Psychological Counseling in Portuguese Higher Education: What are the Students' Needs?*

Asesoramiento psicológico en la educación superior portuguesa: ¿cuáles son las necesidades de los estudiantes?

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the counseling needs of students attending Portuguese higher education. Specifically, a convenience sample of 375 students was surveyed online with the Survey of Student Needs. Descriptive results indicated that "overcoming procrastination", "job search strategies" and "time management skills" were their main concerns. Inferential results indicated differences according to personal and academic information and present living conditions, particularly in regard to personal counseling needs. Also, a linear regression analysis found that gender, academic satisfaction and satisfaction with current living conditions had a predictive effect on counseling needs, and that students had a preference for individual counseling. Conclusions are drawn about the importance of developing interventions targeting specific clients.

Keywords

needs assessment; psychological counseling; university; Portuguese students.

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora las necesidades de asesoramiento de los estudiantes que asisten a la educación superior portuguesa. Específicamente, se encuestó en línea una muestra de conveniencia de 375 estudiantes con la Encuesta de Necesidades Estudiantiles. Los resultados descriptivos indicaron que "superar la dilación", "estrategias de búsqueda de empleo" y "habilidades de gestión del tiempo" eran sus principales preocupaciones. Los resultados inferenciales indicaron diferencias según la información personal y académica y las condiciones de vida actuales, particularmente, en lo que respecta a las necesidades de asesoramiento personal. Además, un análisis de regresión lineal encontró que el género, la satisfacción académica y la satisfacción con las condiciones de vida actuales tenían un efecto predictivo sobre las necesidades de asesoramiento, y que los estudiantes tenían preferencia por el asesoramiento individual. Se sacan conclusiones sobre la importancia de desarrollar intervenciones dirigidas a clientes específicos.

Palabras clave

evaluación de necesidades; asesoramiento psicológico; universidad; estudiantes portugueses.

The transition, adaptation and experience of higher education entails a variety of challenges, particularly with regard to solving developmental tasks in personal, academic, vocational and social areas (Almeida, Soares, & Ferreira, 1999; Biasi, Mallia, Menozzi, & Patrizi, 2015; Giovazolias, Leontopoulou, & Trivila, 2010; Robinson, Jubenville, Renny, & Cairns, 2016). For example, leaving one's parents' home for the first time is often associated with feelings of greater independence/ autonomy and reduction of parental control. On the other hand, it can bring demands related to home management, housekeeping and dealing with a limited budget and financial worries. The integration in a new social environment is associated with the possibility of developing new friendships and relationships but, on the other hand, it can bring homesickness, adaptation difficulties, isolation, feelings of inadequacy and loneliness.

The integration in a new academic environment is associated with the ability to develop new knowledge, skills and interests. Nevertheless, it can entail new study requirements, new time management skills, competition between peers, and sometimes the first experiences of failure. Also, at the vocational level, the transition to university is associated with the achievement of a career plan, but it can also entail an awareness that the idealized course does not always correspond to reality. These and other challenges (e.g., learning disabilities, the need to define career goals, eating disorders, problems with alcohol and/or use of illicit drugs, sexual assault, abuse, suicide ideation, etc.) have already been well documented in the literature (e.g., Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003; Fiates & Salles, 2001; Gallagher, Sysko, & Zhang, 2001; Kitzrow, 2003; Sax, Gilmartin, Keup, DiCrisi, & Bryant, 2000; Wagner, Stempliuk, Zilberman, Barroso, & Andrade, 2007), and their successful resolution contributes to the development of a sense of identity and the sense of a life project, so relevant at the young adult development stage (Giovazolias et al., 2010).

In order to contribute to a successful transition, adaptation and experience of higher education, universities around the world offer counseling services to their students. The United States (US) pioneered the creation of such services in the 40's, at institutions such as the University of South Carolina, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford University (Dias, 2005; Pereira, 2008), and later, they expanded throughout Europe and elsewhere. In Portugal, these services emerged in the 80's, initially at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, followed by a proliferation throughout the country in recent decades (Campos, 2005; Dias, 2005).

These counseling services in higher education typically aim to establish themselves as structures providing specialized services, of high quality and innovation in the promotion of well-being, satisfaction and personal, academic, professional and social success of students, faculty and staff, but also of any other individual or collective entities beyond the academic context (Bishop, 1990; Rede de Serviços de Apoio Psicológico no Ensino Superior [RESAPES], 2002). They are often provided by faculty, doctoral students and trainees of psychology departments/schools, and are intended to offer counseling and support in knowledge areas and skills of excellence at those universities. The services can be quite diverse, including assessment, intervention, research, training and consulting in various fields of psychology (e.g., development of academic skills, vocational guidance and career management, motivation and behavior self-regulation, dealing with substance abuse, etc.), resting on a range of theoretical approaches, models and strategies (cf., Taveira & Silvério, 2008).

The availability of such counseling services is crucial in higher education institutions (Giovazolias et al., 2010; Author et al, *in press*); however, they only properly fulfill their functions if there is an accurate and regular assessment of the characteristics, needs and problems of both the clients and the context the counseling programs are implemented within. As stated by Robinson et al. (2016), it is unwise to assume that the needs of students are universally similar

(p.128). Several previous studies have addressed the prevalence of counselling needs in university populations, stressing out the specificity of those needs according to some personal variables (e.g., Biasi & Bonaiuto, 2014; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2006). In this sense, an evaluation focused on the potential users of these services would permit exploring their characteristics and how these affect their expectations, motivations, fears and intervention needs in greater depth. A greater awareness of these could lead to the design and implementation of intervention programs that are developed to meet their specific needs, bridging the gaps or discrepancies identified between their current and desired situation (Güneri, Aydin, & Skovholt, 2003; Kenny, Aluede, & McEachern, 2009; Rojo et al., 2002, p. 53), and consequently reducing any skepticism and stigma in relation to their use (Gallagher, Colin, & Kelleher, 1992; Juste, 2000; Rojo et al., 2002).

