Discover You! – an Experiential Psychoeducational Program

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Abstract

Introduction: *Change is one of the certainties of everyday life. In the current pandemic context, adaptation to newness and change management at individual level have become crucial elements in maintaining one's well-being. To meet the need identified in practice, the experiential psychoeducation program Discover you! was developed. It combines creative meditation, mindfulness, and a unifying drama-therapeutic scenario with concepts specific to Buddhist psychology.*

Objectives: *The present research aims to explore and evaluate the effects of the experiential psychoeducational program on the way a person perceives oneself and their life context, to activate personal resources. Starting from the conceptualization of the personal transformation process proposed by Mitrofan (2004) and from research in the field on the effect of mindfulness meditative practice on the quality of life and personal resource development (Didonna, 2009c), it was assumed that such a program acts towards influencing psychological well-being, life satisfaction, self-punitive attitudes, compassion, self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy in participants.*

Methods: *A quasi-experimental pre-posttest design was proposed. The participants in the study were chosen by snowball sampling through social media networks. There was a six-week edition of the program with two work groups. The final sample consisted of 12 women (MAge = 38.33) and 6 men (MAge = 39.66), with a total of 18 people (MAge = 38.78) who did not have a previous psychiatric diagnosis, respectively substance use. Two sets of questionnaires were administered, before and after the completion of the program, in digital format. The confidentiality of the data was ensured through an individual coding system.*

Results: *Participants marked changes in the level of Personal Growth factor of psychological well-being (Mpre = 34.61, SD = 4.913, Mpost = 24.44, SD = 2.229, 95% CI [7.506, 12.827], t(15) = 8.063, p = .001), simultaneously with an increase of the Mindfulness factor of self-compassion (Mdnpre = 13.50, Mdnpost = 13.50, z = 2.378, p = .017). Satisfaction with life recorded significantly higher levels post-program (Mpre = 20.89, SD = 6.333, Mpost = 24.06, SD = 5.775, 95% CI 1.220, 5.113], t(17) = 3.432, p = .003). The results mark only trends and cannot be generalized.*

Conclusions: *Participating in Discover you! has an impact on life satisfaction, self-compassion, and psychological well-being. Further research is needed to capture their effects and magnitude at the individual level.*

Keywords: psychoeducation, experiential-unification, transformation, well-being, Buddhist psychology, mindfulness

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I. Introduction

In a world where the only certainty is change, the way in which one perceives oneself and the moment-to-moment experience becomes a crucial factor in maintaining a state of well-being and optimal cognitive and emotional functioning.

How one perceives oneself in the moment and the degree in which one identifies with the feeling, the thoughts or the experience influences the decisions taken, the people one interacts with and the social structure.

In practice, as well as in day-to-day life we encounter numerous people who suffer inside without showing it, but at what cost? Happiness is the first affected when one battles uncertainty in an endeavor to control a context that is highly unpredictable.

When patterns are subjected to change, inner fight and splitting come to be. Decisions are made from fear, people react instead of taking action, creating significantly more emotional pain both at inner and outer levels.

Simultaneously, the change which appears at planetary level the way it does now is a fertile base for unification. When events and experiences restructure almost everything that is known, there is place for discovering and expressing one's authentic self.

For it to be implemented, an inner laboratory for transformation is needed, where the person's mind is fed through beneficial information in order to create new pathways which enforce resilience and decrease the resistance to newness.

Neutrality is the first step.

The self, experience, presence and unification

The self in the experiential-unification therapy

Iolanda Mitrofan (2004) reminds in her book "Unification Therapy – a holistic approach to human development and transformation" of the perpetual cluster model in the functioning of the human psyche, a holistic model based on experience and its transformative quality in relation to the Self, in the present time and space.

In this model the emphasis is on the simultaneity of personal experience, carried out both in the present, manifest experience and in the unconscious dimensions. The latter are reduced to a point in the center of the "cluster" which, in theory, "absorbs, refines and transforms them, regenerating them to the light of Consciousness" (Mitrofan, 2004, p. 24). According to the author, this element describes the Self.

Similar to the conceptualization in Buddhist psychology (Didonna, 2009c), the Self is seen as the main source of sustaining the capacity to love, support and give, which exists perpetually in the inner domain of being, regardless of the levels below which are allowed to be manifested by the person.

Mitrofan (2004) recalls that "the self can be conceptualized as the Center, Tao or divine Creator" (p. 24). This element of the theoretical framework underlies the construction of the experiential-unifying psycho-educational program Discover you! and the use of theoretical elements specific to Buddhist psychology.

Dynamics of experience and the state of presence

The evolution of the Self and the transfiguration of the person take place, according to the unification therapy, in the Ego-Self Transformational Space (ESTS). It is represented as a theoretical tri-axial system in which the experiential and psychological dynamics of each person are described.

The three axes (n. Axis of Identity Roles – Feminine, Masculine, Maternal, Paternal, with their consonant elements: Water, Air, Earth and Fire; Axis of Time; and Axis of Quality of Awareness) build the scheme of interconnection of programs or personal patterns of evolution. They are not to be confused with their content, code or symbolic significance, the restructuring of which is carried out in the dynamics of the development experience (Mitrofan, 2004).

Unification

As Răban-Motounu (2014) mentions, the terminology of "unification" is based on the theories of personality enunciated by Rogers (1951) and Jung (1996).

Rogers (1951) stated in his theory how a person opens up to accepting rejected parts of oneself as they experiences/ benefits from the unconditional respect of the therapist. The psychotherapeutic process helps the client become more acceptable to himself at body level: by accepting his internal experience as an experience of the whole body in the environment, without denying access to consciousness for some parts of the experience (Răban-Motounu, 2014).

Simultaneously, Rogers (1951) observed an increase in acceptance in relation to others and their actions as an effect of increasing the level of self-acceptance. To this is added the openness to meaningful relationships laden with love and compassion.

The stages of the process of self-acceptance and Ego-Self unification are described by Jung (1996). He highlighted as the first point of the process the confrontation with Shadow, defined as the rejected part. The purpose of this step is to create a new self-image that allows the symbolic integration of the two

polarities. The consequence of this process is the individual's understanding of how their projections affect relationships with others. As the person accepts parts of themselves in the Shadow, becoming more open to their deep Self, one's relationships with others improve in terms of acceptance.

Congruently, Neff (2003a) recalls the concept of self-compassion in Buddhist psychology defined as openness to one's own suffering, while experiencing feelings of care and kindness for oneself through a nonjudicial attitude toward perceived inadequacies and failures. This attitude is accompanied by the recognition of one's own experience as part of the common human experience.

Self-compassion acts in this context as a facilitator of the process of union of opposites proposed by Jung (1996, 1999).

The first stage described by the author is the union of spirit and soul in terms of integrating cognitive and emotional plans at mental level. This is called *unio mentalis* and was considered by Jung to be the essence of meditative practice on an internal object, through which the person becomes aware of their changing inner emotional experience.

The second stage consists in the integration of mental, emotional and somatic experiences in the mind-soul-body union (Jung, 2000, Vol. 2).

The final stage is the mystical union of the mind-soul-body with *unus mundus*, the essence of the human being (Jung, 2000; Wilber, 1982, 2005). This involves accessing the transpersonal qualities of the human being: compassion, love, humor, power and kindness (Welwood, 2006).

Going through this process of unification with the authentic Self is considered the way out of suffering. To fully understand the concept of suffering and its sources at the psychological level, we further present its nature starting from the Buddhist conception, chosen for the clarity of expression and the increasingly frequent presence of the concepts contained in it in the literature on the state of well and personal development, from the last 10 to 15 years.

The suffering

The self and suffering in Buddhist psychology

In recent years, there has been a growing dialogue between Eastern philosophical thinking – Buddhism in particular – and Western psychology (Batchelor, 2011; Bush, 2011; Brown & Cordon, 2009; Didonna, 2009c; Epstein, 1995; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011; Molino, 1998; Neff, 2003b; Rubin, 1996; Treadway & Lazar, 2009, Salzberg, 2011; Watson, Batchelor & Claxton, 1999), leading to new ways of understanding and facilitating well-being and mental health (Kabat-Zin, 2011; Kabat-Zinn & Chapman-Waldrop, 1988; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992), including clinically (Kocovski, Segal & Battista, 2009), for a number of conditions such as anxiety disorders (Greeson & Brandley, 2009), depression and suicide (Barnhofer & Crane, 2009), obsessive-compulsive disorder (Didonna, 2009b) and post-traumatic stress disorder (Follete & Vijay, 2009) or addictions (Bien, 2009).

