

The promotion of healthy lifestyles in higher education. Their different visions.

La promoción de estilos de vida saludable en la educación superior. Sus diferentes visiones*

Promoção de estilos de vida saudáveis no ensino superior. Suas diferentes visões

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21803/penamer.14.28.380>

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¿Cómo citar este artículo?

Hernández, A., Infante, A. & Lazo, Y. (2021). La promoción de estilos de vida saludable en la educación superior. Sus diferentes visiones. *Pensamiento Americano*, 14(28), 201-209. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21803/penamer.14.28.380>.

Abstract

Introduction: Lifestyles are related to the usual behaviors that characterize the way of life of a person, the adoption of behaviors that endanger both present and future health, are the cause of a third of diseases in the adult population, making it an essential concern for the university community, especially in the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca" (UPR) for its social responsibility, expressed in its corporate purpose. **Results and Conclusions:** To this end, the training program for health promoters and healthy lifestyles that is developed at the University includes the development of different educational actions: information about drugs, promotion of healthy habits and lifestyles, promotion of emotional self-control, training to successfully face the problems of daily life and resistance to social pressures towards tobacco and alcohol consumption, as well as the development of safe sexual practices.

Key words: University; Habit; Lifestyle; Health; Student.

Resumen

Introducción: Los estilos de vida se relacionan con las conductas habituales que caracterizan la forma de vida de una persona, la adopción de comportamientos que ponen en peligro tanto la salud presente como futura, son la causa de un tercio de las enfermedades en la población adulta, convirtiéndolo en preocupación esencial para la comunidad universitaria, especialmente en la Universidad de Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca" (UPR) por la responsabilidad social de esta, expresada en su objeto social. **Resultados y Conclusiones:** El programa de formación de promotores de salud y estilos de vida saludables que se desarrolla en la Universidad, incluye el desarrollo de diferentes acciones educativas: información sobre las drogas, promoción de hábitos y estilos de vida saludables, fomento del autocontrol emocional, entrenamiento para afrontar con éxito los problemas de la vida cotidiana y resistencia a las presiones sociales hacia el consumo de tabaco y alcohol, así como el desarrollo de prácticas sexuales seguras.

Palabras clave: Universidad; Hábito; Estilo de vida; Salud; Estudiante.

Introdução: Os estilos de vida estão relacionados com os comportamentos habituais que caracterizam o modo de vida de uma pessoa, a adoção de comportamentos que prejudicam a saúde presente e futura, são a causa de um terço dos casos das doenças na população adulta, o que a torna uma grande preocupação para a comunidade universitária. Isto o torna uma preocupação essencial para a comunidade universitária, especialmente na Universidade de Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca" (UPR), devido a sua responsabilidade social disposta, expressa em seu objeto social. **Resultados e Conclusões:** O programa de formação de promotores de saúde e estilos de vida saudáveis que é desenvolvido na Universidade, inclui o desenvolvimento de diferentes ações educacionais: informação sobre drogas, promoção de hábitos e estilos de vida saudáveis, promoção do autocontrole emocional, treinamento para lidar com sucesso com os problemas da vida cotidiana e resistência às pressões sociais em relação ao uso do tabaco o consumo e álcool, assim como o desenvolvimento de práticas sexuais seguras.

Palavras-chave: Universidade; Hábito; Estilo de vida; Saúde; Estudante.



Introduction

Each historical epoch is given its own needs and interests, where problems occur that find expression in all areas of social life, have repercussions on the quality of life of its citizens and condition the dynamics of the system of social relations.

The United Nations (UN) recognizes that the attainment of the highest level of health, without discrimination, is one of the fundamental rights of every human being. For the World Health Organization (WHO). Health promotion is based on this fundamental right, which recognizes health as a positive, inclusive and determining concept of quality of life; hence a growing number of countries in the world today conceive health promotion and healthy lifestyles as a powerful public health strategy.