Studies in this area have been developed at a national and an international level (cf., Almeida et al., 1999; Gallagher, 1993; Gallagher et al., 1992; Giovazolias et al., 2010; Güneri et al., 2003; Pinto & Martins, 2017; Nicholas, 1995, 2002) in order to determine the counseling needs of students (including international students; cf., Arthur, 1997; Brinson & Kottler, 1995; Komiya & Eells, 2001), including in some cases exploring perceptions and attitudes about the nature of the counseling services already available on campus. As found, the support needs in career and academic areas seemed to outweigh the need for support in personal and social areas (cf., Nicholas, 1995), with differences evident in the specific needs identified in those areas, depending on the population, gender, age, race and socioeconomic status (cf., Aluede, Imhonde, & Eguavoen, 2006; Güneri et al., 2003).

It was also found that while, on the one hand, students would recommend the use of counseling services to their peers, when it came to their own potential use, students still had a negative and cautious attitude (Giovazolias et al., 2010; Vogel, Wade, & Haake, 2006; Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007). Being a woman,

being more open to emotions and experiencing prior counseling were found to be significant predictors of seeking counseling (Komiya & Eells, 2001), and when students opted for its use, they clearly demonstrated a preference for individual counseling or workshops (Author et al., *in press*). In addition, students who attended the counseling services provided by their university were found to have higher levels of academic and social adjustment to college (Setiawan, 2006).

Despite such findings, it could be argued that there is a need for an even greater systematization of data, towards the design of different psychological intervention services according to the specific needs of students (Kenny et al., 2009) and the location of services. Thus, this present work involves an exploratory study aiming to identify and prioritize current counseling needs of college students enrolled in Portuguese higher education, from their own perspective, as well as to identify the types of preferred and previously obtained counseling in response to their needs.

Method

Sample Description

The study participants were 375 Portuguese students, 272 of whom (72.5%) were women and 131 (27.5%) men, in the age range 18-32 years (mean = 19.48 years; SD = 2.01). They were enrolled in the academic year 2015/2016, 76.3% (n = 286) attending a graduate-level course, 23.4% (n = 88) a Master's course, and 0.3% (n = 1) a PhD course, at 36 different Portuguese universities.

About 72.8% (n = 273) of the sample was attending the course that was their first option when applying for higher education, with a current academic average of 13.76 values (considering a 0-20 scale; SD = 1.58; Min-Max = 10-20 values). Considering the satisfaction with the academic path followed thus far on a Likert-type scale in which 1 means *Very dissatisfied* and 4 means *Very satisfied* (M = 3.08; SD = 0.608), most participants were satisfied (n

= 258, 68.8%) or very satisfied (*n* = 78, 20.8%). In regard to satisfaction with participation and involvement in academic activities (M = 2.90; *SD* = 0.822), most participants were satisfied (*n* = 200, 53.3%) or very satisfied (*n* = 83, 22.1%).

The participants' contact with parents/family members occurred, personally or on the phone, on a daily base for 86.7% (*n* = 325) of the participants, and between once and twice a week for 11.4% (*n* = 43). Considering the global satisfaction with present living conditions (M = 3.16; *SD* = 0.61), over half of the participants were satisfied (*n* = 241, 64.3%) and 26.7% were very satisfied (*n* = 100).

Measures

A *socio-demographic* questionnaire with eighteen items sought demographic information, organized in the main areas of: (i) personal information (e.g., gender, age), (ii) academic information (e.g., satisfaction with current academic path), and (iii) information about present living conditions (e.g., contact with parents/family members; satisfaction with living conditions).

The Survey of Student Needs (Gallagher et al., 1992) is a self-reported measure used to obtain data in regard to concerns students face during higher education. It contains 44 items, organized into three dimensions: (i) Personal needs (items 1-32), (ii) Career needs (items 34-36) and (iii) Learning needs (items 37-42). In addition to the initial 42-item version, two items were added related to controlling drug use and peer pressure to use drugs under the Personal needs dimension. Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *No need* to 4 = *High need.*

The 44-item Portuguese Survey has high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92), and the personal, career and learning subscales also shows this (Cronbach's alpha = 0.9, 0.8, and 0.78, respectively). These results are similar to those obtained in a previous study by Pinto and Martins (2017) thus ascertaining the reliability of the assessment measure.

At the end of the survey, there were two questions concerning, firstly, the type of assistance participants would like to receive for the concerns listed, and, secondly, whether they had ever sought assistance for the concerns listed. For the first of these questions, the authors maintained the list of options presented in the original survey - Individual Counseling, Group Counseling, Workshops, Lecture, Discussion Groups - and also added the option of "None" (meaning any assistance at all).

Procedure

This study involves a collection of a probabilistic test, but specifically a convenience sample. The research protocol, consisting of an informed consent step and the assessment measures mentioned above, was inserted into an online platform (Google Docs), and disseminated on social networks (e.g., Facebook, Linkedin, Twitter) to professors, academic associations and higher education students from all Portugal. No rewards were offered to participants. The average response time to the questionnaire was 30 minutes, which is a valuable indicator of the validity of the questionnaire.

Data from this sample were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software (version 22 for Windows). A descriptive analysis of the prevalence of the Personal, Career, and Learning needs was made, which indicated the ranking order of the percentage of students who indicated a "moderate need" and a "high need" regarding these problems (combined scores). Then, analyses of differences in Personal, Career and Learning needs were performed, according to personal and academic variables, and also current living conditions. The predictor effect of those sociodemographic variables on the Personal, Career and Learning needs was weighed through the development of a regression analysis (Method: Enter). Finally, descriptive statistics are presented on the types of psychological counseling previously obtained and preferred, and the relationship between the existence of Personal, Career, and Learning needs and the

preferred and obtained psychological counseling types was analyzed. Results were considered statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05 or less ($p < 0.05$).

