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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Impact of a self-control promotion program on nursing students<sup>☆</sup>

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### KEYWORDS

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Promotion;  
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### PALABRAS CLAVE

Salud mental positiva;  
Promoción;  
Estudiantes de enfermería

### Abstract

**Objective:** To describe the characteristics of positive mental health in nursing students, and to determine the impact of a self-control promotion program.

**Method:** A quasi-experimental controlled trial including 72 second-year of Vitoria-Gasteiz University Nursing School.

**Results:** The lowest scores in every measurement were for the self-control factor (F3). There were no statistically significant differences in self-control (F3) between the groups.

**Conclusion:** This program shows higher scores in inter-personal relationship skills.

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### Impacto de un programa de promoción del autocontrol en estudiantes de enfermería

#### Resumen

**Objetivo:** Describir las características de salud mental positiva en estudiantes de enfermería y determinar el impacto de un programa de promoción del autocontrol.

**Método:** Estudio cuasiexperimental controlado. En este programa participaron 72 estudiantes de segundo curso de la Escuela Universitaria de Enfermería de Vitoria-Gasteiz.

**Resultados:** En el factor autocontrol (F3) se obtuvieron las puntuaciones más bajas en cada una de las determinaciones. No se observaron diferencias estadísticamente significativas entre los grupos respecto al factor autocontrol (F3).

**Conclusión:** Este programa supone una mejora en el factor de habilidades de relación interpersonal.

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## What is known?

Positive mental health is defined as “autonomy which enables individuals to identify, confront and resolve problems” and is encapsulated within the area of mental health promotion, considered by several authors as the “new state health” because of its nascent nature. Bodies such as the Pan American Health Organisation or the World Health Organisation, which define mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community”, reflect the need to approach mental health from promotion, aimed at reducing the rates of prevalence of mental disorders.

On a national level, the data published in the ESEMeD-España study reveal that mental disorders in general are more prevalent in the population aged 18–24 years of age (10.1%), with there being a prevalence of anxiety disorders of 7.8% in this age group which is much higher than in the remainder of the population. The reason appears to stem from the important life changes of this adult stage and new demands. Furthermore, the results also reflect that the more years spent in formal education, the lower the prevalence of mental disorders.

## What does this paper contribute?

The process of adapting to university is no easy task and many variables come into play such as age, lack of orientation regarding one’s chosen degree, employment prospects, academic performance or social difficulties. This may lead to withdrawal from the education system or insufficient preparation of the student as a future professional, which may have negative repercussions on their state of mental health.

More specifically, self-control is essential for appropriate emotional stability, better levels of stress management and appropriate experiencing and expression of both positive and negative emotions. Furthermore, it involves a higher ability to delay gratification and achieve objectives which require continuous work, such as university studies.

A program for the promotion of positive mental health in university students which focuses on fostering self-control would inspire positive qualities, instigate maximum potential development and heighten quality of life and positive mental health.

## Introduction

The concept of positive mental health arises from the need to understand mental health as something other than the mere absence of illness. It was initially described by Jahoda

and subsequently recaptured by Lluch who defined it as “autonomy which enables individuals to identify, confront and resolve problems” falling within a positive viewpoint, and focusing on well-being and quality of life. This focus matches the aim of numerous bodies and institutions in their approach to mental health, its promotion and the prevention of mental disorders.<sup>1,2</sup>

On a national level mental disorders in general are more prevalent in the population aged 18 to 24 (10.1%) years, with there being a prevalence of anxiety disorders in 7.8% in this age group. The reason for this may be due to major life changes at this adult stage and new demands, such as disorientation regarding one’s chosen degree, employment prospects or academic performance.<sup>3</sup>

Many authors suggest that the development of promotion program leads to benefits such as better adaptation of university life, better academic performance and more effective management of stressful factors.<sup>4,6–14</sup> Lluch proposes a model founded on six interrelated factors and markers of mental health. Thus, the positive mental health program of Lluch is defined by factors of personal satisfaction, prosocial attitude, autonomy, self-control, problem-solving and self-actualisation and interpersonal relationship skills. Specifically, the self-control factor is essential for an appropriate emotional balance and implies a greater capacity to achieve objectives which require continuous labour, which would be the case of a nursing degree.<sup>2–5,14</sup>

University students have a tendency for poorer scores in self-control.<sup>4,6–8,14</sup> A descriptive study in Lluch’s positive mental health questionnaire was applied (1999) on psychology students and revealed a mean score of 2.92 out of 4 in self-control, which is very much below the other positive mental health factors where the mean was over 3.34.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in another descriptive study the poorest percentage was self-control (only 47% of the sample presented high levels whilst for the other factors this was over 60%).<sup>4</sup> Once again another study of similar characteristics revealed that only 3% of the university students presented with high levels of self-control, whilst personal satisfaction reaches 71%.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in a national study which evaluates the effectiveness of a program of empowerment in nursing students by applying Lluch’s (1999) positive mental health questionnaire, it was observed that the lowest baseline levels corresponded to self-control, with a mean score of 13.3 out of a maximum of 20 points.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the magnitude of the problem and the suggested lines of research, the promotion of positive mental health has not yet led to intervention program at university. There is therefore a need to design and implement a program for the promotion of positive mental health in university students.

The aim of this study was to describe the characteristics of positive mental health of university students in their 2nd year at the University Nursing School of Vitoria-Gasteiz and to determine the impact of a promotion program of positive mental health focused on self-control in university students through Lluch positive mental health questionnaire.

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