Buddhist psychology focuses largely on the analysis and understanding of the nature of the self (Neff, 2003b).

Suffering (Pāli orig. "Dukkha"), according to the Buddhist perspective, is a consequence of attachment to a particular state or a stable sense of self, while considering experiences, thoughts and sensations as fixed and static. Liberation from suffering derives from the awareness of the transient nature of experience and the relationship with pain, suffering, joy and happiness, through an attitude of non-attachment, compassion, loving kindness and acceptance (Geller, 2003).

Taking this into account, exploring the model of mind and health proposed by Buddhist psychology and adapting its aspects to Western therapeutic practice is necessary, especially in terms of focusing on the mind process and the interaction of its contents to the detriment of structure (Didonna, 2009c; Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011).

According to Didonna (2009c), the unit of work of the Buddhist model of mind and mental health is a "singular moment of the mind", characterized by a number of mental factors, partially equivalent in Western psychology to the concept of "emotion" (Goleman, 1991).

The partial character is given by the fact that some of these factors belong to cognition and perception.

According to the Buddhist model, each of these mental factors can influence a person's perception of reality and the processing of momentary experience.

Each mental state consists of a variety of properties subject to change that can be combined to determine a particular mental state and its tone (Goleman, 1991).

The basic rule regarding the assessment of the nature of the factors and the maintenance of mental health in this context is simple and based on experience: negative or suffering states are those that do not lead to calm, peace, balance and meditation. If a factor supports and promotes balance, then it is considered to be beneficial (Didonna, 2009c; Goleman, 1991).

Thus, of the approximately 50 factors proposed in Abidharma, one of the branches of Buddhist psychology, the basic negative factors are illusion or ignorance, attachment or desire (not to be confused with the concept of attachment proposed by Bowlby, 1969) and aversion or hostility.

Illusion or ignorance. This is described as a perceptual defect, a blurring of the mind that stops the person from seeing things clearly, without making any judgment about what is perceived.

One of the most destructive aspects of ignorance is the individual's tendency to identify with the changing and transient aspects of experience, states, feelings, thoughts, or activities experienced, as if they were parts of an independent self, perpetual, whose evaluation dictates the self-value of the person (Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011).

Attachment or desire. According to Abidharma (Bodhi, 2011), attachment is expressed as a selfish longing for gratification that tends to overestimate the quality of the thing desired by the person, by idealizing it. At the same time, it distorts reality in such a way that the person remains anchored in the object, thought or experience. As a result, a kind of fixation is created, that is difficult to overcome and from which distancing is difficult in most situations (Didonna, 2009c).

Aversion or hostility. These are understood as intense anger that leads to distortion of reality, but in the opposite direction to attachment, making the person look at everything in a negative light (Didonna, 2009c).

Combinations of these factors lead to the presence of different types of suffering and psychological discomfort by activating maladaptive mental programs (Goleman, 1991; Mitrofan, 2004), which in turn become the basis for future negative interpretations of experience.

Coming out of suffering. The state of presence

Along with these, the sine qua non basis for overcoming suffering is the state of presence in the here and now, found under the term mindfulness (Pāli orig. "Sati") and defined as the ability to observe and live the experience without being overwhelmed by it (Geller, 2003). This state is characterized by three aspects: awareness, attention, and remembrance (Bodhi, 2011), and is based on the idea that the mind can observe itself and its own nature (Dalai Lama et al., 1999).

Awareness is the primary condition for starting the process. It works organically along with redirecting *attention*, allowing one to adjust how an experience is lived in the absence of an attempt to control it or suppress intense emotions.

Remembrance, in this context, is not about memory, but about the intentional placement in the main plane of the mind of the intention to maintain the state of consciousness and focused attention. Without the intention and intentionality of the practice, transformation is not possible, in line with the elements presented at the beginning of this section.

The purpose of the mindfulness practice is to eliminate suffering by cultivating insight into the internal mechanisms of the mind and the nature of the material world. The higher level of practice includes non-judgment, acceptance and compassion (Siegel, Germer & Olendzki, 2009).

The main method proposed for cultivating the state of detached, nonjudicial presence is vipassana, a type of meditation focused on the perception of things in their current state, in the absence of personal evaluation and projections on them (Batchelor, 2011).

Compassion

According to Neff (2003b), in the Western psychology, compassion is usually conceptualized in terms of compassion for others, but in Buddhist psychology, compassion for oneself is a condition prior to that manifested in relation to others, of a similar degree of importance.

Thus, compassion implies being open and moved by the suffering of others, insofar as there is a desire to diminish the suffering of those people. It also involves manifestations of patience, kindness, and non-judgmental understanding, while acknowledging that all people are imperfect and prone to error.

Similarly, self-compassion involves being open and moved by one's own suffering, experiencing feelings of self-care and kindness, showing understanding, a non-judgmental attitude toward personal inadequacies and failures, and recognizes that one's own experience is part of the common human experience (Neff, 2003b).

From a Buddhist perspective, compassion is an increase in the degree of wisdom that involves conscious involvement in the suffering of another, providing a response bearing kindness, and recognizing human interconnection with others, from which arises the genuine desire to alleviate suffering (Feldman, 1995; Jinpa, 2015).

Pommier et al. (2019) operationalized compassion as an experience of kindness, a sense of common humanity, diminished attention and indifference to the suffering of others, starting from the concept of self-compassion of Neff (2003a).

There was a significant negative correlation of self-compassion with anxiety and depression and a significant positive correlation with life satisfaction.

This suggests the adaptive nature of self-compassion by increasing psychological resilience and well-being.

Compassion and self-punitive attitudes

Behavioral self-regulation is characterized as a process of setting standards, goals, or values, followed by active attempts to achieve those standards in a person's behavior (Bandura, 1977; Carver & Ganellan, 1983; Carver & Scheier, 1982, 1983; Kanfer, 1977; Kirschenbaum, Tomarken & Ordman, 1982; Locke et al., 1981; Rehm, 1977).

Although in most cases this process is beneficial, three factors specific to the pathology of depressive and anxiety disorders were described by Carver and Ganellan (1983) through the concept of self-punitive attitudes: (a) maintaining excessively high standards in self-assessment; (b) harsh self-judgment as a consequence of not meeting those standards; and (c) over-generalizing negative judgments in relation to oneself.

In relation to self-punitive attitudes, Neff (2003a) recorded a significant negative correlation of self-compassion with neurotic perfectionism, but no significant link was found between self-compassion and high personal standards. This finding indicates that people who show self-compassion have a higher level of acceptance and experience less suffering when they fail to meet their personal standards, without impacting the construction of performance standards.

Well-being, self-esteem and personal resources

Given that the present study's goal is the development and practical testing of an experiential psychoeducation program aimed at discovering and building personal resources designed to support well-being, effectiveness and, by extension, overcoming the suffering described above, we included the dimension of well-being, self-esteem and personal resources.

Well-being and satisfaction with life

Starting from the present stage of knowledge, Ryff (1989a) argued the integration of the existent perspectives in a parsimonious conceptualization of psychological well-being. It starts with the main elements common to previous theories, which he combines in six dimensions of the concept of psychological well-being. According to Ryff (1989b), these are: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, mastering the environment, purpose in life and personal growth.

Self-acceptance and environmental control have been strongly associated with measures of life satisfaction, emotional balance, self-esteem, and morale, thus indicating clear links between the theoretical components of well-being and the markers present in empirical studies (Ryff, 1989a).

Self-efficacy

According to Luszczynska, Scholz and Schwarzer (2005), the main factor influencing behavior is perceived self-efficacy, defined by a person's belief in their own ability to perform a specific action necessary to achieve a desired result. It can be assessed at a general or specific level, in certain areas of a person's life.

