

Identification of psychological intervention needs: a pilot study in Portuguese higher education

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the psychological intervention needs of the students attending the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Portuguese Catholic University. 157 students were evaluated on their personal, career and learning needs and concerns, as well as on their possible support preferences, through the questionnaire of identification of psychological intervention needs. The results indicate that participants need more information or support in the following areas: (i) management of anxiety and nervousness, (ii) fear of failure, (iii) job search, (iv) career choice and (v) time management skills. There is a preference for individual counseling and workshops. There are differences according to sex, academic grades, regularity of family contact and academic and global life satisfaction. Implications are drawn for the availability of systems, strategies and activities of psychological support for students that can respond appropriately to their different needs.

Keywords: needs, psychological intervention, higher education.

Introduction

The current investigation with university students has made the changes occurred over the last decades stand out. In fact, the university population became increasingly more different (Eurydice, 2007, 2008; OCES, 2004), hence those who work in this scenario need to become better acquainted with the targets of their actions, namely their characteristics, needs and family, as well as their economic, political and social origins (Silva & Nascimento, 2012).

One of the most relevant changes in higher education is related to the demographic and social structure of the current student population (Martins, Mauritti, & Costa, 2008). In comparison with previous generations, today's university students are more diversified, especially in terms of gender, age and nationality. In Portugal, according to the Directorate General of Education and Science Statistics, in the school year of 2001/2012, 29.8% of students enrolled in higher education were aged between 17 and 20, 32.9% between 21 and 24, and 37.5% between 25 and 50. The number of foreign students has also increased in many university campuses through different international mobilization programs (ME-DGES, 1999). In the school year of 2011-2012, a total of 28,363 students from 36 different nationalities studied in Portuguese institutions of higher education, (DGEEC, 2012). Moreover, there was an increase in the number of people from the female sex

that searched for this level of education (Balsa, Simões, Nunes, Carmo, & Campos, 2001; Fernandes, 2001). In the 1970s, women accounted for 31% of the total number of enrolled students in Portuguese universities, while today they represent about 53.4% of that population (DGEEC, 2012). Another aspect to be highlighted is the expansion of the social basis in which young people can be recruited to higher education, with a growing incidence of families from lower sociocultural levels (Fernandes, 2001).

Both demographical and social changes that occurred encourage students to develop many personal, educational and professional paths that are transformed into different objectives, motivation and expectations for the frequency of this level of education (Fernandes, 2001; Soares & Almeida, 2003). Owing to its diversity, it is increasingly more important to conceive interventions that are directly aimed at specific groups (Hermon, 2005; Hermon & Davis, 2004). For instance, the greatest challenge of older students that go back to university may be the transition from work to college, balancing work with academic demands and harmonizing the different roles they play in their lives (Kirby, Biever, Martinez, & Gómez, 2004; Santos & Nascimento, 2010). Foreign students, in their turn, need to adapt to a new set of basic values and beliefs, being constantly challenged to become comfortable with a great variety of cultural differences (Mori, 2000). Moreover, the increase in the participation of women in higher education creates new needs for intervention, particularly in areas traditionally chosen by men, or when

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they are target of discrimination and sexual harassment (Saavedra et al., 2011).

For a large part of the students, it is important to carry out an intervention aimed at decrease academic failure, adaptation difficulties (Mayes & McConatha, 1982), the need to define career goals (e.g., Weissberg, Berentsen, Cote, Cravey, & Heath, 1982), dealing with financial problems (Sax, 1997) and feelings of alienation and loneliness (Sax, Gilmartin, Keup, DiCrisi, & Bryant, 2000) that at times arise at this stage of life. In addition, many psychological disorders such as depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia tend to manifest themselves in late adolescence and early adulthood, which is the age of most university students internationally (Kitzrow, 2003).

Many studies have mentioned an increase in the psychological problems of university students over the last five years, namely: learning difficulties (Gallagher, Sysko, & Zhang, 2001), eating disorders (Fiates & Salles, 2001), use of other illicit drugs (Wagner, Stempluk, Zilberman, Barroso, & Andrade, 2007) and problems related to sexual abuse (Bertocci, Hirsch, Sommer, & Williams, 1996). Kitzrow (2003) also highlights the diversity of social and cultural issues, which are increasingly frequent for university students, such as divorce, family dysfunction, emotional instability, difficulties in interpersonal relationships and the lack of parental skills and of tolerance with frustration.

This entire set of changes demands from institutions of higher education the development of services and interventions of psychological counseling that play a dominant role in promoting well-being, satisfaction and success in a personal, academic and professional level (Bishop, 1990; RESAPES, 2002). Universities from many countries (e.g. Glamorgan University, in Wales; University of Piraeus and University of Crete, in Greece; University of the Western Cape, in South Africa) have invested human and financial resources in the development of investigations in this domain, aiming at identifying the needs for psychological support/intervention of their students and then developing integrated response systems and strategies appropriate for those needs (e.g., Giovazolias, Leontopoulou, & Triliva, 2010; Nicholas, 2002). In this sense, many investigators have mentioned the need for a regular evaluation of the needs of university students (e.g., Gallagher 1993; Gallagher, Golin, & Kelleher, 1992; Giovazolias, Leontopoulou, & Triliva, 2010; Güneri, Audin, & Skovholt, 2003; Pinto, 2010; Nicholas, 1995, 2002; Van Schoor & Whittaker, 1988), highlighting its multiple benefits, the possibility of designing different interventions according to the specific needs of the students.

