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Stress, Anguish, Anxiety and Resilience of University Teachers in the Face of Covid-19

Estrés, angustia, ansiedad y resiliencia en profesores universitarios de cara al Covid-19

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RESUMEN

El aislamiento social, que es una medida impuesta debido a las consecuencias de la pandemia del Covid-19, afecta de un modo considerable la salud mental de las personas. El objetivo fue determinar los estados emocionales de los docentes universitarios frente al Covid-19. El estrés manifestó un nivel alto en el 89,4%; la angustia, con un nivel alto del 94,2%; la ansiedad con un nivel alto del 92,3%. Respecto a la resiliencia, esta se manifestó en un nivel medio-alto con un 60,9% de los encuestados. Se concluye que el estado emocional de la mayoría de los docentes es bajo y su respuesta a través de su resiliencia es medio-alto.

Palabras clave: Aislamiento social, Covid-19, estado emocional, resiliencia.

ABSTRACT

Social isolation, which is a measure imposed due to the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, it significantly affects people's mental health. The objective was to determine the emotional states of university teachers in the face of Covid-19. Stress showed a high level of 89.4%; anxiety, with a high level of 94.2%; anxiety with a high level of 92.3%. Regarding resilience, this was manifested at a medium-high level with 60.9% of those surveyed. In conclusion, the emotional state of most of the teachers is low and their response through their resilience is medium-high.

Keywords: Social isolation, Covid-19, emotional state, resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

In the current times of health crisis and pandemic; stress, anguish and anxiety are expressed in various affective states that impact, on an international scale, also in university teachers. This fact directly or indirectly influences their family, social and academic environment.

Theoretical foundations related to emotional states

Emotional states are related to a set of attitudes and feelings that a person adopts as a result of some event that occurs in their social environment; that is, an emotion is related to a set of feelings and reactions. In this sense, emotions are experienced individually. In this regard, Bisquerra (2001) states that an emotion "... is a complex state of an organism characterized by an excitement or disturbance that predisposes to a certain organized response. Emotions are usually generated in response to an external or internal event" (p.61).

Then, an emotion is related to an intense feeling that the human being experiences. It is about a set of reactions that an individual perceives, as a result of certain external stimulations that allow him to adapt to a certain situation. Without a doubt, an emotion is a response to a stimulus, which it can be positive or negative. These emotions are classified as physiological reactions that adapt to certain stimulations (perceptions, experiences, or events) that influence human behavior. Therefore, the emotional states (stress, anguish and anxiety) of the individual have three components: the neurophysiological, the behavioral and the cognitive. The neurophysiological component is related to a set of physical responses, while the behavioral part is related to emotional expression; this means that, it is associated with a set of behaviors and conducts that are the product of emotions. Finally, the cognitive component is related to experiences and learnings from the emotions experienced (Bisquerra, 2011, pp.18-19).

In this context, emotions have a very close relationship with the human brain. It is so from the 1990s to 2000, many studies have been carried out regarding the relationship between emotion and the brain, neurosciences and emotions (Damasio, 1996; De Loux, 1999; Barraquer, 1995; Cornelius, 1996; Lane and Nadel, 2000, Ramírez, Lay, Avendaño and Herrera, 2018; Villalobos and Ramirez, 2018; Ramirez, Villalobos And Herrera, 2018; Villalobos, Ramirez and Díaz-Cid, 2019). Without a doubt, emotions are processed in the nervous system. Based on this, studies related to the emotional brain were developed. De Loux (1999) suggests that, in the presence of certain stimulations, the brain values their meaning and activates a response. In the neuronal context, the evaluation of the stimulus and the activation of the response are carried out in the part of the amygdala (subcortical structure of the brain that has several neuronal connections). Similarly, according to Ocampo (2019), the human brain is divided into two parts, the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere (...). The left hemisphere is the logical brain and is responsible for logic, numbers, analysis, sequence, etc.; while the right hemisphere is characterized by being intuitive and spontaneous; it is the creative brain and is responsible for perception, imagination, consciousness, among other aspects (p.43).

Then, the functions that the right hemisphere of the brain develops are closely related to the emotional processes and the responses that are generated in times of crisis. Following Le Doux (1999), there are two types of emotional responses: the first (type I) occurs immediately and involuntarily; the second (type II) is characterized in that they partially controls the situation, which constitutes a specific response of each individual. This means, each individual has different responses to certain situations that influence both their individual characteristics (personality) and their personal experiences. These considerations, based on the objective of this article, make it possible to determine that university teaching staff, in the face of a certain crisis situation, such as in the case of COVID-19, respond in a different way.

