

## Meditation: a health care strategy for university students

Meditação: uma estratégia de cuidado em saúde para estudantes universitários

Meditación: una estrategia de atención sanitaria para universitarios

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**Abstract: Objectives:** to develop meditative activities with students from a university in northwestern Rio Grande do Sul and to analyze the perception of university students about meditative practice. **Method:** research-intervention, with a qualitative approach. We accomplished 11 meditation meetings, with the participation of five students, from April to July 2019. The data produced through a questionnaire with sociodemographic and health data, non-participant observation and open interview were subjected to thematic analysis. **Results:** students' participation in meditation was motivated by curiosity, difficulty concentrating, stress, irritation, anxiety and nervousness. Mindfulness meditation provided increased concentration and focus for studies, improved sleep quality and promoted self-awareness and subjective well-being. **Conclusion:** mindfulness meditation at the University was important to promote mental health, effective in minimizing stress and anxiety states and promoted positive changes in students' lives.

**Descriptors:** Students; Mental Health; Meditation; Complementary Therapies; Nursing

**Resumo: Objetivos:** desenvolver atividades meditativas com estudantes de uma universidade do noroeste gaúcho e analisar a percepção de estudantes universitários sobre a prática meditativa. **Método:** pesquisa-intervenção, de abordagem qualitativa. Realizaram-se 11 encontros para meditação, com participação de cinco estudantes, no período de abril a julho de 2019. Os dados produzidos mediante questionário com dados sociodemográficos e de saúde, observação não participante e entrevista aberta foram submetidos à análise temática. **Resultados:** a participação dos estudantes na meditação foi motivada pela curiosidade, dificuldade de concentração, estresse,

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irritação, ansiedade e nervosismo. A meditação *mindfulness* proporcionou aumento da concentração e foco para os estudos, melhorou a qualidade do sono e promoveu autoconhecimento e bem-estar subjetivo. **Conclusão:** a meditação *mindfulness* na Universidade foi importante à promoção da saúde mental, efetiva à minimização de estados de estresse e ansiedade e promoveu mudanças positivas na vida dos estudantes.

**Descritores:** Estudantes; Saúde Mental; Meditação; Terapias Complementares; Enfermagem

**Resumen: Objetivos:** desarrollar actividades meditativas con estudiantes de una universidad del noroeste de Rio Grande do Sul y analizar la percepción de universitarios sobre la práctica meditativa. **Método:** investigación-intervención con enfoque cualitativo. Se realizaron 11 encuentros de meditación, con la participación de cinco estudiantes, entre abril y julio de 2019. Los datos producidos mediante un cuestionario con datos sociodemográficos y sanitarios, observación no participante y entrevista abierta se sometieron al análisis temático.

**Resultados:** la participación de los estudiantes en la meditación estuvo motivada por la curiosidad, dificultad para concentrarse, estrés, irritación, ansiedad y nerviosismo. La meditación *mindfulness* proporcionó una mayor concentración y enfoque para los estudios, mejoró la calidad del sueño y promovió la autoconciencia y el bienestar subjetivo. **Conclusión:** la meditación *mindfulness* en la Universidad fue importante para promover la salud mental, eficaz para minimizar los estados de estrés y ansiedad y promovió cambios positivos en la vida de los estudiantes.

**Descriptores:** Estudiantes; Salud Mental; Meditación; Terapias Complementarias; Enfermería

## Introduction

University admission means the end of a cycle and admission to one that will lead you to professional life. For some people, the need to adapt to the demands of university life can affect their academic performance, generate crises and, sometimes, illness processes.<sup>1-2</sup>

A study on depression in students of Biomedicine, Physical Education, Nursing and Pharmacy courses from a public university in Mato Grosso identified a tendency towards depression in 41% of the university students, with a higher occurrence in the Nursing course (55%). The same study highlighted a significant prevalence of this tendency towards depression in female students in the initial grades.<sup>1</sup> Another study on the manifestations of anxiety in Nursing students underlines that these students present such symptoms during the course, which may interfere with their professional training.<sup>2</sup>

