Article

Youth Community Groups: Promotion of Mental Health and Capacity Building

Jéssica Quintero-Jurado[*, 1]
Orcid.org/0000-0002-7565-8144

Yomar Ossa-Henao[1]
Orcid.org/0000-0001-6842-3040

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[1]*Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios, Colombia*

Abstract

In contexts of high socioeconomic vulnerability and psychosocial risk, communities are recognized as active agents, generating strategies to respond to their problems and needs in mental health. This research aimed to understand the role of community youth groups in prevention and promotion in mental health. The hermeneutic method has been adopted. Participated 6 youth groups of sport, cultural, artistic and religious character. Focal groups were conducted with the members and semi-structured interviews with the leaders. It was found that the groups are presented as strategies to prevent damage in a context of risk, and for the promotion of mental health through capacity development. These capacities are related to the use of free time, recreation and leisure, the establishment of meaningful links, moral reflection, the formation of talents, the strengthening of the character and the projection into the future. It was concluded that investing in the strengthening of community strategies consolidates bases for the development of young people, offering alternatives of choice that allow them to build meaningful lives for themselves, develop capacities and have the freedom to be architects of their history.

Keywords: Mental health, health promotion, community, youth, human development.

Grupos Comunitários Juvenis: Promoção da Saúde Mental e Desenvolvimento de Capacidades

Resumo

Em contextos de alta vulnerabilidade socioeconómica e risco psicossocial, reconhece-se as comunidades como agentes ativos, que geram estratégias para responder às suas problemáticas e necessidades em saúde mental. O presente estudo tevo como objetivo compreender as funções dos grupos juvenis comunitários na prevenção e promoção em saúde mental. Adotou-se o método hermenêutico. Participaram 6 grupos juvenis de carácteres desportivo, cultural, artístico, e religioso. Realizaram-se grupos focais com os integrantes e entrevistas semiestruturadas com os líderes. Constatou-se que os grupos apresentam-se como estratégias de prevenção frente ao contexto de risco, e de promoção da saúde mental a partir do

desenvolvimento de aptidões. Estas aptidões estão relacionados com o uso do tempo livre, a recreação e o ócio, o estabelecimento de vínculos afetivos, a reflexão moral, a formação de talentos, o fortalecimento do carácter e a projeção para o futuro. Concluiu-se que investir no fortalecimento das estratégias comunitárias consolida bases para o desenvolvimento dos jovens, oferecendo alternativas de escolha que lhes permitam construir vidas significativas para si, desenvolver capacidades e ter a liberdade de ser arquitetos de sua história.

Palavras-chave: Saúde mental, promoção da saúde, comunidade, jovens, desenvolvimento humano.

Agrupaciones Comunitarias Juveniles: Promoción de la Salud Mental y Desarrollo de Capacidades

Resumen

En contextos de alta vulnerabilidad socioeconómica y riesgo psicosocial, se reconocen las comunidades como agentes activos, que generan estrategias para responder a sus problemáticas y necesidades en salud mental. La presente investigación tuvo como objetivo comprender las funciones de los grupos juveniles comunitarios en la prevención y promoción en salud mental. Se adoptó el método hermenéutico. Participaron 6 agrupaciones juveniles de carácter deportivo, cultural, artístico y religioso. Se realizaron grupos focales con los integrantes y entrevistas semiestructuradas con los líderes. Se encontró que los grupos se presentan como estrategias de prevención frente al contexto de riesgo, y de promoción de la salud mental a partir del desarrollo de capacidades. Estas capacidades están relacionadas con el uso del tiempo libre, la recreación y el ocio, el establecimiento de vínculos significativos, la reflexión moral, la formación de talentos, el fortalecimiento del carácter y la proyección a futuro. Se concluyó, que invertir en el fortalecimiento de estrategias comunitarias consolida bases para el desarrollo de los jóvenes, al ofrecer alternativas de elección que les permitan construir vidas significativas para sí mismos, desarrollar capacidades y tener la libertad de ser artífices de su historia.

