

Psychological distress and economic consumerism among emerging adults in Mexico

Malestar psicológico y consumismo económico en adulto emergentes de México

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SUMMARY

Introduction: *The emerging adult has a high prevalence to psychological distress as this encompasses clinical manifestations of anxiety and depression disorders. They are also more prone to economic consumerism, which involves social and psychological issues.*

Purpose: *To determine to what extent the level of psychological distress is related to the level of consumerism in emerging adults in Salamanca Guanajuato, in order to find a possible new risk factor in the mental health of this population, to generate new lines of action.*

Method: *The participants of this study were 190 emerging adults from the municipality of Salamanca,*

Guanajuato, Mexico, three instruments were applied, Kessler Scale (K10): reliability and validity, $\alpha=0.90$. The Consumption Habits and Behavior Scale: reliability and validity, 0.87 and the Impulsivity in Purchasing Scale: reliability and validity, 0.83. The design was non-experimental, cross-sectional with correlational scope, and Pearson's statistical test was used.

Results: *A relationship was found with the level of consumerism and psychological distress ($p=0.032$). Likewise, a relationship was found between anxiety and impulsivity in shopping ($p=0.002$).*

Conclusions: *It suggests new prevention proposals in mental health for emerging adults who present psychological distress and new lines of research in mental health and economic consumerism are proposed.*

Keywords: *Psychological distress, consumerism, emerging adult, depression, anxiety, Mexico.*

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RESUMEN

Introducción: *El adulto emergente tiene una alta prevalencia al malestar psicológico ya que este abarca manifestaciones clínicas de los trastornos ansiedad y depresión. Así como también es más propenso al consumismo económico, el cual implica cuestiones sociales y psicológicas.*

Objetivo: *Determinar en qué medida se relaciona el nivel de malestar psicológico con el nivel de consumismo en adultos emergentes de Salamanca Guanajuato, con el fin de encontrar un posible nuevo factor de riesgo en la salud mental de esta población, para generar nuevas líneas de acción.*

Método: *Los participantes de este estudio fueron 190 adultos emergentes del municipio de Salamanca, Guanajuato, México, se aplicaron tres instrumentos, Escala Kessler (K10): fiabilidad y validez, $\alpha=0,90$. La Escala de Hábitos y Conductas de Consumo: fiabilidad y validez, 0,87 y la Escala de Impulsividad en la Compra: fiabilidad y validez, 0,83. El diseño fue no experimental, transversal de alcance correlacional, se utilizó la prueba estadística de Pearson.*

Resultados: *Se encontró una relación con el nivel de consumismo y malestar psicológico ($P=0.032$). Asimismo se encontró una relación entre la ansiedad y la impulsividad en las compras ($P=0.002$).*

Conclusiones: *Se sugieren nuevas propuestas de prevención en la salud mental para los adultos emergentes que presentan malestar psicológico y se proponen nuevas líneas de investigación en la salud mental y el consumismo económico.*

Palabras clave: *Malestar psicológico, consumismo, adulto emergente, depresión, ansiedad, México.*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, the mental health of society has been significantly affected, since according to the World Health Organization (WHO) more than 300 million people in the world suffer from depression and more than 260 million have anxiety disorders (1). Depressive disorder is the most frequent and one of the main causes of disability worldwide (2), in addition to its impact on mental and physical health, it also affects family, social and work performance (3). Mosqueda-Díaz et al. (4) argue that psychological distress is one of the most frequent mental health problems worldwide. Psychological distress encompasses different clinical manifestations related to mental disorders such as depression and anxiety (5). Because of this, it is estimated that psychosocial and mental health support needs will have increased greatly in recent years (6).

In Mexico, according to the National Mental Health Survey, 18 % of the urban population of productive age (15-64 years of age) suffers from some mood disorder such as anxiety, depression or phobia (9) and only one in five of these people receives treatment, and the time it takes to receive this care in a health center ranges from 4 to 20 years depending on the type of condition (10).

During the pandemic in 2020 in the state of Guanajuato, 23 833 Guanajuato's with different mental disorders have been treated in the mental health system, reaching a figure of 190 503 psychological and psychiatric care in 2021, where the state health secretary reported that 42 % of these were for anxiety and 19 % for depression (11,12).