In line with this study, strategies that collaborate in minimizing students' distress, such as listening, welcoming, support and meditation, among others, are important at the university. In this direction, research identified that the approach between teachers and students, where

the teacher maintains a mobilizing, motivating and supportive attitude to the proposed activities, can constitute a strategy that enables listening and welcoming students, thus minimizing anxiety.<sup>2</sup>

This question requires attention from higher education institutions (HEI), which should include, among their student assistance programs and policies, actions aimed at promoting the physical and mental health of university students and, consequently, improving their quality of life. This is justified, because the university stage may be marked by some difficulties, which are academic, interpersonal and personal, which requires the HEI to build health care assistance intervention strategies for their students.<sup>1-2</sup>

In this sense, meditation may be a beneficial intervention to the student, since its practice involves a type of training that seeks to develop and improve mental, cognitive and emotional skills, which contributes to a more efficient performance, both in terms of intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects, as well as a more quality and healthy life.<sup>3</sup>

The word meditation comes from Sanskrit, the traditional language of India, which means attention, contemplation, and expresses the practice of meditating. It has the ability to produce a connection among the mind, body and spirit, causing structural changes in brain areas that favor the improvement of the person's cognitive and emotional functions.<sup>4</sup>

There are several meditation techniques, being that the most well-known and used in the West are: transcendental meditation, mindfulness, zen and vipassana.<sup>4-5</sup> Mindfulness or “full attention”, a meditative practice adopted in this study, consists of training self-regulation and attentional control of the experience at the present moment. This technique constitutes a type of training that brings together several methods, such as focused breathing, body awareness, meditation, and promotes a deep state of calm and concentration at the present moment, focusing on the body and mind.<sup>6</sup> Regular training in mindfulness skills can reduce emotional reactivity, stress, anxiety, depression and other negative emotions, in addition to enhancing the

capacity for self-regulation, metacognition, emotional intelligence and good physical and emotional status.<sup>4-6</sup>

The Brazilian Ministry of Health encourages the use of Integrative and Complementary Practices (ICP) within the scope of the Unified Health System (SUS, as per its Portuguese acronym), through the National Policy on Integrative and Complementary Practices (PNPIC, as per its Portuguese acronym), which establishes, in its guidelines, meditation as a practice that addresses the human being in an integral way and relates the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions to cure diseases and promote full health and a better quality of life.<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, the object of this study is the meditation practice intended for a group of students from a public university in northwestern Rio Grande do Sul. The concern with the health of university students is justified, because there are often physical and psychological manifestations, expressed by university students, resulting from the changes and responsibilities entailed by this stage of life, which may negatively affect performance in studies, interpersonal relationships and their own health.<sup>1-2</sup>

Mindfulness meditation is a powerful intervention that can contribute to promoting the health of these students. In this direction, the research question outlined was: What is the perception of university students about meditative practice? The objectives of this study were: to develop meditative activities with students from a university in northwestern Rio Grande do Sul; and to analyze the perception of university students about meditative practice.

## **Method**

Qualitative study, research-intervention type, where the researcher works explicitly with, for and by people, instead of studying about them, with a greater focus on generating solutions to everyday problems. This research method analyzes the effects of practices on institutional daily life, deconstructing territories and enabling the development of new practices.<sup>8</sup>

The study was conducted at the Campus premises in a public university in northwestern Rio Grande do Sul that hosts the Administration, Biological Sciences, Economic Sciences, Nursing, Nutrition and Animal Husbandry courses, from April to July 2019. The inclusion criteria of the participants were: being over 18 years old, being a student at the institution, being enrolled in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 2019 and expressing willingness to participate in the meditation group. The students, from the various courses and semesters were invited by the researcher, during visits to the classrooms to present the proposal, as well as through its dissemination in informative folders about the meditation group fixed at the Campus premises.

The research had the participation of five students. There were 11 weekly meetings to practice mindfulness meditation, lasting 1 hour each. Considering the 15 weeks of the academic semester and the period necessary for planning and disseminating the proposal, we established 11 meditation meetings, since mindfulness is an intervention that requires skills training on the part of the mediator. Therefore, the number of meetings was defined by the end of the academic semestre, as the students, when they finish their academic activities, go to their places of residence.