Palabras clave: Salud mental, promoción de la salud, comunidad, jóvenes, desarrollo humano.

Young people are regarded as priorities in the policies of promotion and prevention in mental health - policies aimed at guaranteeing optimum conditions for their development and well-being. Interventions in mental health have developed from individualizing psychiatric conceptions, focused on pathology, medicalization and hospitalization (Tortella-Feliu et al., 2016), to approaches which not only emphasize the construction of personal and collective resources, but which also recognize socioeconomic conditions and its context as determinants of mental health, and which include inescapably the community as a primary agent in its promotion and prevention.

Such proposals for the understanding of mental health have their roots in the socioeconomic model of health (Restrepo & Jaramillo, 2012), a model which has been consolidated es-pecially after the declaration of the Alma Ata. This model emerges as a critique of health interventions based on the individual risk perspective, and conceptualizes health as the result of the socioeconomic conditions of the context and the possibilities of choice. In this way, the readings (as well as interpretations) that are made are contextual, historical and relational, all aimed at portraying health in terms of rights and human development.

The previous model is based on the approach to the social determinants of health (World Health Organization [WHO], 2009), a model which embodies the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age, including the system of health;

These circumstances account for the majority of "health inequities", which is why, in order to improve the health of subjects and communi-

ties, an interdisciplinary and multi sectoral approach is required (Bang, 2014a, p. 101), including "education, work, justice, transportation, environment, housing and social assistance" (Restrepo & Jaramillo, 2012).

In this sense, the Ottawa letter regards the community as a level of intervention in the social determinants of health, whose goals serve to reinforce primary care and community action based initiatives understood as "the effective and concrete participation of the community in the setting of priorities", decision-making and the elaboration and implementation of strategies" (WHO, 1986, p. 3), that facilitate the achievement of better and more optimal levels of health. It is emphasized that the success of this participation is based on the community's ability to empower itself through its own "endeavors and destinies" (WHO, 1986, p. 3).

Based on the foregoing, the present investigation makes reference to the community as the main scenario where the dynamics for the promotion of health and the prevention of the disease are generated (Montero, 2009); In this way, its dynamic and productive nature is highlighted in the planning, execution and evaluation of health actions. It is understood that the community "collectively generates an identity, as well as organizational forms, developing and using resources to achieve its ends" (Montero, 1998, p. 212). Therefore, the community generates strategies to respond to their problems and needs.

The community has been recognized, in various investigations, as a privileged setting for intervention in the promotion of mental health, based on participation in artistic, recreational, sports, occupational and religious activities, which are not explicitly offered as therapeutic actions, but which are articulated as community-based initiatives. In this sense, *interventions based on art are recognized* as music groups (Clift, Manship, & Stephens, 2017; Hedemann & Frazier, 2016), dance, art therapy and creative expression (Ruiz-Casares, Kolyn, Sullivan, & Rousseau, 2015), writing, visual arts (Bridger, Emmanouil, & Lawthom, 2017) and traditional games in the public space (Bang, 2014b); also,

occupational training activities such as training in agriculture (Shields-Zeeman, Pathare, Hipple Walters, Kapadia-Kundu, & Joag, 2016), shoe store and carpentry (Wilson, Cordier, Parsons, Vaz, & Buchanan, 2016), tribal history and jewelery making (Langdon et al., 2016), community cooking and English as a second language (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2015).

Likewise, practices/interventions aimed at the *promotion of physical activity* have been identified, activities such as swimming, tennis, soccer, basketball and cricket clubs (Hurley, Swann, Vella, Allen, & Okely, 2017); rounds, dance, tai-chi (Johnson, Robertson, Towey, Stewart-Brown, & Clarke, 2017) and guided walking groups (South et al., 2016); as well as *interventions in religious institutions* of different confessionals (Mantovani, Pizzolati, & Gillard, 2017; Shields-Zeeman et al., 2016; Sundar, Qureshi, & Galiatsatos, 2016).