Emotions of stress, anguish and anxiety in university teachers in periods of Pandemic

In recent times, due to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is concern and interest in studies related to the emotional state, such as stress, anguish and anxiety, in university teachers from Latin America.

Therefore, in this section, we try to explain theoretical aspects about these emotions, differentiating them from an analysis and a review of the literature.

A category of analysis in this research is the stress that is generated in the current crisis as an emotional state in university teachers. Stress has been a topic of interest and concern for many researchers, since its effects affect the physical and mental aspects of people; as well as in academics and work, due to the anguish and concern that it motivates, even with an impact on the personal, family and social spheres.

Stress is a usual fact in the daily life of the human being, since all individuals, with greater or lesser frequency, have experienced it at some point in their life; however, at present, stress states have increased as a result of the current crisis. Having stress is being under strong pressure, or feeling frustrated, finding yourself in situations in which it is very difficult to have control of circumstances such as health or illness crises, which directly influence the overall well-being of the human being.

The term stress comes from the Old English word *distress*, which means "pain or affliction". Consequently, stress is a non-specific behavior or response of the body to a variety of external and internal pressures; in other words, it is an adaptive and emergency process, being important for the survival of the human being. In any case, stress is a consequence of the relationship between the individual and his environment. In this regard, Martínez and Díaz (2007) argue that:

The underlying problem lies in the requirements of modernity; focused on obtaining results regardless of their consequences on the quality of life and therefore, on the physical and mental health of the affected people (Naranjo Pereira, ML 2009; Villalobos and Ramírez, 2018; Annía, Villalobos, Ramírez and Ramos, 2019). Based on the above considerations, people; specifically university teachers, need to learn how to prevent and manage stress in these times of pandemic and health crisis. Whoever does not do so endangers their health and peace of mind; on the other hand, those who know and take appropriate actions to prevent stressful situations and deal with it in better conditions can enjoy a better lifestyle, even in periods of crisis.

Stress is characterized by a subjective response to what is happening; this means, it is the inner state of mind of tension. In the words of Melgosa (1995), due to the alterations that stress causes in the person, stress is understood as: "A set of physiological and psychological reactions that the body experiences when it is subjected to strong demands" (p.19). Consequently, stress occurs when the person identifies a threatening situation, the magnitude of which in many cases exceeds their own individual resources; from this, two processes are presented: a cognitive assessment of the event and a process of coping or resistance. In the first, the individual analyzes the benefits or damages of the situation; in the second, it reflects and estimates what it can or cannot do to face the situation, in such a way as to prevent damage or improve its perspective.

On the other hand, anxiety as another category of analysis in this research, it is about an emotional state experienced by the human being. According to Ayuso (1988), anguish is defined as: "... A complex, diffuse and unpleasant emotion that entails psychic and organic (physical) repercussions in the individual who feels threatened by something" (cited by Sierra, Ortega and Zubeidat, 2003). This means, it is about a state of intense restlessness or intense restlessness, caused by something unpleasant or by the threat of misfortune or danger.

Based on the previous considerations, anxiety can be adaptive and useful, in the sense that it is a normal reaction in our daily life; however, in the current health emergency that is experienced on a global and planetary scale, it constitutes a very important element of analysis. This emotional state can have attitudinal and behavioral consequences, which influence the social and family environment.

In the words of Corbin (2015), anxiety presents a set of symptoms and characteristics such as:

- Worry and fear.
- Despair.
- Muscle tension and suffocation.
- Difficulties sleeping. (Available at: <https://psicologiyamente.com>. Retrieved on: July 23th, 2020).

Actually, anxiety problems in university teachers are very frequent due to the health emergency and the COVID - 19 pandemic; for this reason, it is very important that this professional population be able to develop a set of skills and capacities to better face this crisis, solving the problems that are generated as a result of this crisis.

Without a doubt, anxiety is part of the existence of the human being: since all human beings feel anxiety in different degrees; however, in times of crisis, such as the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, anxiety levels increase, both at the individual level, as well as at the family and community level.

From a psychological perspective, Gray (1982), Sandin (1990), among others, conceive anxiety as a trait and an emotional state. From a trait point of view, they refer to an individual situation and to the personality of responding to a situation of danger and threat; and, from the perspective of emotional state, to the ability of people to show certain responses to certain stimulations, whether internal or external. According to the approach of Sierra, Ortega and Zubeidat (2003), anxiety refers to: A state of agitation and restlessness characterized by the anticipation of danger, the predominance of psychic symptoms and the sensation of catastrophe or imminent danger; this means, the combination between cognitive and physiological symptoms (...) in which the individual tries to find a solution to the danger (...) Undoubtedly, in the current situation, it greatly affects, the anxiety states of the Latin American university population; directly influencing attitudes, behaviors, as a response to the level of danger and threat from COVID- 19.

