

Mental Health in Informal Workers During the Pandemic by Covid - 19 in the City Sincelejo, Salud Mental En Trabajadores Informales Durante La Pandemia Por Covid - 19 En La Ciudad De Sincelejo

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Abstract

The following research evaluated mental health conditions in times of pandemic in informal workers in the city of Sincelejo- Sucre. Objective: To describe the mental health conditions of informal workers in the city of Sincelejo during the covid - 19 pandemic period in the city of Sincelejo. Method: Quantitative, the research was oriented towards a descriptive, non-experimental study in a population of 50 informal workers, where the GHQ-12 mental health screening instrument was used to collect information, which investigates four basic areas: anxiety, depression, social inadequacy, and hypochondria. Results: The results show that 80% of the informal workers had thoughts that they were worthless, but that they still managed to continue trusting in themselves, which can be seen in the same 80% who stated that they continued to believe and trust in themselves. Conclusion: Having feelings of trust and enjoyment in daily activities became adequate protective factors for maintaining good mental health in the population of informal workers in times of pandemic.

Keywords: Mental Health, Informal Work, Pandemic, COVID-19, Confinement.

INTRODUCTION

The covid-19 pandemic left significant effects on society in general, including a substantial transformation in the different forms of work, in some cases the workers managed to get ahead when they were supported by a direct contract with some type of employer assuming the virtual modality, but in the case of people who have the modality of informal work, the consequences were more devastating, from the reduction of their daily income as the concern of not having their daily sustenance for being under the confinement and social isolation declared by the national government. Throughout this process of learning and discovering the consequences of covid-19, it has been possible to identify that the impact has not only been on physical health but also the mental health of a large part of the general population (Buitrago, Ciurana, Fernández & Tizón, 2021). In addition to this data, the International Labor Organization (ILO) states that the pandemic not only became a public health problem but also caused difficulties in the economy that affected the welfare of people and put at risk the income and means used to survive in the long term (World Health Organization, WHO, 2020).

On the other hand, several investigations developed in recent years have shown that the pandemic period caused by Covid-19 and several social, socioeconomic, and organizational factors derived from the pandemic negatively affected the mental health of workers, with an increase in emotional disturbances, a decrease in family income and a lower qualification of personnel (Tizón, 2020).

Mental Health

The WHO (2016) states that mental health becomes a component of wholeness and is fundamental to health. It declares that health is then that state characterized by mental, physical, and social well-being that is not characterized by the absence of disease.

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From psychology, mental health is related to a relatively lasting state, where the person manages to be well-adapted, feels a taste for life, and has achieved or is achieving self-realization. It can be said that it is a positive state that does not necessarily have to be free of mental disorders; it can also be considered a normal state present in an individual (Davini, Gellon de Salluzi , Rossi, 1978). Within the conditioning factors of mental health, it is possible to recognize biological, genetic, gender-related factors, family, social, personal, and economic experiences, where in this last point it is worth mentioning poverty (Comisión de las Comunidades Europeas, 2005). According to the European Opinion Research Group EORG (2023), other factors that also determine mental health are related to educational levels, type of employment, and the environment in which the individual lives, whether rural or urban. To these are added those cultural factors that can cause stress such as diseases, social conflicts, serious illnesses, and social disasters in which pandemics can be alluded to as a high source of discomfort in the mental health of individuals (Montero, Aparicio, Gómez-Beneyto, Moreno-Küstner, Reneses, Usall, et al. 2004; Sánchez-López, López-García, Dresch & Corbalán, 2008).

On the other hand, mental health can be understood as a multidisciplinary construct that includes personal, social, and public policy circumstances (Macaya, Pihan, Vicente, 2018). From a socioeconomic point of view, mental health is affected by certain conditions of society, such as the economic condition and the socioeconomic resources available (Restrepo & Jaramillo, 2012).

In this sense, mental health is closely related to everyone's daily life and refers to the way each individual relates to daily activities and the community in general, linking the way each one harmonizes his ideals, abilities, desires, and all those requirements that allow him to face the demands of life, relating how he feels about his health and the way he is responding to the demands of life and his environment (Fernández,2012).

