



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Pinar del Río psychologists vs. COVID-19: an experience of counseling from telepsychology service

Psicólogos pinareños vs. COVID-19 en una experiencia de orientación desde la telepsicología

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Received: 2 August 2020

Accepted: 8 October 2020

Published: 10 December 2020

Citar como: Ordaz Hernández M, Miranda Otero D. Psicólogos pinareños vs. COVID-19 en una experiencia de orientación desde la telepsicología. Rev Ciencias Médicas [Internet]. 2020 [citado: fecha de acceso]; 24(6): e4636. Disponible en: <http://revcmpinar.sld.cu/index.php/publicaciones/article/view/4636>

ABSTRACT

Introduction: in view of COVID-19, the population needs for psychological counseling increased; paradoxically, circumstances hindered the traditional face-to-face counseling, consequently telepsychology service was the alternative.

Objective: to socialize the main actions developed by Pinar del Río psychologists with emphasis on telepsychology service, to provide counseling and support to the population to cope with COVID-19.

Methods: descriptive and cross-sectional study was carried out in Pinar del Río, between March and June 2020, applying dialectic, historical-logical methods, individual interview and documentary analysis with an intentional sample of five-type subjects chosen from the group of Pinar del Río psychologists.

Results: the constant counseling of psychologists was favored, through several means: online consult, in the provincial online-newspaper with 1 688 visits; in Pinar del Río television-network, with the space "Psycho-support at Home" and other typical programs, also from Guama radio station and its municipal studios. A WhatsApp Group was created, which led initiatives such as the development of messages of support for vulnerable groups, disseminated on social networks and carried out face-to-face counseling with diagnosed positive cases, suspects, health personnel, as well as in quarantined communities. Sports psychologists combined telephone and virtual counseling for athletes and their families.

Conclusions: the application of telepsychology was a challenge for psychologists and at the same time an opportunity that stimulate new learning approaches and greater professional and personal cohesion to offer help to the population in the dealing with COVID-19.

Keywords: Psychology; Orientation; Telepsychology; Covid-19; Pandemics.

RESUMEN

Introducción: ante la COVID-19, se incrementaron las necesidades de orientación psicológica de la población; paradójicamente, las circunstancias obstaculizaban la tradicional atención cara a cara, por lo que se recurrió a la telepsicología.

Objetivo: socializar las principales acciones desarrolladas por los psicólogos de Pinar del Río con énfasis en la telepsicología, en la orientación y acompañamiento a la población frente a la COVID-19.

Métodos: estudio descriptivo y transversal realizado en Pinar del Río entre marzo y junio de 2020, con los métodos dialéctico, histórico lógico, entrevista individual y análisis documental, con una muestra intencional de cinco sujetos tipo seleccionados del universo de psicólogos pinareños.

Resultados: se propició la atención constante de los psicólogos a través de varios medios: una Consultoría online, en el periódico provincial con 1 688 visitas; en la televisión pinareña, con el espacio "Psico ayuda en casa" y otros programas habituales, también desde la emisora Radio Guamá y sus estudios municipales. Se creó un Grupo de WhatsApp, que lideró iniciativas como la elaboración de mensajes de apoyo a grupos vulnerables, divulgados en las redes sociales, y se realizó orientación presencial con casos diagnosticados, sospechosos, personal sanitario, así como en comunidades en cuarentena. Los psicólogos del deporte combinaron la orientación vía telefónica con la virtual, dirigida a los atletas y sus familias.

Conclusiones: el uso de la telepsicología constituyó un reto para los psicólogos y a la vez una oportunidad que estimuló nuevos aprendizajes y mayor cohesión profesional y personal para ofrecer ayuda a la población ante la COVID-19.

Palabras clave. Psicología; Orientación; Telepsicología; COVID-19; Pandemia.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, humanity has faced the spread of epidemics: the plague that devastated Europe in the 14th century, the deadly cholera outbreaks in the 19th century, HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, and the Ebola virus that spread from Africa, the spread of Zika in Brazil, and the MERS-CoV, among others. The most recent, since December 2019 in the People's Republic of China, the acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV-2) known as COVID-19, has considerably impact on the collective subjectivity and general life of individuals.⁽¹⁾

In addition to the factors strictly related to the biological dimension and the real danger to life that this disease represents, there are also problems of a psychological and social nature, due, among other factors, to the high probability of contagion, even by asymptomatic patients, which generates measures of isolation, suspension of daily activities of study, work and other social activities. All this leads to a coexistence maintained over time, by most family members in their homes and the breakdown of their daily rhythms of life.