Resilience as a preponderant factor to overcome emotional states of crisis in university teachers

The mental health of teachers in the university context is very important in times of health crisis, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the academic field, problems of anguish, anxiety and stress have been spread, which often result in decreased work performance; however, these emotions are not typical or exclusive to professionals dedicated to academia. The hurry, the competitiveness, the social and technological changes, added to this the health crisis and the pandemic, threaten the psychological balance of many university teachers in Latin America.

Faced with this reality, the ability to develop resilience processes that allow us to overcome times of crisis is very important, strengthening a set of capacities and abilities that help us to overcome this situation.

The term resilience has its origin in the Latin language; comes from the term *resilio*, which means to go back, highlight, bounce. Therefore, the incorporation of this concept into the social sciences, including psychology, and the health sciences is relatively recent. In the words of D'Alessio (2015), resilience is defined as "The ability to emerge from adversity, adapt, recover and access a meaningful and productive life (...) individual ability to prosper when faced with the challenge of a crisis experience and stress "(p.7).

Undoubtedly, the brain is the central organ in the elaboration and execution of the response to stress and, consequently, responsible for the implementation and regulatory control of the mechanisms of resilience. Then, the brain allows the body to perceive a set of internal and external stimulations, and respond to the different stimulations that cause stress (environmental and biological).

In crises, undoubtedly, the emotions of anxiety and stress are increased. These emotions, in many cases, increase the vulnerability, both psychological and physical of people; however, there are people who regardless of living in certain crisis situations, assume proactive behaviors to face difficult situations. These people are considered resilient. Resilient people use their neuropsychological capacities and resources in a positive way to face crises; they have high degrees of motivation to get ahead.

In this line, resilience in the context of higher education, fundamentally in university teachers is an important element of analysis. In this regard, Rockwel (2012) mentions that: teaching work is a delicate skill,

composed of many elements such as trust, relationship with students, intrinsic interest in academic content and activities, perseverance in conducting, follow-up activities, which allows to achieve academic objectives and social (p.451).

These situations show the importance that university teachers, in addition to their training and academic preparation, they must have emotional skills in relation to their social environment (family, community) and their relationship with their academic environment (university community). In this way, empathic scenarios can be achieved; above all, strengthening skills and capacities to overcome crises such as the health emergency and the current pandemic.

METHODS

The present work has been developed under the positivist paradigm, framed in a descriptive quantitative approach. Hernández, Fernández and Baptista (2010) point out that descriptive studies:

They seek to specify the properties, characteristics and profiles of people, groups, communities, processes, objects or any other phenomenon that is subjected to analysis. This means, they only intend to measure or collect information independently or jointly on the concepts or variables to which they refer, that is, their objective is not to indicate how these are related (p.80).

The design is descriptive transectional, because a variable was measured in a group of people and its description was provided based on dimensions.

The technique used for data collection was the survey and the instrument, the emotional state questionnaire. The latter was adapted to the population, in order to collect the information. Given the situation that was being generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided to carry out a Google Forms questionnaire; which was disseminated through social networks, virtual platforms and also, through emails to different colleagues and universities.

The questionnaire was made up of 58 items, organized in four dimensions: stress, anguish, anxiety and resilience. Each one presented four response alternatives: Always (A), Frequently (F), Sometimes (S) and Never (N).

The reliability criterion of the instrument was determined by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and the instrument has a very high level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.910$).

For the validity of the instrument, exploratory factor analysis was applied to each of its dimensions. The results obtained show us one-dimensionality; which means that each of the items are closely linked. The empirical validation tells us that it is unique and that each of its items seeks the measurement of a single dimension; this means, there is uniqueness of the items. In order to find the validity and reliability of the instrument, the SPSS V-25 was used.

RESULTS

The results of the survey are presented below. The sample was recruited from May 10th to 30th, 2020.

The population was made up of 207 university teachers, belonging to different universities in Latin America. The highest frequency of age of teachers is between 45 and 54 years (37.2%), most of the teachers are married (61.4%), the representation by sex behaved as follows: 51.7% female and 48.3% male. According to the number of people living with the survey respondent, it was observed that 25.6% of them live with 3 or more people. It was also stated that the vast majority (63.3%) dedicate at least 2 hours of their time to inform themselves about the pandemic. The vast majority (51.7%) state that the information they receive regarding the pandemic is regular and that there is a certain deficiency.