However, it is not always that the institutions of higher education invest in the creation of these services, and at times their presence and availability does not guarantee that they are demanded, since it is not always that students see them as an effective and convincing resource to support their needs (Giovazolias et al. 2010). In this sense, the present study aims at exploring the needs for psychological intervention of the students at the College of Humanities

(Faculdade de Ciências Humanas – FCH) of the Catholic University of Portugal (Universidade Católica Portuguesa – UCP). For that purpose, the concerns and needs related to personal, career or learning issues are explored, as well as preferences regarding the desired support or the support which was previously received.

Methodology

Goals and hypotheses of the investigation

The present pilot study aims at: (i) evaluating the concerns and needs for psychological intervention of the students of the College of Humanities of the Catholic University of Portugal, (ii) verify the existence of differences in the types of concerns and needs for psychological intervention according to a set of sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and (iii) evaluate the types of counseling previously obtained and preferred.

Considering the first goal, participants are expected to present many needs for psychological intervention in each of the different dimensions (personal, career and learning) considered in the instrument of evaluation which was used. In particular, these needs are expected to be associated with issues of self-concept and well-being, life planning, decision-making and time management (hypothesis 1).

As for the second goal, statistically significant differences are expected among the different groups of participants which were formed based on the sociodemographic variables. More specifically, the differences are as follows: hypothesis 2 – differences according to gender, with higher results in the concerns and needs for psychological intervention of women; hypothesis 3 – statistically significant differences according to average mark in the course, with more participants with an average mark equal to or higher than 14; hypothesis 4 – differences according to contact with family, with the participants with less family contact presenting higher results in their concerns and needs; hypotheses 5 and 6 – statistically significant differences for the levels of academic satisfaction and overall satisfaction with life, with the most unsatisfied students presenting higher results for their concerns and needs.

As for the types of counseling previously obtained and preferred, the higher results in both conditions are expected to be obtained for the types of individual counseling and group counseling (hypothesis 7).

Participants

A total of 157 students, which were enrolled in the school year of 2012/2013 of the College of Humanities of the Catholic University of Portugal, participated in this study. Of these participants, 136 (86.6%) are women and 21 (13.4%) are men. 154 are Portuguese (98.1%), with an average age of 25.05 years (SD=8.53; min-max=17-53). In general, these participants are single (n=130; 82.8%) and have no children (133, 84.7%). 67 are enrolled in the course of social

communication (43.3%); 25 of them study applied foreign languages (15.9%), 24 study social services (15.3%); 15 are enrolled in the course of cultural studies (9.6%); 8 study philosophy (5.1%) and 7 study psychology (4.5%). These participants are mostly enrolled in the first cycle of studies (114, 72.6%). A total of 133 (84.7%) are enrolled in the course that was their first choice at the moment of their application to higher education. Considering the total of participants, their current average mark in the course they are enrolled in is 14.52 (in a scale of 0-20; SD=1.55; min-max=10-18).

Instruments

The participants filled a brief sociodemographic profile which includes a set of information about personal aspects (e.g., gender, age, nationality), academic aspects (e.g., course, year, current average) and current life conditions (e.g., frequency of their contact with parents/family, satisfaction with the participation in the academic life and satisfaction with current life conditions).

The concerns and needs related to personal, career and learning issues of the students were evaluated through the *survey of identification of psychological intervention needs (survey of student needs)* (Gallagher, Golin, & Kelleher, 1992; translated to Portuguese by Pinto, 2010). The survey is a self-report instrument originally composed of 42 items that evaluate the needs for information or support related to three areas: (a) personal concerns; (b) career concerns and (c) learning concerns. In the version used in this investigation, the survey has 44 items, for two items were added to the original version related to the control of drug use and peer pressure to use drugs. The answer to each item is given by a 4-point Likert scale, in which 1 means “no need” and 4 means “high need”. Two more items were added aimed at evaluating the desired support for their needs or concerns, as well as the support previously received in this context. In this study, the instrument presents indexes of internal consistency of 0.92 for the totality of the items. Considering the subscales, the values for Cronbach’s alphas are 0.9, 0.86 and 0.8 for the personal, career and learning dimensions, respectively.

Procedures

Initially, the development of this pilot study was authorized by the direction of the FCH-UCP, having the students of the college as sample, and the author of the original instrument also authorized its translation to Portuguese. The survey was inserted into an online platform and released to teachers and students through e-mail. The data collection occurred between April and September 2013. The goal of the study and an informed consent were presented to the students, and a contact gave their e-mail address in case the students had any doubts about this study.