In Cuba, the mentioned conditions of isolation or social distancing induced through the media with the phrase: [#StayHome](#), constituted one of the alternatives to stop the transmission of this dangerous disease. But they added to the daily reality of people, marked by the direct impact of COVID-19, the unprecedented circumstances derived from this pandemic, the confinement in their homes and the constant coexistence. All this caused uncertainties and tensions that required guidance from psychology. To deal with this unforeseen event, it was necessary to look for alternatives other than the usual face-to-face care.

What to do? How could the need for psychotherapy be reconciled with the specialists having the tools and a reality making difficult or limiting a face-to-face approach? One of the answers that have emerged at the international level to solve this challenge is the recognition of the role of new information and communication technologies, which have exponentially accelerated in recent decades and have been used as mediators in counseling relationships.

The name used to describe the use of these tools varies according to authors and publications: cyber-therapy, online therapies, online psychology, cyber-psychology, telepsychology, tele-therapy among others. Tele-therapy has been defined as: "the provision of psychological services using information and communication technologies, through the processing of information by electrical, electromagnetic, electromechanical, electro-optical or electronic means".⁽²⁾

The means to be used include mobile devices, personal computers, e-mail, websites, blogs, videoconferences, social networks; among other alternatives to establish communication in an oral or written, synchronous or asynchronous approaches.

Tele-therapy reinforced its usefulness in the aforementioned circumstances generated by COVID-19. The necessary confinement that people were forced to assume caused tension, anguish, anxiety, and in some cases, depression. It is valid to emphasize that individuals can suffer some of these signs and symptoms without suffering from a mental health disorder. Therefore, although children, the elderly, and people with a personal pathological background were recognized as the most vulnerable groups, it was also possible for adolescents, young people, and adults to experience these risks due to frustrations caused by the interruption and/or postponement of their professional and personal projects.

Some researchers in the field call for thinking about why it is logical to expect mental health conditions to be large, with different reactions to be addressed. Larroy⁽³⁾ refers to the large scale of this phenomenon, in which the entire population is tangibly affected during an unpredictable time and with uncertain consequences in the future, as well as needs to be considered in the medium and long term; also the impossibility of providing face-to-face care; which has led to a greater deployment of telepsychological counseling.

So that this mediation has become an essential resource, since it favors access to continue and increase the attention to the subjects that need it. At the same time, it has meant a great challenge for psychologists, who are more familiar with traditional approaches. We agree with Larroy,⁽³⁾ in that this practice entails great commitment and responsibility, insofar as the quality of tele-psychotherapy equivalent to face-to-face counseling must be guaranteed.

Although there were previous experiences at international level and some in Cuba, it has been a real challenge for the guild of psychologists to assume tele-psychotherapy as one of the essential methods for the performance of the profession, for this reason it was considered necessary and valuable the exchange among colleagues and the spreading of the professional practices carried out.

Therefore, the article aims at socializing the main actions developed by the psychologists of Pinar del Río with emphasis on tele-psychotherapy, in the counseling and companion of the population to deal with COVID-19.

METHODS

A descriptive and cross-sectional study was carried out in Pinar del Río province, Cuba, in the period from the detection of the first positive cases of COVID-19 patients (March 11, 2020) until the beginning of post-COVID-19 recovery stage, on June 18th, 2020. In Cuba, two stages were established in the process of COVID-19 recovery stage, based on indicators related to the behavior of the pandemic: the first, called Post-COVID-19 Recovery Stage, and the second, the Stage of Strengthening the Economy to Face a Delayed Scenario of Crisis.

From a dialectical materialistic conception, the method implicit in the research process that supports the present article is derived, in which, besides the theoretical and the historical-logical along with the empirical order, the semi-structured individual interview (Annex 1) and the documentary analysis were combined.

From the target group comprised by psychologists practicing in Pinar del Río province in the period studied ($N \approx 200$), an intentional sample assortment of typical subjects was made, comprised by the formal leaders of the groups and scientific societies that associated the specialists; as well as the informal leaders who emerged as protagonists of counseling actions from tele-psychotherapy, in the main traditional mass media of provincial reach and other communication alternatives ($n=5$).