Three types of objectives were recognized in these interventions which focused on the promotion of mental health: on the one hand, some were aimed at the decrease in psychiatric symptoms, symptoms such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and distress (Clift et al., 2017; Hedemann & Frazier, 2016; Johnson et al., 2017); others addressed the construction of personal resources for individual and social empowerment (Bridger et al., 2017; Sundar et al., 2016); Finally, they focused on the construction of community skills, skills such as the consolidation/development of social networks, community participation and the recovery of public space (Bang, 2014b; Hurley et al., 2017; South et al., 2016).

Based on the above considerations, mental health promotion practices in the community are aimed at capacity development. These capacities are based on four principles: (1) each person is conceived as an end in itself; (2) *a focus on freedom or choice*, as is oriented to promote opportunities that broaden the spectrum of action of the subjects; (3) *pluralism* because it recognizes and acknowledges that each person/individual has different capacities and options; and (4) the assumptions of *injustice and social inequality* as

producers of deficiencies in human and community capacities.

The capacity is not only referred to as the internal resources of a person, but also to (as) those opportunities that arise from the mixture between these personal inputs and the social, economic and political context. In this regard, Nussbaum (2012) refers to the result of this mixture with the term "combined capacities": the more a subject accomplishes, the greater the feeling of happiness and satisfaction it can achieve. In this way, capacities belong to the subject-context interplay, as well as understanding health as part of social and personal development.

Contextualization

The young people which constitute the focus of this investigation belong to the municipality of Bello (Antioquia), north of the Aburrá Valley, a valley situated in the region of Cordillera de los Andes. The urban area of this municipality is divided into 11 communities, which are organized in turn into neighborhoods. This investigation was carried out in commune 11, which comprises of 7 neighborhoods, with a total of 22,598 inhabitants. In the municipality of Bello, those aged between 15 and 24 years of age, represent the predominant age range of the number of people, corresponding to 28% of the total population.

Among the main problems of the Municipality of Bello, it is highlighted that there is a high number of families classified as being in extreme poverty (3,427); likewise, the number of children and adolescent victims of armed conflicts who arrived at the Municipality has increased (2,194 between 2005 and 2009), and Commune 11 is the recipient of 15% of the displaced population. Bello is also characterized by poor access to cultural programs and services (only 8% of the population), limited recreational and sports participation (12%) and little community participation. In addition, there is lack of physical spaces for cultural development, with only one seat in commune 11 (Municipio de Bello, 2012).

In spite of prior problems, it was found that the communities create and manage groups that include the youth population as the main beneficiary who responds to their needs and problems.

These groups are cultural, sports, artistic, recreational and religious-based. The objective of this research is to understand the functions of these community groups in the prevention and promotion of the mental health of young people.

Methodology

This research is based on the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2000), with an interpretive approach (González, 2000) and a qualitative design (Salgado, 2007). In addition, the hermeneutic method has been adopted (Sandoval, 2002), a method which seeks to understand social reality under the metaphor of a text that can be interpreted.

Participants

At first, a mapping plan was implemented (Sandoval, 2002) to identify the community-based organizations that operate in commune 11 of the municipality of Bello, which implement strategies to promote mental health in the youth population. Eighteen sports, cultural and artistic groups were identified, including dance, football, music, skating, scouting, literature and recreation groups. Likewise, 9 youth groups belonging to different religious denominations were recognized. The groups belong to the 4 districts of Zamora, Santa Rita, Acevedo and Gabriela, because youth groups did not operate in the other neighborhoods.

In the process of selecting those groups that participated in the research, the following criteria were taken into account: The requirements of a community initiative aimed at promoting young people as the main beneficiaries; the driving motive of a sense of belonging to the community; the composition of young people between 14 and 28 years of age; the conduction of regular meetings – with at least one year of compliance/conformity.

Of the 18 groups that were identified, only a few could be contacted; In addition, due to political transition processes in the communal elections, it was discovered that some had been temporarily suspended due to lack of resources and physical spaces. Finally, 6 groups which fulfilled the established criteria, participated (See Table 1).

