



# Virtual events promoted by the women's health care league during the covid-19 pandemic

*Eventos virtuais promovidos pela liga de cuidados à saúde da mulher na pandemia de covid-19*

*Eventos virtuales promovidos por care league a la salud de la mujer en la pandemia de covid-19*

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to analyze the participants' perception of the online events promoted during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic by the Women's Health Care League (LCSM). **Methods:** cross-sectional, descriptive study, with a quantitative and qualitative approach, developed online with 90 participants in ten events on the theme of women's health, promoted by LCSM in 2020. Data were collected using a semi-structured online form from July to November 2021. For data analysis, IBM SPSS was used, through descriptive statistics of qualitative variables and for the analysis of qualitative data, thematic analysis was used. **Results:** 98,89% of the participants answered that the LCSM events in online format had a positive influence on their academic, professional or personal life. The analysis of the responses allowed the identification of three categories: feeling of "closeness" to the University, description of positive influences, and knowledge beyond the classroom. **Conclusion and implications for practice:** The data from this study allow us to infer the important and necessary role of information technology and academic leagues in the construction of knowledge and in the deepening of reflections and debate on women's health care.

Keywords: Covid-19; Information Technology; Nursing; Pandemic; Women's Health.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** analisar a percepção dos participantes sobre os eventos online promovidos durante o primeiro ano da pandemia da Covid-19 pela Liga de Cuidados à Saúde das Mulheres (LCSM). **Métodos:** estudo transversal, descritivo, de abordagem quantitativa e qualitativa, desenvolvido de forma online com 90 participantes em dez eventos sobre a temática relativa à saúde da mulher, promovidos pela LCSM no ano de 2020. Os dados foram coletados por um formulário semi-estruturado *online* no período de julho a novembro de 2021. Para a análise de dados, utilizou-se o IBM SPSS, por meio de estatística descritiva das variáveis qualitativas e para a análise dos dados qualitativos utilizou-se a análise temática. **Resultados:** 98,89% dos participantes responderam que os eventos da LCSM no formato *online* influenciaram de forma positiva na vida acadêmica, profissional ou pessoal. A análise das respostas permitiu a identificação de três categorias: sentimento de "aproximação" à Universidade, descrição das influências positivas, e conhecimentos para além da sala de aula. **Conclusão e implicações para a prática:** Os dados do presente estudo permitem inferir o importante e necessário papel da tecnologia da informação e das ligas acadêmicas na construção do conhecimento e no aprofundamento das reflexões e do debate sobre os cuidados à saúde das mulheres.

Palavras-chave: Covid-19; Enfermagem; Pandemias; Saúde da Mulher; Tecnologia da Informação.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** analizar la percepción de los participantes de los eventos online promovidos durante el primer año de la pandemia del Covid-19 por la Liga para el Cuidado de la Salud de la Mujer (LCSM). **Método:** estudio transversal, descriptivo, con abordaje cuantitativo y cualitativo, desarrollado online con 90 participantes en diez eventos sobre el tema salud de la mujer, promovidos por la LCSM en 2020. Los datos fueron recogidos a través de un formulario semi-estructurado en línea de julio a noviembre de 2021. Para el análisis de datos se utilizó IBM SPSS, a través de estadística descriptiva de variables cualitativas y para el análisis de datos cualitativos se utilizó análisis temático. **Resultados:** El 98,89% de los participantes respondieron que los eventos LCSM en formato online influyeron positivamente en su vida académica, profesional o personal. El análisis de las respuestas permitió identificar tres categorías: sentirse "más cerca" de la Universidad, descripción de influencias positivas y conocimiento más allá del aula. **Conclusión e implicaciones para la práctica:** Los datos del presente estudio permiten inferir el importante y necesario papel de las tecnologías de la información y de las ligas académicas en la construcción del conocimiento y en la profundización de la reflexión y el debate sobre el cuidado de la salud de las mujeres.