The relationship between health and development has been addressed relatively frequently in recent years by international organizations, including the non-aligned countries, the Group of 77, as well as by United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, notably the World Health Organization (WHO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), convinced of the need to move toward economic development in such a way as to improve the living conditions and health of the entire population.

As a reference guide for its work, the United Nations General Assembly establishes a transformative vision towards economic, social and environmental sustainability, based on the signing by its 193 member states of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes among its objectives the need for inclusive, quality education that promotes opportunities for all, which will be the basis for improving the quality of life of people and for sustainable development.

Simultaneously, it is defined that in order to advance toward development it is necessary to have a healthy, educated and productive population. It has even been stated that without health there is no development and without development there is no health. The State and the people of Cuba have worked in this direction, despite the growing obstacles that this small country has had to face for more than 60 years.

According to this approach, a fundamental area of health promotion, referred to environments and environments, is found in the University, as the area where students live most of their time. Another fundamental area is referred to the development of personal attitudes, it is here where the student's commitment is needed to develop healthy lifestyles, especially in the current world situation.

The contribution of the University to the development of health culture presupposes that the actions implemented in the National System of Higher Education are not spontaneous; they must correspond to well-conceived strategies in order to meet the demands that society places on the educational institution.

When young people enter the university environment, they change their attitudes, routines, modify their habits and



The new lifestyle, with greater freedom and less control, leads them to take responsibility for their actions, decisions and life project, appropriating new ways of dressing, interacting, moving around and managing their time, money and food, (...) it is expected that this will have a greater impact on scholarship students, whose change in support networks and lifestyle is even greater (Posada-Lecompte, 2006).

This stage of life is also defined as a time of consolidation of the main acquisitions obtained in previous stages, a process that occurs in close relation to the work that the young person must face in decision making, in the execution of plans, goals and objectives in the different areas of life, looking towards the future (Domínguez, 2002).

As the WHO points out, most young people are healthy, however, through statistics and background information provided by this organization, it is possible to confirm that every year a significant percentage of them consume tobacco and alcohol, or that every day they die as a result of interpersonal violence and traffic injuries (WHO, 2010).

Health promotion is the starting point for the development of healthy lifestyles and the formation of a culture of health in men and women, if from the earliest ages it is set out as a purpose in the educational objectives and becomes concrete in the different actions that society as a whole develops to have a healthier and more active population (Sotolongo and Fernandez, 2019).

Health Promotion does not designate a specific area of action, but is conceived to transform students' ways of acting in a general way, being associated with the transformation towards a positive state of health and wellbeing.

Among the aspects identified as components of behaviors and habits that characterize a person's lifestyle are motivational factors, learning, beliefs and social influences, in addition to biological history (Espinoza, 2004); therefore, the aim is to establish healthy behaviors and eliminate risk behaviors, as an aspiration of health promotion in society.

University institutions host subjects with different histories and trajectories, who have different meanings, but who must be oriented towards a single objective, which demands the development of educational proposals (...) with the aim of building new knowledge, promoting a social interaction that, dialectically articulated, allows transforming this educational scenario (Lazo et al., 2019).

Therefore, in the University, health promotion as a methodological approach associated with university extension, is executed by the personal components and assumed by this thesis: professors, students and group.

Health promotion seen from a methodological approach associated with university extension is seen in close relation with sociocultural promotion, since health promotion is also the promotion of a culture of health.

Health promotion in the educational context.

In Cuba, the pedagogical interest in protecting and promoting the health of students from school is historical, there are some facts that prove it, for example: In 1816 the Secretary of Education appointed the first school inspectors who had among their duties: To watch over the morality, application and cleanliness of the youth who attended the schools, judiciously warning teachers about the defects they noticed (López, 2012).

In 1901 the Municipal Board of Health founded a School Inspection Service formed by six physicians, in 1902 the Health Department of Havana assigned two physicians as school inspectors to enforce hygienic principles, in 1910 the School Hygiene Service was created in the Health and Welfare Secretariat and in 1935 the School Hygiene Bureau was organized and physicians, nurses and dentists were assigned the responsibility of giving hygienic talks in schools.