Mindfulness meditation was guided by one of the authors, a student in the 9<sup>th</sup> semester of the Nursing course, who previously performed instrumentalization for such procedure. The data were produced by hybrid strategies, with multiple sources of triangulated evidence that included: questionnaire with sociodemographic and health issues, responded in the first group meeting; non-participant observation of meditative practices recorded in a field diary by a research assistant; open, non-structured interview, recorded and transcribed by the researcher, performed at the end of the 11 meetings, with questions about the participants' perception of the accomplished mindfulness meditation practices.

Meditative activities started with the reception of the study participants by the researcher. After that moment of welcoming, some students sat in chairs with their backs supported and others lay down on mattresses to start the practice. The meditation was guided

by audios or by the researcher, who used words uttered to conduct body and mental relaxation. Moreover, the researcher encouraged conscious breathing and creative visualizations converging to the themes of each meeting, such as gratitude, peace, physical well-being, mental and emotional health, among others. All experiences shared by the participants in relation to meditative practices and their subjective manifestations were captured by the observer and recorded in a field diary.

In order to preserve the participants' identity, at the end of the speeches, they were identified by the letter 'S', initial letter of students, followed by numbers from 1 to 5. The record of observations in the field diary was preceded by the identification: Note from the Field Diary (NFD), followed by Meditation Practice (MP) and numbers from 1 to 11 related to the developed meetings.

The empirical data produced in the field work were subjected to the thematic analysis technique, which allows the identification of manifest contents of the participants' speech in their social and historical context, operationalized through the following steps: pre-analysis; exploration of the material; treatment of the obtained results; and interpretation. In the pre-analysis, we performed the transcription of the recorded interviews, selection and systematization of the initial ideas and re-reading of the produced material, which favored the overview of the produced data, in order to meet the validation criteria of emerging themes, such as completeness, representativeness, homogeneity and pertinence. Subsequently, the produced empirical data were classified, categorized and interpreted in an articulated way to the theoretical framework in response to the study objectives.<sup>9</sup>

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Santa Maria on 03/22/2019, with opinion n° 3.215.383, and all participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form in accordance with Resolution n° 466 of the National Health Council.

## Results and discussion

### Sociodemographic and health characteristics

Of the five participants, four were female and one male, aged between 18 and 23 years old, single and recognized themselves as white skin color. All students came from public schools, where they attended high school. Of these, three were students in the Nutrition course and two in Nursing course, between the second and seventh semesters. Since 2004, there has been an expansion of higher education in Brazil, through public programs and policies for democratization and universal access to these institutions, with emphasis on Law nº 12.711, which establishes the reserve of quotas in federal universities for students from public schools.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, two students responded that they were not working during the research period, two others worked up to 20 hours a week and one worked eventually. As for the financial situation, two had no income and their expenses were borne by the family and/or other people; two others had income, but also received financial assistance from the family and/or other people; and one had his personal expenses financed by government programs on a scholarship basis. Research with Nursing students whose objective was to analyze the association between the presence of stress and sociodemographic and academic vulnerabilities showed that the experience of stress was greater in those who needed to work to pay for their studies, with 3.14 more chances of developing stress, when compared to those who did not need to work.<sup>11</sup>

When asked about the meaning of studying, for four participants, it was a form of personal growth, while for one, acquiring knowledge. As for the extra-class study routine, three responded that they studied on alternate days and two daily, with three dedicating one to three hours a week to studies and two from eight to twelve hours. There was a consensus among them that studying alone was better. Concerning the habit of reading books, magazines, newspapers and/or others, all responded that they read books. Regarding the most used means of communication to stay informed, the internet was unanimous among the participants. As for

the time allocated to the use of social networks (*Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp*), four responded from two to four hours a day and one from six to eight hours a day.

In continuation, two students said that they often felt alone, one sometimes and the other rarely. Concerning the support network accessed to deal with difficulties during the undergraduate course, for three students, the classmates and/or friends were the most outstanding, one mentioned the parents and the other mentioned not having received any type of support in these situations.

