

A look at the mental health of children and adolescents in Puerto Rico



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Mental Health

- ▶ "A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not just the absence of disease or illness" (WHO)
- ▶ "Having mental health in childhood means reaching developmental indicators and emotional indicators, as well as learning healthy social skills and how to deal with problems that may arise. Children who are mentally healthy have a positive quality of life and can perform well at home, school and in their communities. "(CDC, 2020)

Mental Health (OMS, CDC)

- ▶ One in five children may be experiencing or may develop mental illness in their lifetime (CDC, 2020).
- ▶ 50% of mental disorders develop before the age of 14 (WHO).
- ▶ 18.14% of children in Puerto Rico meet criteria for some mental health condition (Assmca, 2016).
- ▶ Of that 18.14%, there was 8% among 16-18 years old (Assmca, 2016).

Puerto Rico Statistics (Disdier y Rodríguez, 2019)

- ▶ "In 2017, more than 45% of female students felt sad or hopeless, which represents an increase compared to 2015."
- ▶ "The number of students who seriously considered committing suicide increased from 12.3% in 2015 to 17.1% in 2017."

Mental health in childhood and youth after Hurricane Maria

(Orengo, Steward, de Arellano, Suárez y Young, 2019)

- ▶ Survey carried out in 7 regions of Puerto Rico.
- ▶ 96, 108 children and youth, grades 3-12 completed the survey.
- ▶ Results:
 - ▶ 83.9% observed property damage.
 - ▶ 57.8% had a friend or family member who had to leave the island.
 - ▶ 45.7 had damage to his home.
 - ▶ 32.3% had a shortage of water and / or food.
 - ▶ 29.9% felt that their life was in danger.
 - ▶ 7.2% reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD).

Crossroads between earthquakes and COVID-19 in Puerto Rico

- ▶ The Pandemic arrives when we are still dealing with the tremors.
- ▶ Increase in violence
 - ▶ Between March 15 and April 8, 2020, 441 referrals for child abuse were reported to the Family Department (El Vocero, April 2020).
 - ▶ From March 15 to May 6, 919 gender-based violence cases have been reported (Metro, May 2020).

Pandemic

- ▶ Food insecurity- The government had to be sued for the opening of school canteens.
- ▶ Confinement limits access to school and play spaces as well as contact with friends and extended family.
- ▶ We do not yet have data on the impact of life changes experienced in childhood as a result of COVID 19.

Childhood and adolescencetrauma

- ▶ A traumatic event is a terrifying, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat to the life or bodily integrity of a child. Witnessing a traumatic event that threatens the life or physical safety of a loved one can also be traumatic. This is particularly important for young children as their sense of security depends on the perceived security of their attachment figures (National Child Traumatic Stress Network).
- ▶ Traumatic events include sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence, violence in the community and at school, medical trauma, car accidents, acts of terrorism, war experiences, natural disasters, human-made disasters, suicides and other losses. traumatic (APA).

Traumatic reactions (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)

- ▶ Intense and continuing emotional distress
- ▶ Symptoms of depression or anxiety
- ▶ Behavioral changes
- ▶ Difficulties with self-regulation
- ▶ Problems related to others or the formation of attachments

Traumatic reactions (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)

- ▶ Attention and academic problems
- ▶ Difficulty to sleep
- ▶ Eating difficulties
- ▶ Physical symptoms, such as pain and various discomforts
- ▶ In adolescents you can observe the use of drugs or alcohol, behave risky or participate in unhealthy sexual activities.

Red de respuesta en salud mental y desastres (RRSMD)

Psychological First Aid

- The Psychological First Aid (PFA) model seeks to reduce initial distress caused by traumatic events and encourages adaptive functioning and coping in the short and long term. Psychological first aid is intended to help people cope with the acute phase of a major incident, rather than necessarily treating subsequent mental health problems, mental disorder, or illness. Psychological first aid does not presume that all trauma survivors will develop mental health problems or long-term difficulties (WHO, 2011).

Mental Health and Disaster Response Network (2017-2020)

- ▶ Hurricanes Irma and María:
 - ▶ Collection center
 - ▶ Trainings for more than 200 volunteers in Psychological First Aid
 - ▶ Collaborative alliances: Red Cross, Violent Caravan of Peace Coordinator for Women, Assmca, Emergency Stop and Go.

Mental Health and Disaster Response Network (2017-2020)

Apoyo APPR a PR tras el paso de Huracanes



Mental Health and Disaster Response Network (2017-2020)

Services coordination during earthquakes

From the same January 7 in the afternoon, members of our network approached Guánica to begin bringing Psychological First Aid to those affected by the earthquake.

More than 100 volunteer psychologists joined different brigades to collaborate, in alliance with the Carlos Albizu University, the College of Surgeons and the Extrabases Foundation.

Emotion management talks to employees of different companies throughout the country.

We also offered support to the Department of Correction and Rehabilitation by offering Psychological First Aid to inmates and officers.