The data gathered were analyzed by the statistical software IBM SPSS (version 21 for Windows). Analyses of descriptive statistics were performed for the

sociodemographic characterization of the participants and their support needs. In addition, analyses of inferential statistics were performed to verify the existence of differences among the groups of participants with respect to gender, current average in the course, level of academic satisfaction and level of overall satisfaction with life. The results are considered statistically significant when the value of significance obtained is equal to or higher than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$).

Results

Descriptive sociodemographic results

For the variable “I live with”, more than half of the participants live with their family of origin (85 – 54%). About 12% of the participants ($n=19$) live alone or with their partner and children (18 – 11.5%). A small percentage of the participants live with a few friends (13 – 8.3%), only with their partner (11 – 7%) or with other family members (10 – 6.4%).

As for the “contact with parents/family”, most participants see their parents/family or talk to them over the phone every day (117 – 74.5%). About 11.5% see their parents/family or talk to them over the phone at least once a week ($n=18$), and about 10.2% do that twice a week ($n=16$). Only 3.2% of the participants stated that they have no regular contact with their parents/family ($n=5$).

For the variable “academic satisfaction” ($M=2.67$; $SD=0.729$; min-max=1-4), most participants are satisfied ($n=108$ – 68.8%). However, it should be highlighted that about 15.3% of the participants are unsatisfied ($n=25$), 10.8% are very unsatisfied ($n=17$) and only 4.9% are very satisfied ($n=7$).

As for the level of overall satisfaction with life ($M=2.94$, $SD=0.747$; min-max=1-4), about half of the participants is satisfied ($n=87$ – 55.4%), and 21% are very satisfied ($n=33$). However, it should be highlighted that 19.1% of the participants stated that they are unsatisfied ($n=30$), and 3.8%, very unsatisfied ($n=6$).

Descriptive results of the evaluation of the psychological intervention needs

The descriptive results of the evaluation of the psychological intervention needs were organized into three areas (Table 1).

With respect to personal needs, evaluated from a total of 34 items, it was verified that the participants presented results higher than the average for the items “controlling anxiety”, “nervousness” ($M=2.66$; $SD=1.01$) and “fear of failure” ($M=2.55$; $SD=0.916$). Results close to the average (even if slightly lower) were observed for the items “increase motivation” ($M=2.47$; $SD=0.958$), “increase self-confidence” ($M=2.41$; $SD=0.974$) and “overcoming procrastination” ($M=2.39$; $SD=0.978$). In all the other items, the obtained results are further from the respective average.

In relation to the career needs, evaluated from a total of four items, it was verified that the participants

Table 1
 Evaluation of the need for psychological intervention: descriptive results

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Items – Concerns</i>	<i>Average (SD)</i>
Personal	1. Overcoming procrastination	2.39 (0.978)
	2. Anxiety of public speaking	2.20 (0.998)
	3. Increase self-confidence	2.41 (0.974)
	4. Increase motivation	2.47 (0.958)
	5. Eliminating defeatist behaviors	2.18 (0.966)
	6. Become more assertive	2.17 (0.921)
	7. Fear of failure	2.55 (0.916)
	8. Control anxiety and nervousness	2.66 (1.01)
	9. Concern with the relationships with academics	1.83 (0.841)
	10. Dealing with depression	1.82 (0.919)
	11. Finding out a life goal	1.99 (1.01)
	12. Meeting people for a relationship	1.69 (0.889)
	13. Overcome shyness	1.78 (0.859)
	14. Dealing with loneliness	1.63 (0.803)
	15. Discomfort in social situations	1.69 (0.758)
	16. Frequent headaches or stomach aches	1.67 (0.901)
	17. Dealing with the end of a romantic relationship	1.68 (0.901)
	18. Roles and expectations of men and women	1.53 (0.703)
	19. Problems in controlling temper	1.87 (0.878)
	20. Controlling weight	2.15 (1.01)
	21. Adaptation to university/campus	1.58 (0.691)
	22. Insomnia	1.70 (0.93)
	23. Concerns about sexual performance	1.43 (0.7)
	24. Problems with parents/relatives	1.66 (0.783)
	25. Dealing with prejudice	1.39 (0.648)
	26. Anxiety over sexually transmitted diseases (e.g., AIDS, genital herpes, hepatitis B)	1.39 (0.739)
	27. Adaptations to culture and social norms	1.40 (0.639)
	28. Conflicts about values and morality	1,44 (0,644)
	29. Suicidal thoughts	1.20 (0.571)
	30. Controlling drinking	1.20 (0.512)
	31. Controlling drug use	1.11 (0.408)
	32. Concerns about sexual identity	1.08 (0.331)
	33. Peer pressure to drink excessively	1.10 (0.395)
	34. Peer pressure to use drugs	1.04 (0.192)

continues...