Results

Descriptive results of the assessment of Personal, Career and Learning Needs

Table 1 presents the descriptive results for the items that comprise the Personal, Career and Learning Needs subscales. Ranking orders are also presented for the items according to the proportion of students who expressed a "moderate need" or "high need" for help on that issue (cf., Nicholas, 1995).

Considering the average for each item, results indicated that the participants scored above the midpoint (2.5 points) on the 4-point Likert-type scale for items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 related to personal needs; on items 35 and 36 related to career needs; and on items 39, 40, 41 and 42 related to learning needs.

As regards the ranking orders, the three items with the highest percentage of participants indicating a "moderate" or "high" need (combined) were, in the personal needs, items 1 (64.8%), 8 (64%) and 4 (59.5 %); in the career needs, items 35 (62.9%), 36 (52.3%) and 37 (50.1%); and, in the learning needs, items 41 (70.1%), 39 (66.1%) and 40 (56.6%).

Table 1

Assessment of Personal, Career and Learning Needs subscales: descriptive results

Subscales	Items	Mean (SD)	Rank	%
Personal Needs (*M* = 63.9; *SD* = 13.69; Min-Max = 34-115)	1. Overcoming procrastination	2.73 (0.93)	1	64.8
	2. Public speaking anxiety	2.51 (0.97)	6	52
	3. Increasing self-confidence	2.63 (0.938)	5	56.8
	4. Increasing motivation	2.65 (0.91)	3	59.5
	5. Eliminating self-defeating behaviors	2.37 (1.02)	7	44
	6. Becoming more assertive	2.35 (0.882)	8	43.4
	7. Fear of failure	2.66 (0.936)	4	57.3
	8. Controlling anxiety and nervousness	2.86 (0.919)	2	64
	9. Concern about relationships with academic staff	2.07 (0.933)	13	30.4
	10. Coping with depression	1.81 (0.941)	16	22.7
	11. Finding greater purpose in life	2.22 (0.991)	9	39.7
	12. Meeting people to date	1.99 (1.02)	12	30.7
	13. Overcoming shyness	2.23 (0.986)	11	38.4
	14. Coping with loneliness	1.75 (0.878)	17	21.2
	15. Discomfort in social situations	2.03 (0.894)	14	26.9
	16. Recurrent headaches or stomach aches	1.79 (0.921)	18	20.6
	17. Coping with a broken relationship	1.64 (0.923)	22	18.6
	18. Roles and expectations of men and women	1.68 (0.813)	23	16.8
	19. Problems with controlling temper	1.93 (0.919)	15	24.5
	20. Controlling weight	2.2 (1.03)	10	39
	21. Adjustment to campus	1.77 (0.822)	20	20
	22. Insomnia	1.67 (0.903)	21	18.9
	23. Concerns about sexual functioning	1.46 (0.741)	26	10.6
	24. Problems with parents/family	1.78 (0.935)	19	20.5
	25. Coping with prejudice	1.51 (0.745)	25	12
	26. Anxiety about sexual diseases (e.g., AIDS. genital herpes, hepatitis B)	1.41 (0.739)	28	9.3
	27. Adjusting to culture norms	1.47 (0.692)	27	9.4
	28. Conflicts over values and morals	1.65 (0.787)	24	15.8
	29. Suicidal feelings	1.21 (0.565)	30	5.6
	30. Controlling drinking	1.34 (0.655)	29	9
	31. Controlling over the use of drugs	1.15 (0.473)	31	3.7
	32. Controlling about sexual identity	1.15 (0.475)	33	3.2
	33. Peer pressure to drink to excess	1.16 (0.481)	31	3.7
	34. Peer pressure to use drugs	1.09 (0.42)	34	2.1
Career Needs (*M* = 9.94; *SD* = 2.93; Min-Max = 4-16)	35. Job search strategies	2.67 (0.918)	1	62.9
	36. Selection of a major subject	2.5 (0.989)	2	52.3
	37. Understanding career interests, abilities	2.45 (0.894)	3	50.1
	38. Concern about career choice	2.33 (0.929)	4	45.6
Learning Needs (*M* = 14.81; *SD* = 4.08; Min-Max = 6-24)	39. Improving study skills	2.79 (0.925)	2	66.1
	40. Learning test taking strategies	2.57 (0.962)	3	56.6
	41. Time management skills	2.87 (0.908)	1	70.1
	42. Test anxiety	2.63 (1)	4	54.6
	43. Math's anxiety	2.04 (1.14)	5	34.6
	44. Improving reading skills	1.91 (0.965)	6	28.5

Inferential results of the assessment of Personal, Career and Learning Needs: differences according to personal information

Table 2 presents the items, from the Personal, Career and Learning Needs subscales, in which there are statistically significant differences according to gender. Considering the Personal Needs subscale, significant differences were identified between male and female in 19 items. Males had higher results for items 12, 31, 33, and 34. Considering the Career Needs subscale, significant differences were identified between males and females in three items. Females had higher results for all items – 35, 37 and 38. Considering the Learning Needs subscale, significant differences were identified between males and females in four items. Females had higher results for all items - 40, 41, 42, and 43.