Overall self-efficacy may explain a wider range of human behaviors and coping outcomes, given the less specific context. It has been identified as useful in the simultaneous evaluation of several behaviors (Luszczynska et al., 2004) or in the study of the well-being and behavior of patients who have to adapt their lives to multiple requirements due to a disease state (Bonetti et al., 2001).

People who have high levels of self-efficacy focus on the future and develop possible positive scenarios about it, have more goals that they constantly pursue, and have higher levels of intention to action than people who do not perceive themselves to be effective.

There were positive correlations between perceived self-efficacy and the adoption and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle, along with faster recovery from regression (Luszczynska, Scholz & Schwarzer, 2005).

Optimistic beliefs about one's own competence support positive emotional states instead of negative ones, such as anxiety. Self-efficient people may experience low levels of negative emotions in a threatening situation and, as a result, may feel unable to control the situation (Bandura, 1977).

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is defined by the level of value that people feel in relation to themselves (Rosenberg, 1965).

According to Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs (2003), its high levels refer to an extremely favorable overall assessment of the self. Low self-esteem, by definition, refers to an unfavorable definition of the self.

The variability of self-esteem, not its value, is correlated with the onset of depression (Butler, Hokanson & Flynn, 1994; Kernis et al., 1998; Kernis et al. 2000; Roberts & Monroe, 1994).

Hayes, Harris and Carver (2004) identified interpersonal adverse events, defensive mental schemas,

and negative generalization as contributing factors in the emergence of self-esteem variability.

Given this, it is expected that the discovery and application of personal resources, together with the support of a conscious perspective, detached and full of compassion on oneself, to have a positive impact on reducing the variability of self-esteem in the future.

Human connection

People are social beings. Individual transformation, the principles of generational transmission, social psychology and almost the entire human affective structure is shaped at social level. The needs for belonging, intimacy and contact are most present in sanogenic development, being the first needs whose satisfaction was altered during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The human connection defines, according to Aron, Aron and Smollan (1992), the degree of closeness that a person feels towards those around them, on all levels. The concept is part of the ability to experience compassion, relationship satisfaction and psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989a; Neff, 2003a).

Support through psychoeducation and experience

Discover you! was created in response to the mindfulness training model by Bohecker et al. (2015), focused on improving tolerance for ambiguity, the combined psychoeducational-experiential structure proposed by Bowden (2011) in a program for mourning therapy, current research in the field of mindfulness meditative practices by Van Dam et al. (2018), Li et al. (2009), Hölzel et al. (2011), and the concept of unification proposed by Mitrofan (2004).

The introduction of the experiential component together with the psychoeducational one aims to support the change in participants by simultaneously approaching the cognitive, emotional and social areas (Bowden, 2011; Hill et al., 2011).

According to Bohecker et al. (2015) and Felder and Robbins (2016), the integration of aspects of the concept of mindfulness (awareness, attention in the moment and self-acceptance attitude) in such a program leads to the consolidation and anchoring in daily practice of coping adaptive mechanisms, with sanogenic effects, in order to decrease the level of anxiety, depression and increase the adaptability to the environment.

The purpose of the Discover you! is facilitating the process of self-reflection (Hölzel et al., 2011; Li et al., 2009), practicing and integrating compassion for oneself and others (Geller, 2003), awareness and support of personal boundaries and contact with oneself and others (Glanzer & Early, 2012), the integration of the concept of neutrality and calmness (Eng. orig. “equinimity”) proper to mindfulness practices (Desbordes et al., 2014), the discovery of new personal resources by integrating archetypal aspects and mental energy in the Shadow (Jung, 1964, Mitrofan, 2004), in order to increase psychological well-being, perceived self-efficacy (Luszczynska, Scholz & Schwarzer, 2005), compassion for oneself and others (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Neff, 2003a) and reducing self-punitive attitudes (Carver & Ganellan, 1983).

Thus, elements of theory, experience, exercises for home were integrated. In the Method section, the experiential exercises and therapeutic challenges proposed in the program are presented.

For each of these, the intended content and the expected results are mentioned. The detailing of the sessions and of the psycho-educational content is present in the Methodology chapter of this paper.

The program is conducted entirely online, for social and epidemiological reasons. It can be later adapted to face-to-face interaction.

Objectives

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the effects of the psycho-education program on the way a person perceives themselves and their life context, in order to activate personal resources.

Hence the research question: “Can such a program positively impact a person’s perception of themselves when put in the situation of discovering a new lens through which they can understand the world, their place in it, but also interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics?”

To answer this question, a set of hypotheses was developed, based on the main factors affected by such a program, according to the literature presented above.

Hypotheses

H1. Participants will experience significant changes in the factors of Self-punitive attitude.

H1.1. Participation in the Discover you! will lower the level of High standards.

H1.2. Participation in the Discover you! will lead to a decrease in the level of Self-criticism.

H1.3. Participation in the Discover you! will lead to a decrease in the level of Generalization.

H2. Participants will manifest significant changes at the level of the global state of psychological Well-being.

H2.1. Participation in the Discover you! will lead to a significantly higher level of Autonomy.

H2.2. Participation in the Discover you! will lead to a significantly higher level of perceived Control over the environment.

H2.3. Participation in the Discover you! will lead to a significantly higher level of sense of Purpose in life.

H2.4. Participation in the Discover you! will lead to a significantly higher level of Self-acceptance.

H2.5. Participation in the Discover you! will influence the perceived level of Personal growth.

H2.6. Participation in the Discover you! will influence the perceived level of Positive relationships with others.

H3. Participation in the Discover you! will influence the level of Compassion, under different aspects in its factors.

H3.1. Participation in the Discover you! will lead to a significantly higher level of the Goodness factor.

H3.2. Participation in the Discover you! will lead to a significantly higher level of the Common humanity factor.

H3.3. Participation in the Discover you! will lead to a significantly higher level of Mindfulness factor.

H3.4. Participation in the Discover you! will influence the level of the Indifference factor.

H4. Participation in the Discover you! will influence the level of Self-compassion, under different aspects in its factors.

H4.1. Participation in the Discover you! will increase the level of the Self-kindness factor.

H4.2. Participation in the Discover you! will lower the level of the Self-judgment factor.

H4.3. Participation in the Discover you! will increase the level of the Humanity factor.

H4.4. Participation in the Discover you! will decrease the level of the Isolation factor.

H4.5. Participation in the Discover you! will increase the level of the Mindfulness factor.

H4.6. Participation in the Discover you! will decrease the level of the Over-identification factor.

H5. Participation in the Discover you! influence the level of Self-esteem.

H6. Participation in the Discover you! will influence the level of overall Self-efficacy.

H7. Participation in the Discover you! will increase Satisfaction with life.

H8. Participation in the Discover you! will influence the perceived degree of Connection with others.

II. Method

Research model & design

A quasi-experimental research model was used, as noted in Table 1, with pre- and post-participation measurements targeting people from different levels of society with a pre-existing interest in improving the quality of life and personal development.

Table 1. Research design and measurements employed in pre/ post test

Pre test	Experiment	Post test
ATSS		ATSS
RSES		RSES
GSES		GSES
PWBS	Discover you!	PWBS
SWLS	program	SWLS
CS		CS
SCS		SCS
IOS		IOS

Note: Abbreviations: ATSS – Attitudes toward Self Scale; RSES – Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale; GSES – General Self Efficacy Scale; PWBS – Psychological Well-Being Scale; SWLS – Satisfaction with Life Scale; CS – Compassion Scale; SCS – Self Compassion Scale; IOS – Integration of Others in Self.

Participants

Participants were selected through social media and from people who previously participated in courses organized by the collaborator, Lead Your Life Center, using the snowball sampling method.

A series of announcements were launched to present the program. The initial registration of participants was made at choice through a contact form.

Of the 25 participants initially registered, seven gave up. The final sample described below surprises only those who have completed the program with a maximum of two absences.

The final sample consisted of 12 women (Age = 38.33) and 6 men (Age = 39.66), with a total of 18 people (Age = 38.78).