The sample comprised five psychologists: president of the Chapter of Psychology of Health: Nilda Alina Santos Fernández, BsC, MSc.; president of the Provincial Group of the Cuban Society of Psychology: Eliseth Castro Peñate, BSc; Coordinator of the group "*Psycho-counseling in COVID-19 times*": Javier Reyes Hernández, BSc, PhD. and the editor of the editorial "*Trova Nueva*", of *Guerrillero* provincial newspaper: Geidy Díaz Crespo, BSc., MSc.

From the interviews with these specialists, we took the testimony of both, the activities developed by them in their personal view and the information concerning the main experiences of the rest of the colleagues in the province.

The documentary analysis allowed to complement the information and provided evidence of the use of telepsychology as a means to promote the counseling relations that have taken place between the specialists and the population in view of the incidence of the new coronavirus.

During the creation and implementation of the electronic spaces and the performance of the psychologists in the proposed tasks; the activities were established according to the principles of bioethics with dauntless optimism and commitment to an activity that has a high demand among the population.

RESULTS

The psychologists of Pinar del Río, in this stage of coping with COVID-19 pandemic, have incorporated and multiplied their actions to offer guidance and companion to the population. They have relied on technologies, with the typical media and other emerging ones, to fulfill their social task, as the subjective and objective need for health in the population has increased. "The actions of the society of psychologists towards the educational communication and the psychological care constitute the two elementary angles to emphasize on, this last one centered in the population and also in healthcare personnel".⁽⁴⁾

Some of the activities developed during this period through the mass media were:

Newspapers and newsletters

Guerrillero Consultancy on-line: an important alternative for the population, at a time when it was difficult to be present at diverse psychological services in the province. Many people found in times of pandemic, an option in the Consultancy, with its high potential to receive advice, guidance and psychosocial support, from their homes through different devices.

Cabrera referred to the purposes and impacts of this initiative of the Psychologists' Guild in the province:

"The objective?- to mitigate the psychological impacts that this epidemiological crisis can generate at the individual, group, community and organizational levels, as it says on the home page of this section of the provincial newspaper that already has hundreds of followers since its publication last April 6. In this effort to maintain the emotional balance at the individual and social level, psychologists from various institutions in the province are participating".⁽⁵⁾

The Consultancy is still available on the website of the electronic edition of *Guerrillero* newspaper (Fig. 1)



Fig.1 *Guerrillero newspaper's website: psychology consultancy on-line*

Through it, they have offered their professional services to 16 specialists from the province, coordinated by the professors, Díaz Crespo G. and Reyes Hernández J. Both have worked as modelers, managing the communication between the readers who send their questions and the psychologists from Pinar del Río, who offer psychosocial counseling to deal with the expressed problems in an encouraging way.

Until June 17, 1688 visits and 81 questions had been received. All of them were answered by the professionals who included the work team. In the 42 cases that were authorized by their authors, these were published in the website. The remaining questions were answered by the psychologists through personal E-mails.⁽⁶⁾

Among the issues on which the population of Pinar del Río requested guidance were: management of problems associated with children, adolescents, youth and the elderly; the situation generated by the pandemic in terms of continuous staying at home; couple relationships; family and gender conflicts; anxiety disorders; domestic violence; concerns related to the school year, university entrance examinations, completion of studies, and advice to executives of companies and enterprises.

"Trova Nueva" column of *Guerrillero* newspaper: although it did not arise with the pandemic, its author, Díaz Crespo G., stated that its messages were focused on daily realities of this stage, such as: "Love in coronavirus times", "COVID-19 and social networks", and "Life without COVID-19: the coming-back to normality"; to mention a few. The column is very well-received by readers, although Díaz expressed his desire that there are communication platforms for the audience to react and interact with the specialists. He considers that: "Guidelines should be given to help people recognize their reality, so that they can, by themselves, put it into criticism (...) For me, a good counseling session is one that leaves the audience in dialogue, the role it should play is encouraging, respecting all the existing diversity".⁽⁷⁾

"Onda Juvenil" Digital Newsletter:⁽⁷⁾ this is a weekly proposal for young people, which was originated in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at Pinar del Río University (UPR), and was disseminated through e-mail, WhatsApp groups and social networks [<https://www.autoyas.com/CU/Pinar-del-R%C3%ADo/370200100227941/Facultad-Ciencias-Sociales-y-Humanidades---FEU>].