Table 1
Participating Groups

Group	Number of Members	Formation time
Soccer	100	12 years
Cultural and Recreational Group	15	11 years
Scouts Group	50	27 years
Dance Group	20	1 year
Christian Church 1	80	5 years
Christian Church 2	30	3 years

Procedures for Data Collection

With the indicated groups, the technique of a focal group aimed at the members of the groups was implemented, a session with each one, after obtaining the informed consent of the young people and their legal representatives in the case of minors, of whom also consent was requested in writing. During the selection process of the participants in the focus group, approximately 8 young people per group, who fulfilled the following criteria, were invited: membership of the group for more than a year and the attendance of regular meetings at least during the previous year (See Table 2). Subsequently, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each leader. There were a total of six focus groups and five interviews aimed at investigating the expectations, results, achievements and benefits of participation in the group for the promotion and prevention of mental health. The sessions were recorded in audio and transcribed.

Table 2
Participants in the Focus Groups

Group	Number of Participants	Number of Men	Number of Women
Soccer	8	4	4
Cultural and Recreational Group	8	5	3
Scouts Group	6	4	2
Dance Group	7	5	2
Christian Church 1	8	5	3
Christian Church 2	9	7	2

Data Analysis Procedure

The microanalysis procedure was followed (Strauss & Corbin, 2002) in order to generate codes and categories of analysis. A process of data exposure was carried out (Coffey & Atkinson, 2005), through the construction of networks (Networks) that allowed the establishment of relationships between the categories and their subcategories to form a greater interpretative scheme, from which the thesis that is sustained

in this article is formulated. As regards the analysis of the data, Atlas Ti software in version 7 was used as an instrument.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical considerations for this study are based on Resolution Number 8430 of 1993 of the Ministry of Health of Colombia. The right of participants to information, non-participation, privacy and anonymity maintenance was preserved at all times. Informed consent was requested from the participants and / or their legal representatives.

Results

The Group as an Alternative Space

Young people consider the group as an alternative space, which is in tension with the proposals that come from "the street", as they call them. "The street", like "the corner", is represented by young people as a risk area where actions such as consumption and sale of psychoactive substances (SPA), delinquency, prostitution and gambling take place. Faced with these realities, groups present alternatives of resistance and protection against "street" options, alternatives such as dancing, reading, praying or sharing. This is stated by one of the participants:

> *What do we expect? That the street does not take them away, that the street does not take them away. That you are going to a corner at this moment and you discover (he is) a child of eleven, twelve years smoking marijuana. Those here do not; those here do not* [referring to the young people of the group] *. . . A recreation space, to have another initiative that is not vice, weapons . . . is to give the young person an idea, that I r give him a ball – a weapon or a ball in exchange for marijuana.* (Interview 3)

The leaders recognize and acknowledge the availability of use of free time, recreation, enjoyment, and the establishment of significant links, within the groups, as components and elements of a successful proposal.

Use of Free Time

For the participants, free time that is not represented in activities that promote their development, presents a threat to their well-being, since they would be more vulnerable to giving in to the proposals of "the street". The groups are presented as spaces that provide different alternatives for young people to make use of their free time, by offering options that generate interest. In this way, they keep the "mind occupied" in activities in which they invest time and effort, as well as those which reduce the possibility of entering groups at risk.

> *Preoccupied with all these activities* [the activities in the group], *a person's mind is busy, such that, he is deterred from smoking (or from saying he is going to smoke), from drinking . . . (or saying he is going to drink), as well as other activities which are regarded as prohibited. That is, this* [the group] *distracts you (from such prohibited activities).* (Focus group 4)

Recreation, Distraction and Enjoyment

Faced with the social context in which young people are immersed, the problems of violence, low economic resources or family difficulties, group activities offer a space for distraction and relaxation, which, according to their story, make it possible to forget everyday problems, "get out of the routine "and" clear the mind".