Table 1
Continuation

Dimensions	Items – Concerns	Average (SD)
Career	35. Strategies to find a job	2.73 (1.03)
	36. Concerns about career choice	2.59 (1.11)
	37. Understanding interests and competences	2.27 (0.958)
	38. Choice of classes/areas of interest	2.08 (0.967)
Learning	39. Improving study techniques	2.31 (0.944)
	40. Learn strategies for taking tests	2.19 (0.981)
	41. Time management abilities	2.43 (0.995)
	42. Anxiety over tests	2.37 (1.07)
	43. Anxiety over mathematics	2.03 (1.20)
	44. Improving reading ability	1.73 (0.874)

presented results higher than the average for the items “strategies to find a job” ($M=2.73$; $SD=1.03$) and “concerns about career choice” ($M=2.59$; $SD=1.11$). For the other two items, the obtained results were lower than the respective mean.

With respect to the learning needs, evaluated from a total of five items, it was verified that the participants did not present results higher than the mean for any of the items. However, the results that were closer to the mean were verified for the items “time management skills” ($M=2.43$; $SD=0.995$), “anxiety over tests” ($M=2.37$; $SD=1.07$) and “improving study techniques” ($M=2.31$; $SD=0.944$).

Differential results of the evaluation of psychological intervention needs

The existence of statistically significant differences was evaluated among the participants according to gender (Table 2).

With respect to the personal dimension, statistically significant differences between men and women ($U=-2.176$; $p=0.030$) were registered. The differences are registered for the items “concerns about sexual performance” ($U=-2.803$; $p=0.005$), “problems with parents/relatives” ($U=-2.304$; $p=0.021$), “dealing with prejudice” ($U=-1.964$; $p=0.050$), “controlling drinking” ($U=-2.471$; $p=0.013$) and “peer pressure to drink excessively” ($U=-3.041$; $p=0.002$). These results were higher in all situations for the male participants.

As for learning, statistically significant differences between men and women were also observed ($U=-1.983$; $p=0.047$). The differences were registered for the items “improving study techniques” ($U=-2.322$; $p=0.020$) and “anxiety over lying” ($U=-2.427$; $p=0.015$). These results were higher in all situations for the male participants.

There were no statistically significant differences registered with respect to career needs and concerns.

The existence of significant differences among the participants according to the average of the course was also evaluated (Table 3).

With respect to the personal dimension, significant differences were registered between the students with an average equal to or lower than 14 and those with an average higher than 14 ($U=-2.013$; $p=0.044$). The differences were registered for the items “overcoming procrastination” ($U=-2.173$; $p=0.030$), “controlling anxiety and nervousness” ($U=-2.267$; $p=0.0230$), “overcoming shyness” ($U=-2.446$; $p=0.014$) and “dealing with loneliness” ($U=-1.960$; $p=0.050$). These results were higher in all situations for the participants with an average equal to or lower than 14.

With respect to the career dimension, no significant differences were registered between the students considering this dimension in its totality ($U=-1.279$; $p=0.201$). However, significant differences were registered for the item “choice of classes/areas of interest” ($U=-1.983$; $p=0.047$), with higher results for the students that had an average equal to or lower than 14.

As for the learning dimension, statistically significant differences were registered between the students with an average equal to or lower than 14 and the students with an average higher than 14 ($U=-4.740$; $p=0$). The differences were registered for the items “improving study techniques” ($U=-4.038$; $p=0$), “learn strategies for taking tests” ($U=-4.319$; $p=0$), “time management skills” ($U=-2.763$; $p=0.006$), “anxiety over tests” ($U=-3.348$; $p=0.001$), “anxiety over mathematics” ($U=-2.684$; $p=0.007$) and “improving reading skills” ($U=-2.365$; $p=0.018$). These results were higher in all situations for the participants with an average mark equal to or lower than 14.

Table 2
Evaluation of the need for psychological intervention: gender differences

Dimensions	Items	Gender	Average (SD)	U
Personal	23. Concerns about sexual performance	F	1.37 (0.642)	-2.803 (0.005)
		M	1.86 (0.910)	
	24. Problems with parents/relatives	F	1.60 (0.753)	-2.304 (0.021)
		M	2.05 (0.887)	
	25. Dealing with prejudice	F	1.35 (0.589)	-1.964 (0.05)
		M	1.71 (0.902)	
	30. Controlling drinking	F	1.16 (0.475)	-2.471 (0.013)
		M	1.43 (0.676)	
	33. Peer pressure to drink excessively	F	1.06 (0.266)	-3,041 (0,002)
		M	1.38 (0.805)	
Learning	39. Improving study techniques	F	2.24 (0.939)	-2.322 (0.02)
		M	2.76 (0.831)	
	43. Anxiety over mathematics	F	1.93 (1.150)	-2.427 (0.015)
		M	2.67 (1.354)	

Table 3
Evaluation of the need for psychological intervention: differences according to course average

Dimensions	Items	Course average	Average (SD)	U	
Personal	1. Overcoming procrastination	≤14	2.52 (0.995)	-2.173 (0.03)	
		>14	2.15 (0.951)		
	4. Increase motivation	≤14	2.66 (0.898)	-3.187 (0.001)	
		>14	2.13 (0.963)		
	7. Fear of failure	≤14	2.66 (0.883)	-2.429 (0.015)	
		>14	2.27 (0.912)		
	8. Control anxiety and nervousness	≤14	2.82 (1.04)	-2.267 (0.023)	
		>14	2.40 (0.935)		
	13. Overcome shyness	≤14	1.84 (0.875)	-2.446 (0.014)	
		>14	1.49 (0.717)		
	14. Dealing with loneliness	≤14	1.71 (0.792)	-1.960 (0.050)	
		>14	1.47 (0.766)		
	Career	38. Choice of classes/areas of interest	≤14	2.18 (0.928)	-1.983 (0.047)
			>14	1.89 (0.994)	

continues...