In its pages, Gómez Veloz G. and Díaz Crespo G. have offered psychological assistance in cases of insomnia, anxious and depressive states. They have also offered some information about the pandemic to young people with pathologies that made them vulnerable to COVID-19 and which they perceived as iatrogenic.⁽⁷⁾

Television

"Psychological help at home": a space that has its broadcast time from the provincial television center (*Telepinar*), on the Educational Channel, every Wednesday since May 13th, at 12 noon. In each program, a video recorded from home by one of the psychologists of the province was broadcast, offering advice, guidance and help to the population on a topic related to COVID-19 pandemic.⁽⁶⁾

For its dissemination, 2 *promotional spots* were developed and have been disseminated on social networks

[https://facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2970791592970047&id=100001177070848] y [<https://www.facebook.com/reyeshernandezjavier/videos/2970791596303380>]

Psychology in regular *Telepinar* programs: since the onset of COVID-19, psychologist Miranda Otero D. has counseled Pinar del Río residents on topics related to this particular situation they have gone through. The main spaces have been the programs: "*Una Mujer*", Friday 5:30 pm and "*Buenas tardes Pinar*", Thursday 4.30 pm. The latter is live broadcast, with the distinctiveness that people can communicate by phone and contact the specialist in order to satisfy their counseling needs, during the broadcast and after it ends.

Other television broadcasting centers: the population of the Consolacion del Sur municipality has also received psychological counseling through a local outreach program conducted by psychologist González García.⁽⁴⁾

Some of the concerns addressed by this way were: psychosomatic manifestations and hypochondria fear of contagion or of their relatives getting sick, conflicts arising from the coexistence at home of all family members, with children, the elderly, among others.

Radio broadcasting stations

Radio Guamá: the program "*Separadamente juntos*", every Sunday from 2 to 6 pm, has invited one of the psychologists from Pinar del Río to share informative capsules of psychosocial counseling with the listeners. The specialist presented a theme in each broadcast, around 3 pm, in real time from home, remaining available to exchange via telephone with those interested throughout the program.⁽⁶⁾

Radio Minas and Radio Sandino: from these municipal radio stations, psychologists León Veloz L. and Ledesma Brito Y., have also communicated systematically to offer counseling and support to the population, in addition to contributing to their strengthening in coping with the risk posed by a stressor as powerful as COVID-19.⁽⁸⁾

Actions in other mass media

The creation and widespread coverage of messages intended for psychosocial support to vulnerable groups: this initiative arose to be supported from tele-psychotherapy and thus multiply its scope from the provincial media. In practice, there were published in several websites, UPR Intranet; Cuban Society of Psychology (CSP); Psychological Guidance and Sense of Life and *Psicovida blog*, among other digital sites. "The messages aimed at vulnerable groups and/or about topics of interest were created by psychologists with scientific results and professional experience in each of the areas".⁽⁶⁾

For children, adolescents and their families, Rivero Brito A. y Coro Carrasco Z. created the messages for "*Escuela de Padres*"- (Parenthood School) [<https://www.facebook.com/reyeshernandezjavier/posts/2942830422432831>] and the "*Mensaje dirigido a los adolescentes*" (Message to adolescents) [<http://www.guerrillero.cu/mensaje-dirigido-a-los-adolescentes>]. The young people were themselves reflected in the text "*Elige Vivir*" (Choose Living), written for them by Gómez Veloz G. [<http://www.guerrillero.cu/joven-elige-vivir>], while the message "*Mensaje de apoyo psicossocial para embarazadas*" (Psychological support for pregnant women), Suárez García L., offered responses and reflections to women in this important moments of their lives [<https://www.facebook.com/reyeshernandezjavier/posts/2947590865290120>]. About one of the potential consequences derived from COVID-19 pandemic, questioned Díaz Castro Y. "*¿Una vacuna para mis emociones?*" (A vaccine to my emotions?), to treat anxiety disorders [<https://www.facebook.com/SociedadCubanaDePsicologia/posts/2406808912874896>].