Inclusion criteria

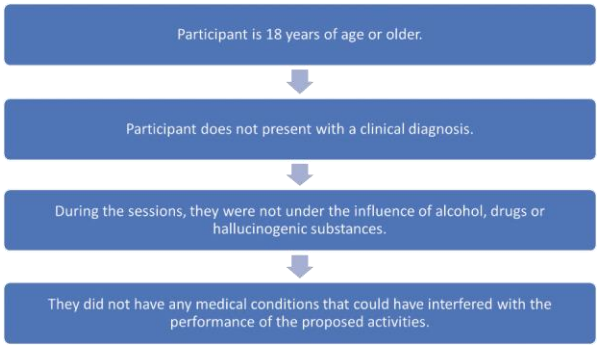

Figure 1. Inclusion criteria in the program

Procedure

In order to register the participants, a series of announcements were launched on various online social platforms. Participants were able to enroll in the program through a form.

Entrants were sent an email three days before the start of the program, containing the information needed to participate in the first session (login link, date and time), unique identification code and the first questionnaire containing informed consent, general data of the participant and the aforementioned pre-test scales.

Of the 34 people enrolled, 25 completed the first questionnaire and attended the first session of the program. Starting with the second session, the participants were divided into two groups, depending on their availability, obtaining two groups of 14 and 11 participants, respectively. The bi-group format was maintained throughout the program. There were seven withdrawals. The number of participants who completed the program is 18.

The sessions took place weekly, in the same time interval, for 6 weeks, online audio-video, using the Zoom platform.

Prior to each session, participants received a reminder message that included a recommendation to enter the session from a comfortable room, allowing for confidentiality, along with bringing auxiliary materials needed for activities.

A maximum of two absences were allowed for each participant, which was announced at the first meeting.

At the end of the program, the second questionnaire was sent by email to participants, along with the unique identification code. Subsequently, individual course evaluation sessions were scheduled for each of the participants, within two weeks of the completion of the program.

Program structure

The participants were informed in the first session concerning the rules of the group, the specifics of the research and the way of conducting the sessions and their topics.

In the following we present the stages of the program, the psychological content addressed, the therapeutic challenge and/ or the experiential exercise and the homework proposed for the inter-session period.

Session 1. Introduction. Here, now & the witness state

Objectives

- Presentation of the program structure.
- Setting the frame.
- Familiarization with the structure and dynamics of the psyche.
- The concept of the here and now.
- Understanding how the here and now presence influences the mental and emotional state (dynamics, benefits, uses).

Psychoeducational component

Theoretical content

- The structure and dynamics of the psyche.
- The concept of the here and now. Presence status.
- Mindfulness in the Buddhist & humanist conception (self-actualization, witness state, mind-body unity).
- Optional. The process of change (stages, effects, attached emotions).

Developed skills

- Communication.
- Group negotiation of needs.
- Setting personal and group goals.
- Observing one's own thoughts, moods and emotions.
- Developing the capacity for reflection through art (art journaling).

Emotional component

- Building trust, support, and empathy.
- Reducing fears of change.
- Reducing the feeling of social blame towards those who seek self-discovery.
- Openness to experience.

Experiential component

- Creative meditation with art-therapeutic support – "Me and my thoughts".
- Heart Coherence Meditation.

Homework

- Art journaling with prompt for representing one's own person in relation to their thoughts for 7 days.
- Inclusion of Heart Coherence Meditation in everyday life.

Session 2. Contact

Objectives

- Art journal processing.
- Awareness and re-establishment of contact with one's own body.
- Identifying their own rhythm.
- Facilitating awareness of one's own breathing and the power of control over states through it.

Psychoeducational component

Theoretical content

- Relaxation – tension dynamics and the balance of extremes – the state of neutrality.
- Personal rhythm and social rhythm. Respiration as a regulatory mechanism.

Developed skills

- Getting in touch with the body and using breathing/ bodily sensations to refocus on the here and now.
- Finding personal rhythm.
- Relaxation and energization through breathing.

Emotional component

- Recognition of emotions through the body.
- Stimulating fluid emotional expression.
- Mutual support and stimulation of empathy.

Experiential component

- Mindfulness meditation for body-mind-emotions awareness.
- Optional. Free breathing: deep, complete breathing technique.

Homework

- Art/ classic journaling with prompt: "How my body feels today".
- Continuing the homework from the previous session.

Session 3. Personal space

Objectives

- Processing the contents identified in the homework and consolidating the identified resources.
- Identifying one's own relationship with space.
- Creating personal space, awareness, and protection of its limits. Regaining control over the permeability of personal space (physical, mental, emotional).

Psychoeducational component

Theoretical content

- Individuation. Relationships.
- The concept of personal space. Physical, mental and emotional space.
- Enclosed space vs. permeability.
- Detachment and witness status.
- Loneliness and loneliness.
- Recharge space.
- The ritual.

Developed skills

- Awareness of personal space and the dynamics of the need for contact (interpersonal or with oneself).
- Creating personal mental and emotional space.
- Detachment from the problematic situation/ disturbing thoughts. Control over one's physical, mental and emotional space.

Emotional component

- Creating a sense of security.
- Detachment of extreme emotions towards neutrality.
- Creating for oneself and others the space for the manifestation of emotions. Mutual support.

Experiential component

- Steps in my space. Body exercise to explore the familiar space and the relationship with it.
- The opening of the sacred space.

Homework

- The ritual "Opening of the sacred space" before the practice of breathing and/ or meditation, as a tool of detachment and refocusing in the present in moments of intense emotional or mental stress.
- Journaling.

Session 4. Equanimity

Objectives

- Processing the contents identified in the topic, the experiences and consolidating the identified resources.
- Development of the ability to achieve peace of mind – the state of neutrality.

Psychoeducational component

Theoretical content

- The concept of equanimity proper to Buddhism and adapted in modern psychology – neutrality (Desbordes et al., 2014).
- Components, process, benefits.
- The 4 Noble Truths, the process and the way out of suffering.

Developed skills

- Integrating the presence in here and now and the awareness of emotions and thoughts with neutrality.

Emotional component

- Exercising self-compassion in the process.
- Mutual support.

Experiential component

- Lake meditation – exercise to integrate the characteristics of the element Water through guided visualization – receptivity, acceptance of change, flow.
- Optional. Metta meditation.

Homework

- Mindfulness meditation (15 min/ day).
- Practicing the presence in the here and now, integrating the techniques previously presented as homework.

Session 5. Masculine and feminine. Archetype

Objectives

- Processing the contents identified in the topic, the experiences and consolidating the identified resources.
- Identifying the manifest elements specific to the male and female archetypes – transformation into resources.

Psychoeducational component

Theoretical content

- TAO.
- Anima and Animus.
- Shadow Vs. "Divine".
- Myth, archetype and symbol.

Developed skills

- Awareness of identification with its archetypes and myths.
- Familiarization with the resources of the male and female archetypes, their self-identification.

Emotional component

- Activation of transgenerational transmitted archetypal contents.
- Awareness of emotional reactions and emotional projections.
- Compassion for oneself and others.
- Mutual support in expression.

Experiential component

- Therapeutic story as a projective support – "Prâslea the strong and the golden apples" ("Prâslea cel voinic și merele de aur").

Homework

- Mindfulness meditation (15 min/ day)
- Practicing presence in the here and now.
- Journaling.

Session 6. Real life

Objectives

- Integration of the presented contents, of the resources identified during the program and their transposition into experience.
- Closing the program.

Psychoeducational component

Theoretical content

- Integration of the parts of the self.
- The balance.
- Self-compassion.
- Optional. Content recapitulation.
- Final clarifications.
- Feedback.

Developed skills

- Self-control over reactions, perceptions and judgments. Deepening the detachment and the state of neutrality in potentially conflictual situations.
- Deepening self-containment and expression.

Emotional component

- Deepening self-compassion.
- Acceptance.
- Mutual support.
- Sharing their own experience in the program and ideas for the future.

Experiential component

- "Saving the planet. Unifying dramatic therapeutic scenario".
- Closing ritual, with a sound "from the heart" and dedicated to the group.

Homework

- Second questionnaire.

Session 7. Individual debriefing

It aims at drawing individual conclusions, marking progress, setting future goals and concluding the process. The duration of the session was set at 45 minutes, in online audio-video format, individually.

