



Influence of mental health in career exploration: study with Portuguese adolescents

Liliana Faria
Universidade Europeia, Lisboa, Portugal

Corresponding Author: liliana.faria@europeia.pt

Abstract

The incidence of diseases related disorders Mental Health has increased over time, both for purely pathological causes, as due to the demands and pressures characteristic of contemporary society. However, little has been written about the reciprocal effects of the mental health and the career development of college students, and consequently the challenges to career counseling. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the depression and anxiety are related to career exploration in a Portuguese group student. The sample includes 296 adolescents of both the sexes (109 girls; 187 boys), with ages between 14 and 17 years old ($M_{age}=17.03$; $S.D_{age}=1.45$). Career Exploration Survey (CES) and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ -12), which evaluate the career exploration and two factors of general health: Depression and Anxiety, respectively. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 19.0 for Windows. The main results show that there is a positive relationship between the dimensions exploration stress, decision stress, and importance of preferred position and anxiety dimension. Yet was found a positive relationship between Intended and systematic exploration and depression.

Keywords: anxiety; career exploration; career counseling; depression; mental health



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1. Introduction

Career exploration is an essential process of career development (Blustein, 1992, 1997; Jordaan, 1963). It constitutes a crucial element in identity construction (e.g., Super, 1980; Porfeli & Skorikov, 2010), and an adaptive mechanism, which helps individuals manage rapid changes in work environments throughout life-span (Flum & Blustein, 2000; Flum & Kaplan, 2006; Zikic & Klehe, 2006).

The career exploration has been presented as a complex psychological process, multidimensional source, which supports research information as well as hypotheses concerning the environment and self test with order to achieve certain objectives vocational (Hall, 1986; Rowold & Staufenbiel, 2010; Taveira, 1997, 2000; Taveira & Moreno, 2003). This process thus involves nature activities cognitive and affective, of explanation and recreation of past and present experiences and projection into the future (Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983; Taveira, 2000; Taveira & Moreno, 2003). Research has shown the efficacy of career intervention in promoting career exploration (e.g., Brown & Krane, 2000; Faria, 2008; Königstedt & Taveira, 2010; Oliver & Spokane, 1983; Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998; Whiston, Brecheisen, & Stephens, 2003). Yet little is known about the effects of mental health, such as anxiety and depression disorders (Blustein & Spengler, 1995), in career exploration.

According to Nassif (2005) work influences the psychic development, strengthening, on the one hand, mental health workers, or, on the contrary, favouring the formation of disturbances. Thus, occupational existence may favour one aspect of adaptability of the individual to the world (Herr, 1989; Niles & Pate, 1989) and factors such as dismissal may enhance the formation of depressive or anxiety disorders (Hutri & Lindeman, 2002; Kates, Greiff, & Hagen, 1993). Also the transition from a situation of labour absence for active employment status (or vice versa) can trigger dysfunctional emotional and cognitive reactions in individual (DeGoede, Spruijt, Iedema, & Meeus, 1999; Paul & Moser, 2009).

Pace and Quinn (2000) reported the results of a 2-year study that included 1,690 students who sought counseling revealed that 11% of clients who sought career counseling as their primary presenting concern also received treatment for mental health issues. Results also showed that 20% of clients who sought counseling for mental health issues received career counseling. Saunders, Peterson, Sampson, and Reardon (2000) asked 215 undergraduates (26% men, 74% women) to complete assessments of career indecision, anxiety, locus of control, depression, and dysfunctional career thinking. Results revealed significant, positive relationships between depression and career indecision as well as between depression and dysfunctional career thoughts. Results also showed a significant negative correlation between depression and vocational identity.