Palabras clave: Covid-19; Enfermería; Pandemias; Salud de la Mujer; Tecnología de la Información.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically concerning the education sector, the Ministry of Health (2020), following the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, promulgated Ordinance 343/2020, which provided for the replacement of in-person classes with digital classes for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic situation.<sup>1</sup>

This scenario demanded the emergence of alternative forms for the continuity of teaching-learning processes, with the remote use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) becoming the predominant way to promote new Distance Learning (DL) strategies.<sup>2</sup> Institutions had to reinvent how knowledge is disseminated as well as adjust teaching techniques according to the context of families and students' subjectivities.<sup>3</sup>

Academic leagues, in the Brazilian scenario, enable differentiated training in health, anticipating the insertion of their participants in the fields of activity and filling the knowledge gaps found in graduation through student-leading roles and autonomy.<sup>4</sup>

In this regard, academic leagues can promote culture and university extension activities that enable integration between the university and society, contributing to the support of the university tripod - teaching, research, and extension -favoring the formation and generation of knowledge. This integration allows the enrichment of students' professional experience, which enables theoretical learning practice, strengthening their ethical, solidarity, and citizen commitments and corroborating the country's technological and social development, improving the population's quality of life.<sup>5</sup>

The Women's Health Care League (WHCL) was created in 2013 at the *Escola de Enfermagem de Ribeirão Preto* of the *Universidade de São Paulo* (EERP-USP), carrying out extracurricular cultural and university extension activities through events aimed at academic audiences and society, spreading knowledge about women's health issues. Its members are undergraduate nursing students, women's health professors, and collaborating nurses who work in the area of women's health.<sup>6</sup> Before the pandemic, biweekly meetings were held to plan and organize events, in addition to establishing goals to be achieved. However, from March 2020, activities began to be carried out remotely.

Although leagues are important entities in the academic world and have played an important role during the pandemic,<sup>6</sup> a recent study<sup>4</sup> demonstrated that the literature on academic leagues is still incipient and research in this area is important.

Despite the existence of reports about the role of academic leagues during the COVID-19<sup>7</sup> pandemic and the impact of remote activities by academic leagues on teaching and learning at undergraduate level,<sup>8</sup> studies that focus on participants' perception of online events promoted by academic leagues are not common, much less in the area of women's health nursing.

Therefore, considering the scarcity of studies on the subject and the importance of academic leagues' performance, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to assess these entities' performance. The present study aims to analyze

participants' perception of the online events promoted during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic by WHCL.

## METHOD

This is a cross-sectional, descriptive study, with a quantitative and qualitative approach, developed online following the Checklist for Reporting Results of Internet E-Surveys (CHERRIES).<sup>9</sup>

The study population was made up of participants in the ten online events, held on Google Meet<sup>®</sup> and promoted by WHCL in 2020.

The events addressed the following topics relating to women's health: 1) The importance of physical exercise as a way of maintaining mental health during quarantine; 2) Coping with violence against women in times of pandemic; 3) Obstetric nurses and assistance to women in times of pandemic: *Centro de Parto Normal Luz de Candeeiro's* experience; 4) Abortion and women's health; 5) Homeless women during the COVID-19 pandemic; 6) Acupressure as self-care in times of pandemic; 7) Sexuality and gender; 8) Empowerment and strengthening of women for home birth: caring for mothers and newborns; 9) Let's talk about: cervical cancer; 10) VI Symposium of the Women's Health Care League - We Need to Talk About Being a Woman: Demystifying Society's Taboos.

Those registered at WHCL events in 2020, with effective participation, confirmed by filling out the attendance lists online, were included. Participants who stayed less than half the time of each event were excluded. It should be noted that the participant nomenclature and a consecutive number were used, aiming to maintain anonymity.

For data collection, an electronic form developed by the researchers was used, transcribed into Google Forms<sup>®</sup>, containing two parts: the first to characterize participants, containing socioeconomic, demographic and academic background data; the second with questions regarding participants' scope, motivation, perception and experience regarding the online events promoted in 2020.

Data collection took place after approval by the Research Ethics Committee, and was carried out from July 21<sup>st</sup> to November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021. To recruit participants, consecutive non-probabilistic sampling was used, characterized as the choice of people or objects more readily accessible as subjects of a research.<sup>10</sup> Participants were recruited via electronic mail, obtained from event registration forms, at which point the research objective was clarified, the procedures to be carried out for data collection, the link was provided to access the online survey page on Google Forms<sup>®</sup>.

The message was sent to listeners of the League's events by email three times, and by instant electronic message (WhatsApp<sup>®</sup>), weekly. After this period, non-response on the online survey page was considered a refusal to participate. In total, messages were sent to 799 listeners, with 103 forms answered. However, there were 13 losses due to incomplete completion, totaling 90 participants in this research.