Table 3
Continuation

Dimensions	Items	Course average	Average (SD)	U
Learning	39. Improving study techniques	≤14	2.56 (0.866)	-4.038 (0)
		>14	1.89 (0.956)	
	40. Learn strategies for taking tests	≤14	2.49 (0.955)	-4.319 (0)
		>14	1.76 (0.881)	
	41. Time management abilities	≤14	2.56 (0.925)	-2.763 (0.006)
		>14	2.13 (0.982)	
	42. Anxiety over tests	≤14	2.62 (1.071)	-3.348 (0.001)
		>14	1.98 (1.009)	
	43. Anxiety over mathematics	≤14	2.25 (1.269)	-2.684 (0.007)
		>14	1.67 (1.037)	
	44. Improving reading ability	≤14	1.86 (0.942)	-2.365 (0.018)
		>14	1.47 (0.716)	

Table 4
Evaluation of the need for psychological intervention: differences according to contact with parents/family

Dimensions	Items	Regularity of the contact with parents/family	Average (SD)	X ² (3)
Career	36. Concerns about career choice	No regular contact	1.00 (000)	15.133 (0.002)
		At least once a week	1.94 (0.938)	
		At least twice a week	2.50 (1.16)	
		Daily	2.63 (1.09)	
	37. Understanding interests and competences	No regular contact	1.20 (0.447)	8.527 (0.036)
		At least once a week	2.11 (0.9)	
		At least twice a week	2.56 (1.03)	
		Daily	2.31 (0.951)	

As for the analysis of statistically significant differences among the participants with respect to the variable contact with parents/family (Table 4), the results indicate differences only for the career dimension [$X^2(3)=10.823$; $p=0.013$]. Thus, statistically significant differences were registered for the items “concerns about career choice” [$X^2(3)=15.133$; $p=0.002$] and “understanding interests and competences” [$X^2(3)=8.527$; $p=0.036$] between the participants who did not have regular contact with their parents/families and those who contacted them at least once a week. In the case of item 36, the results were statistically significant between the participants who do not have regular contact with parents/family and those who talk to their parents/families over the phone or see them every day.

With respect to the analysis of the statistically significant differences between the participants according to the variable academic satisfaction (Table 5), the results indicate differences for some items from the personal dimension and from the career dimension.

With respect to the personal dimension, no statistically significant differences were registered considering the items that constitute its total [$X^2(3)=3.920$; $p=0.270$]. However, when the items are considered individually, statistically significant differences are registered for “increasing self-confidence” [$X^2(3)=8.968$; $p=0.030$], “dealing with loneliness” [$X^2(3)=12.338$; $p=0.006$] and “controlling weight” [$X^2(3)=8.607$; $p=0.035$]. In the first case, the difference is registered between the students who are very unsatisfied and those who are very satisfied. In the case of

the other two items, the differences are registered between unsatisfied students and those who are very satisfied.

With respect to the career dimension, there were also no statistically significant differences registered considering the items that constitute its total [$X^2(3)=5,597$; $p=0,133$]. However, when the items are considered separately, statistically significant differences are registered for item “understanding of interests and competences” [$X^2(3)= 9,008$; $p=0,029$] between unsatisfied and satisfied students.

With respect to the analysis of statistically significant differences between the participants according to the variable overall satisfaction with life (Table 6), the results indicate differences in some items from the personal and learning dimensions.

With respect to the personal dimension, no statistically significant differences are registered in its total [$X^2(3)=4.453$; $p=0.217$]. However, when the items are considered separately, there are statistically significant

differences for “controlling anxiety and nervousness” [$X^2(3)=9.085$; $p=0.028$], “controlling weight” [$X^2(3)=9.223$; $p=0.026$], “suicidal thoughts” [$X^2(3)=18.395$; $p=0$] and “controlling drinking” [$X^2(3)=9.554$; $p=0.023$]. These differences are registered between very unsatisfied and unsatisfied students, as well as between those that are very unsatisfied and satisfied, for items 20, 29 and 30. In the case of item 8, the differences are verified between satisfied and very satisfied students. And for items 29 and 30, differences are observed as well between very unsatisfied and very satisfied students.

With respect to the learning dimension, no statistically significant differences are registered in its total [$X^2(3)=1.383$; $p=0.710$]. However, when the items are considered separately, there are statistically significant differences for “anxiety over mathematics” [$X^2(3)=8.963$; $p=0.030$] between very unsatisfied and satisfied students and between very unsatisfied and very satisfied students.