In this sense, mental health cannot be seen exclusively from the individual or the social groups, but on the contrary from the relationships that allow the individual and his community to reflect simultaneously (Galende, 1997). As in the case of the present article, how a public health phenomenon caused by the pandemic may or may not affect the mental health of informal workers.

Informal Work

According to the International Labor Organization, the informal economy is that set of economic activities that can be developed by economic units or workers that are not contemplated by formal systems, not being recognized by the law, which makes them perform outside of them. Informal employment is considered as that type of employment that is not subject to national labor legislation, where the employer may be a person who is not legally constituted, or maybe a staff or a member of a household, where the place of work is also outside the premises of a company (OIT, 2020).

In the last national report for the quarterly January. March for the year 2023 of Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas DANE (2023) the portion of informal workers was 58.2% with a decrease of 0.3% with respect to the same period of the year 2022, whereas a curious fact the city of Sincelejo - Sucre is located in the first city with the highest percentage of the informality of 67.4% figure that has managed to maintain in that margin in recent years, which estimates that for the pandemic period was one of those affected with respect to the lack of opportunity to perform their work as they were usually used to

METHOD

Type of Research

For the development of this research, a quantitative, descriptive, non-experimental methodology was used with the participation of 50 adults voluntarily, taking into account their gender (38 men, 12 women), their marital status: 8 married, single, and 20 in free union, and their level of schooling, where 28 were high school graduates, 20 technicians and 2 professionals (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the sample

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Genre	Man	38	38.0	76.0	76.0
	Woman	12	12.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	50	50.0	100.0	
Marital status	Single	8	8.0	16.0	16.0
	Married	7	7.0	14.0	30.0
	Separated	15	15.0	30.0	60.0
	Unió libre	20	20.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	50	50.0	100.0	
Schooling	Bachelor	28	28.0	56.0	56.0
	Technician	20	20.0	40.0	96.0
	Professional	2	2.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	50	50.0	100.0	

Instruments

The instrument applied in the study was the General Health Questionnaire-12 GHQ-12, validated in Colombia by Ruiz et al. (2017), which is composed of a Likert-type rating scale, with a numerical value scale comprising 0,1,2 and 3, intended to evaluate four basic psychiatric areas: social inadequacy, anxiety, depression, and hypochondriasis. The instrument has a good level of reliability with a Cronbach's alpha ranging between 0.82 and 0.86 (Ruiz et al, 2017).

The research was carried out in the year 2022, a period in which the sanitary emergency caused by Covid-19 continued, in the period of application of the instrument coincided with the economic reactivation, so it was a little easier to access the population that participated in the study, which voluntarily agreed to its application

RESULTS

The analysis of results was done using the SPSS statistical tool.

With respect to the question, "Have you been able to cope adequately with your problems? 36% of the participants were able to answer the same as usual, 54% more able than usual and the remaining 10% less able than usual.

Table 2. Have you been able to cope adequately with your problems?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Same as usual	18	18.0	36.0	36.0
	More capable than usual.	27	27.0	54.0	90.0
	Less capable than usual	5	5.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	50	50.0	100.0	
Lost	System	50	50.0		
Total		100	100.0		

When the workers were asked if they had thought that they were worthless, it became evident that 80% had thought it more than usual, 18.0% not at all, and 2.0% not more than usual, which shows that in moments of anguish not being able to perform their daily tasks as informal workers, thoughts of little personal value increased.

Table 3. You have thought that you are a worthless person?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	More than usual	40	40.0	80.0	80.0
	No, not at all.	9	9.0	18.0	98.0
	No more than usual.	1	1.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	50	50.0	100.0	
Lost	System	50	50.0		
Total		100	100.0		

In relation to the question of whether they have lost their self-confidence, the results show that 80% say no, not at all, 6% more than usual and the remaining 14% no, more than usual, as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Have you lost confidence in yourself?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	No, not at all	40	40.0	80.0	80.0
	More than usual	3	3.0	6.0	86.0
	No more than usual	7	7.0	14.0	100.0
	Total	50	50.0	100.0	
Lost	System	50	50.0		
Total		100	100.0		

To the question that tried to address whether they feel enjoyment in normal day-to-day activities, 68% responded the same as usual, 16% more than usual, and the other 16% less than usual (Table 5).