During the session, participants were asked about the progress they perceived in the form of significant changes in daily life. If necessary, the process was completed by processing any remaining psychological contents.

Instruments

Participants had to fill in a total of two questionnaires in digital format, one sent before the start of the first session of the program and the other after the end of the last session of the program (session 6).

The first questionnaire had 11 sections. The first and second section contained informed consent describing the specifics and objectives of the research, the requirements for the participant, their rights, contact information of research team members and data processing procedure according to the standards of the University of Bucharest, unique identification code, previously assigned and sent by email, questions about age, gender and level of education.

The other 9 sections consisted of questionnaires for the basic measurement of the above-mentioned variables, to which we added the BFI 2 personality

questionnaire. The latter serves to interpret individual results and develop a set of pathway recommendations for participants at the end of the program.

The second questionnaire consisted of nine sections, including the identification code and measurements for the variables investigated.

The measurements used for each variable will be described below.

Self-punitive attitudes. Attitudes Toward Self Scale – Revised, developed by Carver and Ganellen (1983), based on the three-factor structure of the concept of self-punishment, was used.

Thus, the scale measures the three dimensions by 10 items, distributed as follows: three items for the High standards (Cronbach's α = .79) and Self-criticism subscales (Cronbach's α = .65), respectively four for the Generalization subscale (Cronbach's α = .74).

Participants were asked to complete items according to how they felt in the last month.

Well-being. This was measured using the Psychological Well-Being Scale, developed by Ryff (1989a). This 42-item scale measures six aspects of well-being and happiness: Autonomy (Cronbach's α = .83), Environmental control (Cronbach's α = .86), Personal growth (Cronbach's α = .85), Positive relationships with others (Cronbach's α = .88), Purpose in life (Cronbach's α = .88) and Self-acceptance (Cronbach's α = .91) (Ryff, 1989a).

Compassion. Compassion Scale, developed by Pommier, Neff and Toth-Kiraly (2019), based on Neff's theory of self-compassion (2003a), was used.

Compassion was operationalized as having four dimensions: Goodness (Cronbach's α = .85), Common humanity (Cronbach's α = .75), Mindfulness (Cronbach's α = .74) and Indifference (reversed; Cronbach's α = .79).

Self-compassion. The measurement of the variable was performed using the Self Compassion Scale, developed by Neff (2003a), starting from his theoretical model of Self-compassion.

The scale shows a number of 26 items that refer to the frequency with which the person adopts certain behaviors.

The items are divided into 6 subscales that measure the dimensions of self-compassion: Self-kindness – five items, Cronbach's α = .78; Self-judgment – five items, Cronbach's α = .77; Common humanity – four items, Cronbach's α = .80; Isolation – four items, Cronbach's α = .79; Mindfulness – four items, Cronbach's α = .75; Over-identification – four items, Cronbach's α = .81. In calculating the overall score, the items related to the Self-judgment, Isolation and Over-identification subscales are scored in reverse.

Self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale was used to assess the overall level of self-worth. The scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) contains 10 items that measure both positive and negative feelings about oneself.

According to Gray-Little, Williams and Hancock (1997) it is considered to be one-dimensional, with a Cronbach's α coefficient of .88.

Self-efficacy. This variable was measured using the General Self-Efficacy Scale, developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The scale is one-dimensional, containing 10 items scored on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = not true at all; 4 = completely true).

According to Scholz, Doña, Sud and Schwarzer (2002), the scale has a Cronbach's α coefficient = .86.

Satisfaction with life. This variable is operationalized according to Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin's theory, measured through the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS, Diener et al., 1985). The 5-item scale is designed to measure one's subjective evaluation of their life satisfaction. Participants indicate how much they agree or disagree with each of the 5 items, using a 7-point scale, that ranges from 7 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree.

Human connection. This variable was measured by the Integration of Others in Self Scale (IOS), proposed by Aron, Aron and Smollan (1992).

The scale consists of 7 figures representing a set of circles that intersect in different degrees, describing the degree of closeness that the person feels to people around them and is considered to be the best measurement for this type of variable (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992; Ambler et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2016).

Participants were asked to mark the image that best resembled how they felt about those around them, both before and after the program.

Experiential exercises

Cardiac Coherence Meditation

This meditation is taken and adapted from the research of the HeartMath Institute, aimed at entering the

state of brain-heart coherence to decrease the variability of heart rate with effects in lowering the frequency of anxiety, reducing negative stress and cortisol secretion (Brown & Cordon, 2009; Chiesa & Malinowsky, 2011; Dispenza, 2017; Treadway & Lazar, 2009).

In the context of the Discover you!, Heart coherence meditation is used to familiarize participants with the state of inner calm and centering, the basis for connecting to themselves in times of mental and emotional stress. At the same time, anchoring attention in the body facilitates contact with the physical self and its resources.

Creative meditation with art-therapeutic support – "Me and my thoughts"

The meditation was created by the main author of the present article.

The purpose of this creative meditation is to become aware of the relationship with one's thoughts through plastic support in order to reconstruct this relation, to reduce the impact of intrusive thoughts and restore emotional balance, by becoming aware of the transient nature of thoughts and the space between them and oneself.

The stages of meditation are: (1) focusing inward through breathing; (2) connecting with thoughts by guiding attention to their presence without changing them; (3) resonating with them; (4) exploring the emotional content of the relationship between self and thoughts; and (5) the plastic expression of this relationship through drawing. Subsequently, the content is processed within the group.

Mindfulness meditation for body-mind-emotions awareness

It was adapted from a basic mindfulness meditation script proposed in Didonna (2009a), as a combined technique of relaxation, contact with the body and awareness of one's feelings in the present moment.

The exercise involves entering a meditative trance state guided by the therapist in which the first step is body relaxation, followed by leading attention to the receiving organs and the five senses.

Following the detached awareness of the messages received by the sense organs, the participant's attention is guided to the mental level, where the process of non-judgmental awareness extends to the cognitive sphere, with the exploration of the transient nature of thoughts. Meditation ends with sending a compliment to oneself and resonating with the experience of compassion.

The secondary purpose of this meditation is to lay the foundation for contact with one's body from a space of awareness, acceptance and compassion that will later be extended to different contexts of life (Brown & Cordon, 2009; Geller, 2003; Treadway & Lazar, 2009).

"Steps in my space". Body exercise to explore the familiar space and the relationship with it

In the current social context, characterized by restrictions on outdoor exploration and forced retreat in closed spaces, the well-being of people has undergone significant changes. The role of habitat in maintaining people's mental balance and its impact is emphasized by Atkinson (2020), who underlines the importance of adapting to it in coping with the force majeure situation imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Thus, building an environment conducive to the psychological well-being of the person, characterized by optimal metric space used to meet personal needs and ensure physical and psychological comfort is an essential point in supporting the process of personal evolution.

The exercise "Steps in my space" aims to explore the living space, treated in this program with double valence (role of therapeutic and living space), in order to identify personal relationship with it, awareness of emotions experienced in relation to space, identifying blockages and creating a dedicated "recharging space".

To this end, participants are guided in the gradual exploration of the space in which they are, through all five senses, and then retreat to the area perceived as the most comfortable. Here, their attention is guided to become aware of the structure of the room, the place of the elements in it, from an attitude of acceptance. Once they have become familiar with the space they are in, their attention will be directed inward. Through the mental screen technique (Seracu, 2014), participants will be guided to explore the mental space and its content in terms of thoughts and emotions and their quality, so that later they graphically represent the proportion of beneficial thoughts-intrusive thoughts-emotions-state presence.

The purpose of this exercise is to explore all types of personal space and establish a basic level of quality of personal boundaries on a physical, mental, and emotional level. The theme of invading personal space can also be explored.

"The opening of the sacred space". Body exercise of awareness and consolidation of personal boundaries at the mental, emotional, physical level

"The opening of the sacred space" introduces the notion of ritual. Its origin is in the traditions of the Laika shamans, and the practice is found in the Munay Ki system (Villoldo, 2006). It is used in this program to bring

in the concept of intentional repetition, with a high degree of mental energy guided towards declaring and enforcing one's personal space, both physically and mentally.