With respect to health, two students considered it to be good, two others considered reasonable and one rated it as very good. All responded that they did not have a chronic disease, only one student used medication continuously and only one practiced physical activities. Regarding the daily diet, three students considered it good and one rated this item as bad.

A study on depressive symptoms in health students from a public university emphasizes that social, economic and academic aspects, as well as health habits, are among the factors that may influence the development of common symptoms of depression in this population. Elements such as healthy lifestyles, moments for physical activity and leisure and good social and affective relationships are promoters of the student's mental and physical health.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, with regard to difficulty sleeping, three students reported that they sometimes had it, one reported that he always had it; and, for one, it never happened. As for the use of legal or illegal drugs, three responded that they used alcoholic beverages once a month; one used it once a week; and the other only on festive occasions. None of the surveyed participants reported using other psychoactive substances.

### **Meditation: a health care strategy for university students**

From the students' perspective, mindfulness meditation was recognized as a practice that promotes greater self-knowledge, a state of mental and spiritual clarity, well-being and positive



emotions. It also favors body relaxation, mitigates anguishes and anxieties, in addition to improving concentration and sleep quality.

In addition to the benefits of positive changes in mood and cognitive performance, meditation also provides processes of personal transformation, through subjective experiences, with the development and/or expansion of humanistic potentialities that may favor feelings of well-being, harmony, growth, personal satisfaction and peace.<sup>4,7,13</sup> Curiosity about the practice of meditation, difficulty concentrating and anxiety were some of the reasons that mobilized the participants to join the meditation group.

*I had heard about it and was very curious about what was done and how we could feel. Everyone said that we could get lighter, concentrated and, sometimes, I don't have much concentration, I'm very anxious. (S1)*

*I'm a person who has to think more about the present, and not worry too much about the future, what will happen tomorrow. Now, I think more about myself and what I'm doing, that's what I really care about. (S3)*

During the mindfulness meditation meetings, the participants commented among themselves that they perceived a significant increase in concentration in their everyday life activities (NFD: MP5; MP7).

Other reasons that encouraged students to participate in the meditation group were: stress, irritation, anxiety, nervousness, need for self-knowledge, patience and concentration.

*I was very angered, stressed, something messed me up! I tried to explore myself more, stay with myself, calm myself down, in terms of spirit. Meditation involves more than just the act. I joined the group to get to know, meet new people. (S2)*

*I always heard that meditation was something that calmed down and brought many benefits. That's what I looked for, in the group, a way to bring calm and patience to life, because I'm very anxious. I think a lot about what will come next, in the future. (S3)*

From an expanded perspective of the subject, meditation highlights the union of body-mind-spirit, overcoming the assumptions of the biomedical paradigm whose emphasis on biological aspects confers materiality to the body as the main object of analysis and interventions. Research on the benefits of meditation highlights that systematic training of attention is developed through techniques capable of generating physical, mental and psychological responses that favor the practice of self-regulation of the body and mind and assist in preventing stress, in controlling established health problems and in promoting mental health.<sup>14-15</sup> An international study that evaluated the effectiveness of a given mindfulness training program for university students highlighted perceived changes in relation to stress and significant improvements in sleep quality, mindfulness and compassion.<sup>16</sup>

Generally, the admission to higher education implies a process of transition to adult life and requires changes and adaptations from the student to cope with the challenges of academic life, which may be sources of stress, such as competitiveness, evaluative activities, skills development and technical skills for professional practice. In this sense, studies indicate that mental disorders, such as, for example, stress, anxiety and depression, in higher education students, cause poor sleep quality, as well as an association with alcohol consumption.<sup>2,17</sup>

In group experiences, we noted that particular attention was paid to deep breathing, greater relaxation, calm and more internal connection with meditative practices. One participant reported that his life is more peaceful, which has contributed to his self-knowledge (NFD: MP7; MP10; MP11). Another highlight was the practice of mindfulness meditation as a tool to encourage and support changes.