The training of promoters has been addressed in Cuba in many lines of work and areas of Public Health and in topics as diverse as nutrition, family planning, prevention of drug use and gender violence and sexually transmitted infections, among others; its wide use and variety has increased efforts to understand and improve the strategies related to these topics (López, 2008).

Since 1959, integral health has been a priority. Among the priority issues has been the prevention of STIs. Since the 1980s, with the appearance of the first cases of AIDS, preventive education in this area has become more relevant. In the case of STI/HIV prevention education. López (2012), considers that "(...) it means taking educational measures aimed at providing the necessary means to prevent people from engaging in risky sexual behaviors that may expose them to these infections". (Lopez, 2012, p.22)

For Castro (2004) this is based on

"(...) systematic knowledge of the particularities of both the health problem affecting them and the characteristics of adolescents and young people, and recognizes the interaction of psychological, social, economic and cultural factors that influence sexual and reproductive health and health in general" (p.41).

We agree with this author in considering that during the process of training health promoters, activities aimed at emotional approach to this problem, raising self-esteem, self-care, respect for diversity, decision making, discernment of psychosocial and economic consequences, as well as the resizing of certain cultural patterns that influence health in general and lifestyles, should be reinforced.

The promoters for the prevention of STIs/HIV in Cuba have their antecedents in the late 1980s; initially they were volunteers, mostly people living with HIV, who mainly carried out their prevention activities in the community. Later, in Cuba, a methodology for the training of promoters among people with HIV began to be applied in 1996 and until mid-1997, which was not exclusive to the country; it had already been used in other countries, although it was observed that it did not contribute to achieving the desired results.



The Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP), starting in 1997, began a process of contextualization of the actions that were being implemented and initiated the development of training workshops adjusted to the social reality. Since then and up to the present, the training of health promoters has been a work direction of the National Center for the Prevention of STD/HIV/AIDS (CNP ITS/SIDA) as well as the National Center for Sexual Education (CENESEX), both belonging to MINSAP, which have implemented their actions outside of school institutions.

This led to the approval and implementation that same year of the National Health Promotion Program in the MES, which includes, among its thematic axes, health promotion and, within it, the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and drugs as a national project.

From this point on, training and training programs and strategies are developed to provide students with life skills training on drugs and HIV/AIDS.

In 2003, the national project "Strengthening the national multi-sectoral response or Expanded response to the epidemic for the prevention and care of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Republic of Cuba", sponsored by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, was launched with the participation of more than twenty agencies and organizations, including the Ministry of Higher Education, which constituted a potential for further promoting health promotion in our institutions.

This project complements and deepens the preparation for social, family and sexual life of young people with the main objective of "promoting responsible sexuality that contributes to the prevention of HIV/AIDS, drugs and tuberculosis.

Researchers at the National Center for STI/HIV/AIDS Prevention considered it important to train promoters "[...] as agents of change, thus preparing the young generation to enjoy a full and responsible sexuality (Ochoa, 2005).

This implied, at the university, the creation of spaces that allowed the training of health promoters for the prevention of STIs and HIV/AIDS, Drugs and Tuberculosis as part of the actions foreseen by the national project, which contributed to the performance of social responsibility for the health of young people.

However, in the opinion of the authors of this research, the initiatives developed are insufficient, since young people need to modify their lifestyles, starting from a good health and social behavior, hence the need to train promoters trained in healthy lifestyles that allow the multiplication of this knowledge in Cuban universities.

Thus, training promoters of healthy lifestyles implies conceiving health as a right that requires the commitment and responsibility of society as a whole in order to become effective. It could be said that the promoter acts as a facilitator of his community, developing initiatives, accompanying and promoting projects and actions within his community to improve its quality of life.



Based on the lack of a definition in the literature consulted that exhausts the essential, sufficient and necessary elements, the process of training promoters of healthy lifestyles at the University is defined as the set of actions, activities and tasks aimed at developing knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in students, aimed at educating themselves and others, towards the assumption of behaviors conducive to biopsychosocial well-being (Vento, 2020).