Based on a developmental perspective of career and in research has shown the existence of significant and positive relationships between career exploration and a variety of dimensions such, adjustment and subsequent satisfaction with career decisions (e.g.,



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Soares, 1999), the development of vocational identity (Kosine & Lewis, 2008), self-concept (Bloch, 2005; Jordaan, 1963), a better sense of direction in one's work life and a greater sense of satisfaction in life (Lapan, Kayson & Aoyagi, 2007), adaptability (Savickas, 1997; Zikic & Klehe, 2006), the realism of expectations about getting a job and motivation to work (Bartley & Robitschek, 2000; Caporoso & Kiselica, 2004) and, occupational self-efficacy (Teixeira & Gomes, 2005), and job satisfaction and career commitment (Bardagi & Boff, 2010), the aim of this study is analyze so that it can be present a deviation from the normative standard of Mental Health in the individual processes can influence career exploration. In other words, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether the depression and anxiety are related to career exploration in a Portuguese group student.

Normally is considered an anxiety disorder when the anxiety present in the individual is dysfunctional high and implements its function alert to a potential danger to the integrity of the individual. Hutri and Lindeman (2002) reported that anxiety, even if not yet manifested to fill the pathological diagnosis, may be present at higher levels than the normative, cognitive dulling and functional activities in general.

As for the anxiety experienced in the vocational context, Öztemel (2013) emphasizes the fact that progressively increases in adolescence. Anxiety is one of internalizing problems more prevalent in this stage of development, leading teens to try and reconsider alternative identity, without taking a firm and definite choice (Crocetti, Klimstra, Keijsers, Hale & Meeus, 2009). Spokane (1989, 1991) found that high levels of anxiety can lead to some individuals to avoid career counseling and other counseling to quit prematurely, depending on the pathology, losing intrinsic interest inherent in personal development career. Namely, anxiety can prevent individuals to play a wide variety of tasks that could facilitate the dissipation of his indecision and consequently the anxiogenic reduction (Gaffner & Hazler, 2002; Germeijs, Verschueren, & Soenens, 2006). Also Carroll and Ponterotto (1998) conducted a study with 21 individuals at the moment of career counseling, showed that 60% had symptoms of psychological stress, a factor which the authors consider as a possible obstacle to the counselors. According Vignoli et al (2005) in adolescence, anxiety is often associated with fear of failure in terms of academic or professional career, which in turn is positively associated with the frequency and diversity of career exploration. Other studies (Akkoç 2012; Ender, Healy & Weinstein, 2002; Fuqua, Newman, & Seaworth, 1988; Fuqua, Seaworth, & Newman, 1987; Jidovanu & Taveira, 2010; Öztemel, 2013) also emphasize the association of anxiety triggered by choice and career indecision, which can may hinder, too, the process of career exploration.

In turn, depression is a common and chronic condition associated with high levels of functional disability (Depression Guideline Panel, 1993). Manifests the emotional-affective, behavioral, physiological and cognitive level (APA, 2002).

Depression in the vocational context can have a big impact on career development, especially the cognitive bias that may result in the individual. Sampson et al. (1999) call



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the attention of even guidance counselors for the existence of negative emotions, lack of empathy and amotivational processes, which may result from anhedonia that may be present in an episode of depressed mood and the existence of negative thoughts (APA, 2002). These negative thoughts can bias the individual's perspective on your career decision and / or on their ability to solve problems (Sampson et al., 1999). These authors show that the existence of thoughts or negative self-talk (covert speech) complicates the analysis of the career goals, manifest capabilities of the individual, hampers motivation for seeking employment and perseverance that same search after been 'rejected' in previous interviews. An individual with a depressed mood shows an oppositional view, skewing the interpretation of the world, which can provide lack of sense of coherence, strengthening difficulties to start and maintain decisions about career, accentuating the indecision and procrastination (Lustig & Strauser, 2002) which may pose a present and future occupational crisis (Hutri & Lindeman, 2002).

2. Method

2.1 Participants

This research involved 296 adolescents of both the sexes (109 girls; 187 boys), with ages between 14 and 17 years old ($M_{age}=17.03$; $S.D_{age}=1.45$). These young people are attending the 10th, 1th and 12th years of regular (28%) and professional (72%) educational institutions in Portugal (see table1).