> "*In my opinion, the group has helped me because we say that it is a way to distract me, and as I leave the whole routine . . . It is like a way to clear the mind*" (Focus Group 1).

The group activities are related to leisure, for its fun, recreational and playful nature, since they are made/generated from the pleasure and enjoyment of the activity itself – activities such as dancing, playing football or talking. These actions do not have the connotation of academic or domestic duty.

Establishment of Significant Links

In the dynamics of the groups it was found that their members establish strong emotional bonds. The way in which young people name

this link is "family", to highlight the closeness and value of the relationships established there.

"*Everyone who goes through a scout group never forgets, because here we work a lot, we are a family, we become best friends*" (Interview 2).

In these spaces, young people find acceptance and acceptance; they feel valuable and not judged, which determines both their entry and their permanence in the group. Likewise, they express that the group is a place where they feel supported, because they perceive that their needs are recognized and attended to. In the same way, the group is a source of motivation for the achievement of collective and personal goals.

"*Young people find acceptance, not by pointing accusing fingers at them, but they find support in us . . . through the love that we show them to help them get out of their problems*" (Focus Group 2).

Subjective Transformation

It was identified that the groups transcend the purpose for which they were created (teach dance, do recreation, learn soccer or scouting and share spiritual and cultural experiences). In this sense, from the experience of the young people, the group does not exclusively imply or function as a space for the learning of a specific skill, but it acquires a broader meaning as it crosses the subjective experience of the participants.

> *Already Beatriz,[1] who entered this group five years ago, is no longer here, and is now a totally different Beatriz . . . It is something (an experience) that completely characterizes and influences (wholly/100%).* (Focus Group 5)

The impact of the group on the participants is denoted by verbs such as "grow", "advance", "evolve" and "strengthen". Young people talk about transformations that have impacted their lifestyle, mentality, way of being, and actions. Such processes of transformation in young people are manifested in two dimensions: first, they promote the strengthening/development of their character, and second, in respect of their future and life projection.

Character Development

It was identified that the transit of young people by the group, and the relationships that are generated therein, promote processes of identity consolidation, allowing the construction of personal resources for sociability, decision making and autonomy. For these purposes/reasons, young people report that the group has favored processes of solving personal difficulties such as low self-esteem, shyness and communication problems.

"*The group helped me a lot to grow as a person, I was very shy before, I was not able to speak, and in one way or another I evolved*" (Focus Group 5).

The group processes encourage developments in the strength of character in young people, which is manifested in the possibility of making autonomous decisions to "say no" to offers such as consumption of SPA, entry into criminal gangs or prostitution, practices that they identify as widespread in the neighborhood. This character allows them to defend their life options against those that they consider harmful and which contradict the new life alternatives/options that they are building and hope to adopt.

> *For me, being a scout is more than being in a youth group, it is a lifestyle, right? Here they teach us . . . to have the authority of one to say "ah!", Because if they offer you something, "no, I do not want to," is like developing the ability to say "no". We are very strong in character/we develop a strong character.* (Focus Group 4)

Likewise, young people feel empowered to face the exclusion or loss of previous friendship ties that they might face as a consequence of not accepting proposals related to "the street", because they have new options for social interaction - options that the group offers and provides.

Projection

Based on the development of capacities and potentials and the processes of personal trans-

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[1] Modified name to save the identity of the participants.

formation, young people manage to visualize long-term goals and projects which were not presented as possible options before they entered the group.

The leaders of the group address issues such as setting goals, purposes and future projects in spaces for conversation with young people. In fact, the leaders affirm that one of their main intentions is to promote in the participants an interest in formal education, legal and dignified work; In addition, they add with satisfaction and fulfilment, that many of the members who have traveled through the group have later progressed to undertake/embark on work and academic projects. These actions are intended to counteract the tendency towards the consumption of SPA and the criminality that they relate to the absence of a life project.

"*Those vicious people only think of vice and vice and vice, on the other hand one thinks about the future*" (Focus Group 3).