Table 2

Assessment of Personal, Career and Learning Needs subscales: differences according to sex

Subscales	Items	Sex	Mean	t (p)
Personal Needs ($t = 3.621$, $p = 0$)	2. Public speaking anxiety	F M	2.61 2.24	3.354 (0.001)
	3. Increasing self-confidence	F M	2.79 2.23	5.284 (0)
	5. Eliminating self-defeating behaviors	F M	2.49 2.06	3.698 (0)
	6. Becoming more assertive	F M	2.43 2.12	3.147 (0.002)
	7. Fear of failure	F M	2.83 2.23	5.715 (0)
	8. Controlling anxiety and nervousness	F M	3 2.5	4.79 (0)
	10. Coping with depression	F M	1.87 1.65	1.988 (0.048)
	12. Meeting people to date	F M	1.91 2.21	-2.609 (0.009)
	13. Overcoming shyness	F M	2.29 2.05	2.163 (0.031)
	15. Discomfort in social situations	F M	2.1 1.84	2.479 (0.014)
	16. Recurrent headaches or stomach aches	F M	1.92 1.43	4.788 (0)
	18. Roles and expectations of men and women	F M	1.76 1.49	2.92 (0.004)
	20. Controlling weight	F M	2.36 1.76	5.252 (0)
	21. Adjustment to campus	F M	1.83 1.6	2.422 (0.016)
	22. Insomnia	F M	1.74 1.5	2.218 (0.027)
	24. Problems with parents/family	F M	1.86 1.56	2.773 (0.006)
	31. Controlling over the use of drugs	F M	1.12 1.23	-2.118 (0.035)
	33. Peer pressure to drink to excess	F M	1.13 1.24	-2.06 (0.04)
	34. Peer pressure to use drugs	F M	1.05 1.19	-3.043 (0.003)
Career Needs ($t = 3.172$, $p = 0.002$)	35. Job search strategies	F M	2.76 2.43	3.145 (0.002)
	37. Understanding career interests, abilities	F M	2.53 2.22	2.992 (0.003)
	38. Concern about career choice	F M	2.39 2.16	2.227 (0.027)
Learning Needs ($t = 4.048$, $p = 0$)	40. Learning test taking strategies	F M	2.67 2.31	3.228 (0.001)
	41. Time management skills	F M	2.93 2.71	2.117 (0.035)
	42. Test anxiety	F M	2.83 2.12	6.479 (0)
	43. Math's anxiety	F M	2.13 1.81	2.448 (0.015)

Inferential results of the assessment of Personal, Career and Learning Needs: differences according to academic information

There were statistically significant differences according to academic average (asked on the sociodemographic questionnaire with the question: please indicate your academic average at this moment of your academic trajectory) in several items from the subscales of the Personal, Career and Learning Needs (participants' results ranged from 10 to 20 points). Considering the Personal Needs subscale, significant differences were identified between students with an academic average equal or inferior to 14 points and students with an academic average superior to 14 points in three items - item 5: $\leq 14_{mean} = 2.44$; $> 14_{mean} = 2.22$; $t = 2.037$, $p = 0.042$; item 12: $\leq 14_{mean} = 1.91$; $> 14_{mean} = 2.15$; $t = -2.167$, $p = 0.031$; and item 21 ($\leq 14_{mean} = 1.85$; $> 14_{mean} = 1.62$; $t = 2.611$, $p = 0.009$). Students in the higher academic average category had significantly higher results for items 5 and 21. Considering the Career Needs subscale, only one significant difference was identified (item 37) among students according to their academic average, with students in the higher academic average category having significantly higher results ($\leq 14_{mean} = 2.53$; $> 14_{mean} = 2.37$; $t = 2.673$, $p = 0.008$). Considering the Learning Needs subscale, significant differences among students were identified in five items. Students in the higher academic average category had significantly higher results for all items – 39 ($\leq 14_{mean} = 2.9$; $> 14_{mean} = 2.58$; $t = 3.097$, $p = 0.002$), 40 ($\leq 14_{mean} = 2.67$; $> 14_{mean} = 2.35$; $t = 2.972$, $p = 0.003$), 41 ($\leq 14_{mean} = 2.97$; $> 14_{mean} = 2.67$; $t = 3.003$, $p = 0.003$), 42 ($\leq 14_{mean} = 2.71$; $> 14_{mean} = 2.42$; $t = 2.733$, $p = 0.007$), and 44 ($\leq 14_{mean} = 2.02$; $> 14_{mean} = 1.72$; $t = 2.818$, $p = 0.005$).

Table 3 presents the items from the subscales Personal, Career and Learning Needs, in which statistically significant differences were identified according to satisfaction with the academic path. Considering the Personal Needs subscale, differences among students were identified in 11 items, according to their satisfaction. In items 3 and 20 the differences were significant between students who were "very dissatisfied" and "dissatisfied". In items 4, 10, 11, 16, 19, 21, 22, and 28, the differences occurred between students who were "very satisfied" and "dissatisfied". In addition, in items 4 and 5 the differences occurred between students were "very satisfied" and "satisfied". Considering the Career Needs subscale, there were identified differences among students were identified in two items, according to their satisfaction: in item 36 the difference occurred between students who were "very satisfied" and "satisfied"; and, in item 37 between students who were "very satisfied" and "dissatisfied", and students who were "very satisfied" and "satisfied". Considering the Learning Needs subscale, differences among students were identified in four items according to their satisfaction. In items 39 and 42, the differences were between students who were

"very satisfied" and "dissatisfied". In items 39, 40, 41 and 42, the differences occurred between students who were "very satisfied" and "satisfied". And, finally, in item 43, the post hoc Scheffé test was unable to identify the groups of students between which there were statistically significant differences.