Table 1. Sample distribution according to age, gender and schooling

	N	Gender		Age		Schooling			
		Girls	Boys	M	SD	Min-Max	1.º 10.º	2.º 11.º	3.º 12.º
Regular Education	83	41	42	16.90	1.75	15-23	62	0	21
Professional Education	213	68	145	17.08	1.31	14-22	112	101	0
Total	296	129	187	17.03	1.447	14-23	174	101	21

2.2 Measures

The Career Exploration Survey (CES; Stumpf et al., 1983 - adapt. by Taveira, 1997) is a multidimensional scale to assess behavioral dimensions, as well as cognitive motivational factors involved in career exploration (Taveira, 2000). This version of the CES, comprising 54 items, was designed to measure twelve of the sixteen original dimensions of the scale: five kinds of beliefs, four types of behaviors, and three types of affective reactions related to career exploration (Taveira, 1997, 2000) of the 54 items,



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53 of which are *likert* response (scale of five response categories, items 1 to 43 and seven categories in items 44 to 53) and also an item (item 54) to indicate the number of vocational areas explored. Items with a *likert type* response scale include values ranging from a minimum of one to a maximum of five or seven points. In this study we used twelve dimensions, i.e., Employment outlook, Certainty of exploration outcomes, External search instrumentality and Internal search instrumentality, as well as Environment exploration, Self-exploration, Intended and systematic exploration, Amount of acquired information, and the importance of getting the Preferred Importance of preferred position, as regards the first two dimensions. As for reactions, it allows to assess satisfaction with (obtained) information, Exploration stress and Decision stress. The confirmatory factor analysis study by Taveira (1997) allows us to highlight the robustness of these model consistent twelve dimensions of career exploration. More recent studies developed with Portuguese students of primary and secondary (Taveira, 1997), college (Soares, 1998) rather than unskilled workers (Silva & Taveira, 2010) indicate adequate levels of internal consistency of the subscales of the CES (Cronbach's alpha), ranging between .60 and .89.

The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) - Health Measures (Goldberg, 1992, Portuguese version adapted by McIntyre, McIntyre and Redondo, 1999) is reduced version of the original *likert* response with four points. This reduced version is equally valid and reliable, in which the selected items contribute significantly to the factor analysis excluding the symptoms of physical illness. Each of the 12 items ascertains whether the respondent has recently experienced a particular symptom or item of behaviour, using a four-point scale: "much less than usual", "less than usual", "business as usual" or "best than usual". The scale is self-administered and it takes approximately five minutes. The factorial structure reflects two factors of general health: Depression and Anxiety. The psychometric properties of the Portuguese version of the GHQ -12 were tested in terms of reliability and construct validity and Cronbach's Alpha was obtained (.83), indicating a good internal consistency (McIntyre, McIntyre, Araújo-Soares, Figueiredo, & Johnston, 2003).

2.3 Procedure



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We established formal contacts with the institution selected for the study to present the objectives and the research team. After obtaining approval students were administered the instruments. Participants answered these questionnaires in the context of classroom, in the presence of a researcher. Ethical issues were respected, participation was voluntary and each questionnaire was accompanied by explanatory information of the objectives, the conditions of research, confidentiality and anonymity of the data being secured. The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), version 19.0 for MS Windows was used for data analysis. Results were considered statistically significant when the value of the significance test was less than .05 ($p \leq .05$).

3. Results

Table 2 presents the average results obtained on the General Health Questionnaire. The results are summarized in Table 2 and confirm the existence of health problems (depression and anxiety). We also observed that the average female has higher values in the two factors (depression and anxiety). Looking understand the differences, we perform a comparative analysis between health problems (depression and anxiety) and gender, statistically significant differences were found in depression ($t = -5.48$, $p = .000$), the results indicated that women are more depressed than men ($\mu = 12.09$, $SD = 4.66$). Regarding anxiety no significant differences between the sexes.