Now, we will proceed to see the results of the necessary measurements and comparisons; based on the four (4) dimensions considered (stress, anguish, anxiety and resilience) and the emotional state variable, in order to determine the behavior of university teachers and whose results are presented below:

Dimension: Stress

Table I. Frequency of stress

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Severe | 185 | 89,4 | 89,4 |
| Moderate | 21 | 10,1 | 99,5 |
| Mild | 1 | ,5 | 100,0 |
| Total | 207 | 100,0 | |

Source: Own elaboration

The Stress dimension is represented by a set of 14 items that, when statistically processed, yield a predominantly severe level of 89.4%. This means that a large percentage of the people surveyed have an inappropriate manifestation of stress, as a result of the social isolation measures that have been put in place to counteract the spread of COVID-19, a moderate level of 10.1% show other survey respondents and a very small number of people reported a mild level of stress (0.5%). A severe level of stress of 37.8% is manifested in teachers, whose ages are between 45-54 years and it is in the female sex where it is mostly reflected with 53%.

Dimension 2: Anguish

Table II. Frequency of anguish

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Severe | 195 | 94,2 | 94,2 |
| Moderate | 10 | 4,8 | 99,0 |
| Mild | 2 | 1,0 | 100,0 |
| Total | 207 | 100,0 | |

Source: Own elaboration

The Anguish dimension is represented by a set of 13 items that, when statistically processed, yield a predominantly severe level of 94.2%. It means that a large percentage of the people surveyed have an inappropriate manifestation of anguish, as a result of the social isolation measures that have been put in place to counter the spread of COVID-19. A moderate level of 4.8% manifested other survey respondents and a very small number of people expressed a mild level of anguish with 1%. A severe level of anguish of 37.9%

is manifested in teachers; whose ages range from 45-54 years and it is the female sex where it is mostly reflected with 51.8%.

Dimension 3: Anxiety

Table III. Anxiety Frequency

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| Severe | 191 | 92,3 | 92,3 |
| Moderate | 14 | 6,8 | 99,0 |
| Mild | 2 | 1,0 | 100,0 |
| Total | 207 | 100,0 | |

Source: Own elaboration

The Anxiety dimension is represented by a set of 18 items that, when statistically processed, yield a predominantly severe level of 92.3%. It means that a large percentage of the people surveyed have an inappropriate manifestation of anxiety, as a result of the social isolation measures that have been put in place to counter the spread of COVID-19. A moderate level of 6.8% showed other survey respondents and a very small number of people showed a mild level of anxiety with 1%. A severe level of anguish of 38.2% is manifested in teacher; whose ages range between 45-54 years and it is the female sex where it is mostly reflected with 52.4%.

Dimension 4: Resilience

Table IV. Resilience Frequency

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| Low | 70 | 33,8 | 33,8 |
| Medium | 122 | 58,9 | 92,8 |
| High | 15 | 7,2 | 100,0 |
| Total | 207 | 100,0 | |

Source: Own elaboration

The Resilience dimension is represented by a set of 13 items that, when statistically processed, tell us that the vast majority show a medium or regular level of Resilience with 58.9%. This means that a large percentage of the people surveyed has an adequate manifestation, with the attitude of overcoming the adverse and that difficulties are nothing more than opportunities to find a solution to our problems; despite the measures of social isolation that have been put in place to counteract the spread of the COVID-19. Another group of survey respondents shows a low level of resilience of 33.8% and a high level of 7.2%. A high level

of resilience of 53.3% is manifested in teachers; whose ages range from 45-54 years and it is the female sex where it is mostly reflected with 66.7%.

Variable: Emotional state

Table V. Frequency of emotional state

| | Frequency | Percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Severe | 198 | 95,7 | 95,7 |
| Moderate | 8 | 3,9 | 99,5 |
| Mild | 1 | ,5 | 100,0 |
| Total | 207 | 100,0 | |

Source: Own elaboration

The emotional state variable is represented by a set of 58 items that, when statistically processed, yield a predominantly severe level of 95.7%. This means that a large percentage of the people surveyed have a manifestation of a great alteration of their emotional state, as a result of the social isolation measures that have been put in place to counteract the spread of COVID-19. A moderate level of 3.9% was manifested by other survey respondents and a very small number of people expressed a mild level of their emotional state with 1%. A severe level of emotional state of 38.4% is manifested in teachers; whose ages range between 45-54 years and it is the female sex where it is mostly reflected with 52%.