Table 3
Assessment of Personal, Career and Learning Needs subscales: differences according to satisfaction with the academic path

Subscales	Items	Satisfaction	Mean	F (p)
Personal Needs (F = 5.503; p = 0.001)	3. Increasing self-confidence	Very dissatisfied	2.13	3.426 (0.017)
		Dissatisfied	2.94	
		Satisfied	2.68	
		Very satisfied	2.42	
	4. Increasing motivation	Very dissatisfied	2.25	11.067 (0)
		Dissatisfied	3.06	
		Satisfied	2.75	
		Very satisfied	2.19	
	5. Eliminating self-defeating behaviors	Very dissatisfied	2.25	4.125 (0.007)
		Dissatisfied	2.71	
		Satisfied	2.43	
		Very satisfied	2.05	
	10. Coping with depression	Very dissatisfied	1.75	4.038 (0.008)
		Dissatisfied	2.16	
		Satisfied	1.85	
		Very satisfied	1.53	
	11. Finding greater purpose in life	Very dissatisfied	2.75	4.655 (0.003)
		Dissatisfied	2.55	
		Satisfied	2.25	
		Very satisfied	1.91	
	16. Recurrent headaches or stomach aches	Very dissatisfied	1.5	3.492 (0.016)
		Dissatisfied	2.26	
		Satisfied	1.78	
		Very satisfied	1.67	
	19. Problems with controlling temper	Very dissatisfied	1.88	4.260 (0.006)
		Dissatisfied	2.32	
		Satisfied	1.97	
		Very satisfied	1.67	
	20. Controlling weight	Very dissatisfied	1.38	4.292 (0.005)
		Dissatisfied	2.58	
		Satisfied	2.24	
		Very satisfied	2	
	21. Adjustment to campus	Very dissatisfied	1.75	4.508 (0.004)
		Dissatisfied	2.19	
		Satisfied	1.78	
		Very satisfied	1.56	
	22. Insomnia	Very dissatisfied	2	4.115 (0.007)
		Dissatisfied	1.97	
		Satisfied	1.71	
		Very satisfied	1.4	
	28. Conflicts over values and morals	Very dissatisfied	2.25	5.920 (0.001)
		Dissatisfied	2.03	
		Satisfied	1.64	
		Very satisfied	1.45	
Career Needs (F = 3.427; p = 0.017)	36. Selection of a major subject	Very dissatisfied	3	3.942 (0.009)
		Dissatisfied	2.71	
		Satisfied	2.55	
		Very satisfied	2.19	
	37. Understanding career interests, abilities	Very dissatisfied	2.38	4.673 (0.003)
		Dissatisfied	2.74	
		Satisfied	2.5	
		Very satisfied	2.14	
Learning needs (F = 6.334; p = 0)	39. Improving study skills	Very dissatisfied	2.5	3.998 (0.008)
		Dissatisfied	3.06	
		Satisfied	2.85	
		Very satisfied	2.51	
	40. Learning test taking strategies	Very dissatisfied	3	4.034 (0.008)
		Dissatisfied	2.74	
		Satisfied	2.63	
		Very satisfied	2.26	
	41. Time management skills	Very dissatisfied	2.75	3.915 (0.009)
		Dissatisfied	3.1	
		Satisfied	2.93	
		Very satisfied	2.58	
	42. Test anxiety	Very dissatisfied	3.25	4.393 (0.001)
		Dissatisfied	2.9	
		Satisfied	2.69	
		Very satisfied	2.28	
	43. Math's anxiety	Very dissatisfied	2.75	2.856 (0.037)
		Dissatisfied	2.26	
		Satisfied	2.07	
		Very satisfied	1.78	

There were statistically significant differences according to satisfaction with the academic involvement in the items from the Personal Needs subscale. Differences among students were identified in four items according to their satisfaction. In items 16, 22 and 34, the differences occurred between students who were "very dissatisfied" and "satisfied". Also, in item 34, the differences occurred between students who were "very dissatisfied" and "dissatisfied", and between students who were "very dissatisfied" and "very satisfied". In item 5, the post hoc Scheffé test was unable to identify the groups of students between which there were statistically significant differences.

Inferential results of the assessment of Personal, Career and Learning Needs: differences according to present living conditions

According to family contact, only one difference was identified, in item 2, from the Personal Needs subscale, between students according to their family contact ($F(3,374) = 3.295$, $p = 0.021$), the difference occurring between students who have contact "once a week" and "daily" and students who have contact "twice a week".

Table 4 presents the items from the Personal, Career and Learning Needs subscales, with statistically significant differences according to satisfaction with present living conditions. Considering the Personal Needs subscale, differences among students were identified in 18 items according to their satisfaction. In items 5, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 21, 24, 25 and 29, the differences occurred between students who were "very satisfied" and "dissatisfied"; in items 3, 4, 8, 10, and 21, the differences occurred between students who were "very dissatisfied" and "dissatisfied"; in items 10, 22 and 25, the differences occurred between students who were "satisfied" and "dissatisfied"; and, in items 11, 12 and 23 the differences occurred between students who were "very satisfied" and "satisfied". In item 6 and item 32 the post hoc Scheffé test was unable to identify the groups of students between which there were statistically significant differences. Considering the Career Needs subscale, differences between students were identified in three items according to their satisfaction: in item 36, 37 and 38 the differences occurred between students who were "very satisfied" and "dissatisfied". Considering the Learning Needs subscale, differences among students were identified in five items according to their satisfaction. In items 39, 40, 41, 42 and 43, the difference occurred between students who were "very satisfied" and "dissatisfied"; also, in item 42 the difference occurred between students who were "satisfied" and "dissatisfied".

Table 4

Assessment of Personal, Career and Learning Needs subscales: differences according to present living conditions