Research in the field of mental health has focused its attention on university students since several studies have shown that depression and anxiety disorders are more prevalent in them than in other populations (7). Barrera-Herrera et al. (8) refer that college-age coincides with the emerging adulthood that goes from 18 to 29 years old, where the most characteristic is that young people of this age do not see themselves as adolescents and most of them do not feel that they have reached adulthood, also in a study by the same authors, it is found that they identify this stage as a period to build an identity as they reach greater independence and autonomy in the emotional and economic areas. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) analyzes that there are various risk factors to which emerging adults are exposed, such as socioeconomic problems at home, family relationships, violence, and excessive technology, and that some emerging adults are more vulnerable than others due to their living conditions and lack of access to health services (13). On the other hand, the WHO points out that mental health is related to the quality of life, a term that varies according to socioeconomic, cultural, geographical, and historical perspectives (14), while Herrera and Rivera, in their study, found a relationship between psychological distress and socioeconomic, family and academic factors (15). In addition, during the period of confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the quality of life of people whose finances were affected was adversely affected (16), thus, mental health is determined by environmental components and influences the individual's behavior (17).

In relation to socio-economic factors, today's society faces another phenomenon, namely consumerism, which involves psychosocial issues and is therefore studied as a problem with social and psychological manifestations that occur not only at the individual but also the collective level (18). Lara (19) indicates consumerism

as an artificial act that generates a problem in the population. Other authors analyze that the reasons for the need to consume have to do with an affective deficit that is caused precisely by this need to consume (20), the contemporary subject moves from image to image that he builds after searching and obtaining products (21). It is then that people with sufficient income to achieve their consumption goals will be able to achieve positive effects when buying, however, those who have economic limitations are likely to experience frustration, sadness, and even depression (22). Salas (23) mentions that consumption has an important psychological component and relates consumerism to status, which generates great anxiety in people since society is composed of a bond of acceptance. Thus, buying can produce an escape from anguish but at the same time developmental disorders (2). Moreover, different studies agree that emerging adults are more prone to consumerism because of their hedonistic culture, and this is rooted in the culture (25, 26) and this psycho-social phenomenon has to do with consumption for significance, which defines roles and generates behaviors in emerging adults (27). Thus, studies conducted in other countries have found a relationship between consumerism and mental health in emerging adults. However, in the Bajío region, there is no research on the relationship between these variables, so the present study will investigate whether consumerism has an impact on the mental health of emerging adults. The main objective of this research is to determine to what extent the level of psychological distress is related to the level of consumerism in emerging adults in Salamanca Guanajuato, through the evaluation of these two variables, to find a possible new risk factor in the mental health of this population, to generate new lines of action.

METHOD

The sample was non-random with a total of 190 participants, the inclusion criteria carried out were the following: to have an age range between 18 and 29 years, to be undergraduate, graduate, or post-graduate students, and to be residents of the municipality of Salamanca Guanajuato and

that their participation was voluntary. With a confidence level of 95 % and a margin of error of 7.1 % according to an estimate of the emerging adult population with these characteristics of the municipality of Salamanca, Guanajuato, México.

For data collection, three evaluation instruments were used: the Kessler K10 psychological distress scale instrument, whose objective is to measure the psychological distress of people, has a content validity and reliability of Cronbach's alpha 0.90, and the instrument has a number of 10 items and the type of response is a Likert scale (28). To measure consumerism, 2 instruments were used to measure 3 of the psychosocial factors that according to Torres Acosta et al. (29) determine consumerism, which are: purchase planning, impulsivity, and tendency to indebtedness. The first was the adapted version of the Consumer Habits and Behavior Scale, whose objective is to measure planning and purchasing behavior; it has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 and the instrument has a Likert-type response, with 19 items (30); however, in the present study only 11 items will be used to provide the number of items in each of the three dimensions it contains (consumer habits and planning, purchasing habits and indebtedness habits). The second instrument used was the Impulsive Buying Scale, with a Cronbach's alpha of .83, which is composed of 7 Likert-type items that fully evaluate impulsive buying (31).

Procedure

The administration of the instruments was carried out online through the Question-Pro application, where the links were shared through social networks. At the beginning of the survey, a brief explanation was given about what the research consisted of, who could participate, as well as the informed consent, and the confidentiality of the data. The instruments were disseminated for one week in October 2021.