DISCUSSION

In the current difficult situation in which we live, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is considered that it is of utmost importance to carry out research regarding emotional states in specific populations; in this case the university professor. The pandemic has brought about changes in the educational system of all countries and these changes have a direct and significant impact on university teachers.

The psychological and social impact of this pandemic is indisputable, a result of the confinement that is being experienced and in the presence of a threat to become ill. The levels of stress, anxiety and anguish increase in the population, but in the face of this, we want to know what is the resilience of the university professor to face this reality.

Recent publications agree as we do that the changes in these difficult times affected not only physically to the population, but also psychologically and emotionally (Stankovska et al., 2020), Johnson, Saletti and Tumas (2020), Ipsos (2020). In this sense, the levels of stress, anxiety and anguish increase in the population, but in the face of this, we want to know what is the resilience of the university teacher to face this reality. According to Lozano (2020), "The pandemic poses the challenge of taking care of the mental health of health personnel, as well as the general population" (p.51).

The data obtained during the application of the methodology indicated for this study; it allows to establish a scientific debate that determines the manifestations of emotional states such as stress, anguish and anxiety in the development of the daily life of the university teacher and how he through of its resilience, it manages to lessen these manifestations in a situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the Stress dimension, it can be seen that the population, especially in the age group 45-54 years and more frequently, in the female sex has a severe manifestation of stress with 89.4%. These data found differ with the results of Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2020), in their research entitled Levels of stress, anxiety and depression in the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in a sample collected in northern Spain, in which stress levels are between mild and moderate. As well as the study carried out by Liu et al. (2020): Psychological states and behavioral changes during a pandemic in China, in which a normal stress score is recorded with 67.9%.

In the Anguish dimension, it can be seen that the population, especially of the age group 45-54 years and more frequently, in the female sex has a severe manifestation of anguish with 94.2%. This is similar to a study carried out in Colombia, which, according to Ipsos (2020), refers that, due to the radical changes in habits and routines; the lack of time and resources has generated anguish in order to prepare for an isolation that from one week to another became mandatory.

Regarding the Anxiety dimension, it can be seen that the population, especially in the age group 45-54 years and more frequently, in the female sex has a severe manifestation of anxiety with 92.3%. These data disagree with the results of Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2020) in their research entitled Levels of stress, anxiety and depression in the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in a sample collected in northern Spain; in which anxiety levels are between mild and moderate. However, there is an agreement with the work of Johnson et al. (2020) in Argentina in reference to the feelings of Uncertainty and Anguish, being the greatest pre-eminence among women.

Regarding the Resilience dimension, it can be seen that the population, especially in the age group 45-54 years and more frequently, in the female sex has a high average manifestation with 58.9%. These data coincide with the results of Román et al. (2020), in their research titled Resilience of teachers in mandatory preventive social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In which they state that, when reviewing the results of the study, a positive and significant association is evidenced between the High Resilience of teachers and relevant factors during social distancing such as the perception of the disruptive event of the pandemic as an opportunity. In addition, the perception of the emotional support provided, the physical activity, the need for training in neuroeducation, the management of online education tools, the socio-emotional skills to face changes, the experiences of positive valence emotions and the implementation of changes in lifestyle during the pandemic.

Faced with this crisis scenario, every person, family and, especially, teachers; they have made changes at all levels within their homes. It has reconfigured their spaces and times; leading in various behaviors towards the search for a solution to this new lifestyle, turning their houses into offices, teaching classrooms, abruptly changing a face-to-face teaching to a virtual one at a distance, not separating at any time the action of teaching and learning in the educational context of the higher level.

Supporting and reconfiguring their structure towards digital and technological media that are the strategic allies in these processes. In this sense, the resilient effects of teachers make them adapt to the new educational profiles that are required in current times, accelerating the training processes in obtaining the required digital skills; despite the moments of tension that they live in these moments.

CONCLUSION

This work made it possible to identify the level of emotional state and the reaction of the university teacher in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic and the social confinement in which he is immersed. In general, the impact is negatively related to the emotional state, because it increased predominantly in a severe way, significantly raising the levels of stress, anxiety and anguish. Affecting mostly in women and in the age group of 44 to 54 years. However, there is a positive reaction in the aspect of Resilience, in the way of facing and reacting to events.

It is extremely important to take into account the results obtained in order to face it directly. Action that has to allow that these indices do not increase and bring greater consequences in the emotional state and the mental health of the university teachers. Likewise, to have a greater impact on the attention to female teachers by facing a double task; on one side, remote work and on the other, care for the family and home. In this sense, it is necessary to propose strategies in order to reduce these impacts in the face of a new reality in which we live.

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