> *We have not had experiences of scouts that have come out, at least of our group, to say "no!, Someone later became a rogue,[2] or this is doing this or that". We have very good experiences to tell about the boys who have left: businessmen, boys who have later aspired and achieved very important public positions.* (Interview 2)

Having a life project anchored in study, work and the development of their abilities, protects young people from entering risk groups, and in this way, allows life to take on meaning and purpose.

Moral Development

The ethical dimension is integrated into the groups' training proposals. Each one expressed having purposes for the cultivation of values in its participants, aims which are articulated to the group's own activities. Two fields of action were recognized: (1) explicit norms, and (2) spaces for reflection and discussion, which are confronted and reaffirmed in daily interactions. All these dynamics give shape to moral principles and criteria – as well as promote moral introspection.

First, leaders recognize that group dynamics imply that young people embrace implicit agreements and explicit norms that organize the execution of activities. They are oriented to the regulation of peer interactions and their relationship with the leader, with the aim of preserving and valuing the group. Among the rules are punctuality, the censorship of profanity and physical aggression, the request for an excuse for non-attendance, among others.

> *I have added some of the following rules, namely: to always arrive early, not to speak when the elders are talking, to arrive in an orderly manner and to have a lot of respect . . . not to say/utter vulgarities, not to fight with others, as well as many other restrictions/things which they cannot practice. I stand on the line with them.* (Interview 3)

In relation to the latter, the group also fulfills the function of establishing limits to the participants who, not only regulate the group dynamics, but also internalize themselves to transfer such limits and restrictions, later, to other contexts such as the school or the family.

As for the spaces for reflection and group discussion, it is recognized that they are propitiated by the leaders, around the assessment of the situations that happen in the group, or experiences of the daily life of the young people, which involve moral actions and decisions, such that its implications and convenience are questioned, together with the possible alternatives of solution.

It is important to note that exclusive and formalized spaces are not used for reflection, but that the discussion occurs immediately after group events, spaces which constitute the inputs for ethical discussions. An example is the reflection on the legal or illegal origin of money in the acquisition of personal belongings, as seen/reflected in the following statement:

> "*I say to the boy: it's so good to arrive and I say, 'hey! This man with those amazing sneakers and these blue jeans', but how do I get those?*" (Interview 3).

The daily interaction provides young people with a series of moral dilemmas and challenges

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[2]   Referred to as a person who commits criminal acts.

inherent to human relationships, which are discussions that are oriented towards respect and recognition of the other, as well as towards building new strategies that allow the distinguishing of interpersonal conflicts from dialogue.

"*We learn to be a family, to organize our problems without the need to get into fights, fists or rudeness*" (Interview 1).

Finally, the participants recognize that the group has fostered in them the acquisition of values such as respect, tolerance, care for objects, loyalty and group value. Likewise, they refer to other values related to personal attributes such as punctuality, discipline, persistence, effort and decency.

Training/Developing of Talents

Community groups are recognized by young people as opportunities for the training of talents that allow them to perform in a specific art such as dance, music, sports, or develop skills for cultural management, spiritual leadership or the promotion of environmental care. For its members, the group is configured as a learning space, since it fulfills educational functions; From among these, training, learning, empowerment, improvement, training and the strengthening/development of talents stand out.

Four moments that were identified in the groups for the formation of talents are considered: (1) possess a talent, (2) discover it, (3) have a space for training and training and (4) devote the skills to the service of the community.

At first, young people recognize that they have a talent, which is found in everyone in a different way, but it is unknown. This talent is presented as a potential, as an internal or capital disposition that could be developed if favorable conditions were offered. It is clear and evident that young people do not start from scratch in the development of their skills at the time of reaching the group, but have personal inputs, named as innate skills. It is important to highlight that for the participants, a range/diversity of skills exists and, to such extent, each young person, in his uniqueness, possesses a talent that needs to be identified in order to develop it. This is expressed by one of the participants:

I believe that every one has a talent, a talent to develop; what happens is that they do not give us the opportunity, so to speak, to discover it . . . I have a talent for music, I play/have a talent for volleyball, (I have a talent) for football. (Focus Group 5)

Secondly, young people must discover that they possess a certain talent, however this discovery does not occur spontaneously or in isolation, but must be leveraged by an external agent, a role that the group assumes in this case. This is recognized as a space where diverse forms of cultural, artistic or sports expression are explored, through which the young person can engage himself until he identifies himself and is linked/connected to some skills. The participants narrate this meeting as an experience of self-discovery of capacity, one which generates enjoyment, interest and commitment, as well as the possibility of being recognized by others.