*[...] you “kill yourself” by studying, but it won’t work, I won’t make it, I can’t do it! With meditation, you really have a word of support and encouragement. Then, the mentality changes, the way of seeing that situation. (S2)*

Research on anxiety and use of anxiolytics by Nursing students highlights the need for strategies to minimize these states of discomfort and recommends measures to educational institutions aimed at reducing risk factors for anxiety, reviewing methodologies and adopting new pedagogical practices, in addition to strategies that enable listening and welcoming students.<sup>18</sup>

In the group meeting that dealt with the issue of emotions, meditation was guided with a focus on the feeling of gratitude to favor changes and elevations related to this vibrational field. At the end, the students shared feelings and experiences that emerged, which were recognized by the majority as positive (NFD: MP2).

For those who meditated individually in their homes, group practice was recognized as the best. The importance of ambience was also pointed out, since adequate and quiet places provide opportunities for this practice. Another highlighted aspect was that group meditation favored its regularity.

*I tried to do it at home, but I couldn't concentrate as much as here [in the group]. Because there [at home] there's a lot of movement. [in the group] I used to concentrate a lot; but, at home, I couldn't concentrate on. (S1)*

*I already tried to do it alone [meditation], but I couldn't. In a group, it enhanced and was much better. (S5)*

Regarding the attendance in the meditation group, this varied from nine to eleven meetings per participant and everyone started to practice meditation at other times, beyond the group meetings, as revealed by a student:

*I started doing meditation at home, usually when I went to sleep or when I was more agitated, nervous. It worked and produced an effect, I have become able to relax, get calmer and sleep better, because sometimes I had insomnia. (S4)*

The surveyed students considered themselves anxious and/or nervous people before joining the meditation group, as indicated by the testimonies:

*Anxious, yes. Everyone says I'm nervous, but I don't think so! When I have exams or some work ahead, I keep thinking about it until it is finished. It may be three days, but I have to do it to be calm. (S1)*

*I didn't even have the patience to get in the meditation group. Before, I tried to do it once or twice. I had no patience to meditate, but now I enjoy doing meditation. (S4)*

For most participants, the practice of meditation was beneficial for improving these aspects:

*Now, I perform breathing techniques, I think it's helping me, I have to continue the meditations, because of anxiety, it has helped a lot. (S1)*

*When you're going to be stressed, you should remember a word you heard during meditation, take a breath and go practice. (S2)*

*I no longer have that agitation I had, I even panicked to be in place, it made me dizzy, it seems that it was getting hot and I felt sick. Now, I don't have that anymore, after I started doing meditation. (S4)*

A student with migraine attacks pointed out that the practice of meditation was beneficial, especially in times of pain:

*In meditation, many times, I was [with migraine], but when we're doing the practice, I didn't think about that and I didn't feel pain. There, at the moment, I forgot everything, that was pretty good. (S1)*

Another participant pointed out that meditation, among other activities, was important to abolish the use of psychotropic medications:

*I took anxiolytic and antidepressant drugs [before entering the practice of meditation]. Meditation has become more constant in my life; sometimes, I go to the "biodanza" class, I try to do physical exercises, take care of my diet, many positive changes. (S5)*

In order to corroborate it, research on anxiety and use of anxiolytics among Nursing students pointed out nervousness, insomnia, stress, presence of anxiety and depression, migraines and hospitalizations as the main reasons for the consumption of anxiolytics, data similar to those indicated by the participants of this investigation.<sup>18</sup> The high consumption of

psychoactive substances and psychotropic drugs and high levels of depression in the students of the cited research highlighted the need for greater attention to the consumption of these drugs, as well as interventions aimed at promoting students' mental health, preventing anxiety and depression, improving self-esteem, encouraging autonomy and developing problem-solving skills.<sup>18</sup>

Research that evaluated the effects of a meditation course on Nursing, Medicine and Speech Therapy students from a public university in São Paulo/Brazil identified beneficial effects, especially in reducing anxiety and decreasing negative feelings, mainly fear and hostility. Moreover, the participants of that meditation course became aware of their emotions and recognized the importance of knowing how to deal with them.<sup>19</sup>

As a strategy for coping with the aforementioned problem, we should highlight that meditation improves the health, quality of life and well-being of practitioners, producing a positive impact on coping with daily difficulties and managing stress. There was a consensus among participants that meditation provides more focus and tranquility for studies, especially before evaluative activities, as highlighted by a student:

