

The program "Eu e os Outros": Adaptation to the university context

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INTRODUCTION

Transitioning to higher education is a significant stage in a young person's life and can be a source of instability and uncertainty. College students are vulnerable to several stressors, including academic and non-academic domains¹. Given the complexity of this transition, university students present an increase in addictive behaviors². The Covid-19 pandemic has emerged as a new stressor that has caused numerous changes and challenges affecting university students in various domains³. In addition to physical and mental health impacts, the pandemic has also influenced addictive behaviors⁴.

"Eu e os Outros" is a prevention program that aims to promote the reduction of problems related to addictive behaviors and dependencies, better knowledge, and the use of resources (see QR code below for more information).

The present study aimed to investigate and analyze the experience of university students from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to the present and its effect on addictive behaviors. It is essential to study and explore the different factors and influences that affect addictive behaviors to design an intervention program tailored to the needs of students. A needs assessment is the first step in adapting the "Eu e os Outros" program to the university context.

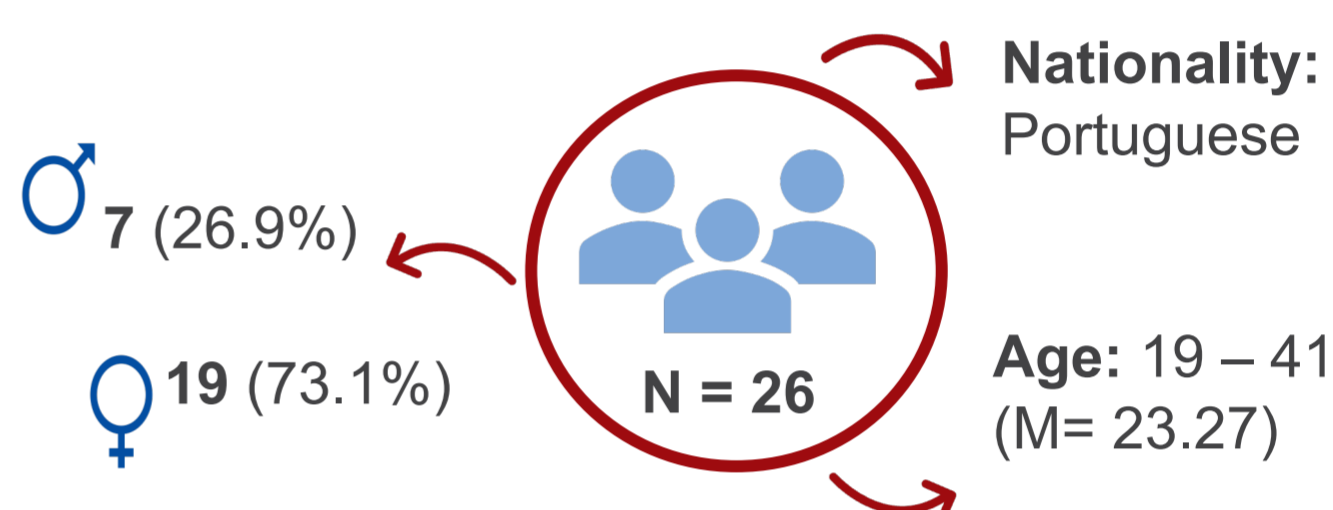
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Based on the Intervention Mapping methodological framework, a needs assessment is the first step to planning and implementing an effective intervention⁵.

This study aimed to investigate the determinants of addictive behaviors and the pandemic's impact through semi-structured individual interviews (n = 26).

A thematic analysis was performed with a deductive-inductive approach to obtain a global and functional description of the addictive behaviors in university students. The main themes were quoted and organized into a thematic model explaining the variables' relationship.