Subscales	Items	Satisfaction	Mean	$F(p)$
Personal Needs ($F = 10.89$, $p = 0$)	3. Increasing self-confidence	Very dissatisfied	1.6	3.140 (0.002)
		Dissatisfied	2.88	
		Satisfied	2.72	
		Very satisfied	2.42	
	4. Increasing motivation	Very dissatisfied	2.2	4.535 (0.004)
		Dissatisfied	2.93	
		Satisfied	2.73	
		Very satisfied	2.4	
	5. Eliminating self-defeating behaviors	Very dissatisfied	2	4.957 (0.002)
		Dissatisfied	2.93	
		Satisfied	2.4	
		Very satisfied	2.35	
	6. Becoming more assertive	Very dissatisfied	1.8	2.951 (0.033)
		Dissatisfied	2.48	
		Satisfied	2.42	
		Very satisfied	2.16	
	8. Controlling anxiety and nervousness	Very dissatisfied	2	3.610 (0.014)
		Dissatisfied	3.28	
		Satisfied	2.85	
		Very satisfied	2.81	
	10. Coping with depression	Very dissatisfied	1.2	8.831 (0)
		Dissatisfied	2.55	
		Satisfied	1.84	
		Very satisfied	1.55	
	11. Finding greater purpose in life	Very dissatisfied	1.8	8.433 (0)
		Dissatisfied	2.72	
		Satisfied	2.32	
		Very satisfied	1.83	
	12. Meeting people to date	Very dissatisfied	2	3.213 (0.023)
		Dissatisfied	1.9	
		Satisfied	2.11	
		Very satisfied	1.74	
	14. Coping with loneliness	Very dissatisfied	1.4	3.060 (0.034)
		Dissatisfied	2.14	
		Satisfied	1.78	
		Very satisfied	1.58	
	15. Discomfort in social situations	Very dissatisfied	1.4	3.274 (0.021)
		Dissatisfied	2.45	
		Satisfied	2.02	
		Very satisfied	1.95	
	18. Roles and expectations of men and women	Very dissatisfied	2	5.618 (0.001)
		Dissatisfied	2.1	
		Satisfied	1.72	
		Very satisfied	1.53	
	21. Adjustment to campus	Very dissatisfied	2	5.380 (0.001)
		Dissatisfied	2.23	
		Satisfied	1.79	
		Very satisfied	1.63	
	22. Insomnia	Very dissatisfied	1.8	5.595 (0.001)
		Dissatisfied	2.24	
		Satisfied	1.68	
		Very satisfied	1.48	
	23. Concerns about sexual functioning	Very dissatisfied	1.2	3.109 (0.028)
		Dissatisfied	1.68	
		Satisfied	1.53	
		Very satisfied	1.3	
	24. Problems with parents/family	Very dissatisfied	1.2	5.566 (0.001)
		Dissatisfied	2.28	
		Satisfied	1.82	
		Very satisfied	1.58	
	25. Coping with prejudice	Very dissatisfied	1	5.382 (0.002)
		Dissatisfied	1.97	
		Satisfied	1.53	
		Very satisfied	1.41	
	29. Suicidal feelings	Very dissatisfied	1	4.249 (0.006)
		Dissatisfied	1.41	
		Satisfied	1.24	
		Very satisfied	1.06	
	32. Controlling about sexual identity	Very dissatisfied	1	2.734 (0.043)
		Dissatisfied	1.28	
		Satisfied	1.19	
		Very satisfied	1.05	
Career Needs ($F = 1.231$, $p = 0.002$)	36. Selection of a major subject	Very dissatisfied	2.6	4.541 (0.004)
		Dissatisfied	2.07	
		Satisfied	2.54	
		Very satisfied	2.25	
	37. Understanding career interests, abilities	Very dissatisfied	2	3.996 (0.008)
		Dissatisfied	2.88	
		Satisfied	2.48	
		Very satisfied	2.25	
	38. Concern about career choice	Very dissatisfied	2.4	4.293 (0.005)
		Dissatisfied	2.79	
		Satisfied	2.36	
		Very satisfied	2.32	
Learning Needs ($F = 4.824$, $p = 0$)	39. Improving study skills	Very dissatisfied	2.4	3.012 (0.015)
		Dissatisfied	3.14	
		Satisfied	2.84	
		Very satisfied	2.59	
	40. Learning test taking strategies	Very dissatisfied	2.6	3.069 (0.05)
		Dissatisfied	3.03	
		Satisfied	2.57	
		Very satisfied	2.43	
	41. Time management skills	Very dissatisfied	3.2	4.893 (0.002)
		Dissatisfied	3.31	
		Satisfied	2.9	
		Very satisfied	2.64	
	42. Test anxiety	Very dissatisfied	2.8	5.049 (0.002)
		Dissatisfied	3.21	
		Satisfied	2.66	
		Very satisfied	2.43	
	43. Math's anxiety	Very dissatisfied	2.6	3.806 (0.01)
		Dissatisfied	2.48	
		Satisfied	2.08	
		Very satisfied	1.78	

The effects of personal, academic and living condition variables on students' personal, career and learning needs

A linear regression analysis was carried out in order to ascertain the extent to which participants' Personal, Career and Learning Needs could be predicted by a set of sociodemographic variables. The choice of the variables that entered the regression analysis was based on the previous inferential results. Important predictors of the Personal Needs were participants' sex ($t = -3.538$, $p = 0.00$), students' satisfaction with academic path ($t = -2$, $p = 0.046$), and students' satisfaction with living conditions ($t = -2.411$, $p = 0.016$), explaining a total of 7.0% of the variance. Important predictors of the Career Needs were participants' sex ($t = -3.089$, $p = 0.002$) and students' satisfaction with living conditions ($t = -2.338$,

$p = 0.02$), explaining a total of 5% of the variance. Important predictors of the Learning Needs were participants' sex ($t = -3.93$, $p = 0.00$), academic average ($t = -3.581$, $p = 0.00$), students' satisfaction with their academic path ($t = -2.152$, $p = 0.032$) and students' satisfaction with living conditions ($t = -2.682$, $p = 0.008$), explaining a total of 12.2% of the variance. Table 5 shows the results of the regression analysis.