Promotion of healthy lifestyles at the University.

The analysis of the lifestyles of young people is necessary in any context in which they develop; for this reason, studying these elements in the university context allows us to understand the behaviors of a specific group with more or less similar characteristics, since education is considered the obligatory path for equitable growth, development, the consolidation of citizenship and personal development, resulting in a context conducive to promoting lifestyles more inclined to healthy than unhealthy behaviors (Ocampo, 2003),

In this sense, the promotion of healthy lifestyles should be based on the design of programs adapted to the characteristics of the target population. They should be aimed at modifying the most powerful determinants of the different health behaviors. Although some of these are impossible to modify, such as gender, biological characteristics or socioeconomic status, changes in these determinants are vital for modifying the lifestyles of the population (Sallis, 1993).

There are many experiences related to healthy universities, most of which have been developed under the auspices of PAHO in the Americas. Among the experiences for which documentation has been found, mention should be made of those of countries such as Mexico, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, Canada, the United States of America, Peru; in Europe there are references mainly in Spain, and in Asia, Japan and Korea have stood out in this area.

In Cuba, the marked social, cultural and economic changes that began after 1959 created the conditions for the development of new conceptions of health promotion. There have been several Cuban authors who have studied the subject in educational contexts (Castro, 1987; González, 2002; Ochoa, 2005; Carvajal and Castro, 2007; Vento et al., 2013; Lazo, 2015; López, 2018). However, it is considered that the practice of this, in educational and especially university contexts, from a cultural dimension has not been investigated in depth.

Consequently, a process of promoting healthy lifestyles in a university context and having as a methodological perspective the promotion of health from a holistic approach to culture, indicates the need to be clear about the specificity of this context and the fact that the same person behaves differently in different contexts, so that in the university converges a large group of students of different nationalities, various provinces and many more diverse municipalities of our territory (Vento, 2020).

This will be of great importance, since the effectiveness of a method for promoting healthy lifestyles will always depend on its adaptation and suitability with respect to the characteristics of the students, the lifestyles in question and the context in which it is applied, in this case all of them living in the community of the Student Residence of the University of Pinar del Río.

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Extension is an integrative and systemic formative process, whose core is the cultural interaction between University and Society, and the exchange that occurs through interaction generates the transformation of both and mutual enrichment. The following are recognized as organizational forms of university extension work: programs, projects, activities, actions and tasks; adopting one or another organizational form depending on the degree of complexity of the problem detected through the diagnosis and that, by its nature, it has been decided to work on it.

The guideline aimed at strengthening the extension dimension of the integral approach to the educational and political-ideological approach has several projections, among them the one aimed at supporting programs for the promotion of health and quality of life, emphasizing the social prevention strategy, as well as the National Programs for the prevention of drug abuse, alcohol and tobacco consumption, environmental protection, and the implementation of the actions of the HIV-AIDS project.

In this sense, university extension as a transversal axis of university activities fulfills the role of articulating, through committed management, teaching and research actions and exploiting their characteristics in favor of increasing the social impact of a Higher Education Institution (HEI).

However, the initiatives developed are insufficient, since young people need to modify their lifestyles, starting from a good health and social behavior, hence the need to train promoters trained in healthy lifestyles that allow the multiplication of this knowledge in the Cuban university, This implies conceiving health as a right that requires the commitment and responsibility of the whole society to become effective. It could be said that the promoter acts as a facilitator of his community, developing initiatives, accompanying and promoting projects and actions within his community to improve its quality of life.

Conclusions

The analysis of documentary sources on the current context of Higher Education and the essential challenges for the improvement of extension work in these institutions, allowed confirming the need and actuality of the training of promoters of healthy lifestyles in the University as a means for the improvement of the integral professional training of university students, from a critical look at the main milestones in favor of this problem, contextualized to the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saiz Montes de Oca". There is an institutional political will that guarantees the sustainability of the processes and the necessary resources to guarantee the systematization and permanence of the university extension actions.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.



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