By using body movement simultaneously with the mental creation of the image of the border and its declaration in the here and now, participants anchor the presence of borders multi-level, establishing their permeability. The exercise is used both during the sessions and as an inter-session theme, to strengthen the capacity for detachment by perceiving the border intentionally established between oneself and others, as the delimitation of one's "personal creation laboratory", a space of one's own, to withdraw from everyday life, having a balancing and recharging function.

Along with meditative practice, this exercise supports refocusing in the here and now.

"Lake" – exercise to integrate the characteristics of the element Water through guided visualization – receptivity, acceptance of change, flow

The "Lake" guided meditation (adapted by the lead author from Didonna, 2009a) is a dual-function therapeutic technique.

First, it supports the self-integration through metaphor of the psychological characteristics necessary for better adaptability to the environment and life situations (receptivity, resilience, acceptance of change, permeability, inner balance) (Didonna, 2009c), simultaneously with the experience of neutrality and calmness of mind (Desbordes et al., 2014).

Second, it creates the connection with the elements Water and Air, archetypal symbols of the Feminine and the Masculine, to integrate and unify the identity poles (Mitrofan, 2004).

The exercise involves a guided view of a lake landscape that includes various natural elements, a metaphorical description of the dynamics between water, air and land that supports the lake, followed by guidance to the fusion of the person with the lake and adopting its characteristics through suggestion.

Therapeutic story as a projective support for the activation of archetypes – the fairy tale "Prâslea the strong and the golden apples"

Fairy tales and stories are therapeutic tools by their tendency to open the communication between the conscious and the archetypal resources active in the unconscious and the subconscious, simultaneously inducing a state of regression to a previous stage of development.

In this program, the purpose of including the fairy tale "Prâslea the strong and the golden apples" is to challenge the activation of patterns and attitudes on femininity and masculinity, introjected internally through the phenomena of transgenerational and cultural transmission. By group processing the activated contents, they are transformed into personal resources.

Simultaneously, given the regressive note of this topic, the opportunity to restructure certain reactionary patterns, identify unmet needs in childhood and use the others as a therapeutic tool to begin the healing process of emotional wounds can be opened at group level. Thus, participants have the opportunity to exercise compassion in relation to themselves and others, as well as the state of presence in an emotionally charged context.

"Saving the planet". Unifying drama-therapeutic scenario.

The script is inspired and adapted for online work from Mitrofan (2004). The scenario triggers the theme of self-awareness, participation and responsibility in situations of existential crisis. The choice of scenario is made taking into account the current crisis situation due to the pandemic and the optimal way to strengthen the personal resources discovered by each participant, simultaneously with the openness to social cooperation.

Adapting the scenario involves the use of communication technology to energize the group through virtual video conferencing cameras. The emphasis is on communication and awareness of the presence of others by observing facial expressions, gestures and para-verbal elements.

III. Results

The data analysis was done using the SPSS software.

Descriptive analysis

A descriptive analysis was performed to establish the overall status of the variables further used to test the study hypotheses.

Out of the 18 unique participants in the study, with Age = 38.78, SD age = 12.071 (Max Age = 57 years, Min Age = 20 years), 6 (33.4%) were men and 12 (66.6%) were women.

Normality condition of data

The condition of normality of the data was met only for some of the variables to be analyzed, determined by the Shapiro-Wilk test due to the small sample size.

As an additional test of normality, the scores for Skewness and Kurtosis were transformed into Z scores and compared to the standard limits. The results

on the normality of the data changed for most variables in favor of accepting normality.

This being considered, a combination of parametric and non-parametric tests was used to analyze the study hypotheses.

Missing data and extreme values

No missing values were recorded. Two limit values were detected at more than 1.5 lengths from the boxplot diagram. The inspection of their values did not report them as extreme and they were maintained in the statistical analysis.

Analysis of hypothesis

Self-punitive attitudes

High standards (HS). A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in averages between the High Standards factor recorded at the beginning and end of the program, respectively. The assumption of normalcy was not violated, according to the Shapiro-Wilk test (p = .054> .05).

There was no significant decrease between pre (M = 10.94, SD = 2.071) and post-program level (M = 10.06, SD = 2.930), 95% CI [-.645, 2.423], t(17) = 1.222, p = .238 > .05, d = .28, leading to rejection of H1.1.

Self-criticism (SC). A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in averages between the level of the Self-criticism factor recorded at the beginning and end of the program, respectively. The assumption of normality was violated, according to the Shapiro-Wilk test (p = .031 > .05), but the verification by transforming Skewness and Kurtosis into Z scores supported the assumption of normality of the data.

There was no significant decrease between pre (M = 9.17, SD = 3.111) and post-program level (M = 8.06, SD = 2.900), 95% CI [-.717, 2.939], t(17) = 1.282, p = .217 > .05, d = .3, leading to rejection of H1.2.

Generalization. A t-test for dependent samples was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in averages between the level of the Generalization factor recorded at the beginning and end of the program, respectively. The assumption of normalcy was not violated, according to the Shapiro-Wilk test (p = .135 > .05).

There was no significant decrease between pre (M = 11.94, SD = 3.152) and post-program level (M = 11.22, SD = 3.353), 95% CI [-.836, 2.485], t(17) = .864, p = .399 > .05, d = .2, leading to rejection of H1.3.

The rejection of H1.1, H1.2 and H1.3 leads to the rejection of H1, considering that participants did not record significant changes in any of the factors of Self-punitive attitudes.

Well-being

The overall score and the six dimensions of psychological Well-being: to test the second main hypothesis of the study (H2), a t test was used for dependent samples, according to the acceptance of the assumption of normality of the data, evaluated by the Shapiro-Wilk test (p = .370 > .05), to establish the statistical significance of the difference registered at the level of the global well-being before and after the program.

There was no significant change between the overall level of psychological Well-being recorded pre (M = 170.33, SD = 29.900) and post-program (M = 154.22, SD = 12.288), 95% CI [-1.212, 33.434], t(17) = 1.962, p = .66 > .05, d = .4, leading to H2 rejection.

Each of the six dimensions of psychological Well-being was analyzed by the t test for dependent samples, the assumption of normality being accepted according to the evaluation by the Shapiro-Wilk test (p > .05).

The results for each dimension are presented in Table 2, with marks for statistically significant values.

Factor	M pre	SD pre	M post	SD post	95% CI		*p*	*d*
					min	max		
Autonomy	**28.94**	**6.637**	**28.50**	**2.618**	**-3.219**	**4.108**	**.801**	**.06**
Environmental control	**25.50**	**5.670**	**24.67**	**3.181**	**-2.943**	**4.601**	**.647**	**.1**
Purpose in life	**22.61**	**4.258**	**23.72**	**3.923**	**-1.258**	**3.480**	**.336**	**.2**
Self-acceptance	**28.17**	**8.780**	**25.33**	**2.326**	**-1.358**	**7.236**	**.192**	**.3**
Personal growth	**34.61**	**4.913**	**24.44**	**2.229**	**7.506**	**12.827**	**.001***	**1.9**
Positive relationships	**30.50**	**6.998**	**27.56**	**4.755**	**1.799**	**7.688**	**.208**	**.3**

*Statistically significant for p > .001

Table 2. Results of t tests for dependent samples for psychological Well-being factors

The results lead to the confirmation of H2.5 hypothesis and rejection of H2.1, H2.2, H2.3, H2.4 and H2.6, thus suggesting that the program had an impact in decreasing the sense of personal growth, without impacting the other areas of Well-being.

Compassion

The assumption of normality was accepted, according to the Shapiro-Wilk test, for the Goodness factor (p = .539 > .05). For the other three factors, following the rejection of the assumption of normality with the Shapiro-Wilk test, it was reassessed using the reporting of the z values of Skewness and Kurtosis to the accepted limits. The procedure confirmed the assumption of normalcy for the factors Common humanity, Mindfulness and Indifference.

Consequently, a series of four t-tests for dependent samples were performed to analyze the changes in the four Compassion factors. Reporting is done individually for each factor, as covered in Table 3.