Table 2. Descriptive measures of general health and results of T-test for independent samples

Factors	Total		Girls		Boys		t
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Depression	11.42	4.81	12.09	4.66	9.45	4.70	-5.48*
Anxiety	5.51	2.61	5.59	2.70	5.28	2.33	-1.14

* $p \leq .05$

Table 3 presents the average results obtained on the subscales of career exploration. The results are shown both for the total sample, both for girls and boys. It was found that the results achieved are above the midpoint on almost all subscales, considering gender; exceptions in Certainty of exploration outcomes, Importance of Preferred Position, Exploration Environment, Intended and systematic exploration and Stress with exploration, in which both sexes were below the midpoint of the respective subscale results. In the Stress with Decision subscale for boys, also obtained below the midpoint



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result. As shown in Table 3, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference at the level of External search Instrumentality subscale ($t = 3.234, p \leq .05$), Internal search Instrumentality ($t = 3.212, p \leq .05$), Self-exploration ($t = 2.819, p \leq .05$), favourable to girls and Intended and systematic exploration ($t = -2.355, p \leq .05$), favourable to boys.

Table 3. Descriptive measures of career exploration and results of T-test for independent samples

Dimensions	Total		Girls		Boys		T
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Employment outlook	9.41	2.30	9.39	2.44	9.43	2.22	-.153
Certainty of exploration outcomes	8.32	2.85	8.15	3.15	8.42	2.66	-.802
External search instrumentality	36.11	6.34	37.65	6.56	35.22	6.5	3.234*
Internal search instrumentality	14.05	2.94	14.76	2.85	13.64	2.92	3.212*
Importance of preferred position	11.20	2.45	11.55	2.43	10.99	2.43	1.912
Environment exploration	11.14	3.42	11.45	3.42	10.95	3.41	1.208
Self-exploration	14.68	4.04	15.53	3.87	14.18	4.06	2.819*
Intended and systematic exploration	5.27	1.86	4.94	1.82	5.46	1.86	-2.355*
Amount of acquired information	9.71	1.95	9.91	1.9	9.59	1.97	1.365
Satisfaction with information	9.72	1.92	9.96	1.87	9.57	1.95	1.692
Exploration stress	14.77	4.93	15.42	5.45	14.40	4.57	1.735
Decision stress	20.27	6.83	21.05	7.3	19.81	6.53	1.500

* $p \leq .05$

In this work our aim was to identify the type of relationship between students' career exploration and mental health problems (anxiety and depression) thereof. If we consider the parametric correlation coefficient, Pearson correlation between the CES subscale and the anxiety and depression variables, we find significant negative and positive associations. The analysis of Table 4 allows us to identify the presence of a statistically significant positive correlation between anxiety and exploration ($p \leq .01$) and decision ($p \leq .05$) stress, anxiety and Importance of preferred position ($p \leq .01$), and between depression and intended and systematic exploration ($p \leq .05$). It also found statistically significant negative correlation between anxiety and employment outlook ($p \leq .05$), certainty of exploration outcomes ($p \leq .01$), intended and systematic exploration ($p \leq .05$), and between depression and employment outlook ($p \leq .05$), certainty of exploration outcomes ($p \leq .01$), external and internal search instrumentality ($p \leq .05$).

Table 4. Intercorrelations among career exploration and anxiety and depression

Career exploration subscales	Anxiety	Depression
Employment outlook	-.081*	-.237*
Certainty of exploration outcomes	-.117*	-.645**
External search instrumentality	.071	-.030*
Internal search instrumentality	.047	-.529*
Importance of preferred position	.294**	.554
Environment exploration	-.124	.150



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Self-exploration	-.353	.165
Intended and systematic exploration	-.120**	.064*
Amount of acquired information	.450	.217
Satisfaction with information	.294	.061
Exploration stress	.156**	.431
Decision stress	.230*	.275

**p≤ .01; *p≤ .05

In order to deepen the relationship between dimensions of depression and anxiety and subscales of career exploration, we performed an analysis of the predictive power - hierarchical multiple regression equation. By observing the values shown in Table 5 can be stated the dimensions Employment outlook, Certainty of exploration outcomes, Exploration and Decision stress predict anxiety dimension. It appears also that the dimensions Employment outlook, Certainty and outcomes of exploration predict the Depression dimension.