Data analysis

A non-experimental cross-sectional design with a descriptive correlational scope was used. A frequency analysis, Pearson's bilateral

correlation, and Mann-Whitney U were used. The software used for statistical analysis was SPSS 25.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of the research are based on the Helsinki code (32) since the main interest of this research had to do with the contribution of discoveries to health science; likewise, respect for all participants was promoted, protecting their individual rights by protecting their anonymity and confidentiality of their data.

RESULTS

The sample of 190 participants corresponds to 50 % women and 50 % men. The age range is heterogeneous and goes from 18 to 29 years, with an average age of 23.9 years. 88.9 % are single and 91 % do not have children. On the other hand, 64.2 % work, and of the total number of participants, slightly more than half (56 %) have received psychological care at some time.

A relationship was found between the level of consumerism and psychological distress, i.e., as consumerism increases, psychological

Table 1
Sociodemographic data of the participants

Data		n	%	sd
Age	18-21	46	24.0	3.17
	22-25	80	42.0	
	26-29	64	34.0	
Sex	Woman	94	49.5	0.50
	Male	96	50.5	
Marital status	Single	169	88.9	0.31
	Married	21	11.1	
Do you have any children?	1	11	5.8	0.77
	2	6	3.2	
Education Level	Degree	91	47.9	1.0
	Postgraduate	13	6.8	
	Degree course	74	38.9	
	Postgraduate course	12	6.3	
Trabajo	Yes	122	64.2	0.48
	Not	68	35.8	
Financial income	De \$200 - \$479	28	14.7	1.5
	De \$480 - \$717	35	18.4	
	De \$718 - \$957	20	10.5	
	De \$958 or more	21	11.1	
Psychological care at some time	Yes	108	56.8	0.49
	Not	82	43.2	

distress increases, and vice versa. Participants who reported having a job showed a higher level of depression compared to those who did not. A correlation was found between impulsivity in shopping and anxiety, i.e. as anxiety increases, impulsivity in shopping increases and vice versa. Participants who reported not having children showed less planning of their consumption

compared to the group that reported having children. It was found that participants who reported rarely spending more than they should, have a higher level of psychological distress compared to those who reported always doing so. Finally, a significant correlation was found between the level of anxiety and the level of depression.

Table 2
Correlation between psychological distress and economic consumerism

	Pearson	P
Psychological distress	Economic consumerism 0.225*	0.032
	Spends more than it should 0.209**	0.004
Depression	Job 0.177*	0.015
	Anxiety 0.647**	0.0001
Anxiety	Impulsivity in purchases 0.226**	0.002
Planning purchasing habits	Number of Children -0.278**	0.0001

Regarding the variable psychological care, it was shown that there was no significant relationship between those participants who reported having ever had psychological care compared to those who had not had it in terms of their level of consumerism or psychological distress.

DISCUSSION

The research question of the present study is the following: To what extent is the level of psychological distress related to the level of consumerism in emerging adults in the municipality of Salamanca Guanajuato? Therefore, the research hypothesis, that the

level of psychological distress is related to the level of consumerism, is accepted, since it is evident that as the value of psychological distress increases, so does the value of consumerism ($r=0.270$, $p= 0.010$ a $p<0.01$), thus fulfilling the main and general objective of the study, which implies: To determine the relationship between the level of psychological distress and the level of consumerism in emerging adults in Salamanca Guanajuato, thorough evaluations of these two variables, to find a possible risk factor for consumerism in the mental health of this population.

The specific objective was to determine whether consumerism and psychological distress are related to ever seeking psychological care. This being so, this hypothesis is rejected, and the null hypothesis is accepted: There is no

relationship between people who have attended psychological care and the level of consumerism and psychological distress (Sig. 0.640).

In addition, other important findings were found, since it was evidenced that people with a completed bachelor's degree have greater symptoms of depression ($r=0.145^*$, $p= 0.045$, at <0.05) in comparison with those who are still studying a bachelor's degree, postgraduate degree, or graduating from the latter, likewise, there is greater depression in people who work than in the rest of the group ($r= 0.177^*$, $p= 0.015$ at <0.01).