Factor	M pre	SD pre	M post	SD post	95% CI		*p*	*d*
					min	max		
Goodness	16.72	2.608	16.33	2.376	-1.572	.795	.497	.16
Common humanity	17.67	2.029	17.98	2.014	-.442	.998	.427	.2
Mindfulness	17.72	2.396	18.22	1.957	-.229	1.229	.166	.3
Indifference	9.56	2.595	9.76	3.782	-1.530	1.975	.792	.1

Table 3. Results of t tests for dependent samples for Compassion factors

The results lead to rejection of H3.1, H3.2, H3.3 and H3.4. It is important to notice that, in the case of the Goodness factor, the evolution was contrary to the predicted outcome. The psychological meaning is to be discussed in the psychological interpretation section of the present article.

Simultaneously, this leads to the rejection of H3 for lack of statistical significance of the changes in Compassion over the four factors.

Self-compassion

The assumption of normalcy was accepted, according to the Shapiro-Wilk test, for the factors Self-kindness, Self-judgment, Humanity, Isolation and Over-identification ($p > .05$) and rejected for the Mindfulness factor.

As an additional test of normality, the scores for Skewness and Kurtosis were transformed into Z scores and compared to the standard limits. The results regarding the normality of the data have not changed.

These being considered, a combination of parametric and non-parametric tests was used to analyze the hypotheses regarding Self-compassion factors. The result can be found in Table 4.

Factor	M pre	SD pre	M post	SD post	95% CI		*p*	*d*
					min	max		
Self-kindness	17.78	5.105	18.56	3.714	-1.103	2.658	.395	.2
Self-judgement	15.50	4.502	14.94	3.811	-1.912	3.023	.641	.1
Humanity	13.17	3.895	14.39	4.002	-.462	2.907	.144	.3
Isolation	10.78	3.209	10.50	4.449	-1.501	2.057	.746	.1
Over-identification	13.22	4.023	11.72	3.322	-.394	3.394	.113	.4

Table 4. Results of t tests for dependent samples for Self-compassion factors

The results lead to rejection of H4.1, H4.2, H3.3, H4.4 and H4.6.

Mindfulness. A signed-rank Wilcoxon test was performed to analyze changes in pre- and post-program Mindfulness factor.

The scores of the post- and pre-program differences were distributed approximately symmetrically, according to the evaluation by a histogram with a superimposed normal curve.

There was a statistically significant increase in the median scores for the factor level (Mdn = 1) in the pre-program (Mdn = 13.50) compared to the post-program (Mdn = 15.50), $z = 2.378$, $p = .017 < .05$, leading upon confirmation of H4.5.

The results lead to a rejection of H4, considering that the changes in the factors of self-compassion were statistically significant only for the Mindfulness factor.

Self-esteem

In order to test the hypothesis of a change in Self-esteem following participation in the program, a t test was used for dependent samples. The assumption of normalcy was not violated, according to the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p = .292 > .05$).

There was no significant increase between the level of Self-esteem pre (M = 27.17, SD = 5.833) and post-program (M = 26.67, SD = 4.015), 95% CI [-2.462, 1.462], $t(17) = -.538$, $p = .598 > .05$, $d = .1$, leading to rejection of H5.

Self-efficacy

A t test for dependent samples was used to analyze the changes in perceived Self-efficacy. The assumption of normalcy was not violated, according to the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p = .729 > .05$).

There was no significant change between the level of perceived Self-efficacy recorded pre (M = 30.39, SD = 4.901) and post-program (M = 31.44, SD = 5.067), 95% CI [-.620, 2.731], $t(17) = 1.329$, $p = .201 > .05$, $d = .3$, leading to rejection of H6.

Satisfaction with life

A t test for dependent samples was used to analyze the changes in Satisfaction with life. The assumption of normalcy was not violated, according to the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p = .890 > .05$).

There was a significant increase in Satisfaction with life post-program (M = 24.06, SD = 5.775) compared with pre-program (M = 20.89, SD = 6.333), with a growth of the mean of 3.167, 95% CI [1.220, 5.113], $t(17) = 3.432$, $p = .003 < .05$, $d = .8$, leading to confirmation of H7.

Connection with others

A signed Wilcoxon-rank test was performed to determine the effect of the Discover you! on the perception of the level of Connection with others.

The scores of the post- and pre-program differences were distributed approximately symmetrically, according to the evaluation by a histogram with a superimposed normal curve.

There was an increase in the median scores for the level of Connection with others (Mdn = .5) in the pre-program (Mdn = 3.5) compared to the post-program (Mdn = 4.5), but the difference was not statistically significant, $z = 1.625$, $p = .104 > .05$, leading to rejection of H8.

IV. Discussion – psychological interpretation of the results

Self-punitive attitudes

The results obtained in this section, although not meeting the threshold of statistical significance, mark a downward trend in the values recorded. Given the low power of the effect size for all three types of attitudes, the impact of the small sample size on the results can be reported.

From a psychological point of view, the trend registered both at group level and at the level of the individual profiles of the participants draws attention to the presence of a beneficial effect of the program on high standards, self-criticism and generalization.

Combined with the significant increase in the Mindfulness factor of Self-compassion, it marks the beginning of a process of rebuilding the relationship with oneself in terms of how participants tend to relate to themselves at the end of the program. They show a high degree of awareness of their own states, needs and desires, which can lead over time to rebalancing exaggerated standards of self and self-criticism, according to research conducted by Neff (2003a, b).

Regarding the tendency towards generalization, the consolidation of its decrease is supported by exercising compassion for oneself in most life situations, along with continuing to experience the state of neutrality.

It is important to note here that self-punitive attitudes are greatly influenced by the emotional load and its constellation with the perceived effectiveness in situations. Thus, there are several variables that can influence their level, especially in the context in which the person has had a predominantly self-punishing style of self-report until now.

Based on the results of the present study, it is recommended that future research take into account the control for such variables (e.g., the presence of interpersonal conflicts during the program that are not related to the group, integration of a scale for assessing depression and anxiety, level perceived stress), together with the segmentation of the sample by age groups.

Self-esteem

Maintaining the level of self-esteem in the participants is an important observation in profiling the results, especially in relation to the increasing trend of self-efficacy.

As a construct, self-esteem defines the extent to which a person appreciates correctly, justified, and balanced their self-worth in terms of success and skills. Based on this fact, the change in level involves a long process, sensitive to external events in the life of each person.

Identifying its subtle changes is desirable to be done in the future at the individual level, adding the assessment of self-esteem variability at different points during an extensive process of unification, a process that follows the person's own pace and considers variables such as their history and life context. This recommendation is built on the rather large variability in group self-esteem values.

The individual profiling of the pre-post program values, together with the observations made during the sessions, highlighted a series of three cases that registered changes at the variable level, with a significant impact on the personal level, in terms of behavior and self-reporting.

In the final interview, the people mentioned increased self-confidence and openness to communicate their needs and to get involved in more activities that they wanted, but for which they did not feel sufficiently prepared aptly, a fact confirmed within the group by more interventions in communication, sharing and openness to support other participants in the process.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy defines a person's belief in the ability to engage in an activity and achieve the desired result based on personal skills, as mentioned above.

In the present study, its evolution is treated as an effect of the cumulation between the change of self-perception towards a fuller perspective of acceptance, compassion and neutrality. Thus, the upward trend, although not meeting the condition of statistical significance, can be interpreted as a first step in increasing self-confidence.

It should be noted that the overall self-efficacy is subject to the influence of several external factors that were not marked in the present study, including events that took place in the personal lives of participants, especially in the form of a series of challenges in adaptability.

The program took place on an emotional and cognitive background laden with insecurity, mental fatigue and a sense of loss of purpose in life for many of the participants, according to their mentions in the first session. In this context, it is natural that the rebuilding of self-confidence is subject to a lengthy process that was not fully captured in the present evaluation or on which such a program does not act effectively.

Future research may consider optimizing the program by extending the duration to eight to ten meetings to support a deeper process of transformation in this area.

Psychological well-being

The results recorded in this segment suggest the active presence of a resettlement stage at the personal level, on all areas, supported by the significant change in the Personal growth dimension. It captures a person's faith in continuous development by opening up to new experiences to see greater self-knowledge and efficiency.