Table 5

Prediction of personal, career, and learning needs according to personal, academic and living conditions variables: linear regression analysis

Factor variables	Predictor variables	R^2 (R^2adj)	$F(7.359)$	β	$t(p)$
Personal Needs	Sex	0.095 (0.07)	5.573 (0)	-5.473	-3.538 (0)
	Family contact			1.541	1.454 (0.147)
	Academic average			0.073	0.159 (0.873)
	Satisfaction with academic path			-2.572	-2 (0.046)
	Satisfaction with academic involvement			-0.62	-0.695 (0.487)
	Satisfaction with living conditions			-2.958	-2.411 (0.016)
Career Needs	Sex	0.066 (0.05)	4.214 (0)	-1.026	-3.089 (0.002)
	Family contact			-0.037	-0.163 (0.87)
	Academic average			-0.042	-0.426 (0.67)
	Satisfaction with academic path			-0.413	-1.494 (0.136)
	Satisfaction with academic involvement			-0.171	-0.892 (0.373)
	Satisfaction with living conditions			-0.616	-2.338 (0.02)
Learning Needs	Sex	0.136 (0.122)	9.47 (0)	-1.762	-3.93 (0)
	Family contact			0.017	0.057 (0.955)
	Academic average			-0.473	-3.581 (0)
	Satisfaction with academic path			-0.802	-2.152 (0.032)
	Satisfaction with academic involvement			-0.024	-0.091 (0.928)
	Satisfaction with living conditions			-0.954	-2.682 (0.008)

Descriptive and inferential results about the psychological counseling

Participants indicated their preferred means of counseling assistance and also if they had already obtained any kind of assistance for their needs. Individual counseling was indicated as the preferred type of counseling with a total of 65.3% of the respondents. Workshops were referred to as the second most prevalent type of preferred assistance. It is noteworthy that ten participants (2.7%) recorded that they would not like to receive any kind of psychological counseling for their Personal, Career and/or Learning Needs. Again, individual counseling was indicated as the most obtained type of counseling with 28% of the respondents. Workshops were the second most prevalent type of assistance obtained. It is noteworthy that 203 participants (54.1%) recorded they had never received any kind of psychological counseling for their needs.

Simple correlations were developed between Personal, Career and Learning Needs and the preferred and obtained types of psychological counseling. No statistically

significant correlations were found between the type of needs and the preferred type of psychological counseling, but statistically significant correlations were found between Personal ($r = 0.132$, $p = 0.010$), Career ($r = 0.136$, $p = 0.008$) and Learning Needs ($r = 0.125$, $p = 0.019$) and Workshops as the prevalent type of assistance obtained.

Discussion

This study aimed to identify and prioritize current counseling needs of college students enrolled in Portuguese higher education, from their own perspective, as well as to identify the types of preferred and previously obtained counseling in response to their needs.

Descriptive results indicate that, in general, students express reduced needs and concerns, emphasizing those related to motivation, procrastination, anxiety, decision making in academic and/or professional domains, and study and time management skills. These results are consistent with previous studies in which needs for self-awareness, motivation, procrastination, anxiety and depression, self-defeating behaviors, definition and planning of life goals, time management skills, study skills, financial situation and family matters were found (Biasi et al., 2015; Gallagher et al., 1992; Giovazolias et al., 2010; Güneri et al., 2003; Nicholas, 1995; Ning, 2010; Pinto & Martins, 2017; Robinson et al., 2016). Hence, it appears that, although there are no universal needs, there exists a pattern in which, despite the use of different needs assessment questionnaires, the results obtained with higher education students of different nationalities tend to point in the same direction. Most studies in this area also indicate a much higher level of psychological intervention needs compared to what was identified in this group of Portuguese students, as well as the fact that support needs in vocational and academic areas outweigh the needs for support in personal/social areas, the first often serving to conceal the second (e.g., Nicholas, 1995). It is unclear why this sample of Portuguese students has

such low levels of psychological support needs compared to other countries (Giovazolias et al., 2010; Güneriet et al., 2003; Kenny et al., 2009; Nicholas, 1995, 2002), given that Portugal is a country with a high prevalence of mental illness, namely anxiety and depression (Pinto, Martins, Pinheiro, & Oliveira, 2015).

Analyses of differences in Personal, Career and Learning needs were performed, according to personal and academic variables, as well as current living conditions. Regarding sex, the results are lower to males. Exceptions are items related to meeting people to date, substance use and peer pressure to consume alcohol and/or drugs. In similar studies (e.g., Aluede et al., 2006; Gallagher et al., 1992; Güneri et al., 2003; Norris, 2008), differences were found in personal, emotional, family, career, moral and self-control variables, and the male students had higher average levels of concern than female students only on issues related to life goals and career, discomfort in social situations, and anxiety about AIDS. We consider that these results show a greater propensity of women to recognize their support needs at different levels, not meaning, however, that they necessarily have more needs. Some authors hypothesize that women are not subject to so many requirements in terms of control, independence and self-reliance in problem solving (e.g., Güneri et al, 2003). In this sense, it becomes easier to recognize their needs.

Regarding the academic average, students with lower academic results show higher levels of concern and support needs in areas associated with eliminating self-defeating behaviors, adjustment to campus, test anxiety, and improving study skills and time management skills. In the study developed by Pinto and collaborators (in press), students with lower academic results had higher concerns about motivation, procrastination, anxiety, shyness, loneliness, selection of major subjects, improving study skills and time management skills. Also in the study by Güneri et al. (2003) students with poor academic results had more concerns about academic, financial, family, and university education factors. It is important to note that

there are few studies that establish a relationship between academic average and the degree/type of counseling needs. It is known, however, that academic performance can affect the self-concept, and that the access to higher education is guided by a number of challenges that, when not well managed by students, can trigger the first experiences of academic failure (Santiago, Tavares, Taveira, Lencastre, & Gonçalves, 2001).