Participants

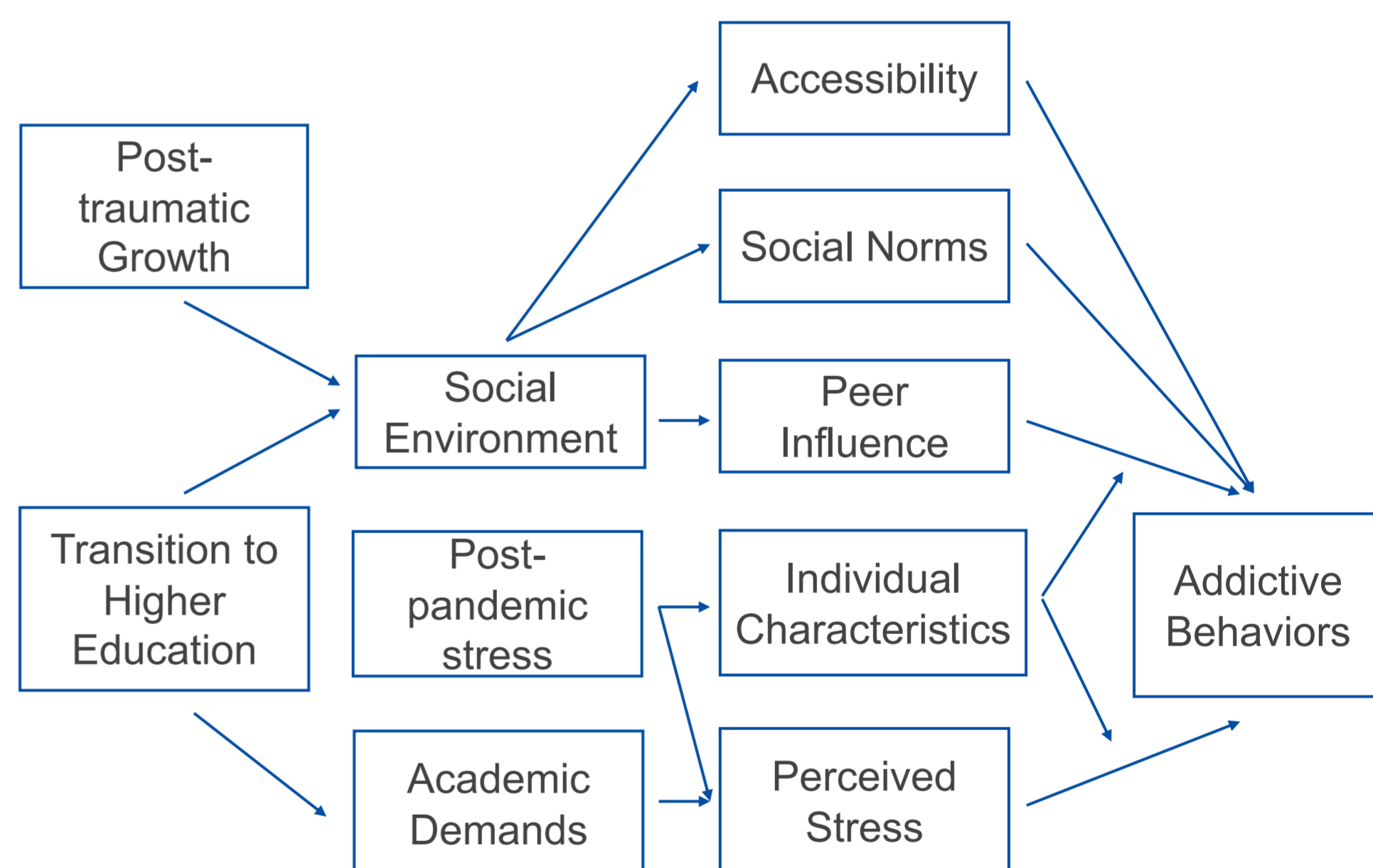


RESULTS

The main themes identified as the determinants of addictive behaviors in the university context were the transition to higher education, social environment, academic demands, accessibility to the behavior, social norms, peer influence, perceived stress, and individual characteristics.

Specific to the lockdown during the pandemic, the main determinants influencing addictive behaviors were perceived to be the transition to an online regime, accessibility to the behavior, social isolation, Covid-related stress, cabin fever, and the need to occupy free time.

Currently, students are dealing not only with all the pre-pandemic influences but also with the repercussions of the pandemic. The thematic model represents the current influences of addictive behaviors in the university context.



DISCUSSION

"In this journey that we are in that child-adult phase, we start to have more responsibilities. At the same time, we have to start making decisions about our future lives, which will have a lot of impacts, and I think these little additions, these little day-to-day walking sticks, end up helping us to have mental health and have a little more refuge from responsibilities" (Participant 17).

Addictive behaviors are a normalized reality in the university context, and the need for effective interventions is clear.

- An intervention program must consider all the dynamics of the university context and include hypothetical scenarios of the academic environment that promote discussion and reflection to enable students to deal with multiple stressors and prevent addictive behaviors.
- For the intervention to be effective, the determinants of addictive behaviors must be addressed through evidence-based methods⁶.
- Social and individual skills must be developed (e.g., the ability to say no, time management, and coping strategies).
- Post-pandemic stress and post-traumatic growth emerged due to the pandemic and should be considered in an intervention plan for college students.

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