Table 5

Evaluation of the need for psychological intervention: differences according to academic satisfaction

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>Average (SD)</i>	<i>X² (3)</i>
Personal	3. Increase self-confidence	Very unsatisfied	2.24 (1.03)	8.968 (0.030)
		Unsatisfied	2.83 (0.963)	
		Satisfied	2.32 (0.936)	
		Very satisfied	3.00 (1)	
	14. Dealing with loneliness	Very unsatisfied	1.41 (0.618)	12.338 (0.006)
		Unsatisfied	2.00 (0.834)	
		Satisfied	1.61 (0.807)	
		Very satisfied	1.00 (0)	
	20. Controlling weight	Very unsatisfied	2.06 (1.03)	8.607 (0.035)
		Unsatisfied	1.79 (0.977)	
		Satisfied	2.19 (1)	
		Very satisfied	3.00 (0.816)	
Career	37. Understanding interests and competences	Very unsatisfied	2.29 (0.920)	9.008 (0.029)
		Unsatisfied	2.75 (0.897)	
		Satisfied	2.18 (0.965)	
		Very satisfied	1.86 (0.378)	

Table 6
Evaluation of the need for psychological intervention: differences according to overall satisfaction with life

Dimensions	Items	Satisfaction	Average (SD)	χ^2 (3)
Personal	8. Control anxiety and nervousness	Very unsatisfied	2.83 (0.753)	9.085 (0.028)
		Unsatisfied	2.77 (0.971)	
		Satisfied	2.79 (1.06)	
		Very satisfied	2.21 (0.857)	
	20. Controlling weight	Very unsatisfied	3.33 (0.816)	9.223 (0.026)
		Unsatisfied	2.10 (0.960)	
		Satisfied	2.02 (0.952)	
		Very satisfied	2.30 (1.10)	
	29. Suicidal thoughts	Very unsatisfied	2.50 (1.38)	18.395 (0)
		Unsatisfied	1.20 (0.484)	
		Satisfied	1.15 (0.495)	
		Very satisfied	1.09 (0.292)	
30. Controlling drinking	Very unsatisfied	2.00 (1.27)	9.554 (0.023)	
	Unsatisfied	1.27 (0.521)		
	Satisfied	1.16 (0.454)		
	Very satisfied	1.09 (0.292)		
Learning	43. Anxiety over mathematics	Very unsatisfied	3.50 (1.23)	8.963 (0.030)
		Unsatisfied	2.13 (1.28)	
		Satisfied	1.86 (1.09)	
		Very satisfied	2.09 (1.26)	

Table 7
Evaluation of the desired support vs. the received support: descriptive results

Type of support	Desired	Received
	F (%)	F (%)
Individual counseling	84 (35%)	48 (26,97%)
Group counseling	26 (10,83%)	8 (4,49%)
Workshop/brief course	63 (26,25%)	15 (8,43%)
Conference	35 (14,58%)	11 (6,18%)
Discussion group	25 (10,42%)	9 (5,06%)
Other	1 (0,42%)	2 (1,12%)
All	1 (0,42%)	0 (0%)
None	5 (2,08%)	85 (47,75%)

Descriptive results related to the desired support vs. the received support

For the evaluation of the types of support desired by the participants in face of their personal, career and learning needs that were previously identified (table 7), the participants indicate a preference for individual counseling (n=84 – 35%) and workshops/brief course (n=63 – 26.25%), followed by conferences (n=35 – 14.58%), group counseling (26 – 10.83%) and discussion groups (n=25 – 10.42%). About five participants indicated they did not want access to any type of support for their needs (2.08%), one participant indicates wanting access to any type of support indicated (0.42%) and one participant indicates not wanting access to any of the types of intervention indicated (0.42%).

The evaluation of the types of support that were previously received by the participants in face of their personal, career and learning needs indicate that most of them did not receive any type of support (n=85 – 47.75%). About 48 students (26.97%) received individual counseling, 15 state they had access to workshops/brief courses (8.43%), 11 state they had access to conferences (6.18%), nine attended discussion groups (5.06%) and eight participated in group counseling sessions (4.49%). Only two participants (1.12%) mentioned receiving support of a different type, but without specifying it.

Discussion

This pilot study aimed at performing a survey of the psychological intervention needs of students from the College of Humanities of the Catholic University of Portugal. The results are discussed from the perspective of the hypotheses that were initially defined.

With respect to the first hypothesis, the obtained results indicated that in general the students express small needs and concerns for the areas discussed in the survey – the personal, career and learning aspects. More specifically, their needs are organized into three main themes: self-concept and well-being, life planning, decision-making and time management. As for this type of needs, the results are partially compatible with those obtained by other studies, in which there are needs recorded with respect to motivation, stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, sexual harassment, family issues, planning of life goals, time management and financial situation (Giovazolias et al., 2010; Güneri, Aydin, & Skovholt, 2003; Nicholas, 1995; Ning, 2010). The identification of the specificity of the needs of the students, of their incidence and of their impact in physical, emotional, cognitive, interpersonal and academic levels is crucial in face of the increase of requirements for the development of mental health support services in higher education (Ning, 2010). However, it is important to point out that most studies in this domain indicate a much higher level of psychological intervention needs in comparison with the level identified for this group of Portuguese students. This fact may be due to the small representativeness of the

sample (Population N of the College of Humanities±1000), which justifies the need to continue the data collection for other samples of the College of Humanities and the Catholic University of Portugal.