Regarding the differences in satisfaction with the current academic path, people "unsatisfied" and "satisfied" generally have more support needs related to self-concept, motivation and well-being, life planning and decision making, and the development of learning, study and time management skills. Regarding the differences in terms of satisfaction with academic involvement, there are differences only in terms of Personal Needs, which indicate that people "very unsatisfied" usually have more support needs, in terms of recurrent headaches or stomach aches, insomnia and peer pressure to use drugs. These results are consistent with the study by Giovazolias et al. (2010) in which students less involved in academic and social activities, and consequently more unsatisfied with these two parameters, experienced more consequences in terms of the development of physical and mental health problems. These results may be explained through a socio-cognitive perspective, according to which there is a crucial role that variables such as self-efficacy beliefs, the perception of support and positive affect play as factors responsible for adaptation, success and well-being in academic contexts (e.g., Lent & Brown, 2008; Singley, Lent, & Sheu, 2010).

According to the contact with the family, results indicate that a large proportion of participants are living with parents/family, or have a fairly regular contact with them. Differences were found between students who have a more regular contact, compared with those who have less contact, as regards the item "public speaking anxiety". Also in the studies by Giovazolias and colleagues (2010) and Pinto et al. (*in press*), a significant majority of students maintained regular contact with their families, in person or by phone. However, in the study by Pinto et al. (in press), the authors found that, the more regular the contact, the greater the Career Needs. These results can be explained by the pressures that parents, and the family in general, have on young adults regarding their academic achievement and career choices. Several studies in Portugal have documented evidence of the presence of parental influence on young people's vocational choices, from an early age to adulthood (e.g., Araújo et al., 2012; Pinto, Viamonte, Taveira, & Faria, 2013). According to previous studies, students in a situation of family separation might be expected to present higher levels of concern with, for example, finances, home management, homesickness and loneliness (e.g., Arthur, 1997; Brinson & Kottler, 1995). It should be noted, however, that inconsistencies in these results require the deepening of this relationship.

The predictive effect of those sociodemographic variables in the Personal, Career and Learning needs was weighed through a regression analysis. It was found that the Personal Needs can be predicted at 7% by sex, satisfaction with academic life and satisfaction with current living conditions; the Career Needs can be predicted at 5% by sex and satisfaction with current conditions; and Learning Needs can be predicted at 12.2% by sex, academic average, satisfaction with academic life and satisfaction with current living conditions. For example, in the study by Giovazolias et al. (2010) the authors found that sex, satisfaction with living conditions, frequency of communication with parents and physical and mental health contributed by 44% to predict students' problems. This shows that, despite some variables in common with the study by Giovalizolias et al. (2010), the model of this study has a weak predictive power for this Portuguese sample, indicating that other important variables might have been excluded (e.g., self-concept, self-efficacy beliefs, personality traits, environmental support and resources, perception of obstacles; Lent, 2004) that can better predict the counseling needs of higher education students.

Finally, descriptive statistics are presented on the types of previously obtained and preferred psychological counseling, and the relationship is explored between the existence of Personal, Career, and Learning Needs and the preferred and obtained psychological counseling types. Students clearly demonstrate a preference for individual counseling or workshops, and this was also the most received modality to meet their needs, which is consistent with other studies (Giovazolias et al., 2010; Pinto & Martins, 2007et al., in press). For example, in the study by Giovazolias and colleagues (2010), one-third of the participants would like to receive individual counseling, one-third group counseling, and three quarters would like to receive support in the form of a workshop. It should be noted, however, that a high percentage of students indicate that they do not want any kind of support. In the study by Giovazolias and colleagues (2010), 75.2% of students indicated a preference for solving problems by themselves. No statistically significant correlations were found between the type of needs and the preferred type of psychological counseling. But statistically significant correlations were found between Personal, Career and Learning Needs and Workshops as the prevalent obtained type of assistance. In this case, it seems that, on the one hand, students intend to get a kind of individualized support, which puts the psychology professional in direct contact with them, exercising greater control and personal influence; on the other hand, they also want to obtain a kind of less personalized and targeted support (also more anonymous and less stigmatized), aimed at the acquisition and development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and forms of behavior, whose synthesis and integration enable personal and professional development (Nicholas, 2002).

Conclusion

Psychological counseling services should integrate higher education institutions, supporting them in the process of personal, academic, professional, social and moral development of students (Dias, 2006). Accordingly, several ideas can be drawn from this study. First, studies conducted in this area have concluded about an increase in psychological intervention needs in higher education (e.g., Gallagher & Gill, 2004). Given the multitude of identified counseling needs, however, the issue of prioritization is of crucial relevance. It is important that the university counseling services recognize their inability to respond effectively to all counseling needs. Therefore, they should critically reflect on the information collected, in order to identify the priority needs that should be addressed specifically by their intervention programs (Kaufman, 1997 cit. in Rojo et al., 2002). Second, it is important to state that different students have different characteristics and backgrounds, and consequently have different support needs (e.g., Aluede et al., 2006 Güneri et al., 2003). This reinforces the rejection of the belief, often existing in this type of counseling, that "one size fits all". All students, in their specificity, deserve special attention in terms of the counseling services provided (Güneri et al., 2003). Third, it is also important to consider the preferences of students for different types of intervention to meet their needs. In this sense, the university counseling services should critically reflect on the preferences of the target audience, the expertise of the professionals in each type of counseling, and also what the literature indicates to be the more effective to address the need. The provision of a counseling service does not ensure, by itself, its use by the target audience (Giovazolias et al., 2010). And fourth, it is imperative to ensure that professionals working at university counseling services have a high-quality theoretical and practical training. This will favor the acquisition, training and development of a diverse range of skills and expertise, to assure a professional performance of excellence (Ning, 2010; Pinto, 2012). This also includes the importance of collaboration of these counseling services with other academic and administrative departments of the university, as well as student associations

(e.g., Güneri et al., 2003), in order to promote the students' confidence in the services provided.

In conclusion, although this study provides preliminary results and circumscribed to a specific and limited sample, it is important to strengthen the idea about the need to develop interventions targeted at specific clients, which consider their specific characteristics and needs, and which resort to methods and strategies that are also specific to the target populations. This seems to be the only way to ensure the success and effectiveness of the university counseling services.

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Notes

*   Research article.