Another sensible thematic was tackled by Hernández Becerra B., with a variety of texts to encourage the critical positioning with sights set on gender, facing the current context that has arisen from this disease. Among them: "*Vioencia de género en tiempos de pandemia*" (Gender violence in COVID-19 times) [<http://www.guerrillero.cu/violencia-de-genero-en-tiempos-de-pandemia>].

De vuelta al ámbito hogareño (Back to home environment), developed by León Veloz L., her "*Mensaje a las familias*" (Message to the families) [<https://www.facebook.com/reyeshernandezjavier/posts/2947886358593904>], while Díaz Crespo G., referred to another important context: : "*La resignificación del espacio comunitario*

en condiciones de aislamiento" (The resignificance of community setting in isolation conditions) [<https://www.facebook.com/reyeshernandezjavier/posts/2949683105080896>]

Regarding education and the value of counseling, reflections were encouraged with two questions: Ordaz Hernández M. "En tiempos de pandemia... ¿qué estoy pensando?" (Pandemic times...what am I thinking about?) [<http://www.guerrillero.cu/en-tiempos-de-pandemia-que-estoy-pensando>], and Reyes Hernández J., "Son tiempos de ensanchar el alma, pero ¿cómo lograrlo?" (These are times to widen the soul, but..how getting it?) [<http://www.guerrillero.cu/son-tiempos-de-ensanchar-el-alma-pero-como-lograrlo>].

The essential ideas of these messages for vulnerable groups were shown on posters, summarized and more visually attractive designs, for its dissemination in social networks. Some of them were printed and placed in public spaces all over the province, as in Doctors' Offices and others. (Fig. 2)

... orientación educativa en tiempos de COVID-19

UNIVERSIDAD DE PINAR DEL RÍO
SOCIEDAD CUBANA DE PSICOLOGÍA

Propongo tomarle las armas a la COVID-19 y hacer una TRANSMISIÓN EXPONENCIAL de buena educación, de buenos sentimientos y buenas prácticas para CONTAGIAR a muchos...

Para ayudarnos ahora y en el futuro... Y que cuando todo pase, porque esto también pasará, seamos mejores personas, más felices y más capaces de contribuir al bienestar de los demás.

Muchos estamos sintiendo **emociones displacenteras** como tristeza, ansiedad, miedo, angustia, incertidumbre...

Podemos sentirnos mejor si focalizamos la atención en algunas **vivencias afectivas positivas**, como el placer de escuchar canciones que alientan la esperanza o realizar actividades que nos agradan; la emoción de compartir el aplauso de las noches; el disfrute de **recibir y expresar cariño a nuestros familiares, amigos u otras personas.**

Seguramente siente **ADMIRACIÓN** hacia todas las personas que están realizando acciones bondadosas y altruistas por otros seres humanos que a veces ni conocen. Y si se pregunta **¿Qué puedo hacer para ayudar? Busque y reconozca desde sus cualidades y virtudes cualquier forma de colaborar: con uno, dos, veinte o más personas...**

TODA AYUDA CUENTA!!!

Ese educador que llevamos dentro (como padres, hermanos, profesores, tutores, miembros de una sociedad que debe formar a las nuevas generaciones) hoy se pregunta: **¿Cuáles son los aprendizajes esenciales para la vida? ¿Qué cualidades debemos educar?**

UNA BRÚJULA ¿Qué tienen en común la mayoría de las personas que HOY están actuando correctamente, que están cumpliendo las orientaciones que reciben para mejorar la situación, que están haciendo ALGO valioso para ayudar a otros, en cualquier magnitud, desde cualquier contexto... ?

Dr. C. Mayra Ordaz Hernández mavrordez@gmail.com

Fig. 2 Educational Counseling in COVID-19 times (Poster)

In this field of educational counseling, a material promoting the appraisal of the school year regarding the things lost and gained was published from the province, considering the social and personal impact of the pandemic, people are invited to reflect on the purposes and life sense towards the most altruistic and praiseworthy attitudes.⁽⁹⁾

WhatsApp groups and Psychological Support in COVID-19 times

Acting on their initiative, Reyes Hernandez J. Diaz Crespo G., y Hernandez Becerra B., the Group was created; other psychologists of the province were joined. Also, the president of the Cuban Society of Psychologists, Lorenzo Ruiz A. along with Nuñez Gonzalez S. Research, Computerization and Post-graduate Vice-rector of Pinar del Rio University; both professionals played a very important role in the interchange of information, and on the spreading of the initiatives concerning the psychological counseling into the social networks.