Table 5. You have been able to enjoy your normal daily activities?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	More than usual	8	8.0	16.0	16.0
	Same as usual	34	34.0	68.0	84.0
	Less than usual	8	8.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	50	50.0	100.0	
Lost	System	50	50.0		
Total		100	100.0		

A correlation between marital status and feeling happy and depressed was also found to be 0.45%, demonstrating that marital status may be related to feeling happy or depressed at the time the study was carried out.

Table 6. Relationship between marital status and feeling happy or depressed.

		14. Marital Status	9. Have you ever felt unhappy or depressed?
Marital Status	Pearson correlation	1	.108
	Sig. (bilateral)		.455
	N	50	50
Have you ever felt unhappy or depressed?	Pearson correlation	.108	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	.455	
	N	50	50

DISCUSSION

The present research was carried out to identify the mental health conditions in a group of informal workers in the city of Sincelejo, Sucre, during the pandemic period. It is important to remember at this point that the pandemic period brought with it social isolation which significantly affected the informal work of a large number of people who see the possibility of starting their own business in the hope of satisfying their basic personal and family needs.

Informal work is understood as that type of employment with little or no social protection, which is not subject to labor legislation because it does not pay taxes and is not entitled to the payment of social benefits (Deelen, 2015). It is important to note that in Latin America and the Caribbean, 50% of the work is informal (Organización Internacional del Trabajo (2018), which demonstrates the extent of this type of population.

On the other hand, it should be understood that the structural problems and the persistent increase in informality rates contribute to the deterioration of the labor market. At this point, it should be remembered that for the year 2019, the increase in unemployment had an increase of 8%, which increased to 10.5% in 2020 (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe CEPAL & Organización Internacional del Trabajo OIT, 2021). But it is in this same year of 2020 that the rate of informality was reduced all because of the economic

crisis and the different control measures resulting from the pandemic by covid -19; but also data for the year 2021 showed an increase in unemployment but in turn, an increase in informal work (CEPAL, 2021) which leads to thinking that workers went from formal employment to informality as a life strategy and subsistence to personal and family novel, which shows that unemployment and informality manage to have a significant impact on the mental health of individuals (López-Ruiz, Artazcoz, Martínez, Rojas & Benavides,2015).

This can be compared with the data found regarding the loss of self-confidence, where 80% of the population interviewed stated that they did not lose confidence at all, which allowed them to return to their economic activities and begin to face adverse situations and continue with their work under the modality of informality.

Another point to highlight is the sense that informal workers have with respect to their work and the way they have faced difficulties where the data confirm that 54% of the population managed to be more capable than usual to face the situation, here we can also highlight the fundamental role of resilience. With respect to the data found related to the variables of schooling, marital status, and gender, it was only possible to demonstrate a direct influence on mental health in the variables of marital status and the possibility of feeling happy or depressed.

In this context, it should be noted that mental health problems have consequences on the quality of life of informal workers and their families, as well as on social and economic development because it should not be forgotten that this type of work contributes to the national economy.

CONCLUSION

When partially analyzing the results obtained with the application of the mental health questionnaire GHQ-12, 80% of the respondents showed good mental health during the pandemic period at the point of economic reactivation. This could be due to factors such as economic recovery, adequate interpersonal relationships, and the possibility of starting again with their daily activities related to their informal work, allowing them to obtain their income again and in this way satisfy their own and their family's basic needs.

It can be said then that the mental health levels of the informal workers were not affected because they demonstrated through the results that they continued to enjoy normal activities and continued to have confidence in themselves, feelings that can be said to have favored continuing with their jobs after the economic reactivation.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Contributions of the Authors

The first author: conceived the research, helped write the article, and applied the instruments.

The second author: conceived the research, helped write the article, and analyzed the data.

The third author: conceived the research, helped write the article, and analyzed the data.

The fourth author: searched for bibliographic information and assisted in writing the article.

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