On this page, after reading the explanations about the research and ethical aspects, those who agreed to participate expressed their agreement electronically by clicking on acceptance to participate button on the page containing the Informed Consent

Form (ICF). Subsequently, there were pages with questionnaires characterizing participants and events, which were self-completed without the researcher's intervention.

For data analysis, IBM SPSS was used through descriptive statistics of quantitative variables. For qualitative data analysis, data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach.

The present study complied with the criteria of Resolution 466/2012 of the Brazilian National Health Council.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee linked to the Brazilian National Health Council (CONEP - *Conselho Nacional de Saúde*).

## RESULTS

A total of 90 people participated in this study, with an average age of 26.78 years ( $SD \pm 9.72$  years), a minimum of 19 and a maximum of 65 years.

Table 1 presents the distribution of study participants regarding sociodemographic variables. Regarding the city of origin, it is worth highlighting that 33 cities, from eight different states, were mentioned, in addition to Ribeirão Preto, SP.

In 2020, WHCL promoted 10 online events and, among respondents, 86.67% (78) had participated in 1 to 5 events and 13.33% (12) had participated in 6 to 11 events. All participants had access to the internet, as 78.89% (71) reported that their means of access was via their own cell phone or home computer; 11.11% (10) also accessed, in addition to these means, a computer from another location; 5.56% (5) accessed only via cell phone; and 4.44% (4) used other means. Table 2 shows the arrangement of participants in relation to their perception of the events in terms of topic relevance, content presented, speakers' didactics, doubt-solving during presentations, workload, adequacy of schedules, platform used and ease of access.

Respondents were also asked about their motivations for participation, and could select more than one of the answers to the data collection questionnaire. It was observed that everyone (100%) was motivated by event topic, 88 (97.77%), by ease of access and/or offering platform, 77 (85.55%), by certificate, 65 (72.22%), by speaker, 35 (38.88%), by event duration, and one (1.11%), by event quality.

Considering the pandemic scenario, we investigated how WHCL events in the online format influenced participants' academic, professional or personal lives. This question was open-ended and, for quantitative description, the answers were classified so that 98.89% (89) responded that there was a positive influence, and 1.11% (1) participant responded that there was no influence. It should be noted that there was no mention of negative influence. The analysis of the answers to this open-ended question allowed the identification of three categories that will be presented below: "Feeling of "closeness" to the university"; "Positive influences"; and "Knowledge beyond the classroom".

### Feeling of "closeness" to the university

During the social isolation imposed by the pandemic, emergency remote teaching allowed the teaching-learning process

**Table 1.** Distribution of participants according to sociodemographic factors. Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil, 2021.

Variable	Frequency	%
<b>Self-reported color</b>		
White	59	65.56%
Brown	19	21.11%
Black	10	11.11%
Yellow	2	2.22%
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	86	95.56%
Male	4	4.44%
<b>Sexual orientation</b>		
Heterosexual	68	75.56%
Bisexual	18	20.00%
Homosexual	3	3.33%
Pansexual	1	1.11%
<b>Gender identity</b>		
Self-identification as a woman	86	95.56%
Self-identification as a man	4	4.44%
<b>Education</b>		
Complete high school	16	17.78%
Incomplete higher education	41	45.56%
Complete higher education	5	5.56%
Incomplete graduate degree	9	10.00%
Complete graduate degree	19	21.11%
<b>Link with USP (student, professor or other employee)</b>		
Yes	61	67.78%
No	29	32.22%
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	65	74.44%
Vocational or higher education professional	20	22.22%
Retired	2	2.22%
Unemployed	1	1.11%
<b>Field of action</b>		
Nursing	73	81.11%
Law	4	4.44%
Physical education	3	3.33%
Psychology	3	3.33%
Others (biology, medicine, social work, speech therapy, occupational therapy, architecture, health technician)	7	7.77%
<b>City of residency</b>		
Ribeirão Preto	47	52.22%
Other	43	47.78%

Source: prepared by the authors.

**Table 2.** Distribution of study participants according to their perception of the events. Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil, 2021.