New ideas have constantly been coming up on this group, debates and development of these ideas with literature interchanging, experiences, the creation of novel projects (individually and collectively), based on the information collected concerning the behavior and natural history of the pandemic in the country and the province, as well as the successive reactions of Pinar del Rio people.

Some experiences of combined tele-psychotherapy with face-to-face psychotherapy

Some psychologists from Pinar del Rio performed their work in contexts with higher incidence of COVID-19, where they combined tele-psychotherapy with variants of face-to-face therapy. The team guided by Santos Fernández N., worked at Leon Cuervo Rubio Hospital, where the confirmed positive and suspected cases were admitted, including doctors of medicine, nurses, technicians and other healthcare workers and care providers. [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F75wDRAjclk>]

The healthcare personnel occasionally suffered from emotional fatigue, fear of contagion, strong feelings of sympathy for the suffering children, worries associated with out-of-home long stays, financial support and care of their families. These people were given care during their resting time in isolation centers, by means of face-to-face approach and videos on the topics of: self-care, group cohesion, satisfaction for helping others and emotion managements.

This work is connected with the usual psychological counseling to admitted people who suffer from other pathologies, face-to-face approach with the protocols established for their self-care; also by phone, personalized and accompanied from their homes. "We could share other kinds of relations that broke the traditional approaches of the therapeutic work".⁽⁸⁾

Children were cared as one of the most vulnerable and sensitive groups by all people involved. For many families the management of children in isolation within their homes was a great challenge, dealing with a drastic change in their daily routine; which was combined with usual periods at home, and other activities in diverse institutions, where it made the situation to worsen in the cases of suspected and/or positive COVID-19 children.

The team working at Pepe Portilla Children Hospital; head by Coro Carrasco Z., and Rivero Brito A., joined with other colleagues from the territory, arranged several initiatives: psychological survey were developed to diagnose the behavioral changes in these children and the management of their parents, as well as the application of tools supported by drawings, where Diaz Castro Y., participated, who has even led in Los Palacios municipality a psychotherapeutic approach for healthcare personnel with acute stress.⁽⁸⁾

Other municipalities dealing with novel and complex situations with COVID-19 were: "Camilo Cienfuegos Community in Consolacion del Sur municipality, where the second limited-autochthonous transmission event of COVID-19 was opened in the country".⁽¹⁰⁾ "Besides; the quarantine was declared for La Ceiba zone, Guane municipality, with a limited-autochthonous transmission event of COVID-19".⁽¹¹⁾

A praiseworthy work was developed the psychologists in these municipalities. Rodríguez Chacón J. C. and Rojas González D. in Consolacion del Sur; and Ledesma Brito Y., in Guane. These specialists provided counseling to the authorities, company and support to the populations of these municipalities, among other initiatives required by this unprecedented situation.⁽⁴⁾

Sports psychologists put into practice several initiatives, when recognizing...“ the pandemic has changed the life of the society of which the athletes are a part. Training, teaching and social relations having face-to-face nature were interrupted (...); psychosocial and physiological manifestations have appeared”.⁽¹²⁾

Among the most frequent: anxiety, depression, insomnia, uncertainty, worries regarding in-shape body and sports fit, as well as weight gaining. The psychologists of this group, gave professional help when combining phone with virtual counseling (WhatsApp), addressed to athletes and their families, aimed at the development of individual training schedules, relaxation sessions, breathing exercises, positive mental representations and motivational activities, among others.⁽¹²⁾

DISCUSSION

Dealing with COVID-19, the individuals, families and communities from Pinar del Rio, as for the rest of the country, faced a transformation without precedents in their everyday conditions of existence, marked by regulations that, given that the social isolation caused a considerable impact on their routine, which originated diverse requirements of psychological care.