When a person is incarnated,[3] or comes to know/eventually realizes what is good (or what has potential), what can have a future, what can, in a certain way, be recognized, he begins in a certain way to seek interest in those things . . . then I think that one way is to exploit the skills that each young person or each child has. (Focus group 5)

Thirdly, young people recognize that training and training spaces are required for talent to be developed, and to have choice alternatives between different spaces of culture, recreation and sport. The participants affirm that the existing spaces are fundamental to the development of skills, but they are insufficient to meet the needs of all the young people of the commune. In addition, they face the scarcity of economic, physical resources and trained human talent that allows them the optimal execution of group activities.

From the development of talents, young people experience personal satisfaction. These skills are then dedicated and committed towards the service of the community through educational practices which involve teaching children,

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[3]   The expression "encarretarse" refers to the interest and enthusiasm for an activity, which is carried out with persistence for the pleasure it generates.

as a way of transmitting and replicating what they have experienced in the groups. Insistently, young people expressed their concern for the protection and care of children as an early way of preventing risks and promoting their development.

Discussion

The groups are configured as community spaces oriented to human development. Explicitly, they are presented to the community as scenarios with specific purposes related to the learning of arts, culture, spiritual accompaniment or scouting. However, in the process of participation, the group transcends these functions, to give rise to processes of capacity development that are fundamental to the prevention and promotion of mental health. These capacities are related to the use of free time, recreation and leisure, the establishment of significant links, moral reflection, the training of talents, the formation of character and future projection.

Young people who participated in the investigation inhabit a social context marked by violence, the scarcity of economic resources, lack of educational opportunities and informal, illegal or low-paid job offers. In short, they have few alternatives to process their needs, coupled with risks/risk offers, which they group in the concept "street", as the consumption and sale of SPA, the admission to criminal groups and prostitution. Faced with this context, groups are presented/offered, to young people, as prevention strategies, consolidating themselves as spaces of resistance and protection, aimed at preventing harm to the mental health of young people.

The preventive function of the group is structured through strategies for the use of free time, as a determinant in the health of young people (García-Laguna, García-Salamanca, Tapiero-Paipa, & Ramos, 2012), through the use of art, play, recreation and cultural activities. These strategies have proven to be effective in preventing drug dependence, and promoting the creation and integration of young people subjected to extreme stressors in risk contexts, which was evidenced in a study conducted by

Tobón, Gaviria, and Ramírez (2012) in the commune 3 of the municipality of Medellín, whose young people have very similar living conditions to the population of this study. However, in the experience of the participants, the groups do not only function/serve exclusively as spaces for protection and prevention, but also as strategies for the promotion of mental health based on the development of capacities.

In line with the above, it was found that community groups promote the formation of personal characteristics in young people, and at the same time offer concrete and available opportunities – as well as options from which they can choose. In this sense, it is recognized that participation in community groups favors the development of some of the central capacities named by Nussbaum (2012), to meet the needs of the subjects in the specific context in which the groups are located: First, through the formation of skills, based on literary, artistic and religious practices, strengthens/develops in young people aspects such as *the senses*, *imagination and thought*, fostering feelings of satisfaction for their performance. Second, it promotes *practical reasoning*, manifesting itself in young people in moral discernment, based on a critical reflection on the planning of one's life and religious observance. Third, it favors the capacity of *affiliation*; the groups serve as spaces for social interaction and promote the establishment of significant links, which allows them to have the necessary social bases for the recognition of the value of themselves and of others. Finally, the ability to *interact*, by participating in spaces for leisure, enjoyment, recreation and humor.