It was found that adults aged 18 and 20 years manifest a higher level of psychological distress and those aged 25 and 28 years have a lower level of distress ($r= -0.213$ $p=0.003$ to <0.001), in agreement with this, a study conducted by Utz (33) on the relationship of consumerism with mental health in early adults of the National University of Itapúa, where it was found that the average age of students at risk of psychopathological problems is 80 % in adults aged 18 to 25 years. In this same study it was found that 15 % to 20 % of the sample shop for anxiety, and in the present study there is a correlation between impulsive shopping and anxiety ($r= 0.226^{**}$, $p= 0.002$ a $p<0.001$), i.e. as impulsive shopping increases, anxiety increases, and vice versa. Similarly, another research by Secchi, Vieira, and Ramos (34) carried out in Brazil, showed that regarding the feeling after the purchase, 5.55 % of the participants have negative feelings such as regret, guilt, and worry. On the other hand, Barros Denegrí and Salazar (35) in their study on consumerism, attitudes towards indebtedness, materialism, and peer influence, with participants between 14 and 20 years of age, showed that the emotions associated with the purchase result are mainly satisfaction and happiness, although emotions before frustrated purchases such as anger, regret, and frustration were also discovered.

The same study by Utz (33) shows significant differences between the sexes in relation to consumerism, as it identifies a higher rate of pathological consumption in women compared to men. Similarly, another study carried out by Jurado and Uribe-Rodríguez (36) found that women have a greater tendency to make impulse purchases than men; however, the results obtained

here do not show a significant relationship in consumerism between sexes (Sig = 0.997).

On the other hand, a study conducted by López (31) on impulsive buying in Psychology students at the UJI and its relationship with financial literacy, finds that the perceived economic situation of each subject influences impulsive buying, with significant differences in the means of these variables, the Pearson correlation is significant at the 0.05 level, positively, which indicates that the higher the perceived economic situation, the higher the level of impulsive buying, compared to this sample, no relationship is found between impulsive buying and income (Sig = 0.176), nor with consumerism in general (Sig=0.729), however, in the participants who do not have a fixed income, the purchase on credit ($r= -0.255^{**}$, $p= 0.0001$ to <0.001) and the feeling of spending more than they should ($r= 0.250^{**}$, $p= 0.0001$ to <0.001) decrease in comparison with the rest of the group that does receive a fixed income.

Finally, Müller (37) makes an ethnographic analysis of the economic representations and practices and affirms that in decision making, people are guided by the norms and obligations to the family, this analysis is related to the results obtained in this study since the participants who report having children manifest better planning habits in the purchase compared to the people who report not having children. ($r= -0.278^{**}$, $p= 0.0001$ a $p<0.001$).

CONCLUSIONS

The literature used for this research is mostly from Spanish-speaking countries, which could shorten the theoretical support, likewise, the sample of the population may be limited, which increases the percentage of margin of error. Regarding the specific objective, to determine the relationship between psychological care and the two variables, the question to the participants referred to whether they had ever taken psychological care, being so, it would be important to make the relationship with those who are currently undergoing some psychological process, to know if this changes the determination of the relationship with the two variables studied.

However, this research yielded results that fulfilled the general objective of this research, achieving the research hypothesis. In addition, the reliability analysis of the application of the instruments was favorable, since the K-10 instrument obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88, the Habits and Consumption Behavior Scale obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.98 and the Impulsivity in Shopping Scale reached a Cronbach's alpha of 0.99, therefore, these analyses demonstrate that it is a reliable study.

This study generates new lines of research, since it demonstrates that the phenomenon of consumerism has a significant impact on the mental health of emerging adults, it would be relevant to identify which consumption has the greatest impact on their mental health, as well as to identify the relationship in other populations such as adolescence.

This is the first study in the Bajío region that investigates and finds a relationship between these two variables, therefore, it is suggested to create new guidelines for the work of clinical psychology in the prevention of psychological distress, taking into account the social phenomenon of consumerism as a risk factor in the mental health of emerging adults, The greater the consumerism, the greater the psychological discomfort, and if the correlation is analyzed inversely, it will be necessary to investigate and investigate whether the emerging adult is inclined to consumerism as a substitute for professional mental health treatment, because of the clinical manifestations of depression and anxiety that psychological discomfort entails.

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