The experiences developed by the psychologists of the province, are part of a broad-spectrum of initiatives implemented at a country level, which agreed on the purpose of joined cooperation against COVID-19 pandemic, where each one provided personal and professional resources, having the novelty of an increase in the application of the tele-psychotherapy approach. ^(1, 13, 14, 15)

From the first moments, several alternatives were promoted in Cuba to reach the services of the specialists to the population. A sample of this is the authorization of a phone number (103), traditionally allocated to the confidential antidrug Line, this time to assume the topic of COVID-19 pandemic and the worries arisen from it, adding the number: 8007257. Both have been systematically broadcast by the national television, along with the E-mail: covid19@infomed.sld.cu, repeating the invitation to the population to request for psychological care.

The professional work of psychologists has been promoted and the initiatives towards the use of tele-psychotherapy from different provinces all over the country. The program “*Mesa Redonda*” (Round Table), May 7th, 2020, was completely devoted to: “Psychology and its contribution to cope with COVID-19 pandemic”. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=86&v=BofDJkDQIbM&feature=emb_logo]

Lorenzo Ruiz A. appeared at the Round Table, who is the president of the Cuban Society of Psychologists, he emphasized on the importance of understanding by the population part the term “*pandemic*”, and the self-care in situation of epidemiological emergency. Some experiences concerning the psychological care given by the provincial teams of the Cuban Society of Psychologists were provided to the audience.⁽¹³⁾

Ávila Vidal A., Dean of the Psychology Faculty at La Habana University, referred to the project *Psychologists Pro-Health*, comprising a group of students, who have been a paradigm in the communities, promoting approaches for protective behaviors and making prevention work about risky behaviors, through social networks and telephones. He also mentioned the work of the psychologists in “*Providing care to healthcare workers and students, who are at constant risks working with suspected people in isolation and contacts of positive confirmed cases*”.⁽¹³⁾

Similarly, the messages presented in these pages, created by the psychologists of the westernmost provinces of Cuba and professors of the above mentioned faculty, provided a cycle of key messages addressed to the Cuban population concerning COVID-19 pandemic.

Calviño M. [<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=532771807397465>]

Arce R. [<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=275625753615001>]

Martín C. [<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=708771076599780>]

Torrallas J. [<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2416713681953672>]

Arés P. [<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2409688185988367>]. This last one has also published a series of videos named: "*Un momento con Patricia*" (A moment with Patricia) [<https://www.facebook.com/723301391066704/videos/243975160199345>].

In the center region of the country, the Cuban Society of Psychologists in Villa Clara, Department of Psychology from the Central University of Las Villas and the Institution of University Well-being, have implemented several actions to minimize the psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic through the social networks, the media, and a phone line of counseling along with E-mail.⁽¹⁴⁾

In the easternmost region, Santiago de Cuba psychologists have implemented actions from the Primary Health Care, radio and television programs with the purpose of providing counseling to deal with COVID-19 pandemic. They have also provided counseling sessions for hospitalized patients and for healthcare personnel, who are risking their lives inside the red zone.⁽¹⁵⁾

In general, a coincidence among the main requests of psychological care was observed all over the country concerning COVID-19. A consensus with respect to the needs of counseling was perceived because of the far-reaching changes in the daily routine of the majority of the people. As in the innovative transformation of the psychologists, in their standard work approaches, towards new experiences throughout tele-psychotherapy, from the traditional mass media and the inclusion of novel practices in the social networks, electronic mail, telephones and WhatsApp groups, among others.

The work developed, even though has presupposed a true challenge, is an opportunity for new learning strategies, it has increased the access and socialization of the work of psychologists into the social networks with the dissemination platforms enabled for people's interaction purposes. Great satisfaction is shown with the modest contribution to support the population with psychological counseling; people feel they are accompanied in these hard times of COVID-19, as well as for the cohesion achieved among all colleagues, from the professional and personal view points.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the authorship of this material.

Declaration of authorship

MOH: Original idea; design, conduct and processing of interviews; presentation of results and discussion.

DMO: bibliographic searches; elaboration of the introduction.

We both participated in the drafting and final revision of the document

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ANEXES

1- Guide of the semi-structured individual interview.

- ✓ Main psychosocial findings in Pinar del Rio population concerning COVID-19.
- ✓ The most vulnerable groups identified.
- ✓ Actions of psychosocial counseling taken: emphasizing on tele-psychotherapy approach.
- ✓ The feedback achieved concerning the effects on the population and on the professional colleagues.
- ✓ Main challenges for the Psychologists of Pinar del Rio.
- ✓ Other important considerations.