COVID- 19

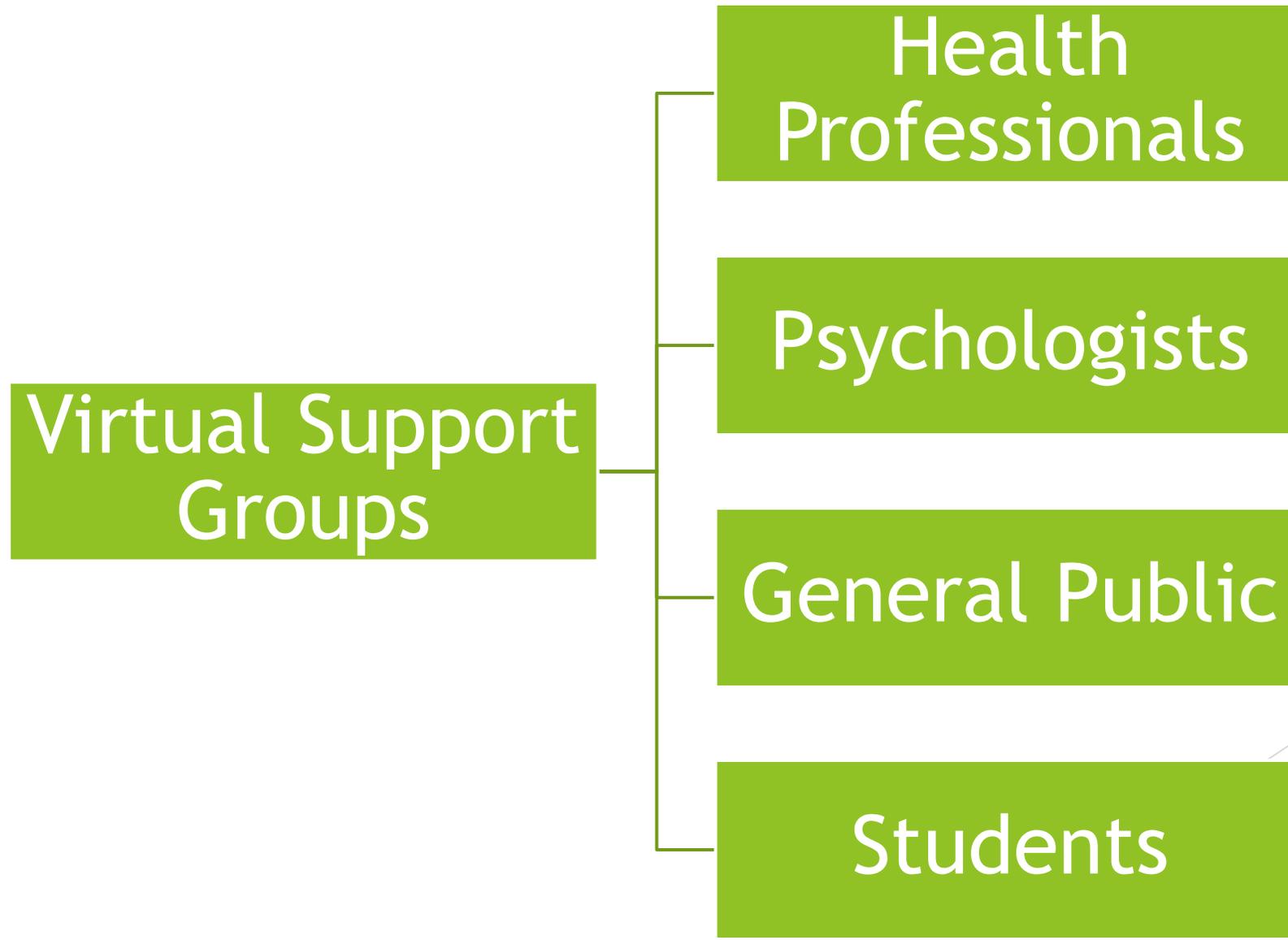
Educational video series broadcast live on Facebook

<https://www.asppr.net/post/serie-especial-de-videos-educativos-por-la-cuarentena-covid-19>.

Educational Material; Psychoeducational guide parents / guardians

<https://bit.ly/2z4Hy4J>

COVID-19- Virtual Support Groups



Directory of Psychologists who offer telepsychology

- ▶ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/0/d/1oILCa95dlc9knJguyczQZD74P9vdwz1x2UkBW6Xl1DM/htmlview>.

Recommendations

- ▶ Continue to work with communities to strengthen their responses to events that can be traumatic.
- ▶ Orient staff who work with children in trauma-informed practices so that they can make referrals on time.
- ▶ Health professionals train in trauma-informed treatments.
- ▶ Continue raising the voice in favor of one of the most vulnerable populations; childhood and adolescents.

Recommendations

- ▶ Increased access to mental health services.
- ▶ Continue denouncing public policies that threaten the rights of children.
- ▶ Continue working for the development of new public policies that have as a priority the well-being of children.