With respect to the differences among groups and considering particularly hypothesis 2 (referring to differences according to gender), it was verified the average level of concerns of male students are higher than those of female students. This result is different from those obtained by other studies, in which men admit having less support needs, maybe because of education models more guided by control, independence and self-sufficiency for the resolution of problems (e.g., Güneri, Aydin, & Skovholt, 2003). According to these studies, women traditionally present more concerns. On the other hand, in this study, men revealed more concerns over their life goals and career concerns, which was also observed in other studies (Norris, 2008).

Considering hypothesis 3, related to the differences according to average mark on the course, the students with lower academic results present higher levels of concerns and of support needs, specifically in areas associated with motivation, procrastination, anxiety, shyness, loneliness, choice of areas of interest, study techniques and time management. It is important to highlight that, with respect to this variable, previous studies seem to neglect its importance, thus a point of comparison does not exist. Most studies (e.g., Lowery et al., 2005; Norris, 2008) have used the phase of the academic path (e.g., freshman vs. senior) of the students, reaching conclusions about the higher needs related to the increase of motivation and self-confidence of freshmen and the increase of the skills of finding a job, decision-making and developing life-goals of seniors.

As for the differences regarding family contact (hypothesis 4), the results indicate that a large part of the participants live with their parents/relatives or have regular contact with them, and that the higher the regularity of the contact, the higher the number of concerns the participants present regarding the considered dimensions, in particular with respect to career concerns. The result differs from other studies, in which a less frequent contact with parents and/or family is associated with higher levels of personal, career and learning concerns for the students (Giovazolias et al., 2010). However, this result is interesting from the point of view of the role of the parents in their involvement in their child's career, since following their academic path more directly may lead to a stronger focus on career development, in comparison with parents which are more distanced from their child's academic path (Faria, Pinto, & Taveira, 2008).

As for the differences according to academic satisfaction and life satisfaction (hypotheses 5 and 6), the results indicated that students that state to be very unsatisfied in both dimensions are also those who stated that they have more concerns and needs in the different domains. This result is compatible with other studies (e.g. Giovazolias et al., 2010) that show that students with more concerns and needs are precisely those that feel more unsatisfied with

their transition and adaptation to academic life, as well as with their current life conditions. Studies developed based on the social cognitive career theory suggest that in general the level in which the students like the academic context and feel satisfied and well-adjusted to it depends mostly on their beliefs regarding if they have the needed skills and resources to deal effectively with occasional obstacles that may appear throughout their academic path (self-efficacy), their perception of support to reach their goals (support) and also the adoption of a positive perception and thought with respect to their life experiences and the world in general (positive affect) (e.g., Lent, Taveira, & Lobo, 2012).

Finally, with respect to the results about the desired support vs. the received support for their needs (hypothesis 7), most students indicate having participated in individual counseling, which is compatible with other studies (Giovazolias et al., 2010). As for the desired type of support, many participants indicate not wanting any type of support, which once again is compatible with other studies. For instance, in the study of Giovazolias and collaborators (2010), 75.2% of students indicate that they prefer to solve their problems on their own. However, it is important to distinguish between the participants who consider they do not have any need in particular and those that, even after finding out some issues, deny any type of support for fearing the stigma or for not knowing how/where to find it (Furr et al., 2001). Many participants indicate that they want support through individual counseling, which is compatible with other studies. For example, in the study of Giovazolias and collaborators (2010), a third of the participants would like to receive individual counseling, another third, group counseling, and three fourths of the participants would like to receive support through workshops/brief courses. This results points out the need for Psychology professionals to invest in the development of a variety of intervention services, types and strategies which are innovative, since not all students will feel comfortable with certain specificities of counseling (Pinto, 2010).

Since "Portugal is part of the Southern European countries ... less prepared for the institutionalized support to higher education students" (RESAPES, 2002, p.9), this work aims at pointing out the need to create new psychology services and to reformulate the previous ones into structures that provide specialized and innovative high-quality services (RESAPES, 2002). It is imperative to provide services at the level of evaluation, intervention, investigation, formation and consulting in the many domains of Psychology, directed to the academic community and the external community that surrounds it. These services should be managed by a professional and high-quality staff, with the purpose of contributing to the promotion of the well-being, the satisfaction and the personal, academic,

professional and social success of university students, professors and employees, as well as of any other individual or collective external entity that is close to this academic context. In the case of higher education in Portugal, it is increasingly relevant to provide Psychology services that allow students to get closer to intervention opportunities which are appropriate to their education, increasing their employability and at the same time helping a possible investigation.