According to the reasoning that has been done, the group performs functions in the promotion of mental health from a positive mental health perspective (Barry, 2009; Muñoz & Restrepo, 2016), favoring both subjective well-being and well-being. psychological (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002) as social welfare (Blanco & Díaz, 2005). Subjective or hedonic well-being is related to pleasure and happiness, and part of cognitive and emotional evaluations. In this regard, young people reported pleasurable emotional experiences as a result of their

participation in the group and the spaces for enjoyment, leisure and recreation. In addition, they reported a satisfactory assessment of their performance.

On the other hand, psychological or eudaemonic well-being is linked to the development of human potential, the acquisition of skills and the achievement of goals and achievements, to promote greater freedom and autonomy. In this context, the groups were described as spaces for the identification and development of capacities; the cultivation of character development for autonomous decision making; personal growth and future projection based on the establishment of long-term academic and employment goals.

Finally, social welfare refers to the functioning of the subject within society, placing it at the center of a network of social relations (Díaz, Blanco, & Durán, 2011). In this sense, the groups promoted the establishment of significant links, which made possible the recognition and the feeling of acceptance, welcome and support. In addition, they facilitated community recognition for the development of skills, which consequently are re invested for the benefit and the service of the community.

In this regard, research has recognized the effectiveness of artistic, sports and religious strategies as promoters of mental health. In this sense, participating in artistic, creative and cultural activities develops/strengthens self-esteem, enhances learning processes and is configured as an alternative to medicalization (Figueroa, 2016); In the same way, they increase psychological empowerment, citizen participation and a sense of community (Ramos-Vidal & Maya-Jariego, 2014), and promote the development of creative, critical and action-oriented thinking, such that they are actors of transformation of their own realities (Bang, 2011). Likewise, participation in sports activities is related to a positive physical self-concept (Grao-Cruces, Fernández-Martínez, & Nuviala, 2016) and generally serve as indicators of improvement in mental health (De la Cruz-Sánchez, Moreno-Contreras, Pino-Ortega, & Martínez-Santos, 2011). It has also been found/discovered that the participation of young people in religious communities influ-

ences mental health, while the support of a faith community favors solidarity and acceptance of the other (Rodríguez-Yunta, 2016).

In respect of all the above, the Colombian Government acknowledges the need to develop public policies aimed at guaranteeing to the community such economic conditions, physical and human resources so that they can develop, in a successful manner, strategies for the prevention and promotion of mental health in young people. Based on the results, it is highlighted that community groups are spaces that require and justify, on their own, to be supported by the public and private sectors for their consolidation, permanence and strengthening.

In the context of the Colombian post-conflict, these strategies pay tribute to the construction of peace, based on the consolidation of community ties. The construction of peace will involve a long time and considerable economic and social investment, to create conditions and guarantees such that the conflict does not relapse (Calderón, 2016), especially when those conditions that must be strengthened/developed and financed are community bonds, and processes of subjective and social repair.

To conclude, it is recognized that investing in the development of community strategies consolidates the bases for the development of young people, by offering alternatives or choices that allow them to build "significant lives for themselves" (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 21), develop capacities and have the freedom to be architects of its history. In short, offer a multiplicity of options that make war an alternative without meaning, an option/alternative that you will not have to choose.

Finally, it is recognized that, being a hermeneutic research, the data generated came from the participants' stories, from their experiences and particular/individual/unique perspectives; likewise, the conclusions are the product of an interpretative process of the conditions of the youth community groups within a specific context. In this sense, due to the ideographic nature of the research, the conclusions cannot be generalized, however/rather, they serve as indicators of the possible effects of participation in community

groups on the mental health of young people. In this sense, it is necessary to complement the research with experimental studies, of explanatory scope, studies that address the needs of a greater number of youth groups and that allow for the evaluation of the variables identified in this work, to establish their relationships along with the goal of the promotion of mental health.

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