*I don't stress about exams anymore, I study calmly, I don't have that pressure that I used to have. (S4)*

The acquisition of intellectual skills and the student performance may be affected by anxiety, as this state is able to interfere in the cognitive aspects of students and even affect reasoning and learning.<sup>18</sup>

With the progress of group meetings, training and better engagement in the practice of mindfulness, the surveyed students reported direct benefits of meditation in their daily lives, such as better management of difficulties related to concentration to study, increased attention, focus on the present moment and full awareness, reduction of stress and anxiety. Mindfulness practice encourages people to play an active role in taking responsibility for their lives and health conditions, through brain changes called neuroplasticity and regulation of mental states

that improve cognitive-emotional capacity, generating new behavioral patterns that promote improvement in well-being and a life with more quality.<sup>6</sup>

In the same direction, mindfulness meditation favors creativity, increased attention and concentration in students, improves performance and socio-emotional skills, as well as symptoms of anxiety and quality of life, which significantly contributes to the mental health of practitioners.<sup>20-21</sup> Moreover, it highlights the potential of the practice of mindfulness by Nursing with regard to the prevention and treatment of problems resulting from stress, in their self-care, as well as in the care of users and their relatives.<sup>21</sup>

Some students mentioned changes that happened in their daily lives from the meditation practice, such as greater awareness and understanding of their experiences, flexibility and self-acceptance, according to the reports of the following testimonies:

*Being more flexible, seeing the bright side. Trying to know what is happening, what is making me angry, what is not working [...] calm, self-confidence. Of course, it's a construction, it's not overnight, it's changed a lot. (S2)*

*I was a very negative person, everything I was going to do was not going to work. Not that I don't have that kind of thinking anymore, but it has decreased. I'm able to police myself, understand things and act more calmly. (S4)*

*Meditation makes us more aware, prioritizing, reflecting before making decisions, brings more self-knowledge. This issue of understanding the processes of the universe of our lives. Understanding that we have no control over everything. (S5)*

Body and meditative practices involve the self-knowledge, the exercise of protagonism, the responsibility and the autonomy in self-care, which contributes to a greater integration among reason, intuition and senses of its practitioners.<sup>22</sup> The changes listed by the participants are favored by the practice of mindfulness whose objective is to maintain awareness in the present moment. This state of presence is considered positive and is associated with mental

health indicators, such as high levels of positive affections, satisfaction with life, vitality, emotional regulation and, also, lower levels of anxiety and depression.<sup>20-21</sup>

In one of the meetings, some participants expressed that their thoughts took them to various places, thus mobilizing a sense of inner peace (NFD: MP1). The relationship between vibrational frequency and mental health was the theme of one of the group meetings that associated the practice of mindfulness meditation and positive statements. After this experience, the researcher urged students to replace negative words, feelings and emotions with positive ones. This was recognized as an exercise that produces feelings of relief, well-being and peace of mind (NFD: MP3).

Research with Medicine students that evaluated the psychological effects after an 11-week “mind-body” intervention program, which combined yoga, meditation and neuroscience techniques, highlighted as results more body awareness, with an emphasis on sensation perception (physical and emotional sensations), attentive listening and improved sleep quality and health conditions, with better ability to manage stress states.<sup>23</sup> For these students, group meditation practices favored concentration, sharing of experiences and therefore was more effective than individual ones.

*At home, I couldn't concentrate so much, there [in the group] I was able to do more, I took the time to do it. (S1)*

*The exchange of ideas, experiences about what each one felt during meditation. Sometimes, what one felt was the same as me; other times, it was a different experience. (S2)*

*Alone, it's more difficult to concentrate to meditate! As a group, I think it allows for greater concentration. In the first [practices], I had difficulties in concentrating. At the end, I managed to stop thinking about other things, controlling my thoughts. But, I still have a little trouble concentrating fully on meditation. (S3)*

Throughout the meditation meetings, some participants reported that they felt relaxed, motivated and welcomed in and by the group, which is why the next meetings were eagerly awaited (NFD: MP1; MP3; MP11). Mindfulness meditation has been recognized as effective for minimizing states of stress and anxiety and changes in the way of life, not only for participants, since it was also experienced by some of their relatives.