Conclusions and implications for the practice

From the realization of this study, it is possible to obtain some implications for the disposal of systems, strategies and activities of psychological support aimed at students that could find an appropriate response for their different concerns.

Many authors suggest that the number of severe psychological problems has increased for higher education students over the last few years (Gallagher, 2003; Ning, 2010), which leads to a growing need for services and resources (Harper & Peterson, 2005; Much & Swanson, 2010). Although not all authors agree with respect to the degree of responsibility that higher education institutions have over the mental health of their students (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004), most of them defend that there should be a combined action from all participants of these institutions, considering the investment in the realization of exploratory studies aimed at evaluating client diversity, their expectations, motivations, objectives and problematics (Pinto, 2010).

This situation entails the development of responses of many types (e.g., individual counseling, group counseling, workshops/brief courses) by psychology professionals for the identified needs, thus increasing the probability that their services become more demanded since they are seen by students as a resource of high-quality, effective and convenient. Moreover, the importance of developing training programs for Psychology professionals that contribute to the creation of responses which are technically and scientifically based, compatible with the identified needs, is clear (Ning, 2010).

With the realization of this study, and considering any disparity between the obtained results and the mentioned literature, the aim is to create a favorable context that contributes nationally and internationally to the strengthening of the investigation of the identification of psychological intervention needs. Hence, the adaptation and validation of the instrument used in this study is expected in an experimental version, due to its usefulness for investigation and practice in the educational and clinical contexts.

Identificação de necessidades de intervenção psicológica: um estudo-piloto no ensino superior português

Resumo: Este estudo analisa as necessidades de intervenção psicológica dos estudantes da Faculdade de Ciências Humanas da Universidade Católica Portuguesa. Participaram 157 alunos, avaliados nas suas preocupações e necessidades pessoais, de carreira e de aprendizagem, bem como nas preferências relativas ao apoio, por meio do *questionário de identificação de necessidades de intervenção psicológica*. Os resultados indicam necessidade de apoio nas áreas: (i) controlo de ansiedade e nervosismo, (ii) medo de falhar, (iii) estratégias de procura de emprego, (iv) escolha de uma carreira e (v) competências de gestão do tempo. Verifica-se uma preferência, no apoio pretendido, pelas modalidades de aconselhamento individual e cursos breves. Registram-se diferenças em função do sexo, da média no curso, da regularidade de contato com a família e dos níveis de satisfação académica e satisfação global com a vida. Retiram-se implicações para a disponibilização de sistemas, estratégias e atividades de apoio psicológico que possam responder às preocupações dos estudantes.

Palavras-chave: necessidades, intervenção psicológica, ensino superior.

Identification des besoins d'intervention psychologique: une étude pilote dans le cadre de l'enseignement supérieur portugais

Résumé: Cette étude vise à explorer le besoin d'intervention psychologique des élèves qui fréquentent la Faculté des Sciences Humaines de l'Université Catholique Portugaise. Ont participé 157 étudiants lesquels ont été évalués sur leurs besoins et préoccupations personnelles, de carrière et d'apprentissage, ainsi que sur leur préférences concernant le support désiré et déjà reçu, à travers *The Survey of Student Needs*. Les résultats indiquent que les participants ont besoin de plus d'information et d'un appui dans les domaines suivants: (i) gérer l'anxiété et la nervosité, (ii) la peur de l'échec, (iii) les stratégies de recherche d'emploi, (iv) le choix d'une carrière, et (v) des compétences pour la gestion du temps. On remarque une préférence pour le conseil individuel et les cours de courte durée. On remarque des différences selon le sexe, le grade universitaire, la régularité du contact avec la famille et la satisfaction avec la vie universitaire et la vie en général. Les résultats évoquent la création des systèmes, stratégies et activités de soutien psychologique, qui puissent répondre à les différentes préoccupations des étudiants.

Mots-clés: préoccupations, intervention psychologique, enseignement supérieur.

Identificación de necesidades de intervención psicológica: estudio piloto en la educación superior portuguesa

Resumen: Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar las necesidades de intervención psicológica de los estudiantes de la Facultad de Ciencias Humanas de la Universidad Católica Portuguesa. Participaron 157 estudiantes, se les evaluaron sus necesidades y preocupaciones, así como las preferencias relacionadas con el apoyo deseado y previamente recibido de la carrera y del aprendizaje, a través del cuestionario de identificación de las necesidades de intervención psicológica. Los resultados indican que los participantes necesitan más información o ayuda en las siguientes áreas: (i) manejo de la ansiedad y del nerviosismo, (ii) miedo al fracaso, (iii) estrategias de búsqueda de empleo, (iv) elección de una carrera y (v) habilidades de gestión del tiempo. Hay una preferencia por asesoramiento individual y cursos cortos. Existen diferencias en función del sexo, grado académico, regularidad de contacto con la familia y satisfacción con la vida académica y global. De los resultados provienen implicaciones para la disponibilidad de sistemas, estrategias y actividades de apoyo psicológico para que los estudiantes puedan contestar adecuadamente a sus diferentes intereses.

Palabras clave: necesidades, intervención psicológica, educación superior.

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