Variable	Frequency	%
<b>Topic relevance</b>		
Above expected	51	56.67%
Within expected	39	43.33%
<b>Content presented</b>		
Above expected	61	67.78%
Within expected	29	32.22%
<b>Speakers' didactics</b>		
Above expected	61	67.78%
Within expected	29	32.22%
<b>Doubt-solving</b>		
Above expected	47	52.22%
Within expected	43	47.78%
<b>Workload</b>		
Above expected	13	14.44%
Within expected	77	85.56%
<b>Schedule and conciliation with other activities</b>		
Adequate time	80	88.89%
Little adequate time	10	11.11%
<b>Platform used</b>		
Above expected	16	17.78%
Within expected	74	82.22%
<b>Ease of access to the event</b>		
Above expected	9	10.00%
Within expected	81	90.00%

Source: prepared by the authors.

to be maintained. In higher education, despite adaptations to different areas of knowledge and different courses, students felt distance, especially from theoretical-practical teaching. Thus, for respondents, WHCL's online activities made them feel closer to the university, motivating learning and maintaining the bond with the course, as presented in the following statements:

*In the beginning of the pandemic, [WHCL events] they were what gave me the strength to continue studying, giving me motivation and resilience. (Participant 6)*

*I felt alive, active, breaking the hide-and-seek routine. (Participant 11)*

*Participating in lectures and events, I had a feeling that I really was an undergraduate student. Even in DL, the events were like a glimmer of hope for coexistence and academic learning. (Participant 54)*

*Opportunities to continue learning about or updating topics that are very important for my research and for life, even in the midst of isolation and uncertainty about when or how we would return to in-person activities. (Participant 76)*

*They were important for keeping me connected with the degree while I was still studying, but I couldn't do internships due to the pandemic. It was a way to continue studying and updating myself. (Participant 21)*

### Positive influences

It is important to highlight that participants did not mention negative influences related to the events promoted. To exemplify the influences mentioned, we highlighted the statements below:

*They had a positive influence, adding knowledge that, many times, they would not have access to because it was [taught by speaker] from other states, such as the lecture given by [speaker]. (Participant 3)*

*The events brought up very important topics in the pandemic context, being extremely relevant both to my academic training and to my personal life, as the pandemic affects all aspects of people's lives. (Participant 12)*

*The events I was able to attend were within the key topics for the period in terms of the relevance of the topic in the period, such as, for example, women in politics. This can contribute to discussions in other spheres of my personal and academic life. Moreover, the lectures made it possible to meet new people and perspectives from different locations and areas of study. (Participant 89)*

*Today, it still influences me, because it is my area of study in postgraduate studies, providing me with learning and professional development with topics that I did not study during my undergraduate studies. (Participant 6)*

### Knowledge beyond the classroom

When planning WHCL events, priority is given to topics and content that are not included in undergraduate nursing curricula and health courses, but that can contribute to work in the area of women's health in clinical practice, teaching or search. This was recognized by the participants, who commented on the importance of being involved in events that bring knowledge that goes beyond what is taught in the classroom.

*I believe they influenced me in providing me access to information that completed my academic training. (Participant 8)*

*In general, the league's events made me take a broader look at issues involving women's health. I had contact with different topics, which are not covered in undergraduate studies. The lectures made me grow personally and also*

*made me think about how I will provide assistance to this population, what type of professional I want to be.* (Participant 25)

*They allowed us to gain knowledge and contact with topics/speakers that might not have been possible in person (distance and logistics). Furthermore, topics that go beyond graduation add a lot to our training.* (Participant 55)

*The events were essential for me to continue dedicating myself and looking for new activities that spoke to the proposed topics. I was able to get closer to women's health issues and also search for theoretical references from influential women, presented at events provided by the League, to better understand the various aspects that involve women's lives.* (Participant 56)

Based on the above, it is also possible to note that, at times, the identified categories intertwine, showing the event contents' full dynamics, which were reflected in respondents' perceptions of WHCL's online performance. As these are extension activities with a specific focus on an area of knowledge, it is notable that the respondents sought to participate because they were familiar with or had some interest in the area. But it is worth highlighting the innovative nature of the content presented, as participants expressed offering and/or deepening topics not discussed in their training.

## DISCUSSION

From the analyses, it is possible to understand that the events held by WHCL contributed to knowledge construction of students, and not undergraduate students, positively impacting, in particular, teaching and extension, in addition to research.

From the analyses, the predominance of female audiences in the events held was observed, although WHCL is integrative and has no sex or gender limitations. However, a more representative participation of women in events held by WHCL was expected, since issues related to this audience are the main focus of the topics covered in all events.