*I would recommend it as a tool to change your look in the face of some things. Not only for nervousness and anxiety, but for those who want to improve in all ways, let's say it's a discovery. (S2)*

*She [grandmother] thought it was good, because she can't sleep. She [grandmother] said she has relaxed a lot. (S1)*

Despite initial difficulties in practicing meditation, a group of adolescents pointed out that it produced significant changes, especially in relation to mood, which contributed to improving the quality of life.<sup>24</sup> The surveyed students highlighted the importance of practicing mindfulness meditation at the University for the promotion of mental health and indicated the need for continuity of the meditation group.

*In a small town, we don't realize meditation so much. [The University] is a place where I'm almost always, but I was looking for changes, and it was the opportunity that further leveraged my self-knowledge. (S2)*

*I loved the initiative of this group, because anxiety and nervousness are increasingly present in the academic setting. There must be more moments like that, it was very beautiful! It should continue in the next semester for the next students. (S3)*

*It's something so good and it's free, we'll want and seek it. It was very good, meditation changes lives. (S5)*

The university training period is a decisive stage for the professional future, and can be crossed by contexts of vulnerability, whose experience may generate stress, affect mental health and produce situations of illness in students, which requires attention from educational



institutions. As strategies to cope with this problem, a study highlights the relevance of institutional programs or actions aimed at promoting students' mental health.<sup>17</sup>

Mindfulness meditation is a low-cost care technology that can be in the life of anyone who sets out to experience it and is associated with improvements in quality of life. This can be practiced in different settings, such as in the family, at work and in educational institutions, deconstructing the idea that circulates in the social imaginary that meditation can only be practiced by alternative groups or communities that share its philosophy.

The university context may produce stressful situations for students due to changes in their daily lives and the need to adapt to moments experienced by the distance from relatives and friends, economic issues and specific demands of the academic world. This situation may generate a situational crisis and, also, illness. Accordingly, we should underline the importance of HEI to develop assistance strategies to welcome and promote the physical and mental health of these students. The practice of mindfulness meditation can become a tool to help academics, thus contributing to the university stage to be experienced in a more positive way. Despite the incipience of this experience, the study presents as limiting factors the fact that it was held with a small number of students, in a single University Campus.

## **Conclusion**

This study had the objective of accomplishing group meditation practices that are configured as an effective tool for minimizing stress and anxiety states, in addition to producing changes in the university students' lives. Curiosity about meditation, difficulty concentrating, stress, irritation, anxiety and nervousness were mobilizing elements for student participation in meditative practice.

In view of the difficulties experienced by students in the university stage, full of changes, conflicts and challenging situations, the meditation group was an innovative initiative at the

University Campus and proved to be important to raise awareness of the academic community in relation to psychological distress and its impacts on students' health.

In the logic of integral care and humanization of health, the basic principles of SUS, where Nursing as a social practice is anchored, mindfulness meditation, in the university setting, is configured as a potent health care strategy. Thus, meditative group practice, with an emphasis on co-responsibility for self-care in health, was a promoter of mental health, as it provided more concentration and focus for studies, favored body relaxation, improved sleep quality and promoted self-knowledge, state of mental and spiritual clarity and well-being of the participants.

The results of the study highlight the importance of new actions of this nature, aimed at the health care of the academic community at the institutional level. We should underline the pertinence of the strong inclusion of ICP in professional training as a health-promoting strategy. Furthermore, we should highlight the potential of Nursing in mindfulness meditation practices, considering welcoming and integral perspectives in the production of health care as a meeting of subjectivities.

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**Chief Scientific Editor:** Cristiane Cardoso de Paula

**Associate Editor:** Daiana Foggiato de Siqueira

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## **How to cite this article**

Schuh LM, Cabral FB, Hildebrandt LM, Cosentino SF, Colomé ICS. Meditation: a health care strategy for university students. Rev. Enferm. UFSM. 2021 [Accessed in: Year Month Day]; vol.11 e9: 1-21. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5902/2179769243156>