at home;
- Not performing exercises with a high risk of injury and that you are not used to;
- Hydrating yourself well and observing any different signs on your body (pain, redness, etc.);
- If you experience respiratory symptoms, stop exercising and seek the nearest medical attention.

Final Considerations

This paper showed us that several adaptations regarding leisure activities were made during the pandemic. When it comes to active leisure, physical exercise practices were adapted to small spaces and carried out using equipment already available in homes.

The time spent in the backyard and apartment balcony also increased significantly and activities such as games and games were present in many families. People who had previously practiced physical activity were more active even in adverse situations, such as quarantine.

With regard to social leisure, activities were severely affected, families made

video calls to maintain communication. As time passed and restriction measures were relaxed, activities in open places such as parks increased. Social leisure practices were replaced by artistic, virtual, manual and intellectual leisure. Access to the internet and online entertainment platforms also showed a significant increase.

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Address of the Author(s):

Ellen Jane Barbosa dos Santos
Electronic Mail: ellenjbds@fam.edu.br

Nícolas Rocha
Electronic Mail: nicolasr@fam.edu.br

Simone Thiemi Kishimoto
Electronic Mail: kishimoto.simone@gmail.com