Another fact that draws attention is the scope of states and municipalities in which the events were monitored: 33 cities and eight Brazilian states in total. It is believed that this was possible due to the events being held remotely, as the in-person model makes it difficult to participate in an event of this type over a long distance. The use of online tools was a measure that contributed to reducing the impact of COVID-19 on the academic path of students<sup>12</sup> as well as the community through extension.

In this context, it is noteworthy that this ease of access promoted a feeling of closeness to academic activities in a time of social isolation. The use of information technology and digital platforms made it possible to meet people from different locations, universities and courses, enabling continuity of knowledge beyond the walls of educational institutions. Virtual media favored interactivity and alleviated the effects of social isolation, allowing students and professors to develop new

communication skills,<sup>13</sup> expanding interaction possibilities and quickly disseminating knowledge and information.<sup>14</sup>

These data reinforce the importance of considering offering future events in a remote and/or hybrid format, with the use of information technologies, even after the return of in-person activities, as a way of maintaining diversity of participation and dissemination of knowledge beyond geographical barriers.

Furthermore, these results partially balance problems that involve holding online events, such as presence, adaptability and creation of links between virtual platforms, website crashing due to not being prepared for high demand (or technological problems that prevent presenters from share their screen and/or voice, as found in an international study).<sup>15</sup>

Another consideration to be highlighted concerns the positive influences of the events promoted by WHCL regarding repercussions on personal and academic life, meeting new people and perspectives, in addition to areas of study. This result is corroborated by an experience report developed in an academic nursing league in Pará, Brazil.<sup>7</sup>

Such positive influences contrast with the side effects of the pandemic, since several areas were affected and brought negative repercussions on the physical, psychological, spiritual and emotional aspects of people who practiced social distancing.<sup>16</sup>

The abrupt interruption of in-person activities during the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a challenging scenario for carrying out teaching-learning activities that allowed the development of skills and abilities to overcome them, in addition to contributing positively to dissemination of knowledge to students and mitigating negative impacts in the academic sphere.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the knowledge generated by the events promoted by the league stands out regarding diverse and comprehensive topics related to women's health throughout life cycle, which go beyond the walls of the classroom and contribute to the construction of an expanded and critical vision.

These results are in line with previous studies that highlighted the salutary relevance of academic leagues for training students and encouraging their development at university,<sup>18</sup> in addition to approaching teaching practices, expanding critical vision, offering teaching-learning opportunities, optimizing education between professors and students.<sup>19,20</sup>

In this context, it is important to highlight that, traditionally, women's health care prioritizes reproductive health, with a focus on prenatal care and childbirth. However, women's health also encompasses other demands and needs, such as sexuality, gender inequality, access to information, among others, which were addressed in the events.

This fact places the league's performance in accordance with the Brazilian National Health Promotion Policy,<sup>21</sup> as evidenced in other studies, by contributing to actions that enable responses to social needs, promotion of quality of life and reduction of risks and vulnerabilities.<sup>7,22</sup>

In this regard, the virtual events promoted by the league during the COVID-19 pandemic also contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), launched by the

United Nations in 2015, to be implemented by 2030, especially the third goal, which deals with health and well-being, the fifth goal, which deals with gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, and the tenth goal, which deals with inequality reduction.<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The non-response rate is considered a limitation of this study, which had a direct impact on sample size, since collection was online and the return of completed forms was not under the control of the researchers, despite efforts to ensure that the entire study population received an invitation to participate in the research. Still, it was possible to satisfactorily meet the study objective.

It is concluded that, according to participants' perceptions, offering events in a remote format had a positive impact on their personal and academic lives, in order to bring together people with common interests in the area of women's health and allow academic-scientific improvement, even in such a turbulent and uncertain period, such as the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data from the present study allow us to infer the important and necessary role of information technology and academic leagues in knowledge construction and in deepening reflections and debate on women's health care with attention to their needs, the persistent inequalities between men and women in their different dimensions of analysis, the exercise of rights and the equalization of opportunities.

## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Study design. Mônica Maria de Jesus Silva, Amanda Maria Urei Rodrigues, Julia Ferreira Cieto, Cecília Verones Cândido de Morais, Wellery Stefany Nunes Glavina, Gleicy Kelly Felix Costa, Nathalia Santarato, Thamiris Martins Michelon, Ludmila de Oliveira Ruela, Juliana Cristina dos Santos Monteiro

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