Although the present data do not allow the construction of predictions about the evolution of people both during and after the end of the program, the downward change in Personal growth can influence the perception of self-efficacy, limiting its growth.

The opposite of growth is the feeling of stagnation, of the inability to develop new attitudes and behaviors. The poles of this dimension are in an alternating dynamic. After each recorded peak, in this case the strong motivation for change and curiosity for the new thing that triggered enrolment in the program, follows the balance to moments of "rest", withdrawal from evolution, especially at the same time with the growing trend of the Purpose in life.

Participants thus recorded an infusion of motivation at the global level of perception of life, in setting new goals, simultaneously with the processing and integration of new content previously in the Shadow.

The interpretation is supported by the simultaneous downward trend of Self-acceptance as a factor of Well-being with the upward trend on the factors of Self-compassion. Based on the recorded data, the participants highlight both the presence of a better awareness of their own needs and feelings, through the significant increase of the Mindfulness factor of Self-compassion, as well as kindness in relation to themselves, openness to their own suffering and its integration, and, apparently paradoxically, a less self-accepting attitude towards themselves, potentially risen from activating aspects of the Shadow and from seeing more up-close, somehow, the areas that concern them. All this could be seen as a part of a process (from which the current study captured a phase-snapshot), as efforts and sometimes struggles of inner transformation towards a more accepting view of themselves and of the Shadow aspects, through the practice and reinforcement of self-compassion.

However, the process is a sustained one, which requires an incubation and processing time, reflecting in the profiling of the dimensions of psychological well-being.

Satisfaction with life

The confirmation of the hypothesis regarding the increase of life satisfaction with a large effect size (d = .8) supports the previous argumentation by its definition.

Satisfaction with life is operationalized as a mark of cognitive well-being, as opposed to the previous variable that captures the affective area of well-being. Thus, the main element that impacts it is the way the person relates rationally.

Non-judgmental, non-evaluative awareness, loaded with specific acceptance of mindfulness and transmitted conceptually-experientially to participants contributes to reframing perception.

Given that the analysis through the interview did not signal major changes in the people's quality of life, the way they tend to perceive the situations in which they are and the context itself as more satisfactory for their own needs has seen an upward trend through the factors Mindfulness and Common humanity out of Self-compassion.

Thus, the hypothesis can be supported with a high degree of confidence: participation in the Discover you! program has a significant impact on the perception of the environment as beneficial to evolution to the detriment of its assessment as harmful.

Looking ahead, this can reduce the negative impact that unforeseen changes have on people. Moreover, it is expected that the level of distress will decrease in favor of eustress, which in turn positively charges the person and their steps of evolution, integration by accepting the areas in the Shadow and unification as an end point.

Once life, in its form of cumulation of experiences, interpersonal and environmental contexts, is perceived as satisfactory, this leaves room for evolution, because the person will no longer perceive themselves as in double conflict, with the environment and oneself.

Compassion for oneself and others

Trends in compassion support the evolution of the previous variables.

At the same time, they reinforce the existence of a change in the relationship with oneself and others, especially in terms of living one's own experience as part of human experiences in the form of "I am not the only person going through this experience. There are other people who share my experience", of Mindfulness (defined as a balanced awareness of the suffering of others accompanied by openness to support them, but without emotional contamination, respectively full acceptance of personal needs and feelings) and over-identification (experiencing failures as part of the self).

The hypothesis can be constructed that the changes appeared as an effect of the part focused on presenting the dynamics of the psyche and the causes of suffering, simultaneously with the exercise of the state of neutrality through creative meditations and guided visualizations proposed in the program.

Strengthening to a statistically significant level of these trends is to be achieved by increasing the sample, given the value of the effect size, and including control for experience in meditative practice or energy work systems (Reiki, Karuna, dowsing, etc.) that can have a significant influence in the way people relate with themselves, to others and to the integration of the transformative processes triggered by the experiences built in the program, according to the data from the interview.

Connecting with others

The results recorded at group level are not statistically significant, leading to the refutation of the hypothesis that participation in the Discover you! leads to increased perceived connection with others.

However, the analysis of the results at individual level in the final interview, together with the participants, caught a balancing phenomenon.

At the present stage, only a still unverified hypothesis can be formulated, according to which the human connection will undergo changes in terms of reducing the tendency to merge with the other, respectively of complete detachment from those around.

The need for the post-program formulation of this hypothesis and launch for testing comes from the evolution of two people at opposite poles of the connection level.

The first of them, who showed a tendency to merge with the other, corroborated with the difficulty of saying "no" and maintaining healthy boundaries in relationships, marked a three-point reduction of the variable, accompanied by the increase of the frequency of the situations in which the person reserves time for themselves and the modification of the affective relation with the close ones, in terms of reducing the degree of affective contamination with their suffering.

The second person registered an evolution in the opposite direction, supported by the openness to the group and the perception of resonance with the members in the affective aspect.

Both participants marked changes starting with session three – Personal space, respectively two – Contact.

Based on this information, it is necessary to consider the exploration and interpretation of the variable at individual level, in the form of a case study, in order to capture the particular changes in the psycho-emotional context of each participant.

Limits and future directions

This research defines an approach to exploring the effects of the psychoeducation program Discover you! in terms of personal evolution and restructuring the perception of the Self, the roles adopted in society and the relationship to the certainty of change as part of life.

Taking this into account, the main limitation of the study is the difficulty of capturing both the individual evolution and the real impact that such a program has on a group. Overcoming this limitation can be achieved by popularizing enrolment in the program and starting it in consecutive series, simultaneously with the construction of an evaluation model in multiple time instances with the inclusion of case studies.

Also, a control measure for depression, anxiety and perceived stress can lead to the refinement of the actual impact capture with a wide range of information on the stress reduction area highlighted by participants at the end of the program.

Based on the literature on individual differences between experienced practitioners in meditation, self-control techniques, and energy work systems (Li et al., 2009), it might be interesting to explore the area of impact differences comparatively in people without experience in these fields and stable practitioners, in order to determine the concrete action of the constructive elements of the program on the participants in terms of activated psychic mechanisms.

An important area to highlight is the environment in which the program was conducted. Despite its adaptation to the online environment, the limitations imposed by the experiential nature of the challenges should be studied in more detail. More of the results can support the influence of online interaction, which is poorer in terms of interaction and resonance than the face-to-face one, to which is added the participants' perception on online communication

(detachment, low involvement). Future research could integrate the double evaluation for the online program, respectively face-to-face, to determine with a high degree of confidence the disturbing factors and their influence on the group therapeutic framework.

One more future direction worth mentioning is the restructuring of the program to include eight to ten sessions, recommended for the face-to-face format, to reach topics with a high degree of depth on the issues of integrating archetypes and strengthening the practice of presence in the here and now.

V. Conclusions

The present research brings an important set of original contributions to the current level of knowledge on psychoeducation and experiential personal development in the online environment, being among the first such programs built in therapeutic practice.

The integration of psychoeducational elements focused on the state of presence and the causes of suffering with the transformational ones from the experiential area is a unique basis for exploring a holistic approach from a constructive point of view of programs focused on change framing, stress management and interpersonal relationships, simultaneously with the self-discovery of resources and the integration of the Shadow parts. It is based on the principle of sustained contemplation of living, in which the mind receives its content to be processed, full of meaning, which it can use to support the rewriting of programs and maladaptive patterns more easily than in the absence of either area.

Such a structure can be interesting for a wider range of people, both those interested in the cognitive part and those for whom the spiritual area is active and an important part of their lives. The combination thus created at the level of the group facilitates the appearance of as diverse themes as possible, of new meanings, with different valences, through whose exploration and transformation at individual level one can reach in time the influence of the Collective Unconscious, starting from the group.

Also, the incipient translation into psychotherapeutic and experiential language of techniques from spiritual traditions, being the case of the Opening of the Sacred Space and the Meditation of Cardiac Coherence, can be seen as an added value in the context of finding means to support the presence and stimulate contact with clients, one's own person and with one's own transconscious, to build, in time, a stage of unification also beyond the therapeutic framework.

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