



## Riscos & Desafios Program - Only a click apart

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### Introduction

The Riscos & Desafios (R&D) Prevention Program is a validated, co-curricular, comprehensive and multi-component competence enhancement based preventive intervention. It is composed of a set of 8 two-hour weekly sessions to be implemented in group format and is aimed at students attending the 1st year of higher education.

To face the changes imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic the R&D life skills development program was adapted as its pertinence became more and more evident. In this context, higher education students were identified as a risk group in terms of psychic vulnerability in times of a pandemic. Thus it became essential to ensure a preventive response in promoting mental health and preventing addictive behaviors and addictions. Since the general and specific objectives of the Risks & Challenges Program metted the identified needs it was not only useful, but even necessary to invest in its implementation considering different application formats: face-to-face, virtual or mixed.

### Methodology

This study presents the process evaluation of the Program implementation in different contexts and in pandemic times with a sample of 221 students.

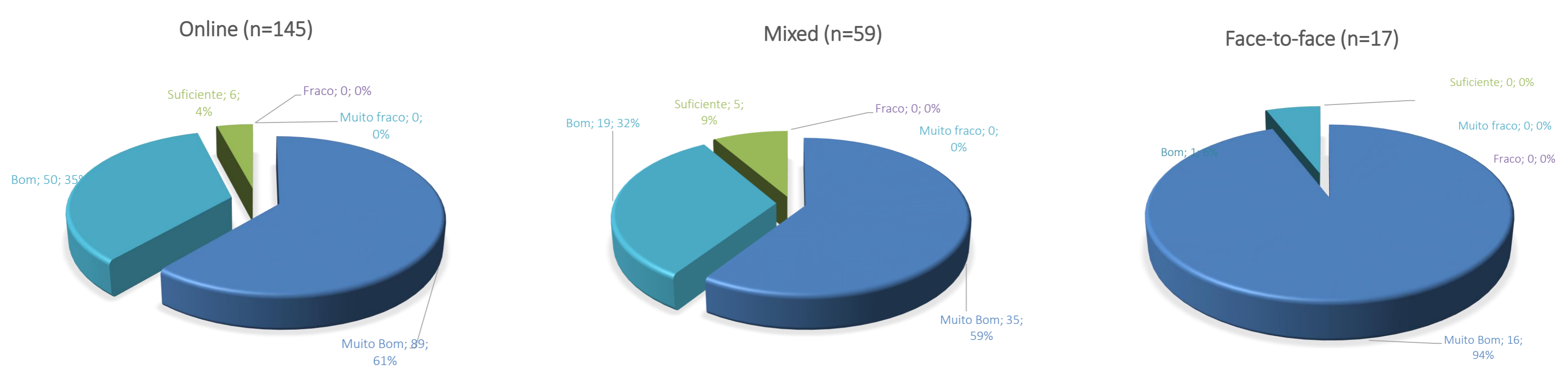
The evaluation instruments used were the Post-Program Questionnaires completed by the participants according to the process evaluation procedures. The conditions of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality were respected. Procedural evaluation of the R&D implementation was done with the Post-Program Questionnaires using univariate analysis of frequency.

The adaptation of the program to a digital format followed the recommendations of the EFPA (European Federation of Psychologists' Associations), the General Directorate of Health and the Order of Portuguese Psychologists (see COVID19 ADAPTATION - Addendum to the R&D Program Manual, 2020). The process of adaptation was supported by the review of literature about online interventions in psychology and skills-training. It was carried out through intensive monitoring and supervision meetings that preceded the following sessions of the implementations that were in course as the contingency measures were implemented. These meetings, as well as the program sessions themselves, were held in e-learning mode through synchronous sessions using digital platforms such as Zoom© or Microsoft Teams©. This delivery format was previously discussed with students, who expressed their agreement and availability. This process resulted in the elaboration of an addendum to the R&D Program Manual with both General and Specific Guidelines to be considered in the implementations constricted by pandemic contingencies in three formats: online, mixed (with on line and face-to-face sessions) and face-to-face (considering the pandemic limitations to physical contact). The methodologies and materials proved to be adequate and consistent with the R&D objectives.

### Results

The results show that the vast majority of students evaluated the different dimensions in their various items in a positive way in the different formats used during this period. The Program continued to be rated as Very Good by most of the students, raising their voice to express the importance of developing personal and interpersonal competences during pandemic times. Students pointed out the particular importance of the skills developed in the program and their relevance to prevent risky behaviors and underlined the impact of attending the program on their personal development at different levels in this period. These data corroborate the positive face-to-face assessment provided by participants throughout the Program's implementation. Most of the students emphasized the importance of the practical nature of the program and expressed that the topics addressed and the competences developed were in accordance with their needs and adapted to their daily realities, preparing them to deal with various problems. They also mentioned that the experience of the Program was very significant in the development of useful personal and social skills and in strengthening the network of relationships among the group members, particularly during pandemic period.

#### Global Opinion on the Riscos & Desafios Program



There was a positive appreciation of the online format in the impossibility of holding face-to-face sessions. Students commented on the transition to the online modality as being important, necessary and useful. Opinions ranged from being a "lesser evil" to "not diminishing the quality of the sessions at all".

However, there was a preference for the face-to-face format. In general, students reported that they preferred the face-to-face application, and those who had it highlighted the importance of physical presence at this time and in this particular context.

The application in mixed mode was the one that raised the greatest difficulties. The change from one modality to another reflected the disruptions and constraints of the pandemic, which caused greater instability in students and promoters.

The results indicated the suitability of the Program adaptation, as evaluated both by facilitators and students.

### Conclusions

The R&D program proved to be an important tool of psychological intervention appropriate to the current situation of COVID-19 pandemics, by allowing a space for integration and secure socialization, by preventing and raising awareness of risk, by promoting the adoption of pro-health behaviours and by developing fundamental personal and social skills for psychological resilience in crisis situations.

The pandemic context has made preventive intervention at a distance imperative, thus constituting a challenge and an opportunity for reflection on remote intervention methodologies and for their experimentation. This type of intervention made it possible to shorten distances between students and formal support structures. Knowing its limitations, the experience showed its relevance in times when the limitations imposed do not allow a face-to-face approach. Hence the importance of flexibility in preventive intervention with young people, responding to their needs in terms of skill development while meeting the motivations of digital natives. Thus, the importance of including technological resources in preventive intervention is emphasized. Future perspectives include the validation of these formats and its gamification.

### Bibliography

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.