Table 5. Regression analysis: statistically significant relationship between career exploration and dimensions of anxiety and depression

Dependent Variable	Predictor	r ² (r ² adjusted)	F (gl=)	Beta	T
Employment outlook	Anxiety	.040 (.031)	4.390	.200	2.095*
	Depression	.092 (.084)	10.669	.304	3.266*
Certainty of exploration outcomes	Anxiety	.050 (.041)	5.503	.223	2.346*
	Depression	.064 (.055)	7.144	.252	2.673*
External search instrumentality	Anxiety	.014 (.005)	1.544	.120	1.243
	Depression	.033 (.023)	3.544	.181	1.882
Internal search instrumentality	Anxiety	.015 (.004)	1.833	.124	1.117
	Depression	.050 (.041)	5.503	.223	1.346
Importance of preferred position	Anxiety	.022 (.007)	1.947	.117	1.687
	Depression	.032 (.039)	5.523	.103	1.754
Environment exploration	Anxiety	.059 (.047)	7.235	.042	1.702
	Depression	.039 (.042)	6.524	.083	1.230
Self-exploration	Anxiety	.051 (.045)	5.333	.093	1.523
	Depression	.028 (.010)	2.789	.090	1.511
Intended and systematic exploration	Anxiety	.017 (.005)	1.388	.114	1.178
	Depression	.061 (.030)	6.998	.007	1.119
Amount of acquired information	Anxiety	.023 (.008)	3.611	.182	1.900
	Depression	.031 (.028)	2.284	.153	1.704



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Satisfaction with information	Anxiety	.023 (.013)	3.544	.181	1.882
	Depression	.034 (.025)	3.665	.184	1.914
Exploration stress	Anxiety	.061 (.052)	6.797	.247	2.607*
	Depression	.063 (.041)	7.008	.022	1.353
Decision stress	Anxiety	.042 (.032)	4.825	.201	2.216*
	Depression	.021 (.012)	2.273	.146	1.508

* $p \leq .05$

4. Discussion and conclusion

The present study focuses on the influence of mental health in career exploration. Specifically, levels of career exploration and mental health (anxiety and depression) of young people were analyzed and examined the differences in results due to socio demographic variables. Also studied the relationship between the different dimensions of career exploration and dimensions anxiety and depression and its effect predictor.

The analysis of the characteristics of career exploration in the sample study shows that the exploration is active in the three components that constitute the CES, in particular, in the beliefs, process, and the reactions, ie, participants have positive beliefs, engage in exploratory activity, and react affectively to career exploration. Regarding the subscales of career exploration, in general, better results are obtained for girls, particularly in response to external and internal instrumentality, and self-exploration. That is, girls have higher beliefs on how the exploration and exploration of their own academic and professional world can facilitate the achievement of their career goals. For this reason, also exhibit more exploratory behaviors themselves. These results are consistent with other studies that indicate that girls are more explored (e.g., Faria, Saavedra & Taveira, 2008; Mota & Taveira, 2010; Vignoli et al., 2005).

The analysis of the General Health Questionnaire alert us to the need to be alert to depressive disorders in young people. The data support the prediction of the World Health Organization (2000), which states that depressive disorders are likely to be in the medium term, the biggest cause of disability worldwide. According to Department for Work and Pensions (2006), mental health problems can affect and be affected by unemployment, which at a time when the unemployment rate in Portugal is around 15.7% (INE, 2014), the reasons of concern seem to be that many. According to the Ozminowski, Goetzl, Chang, and Long (2004), the consequences associated with mental disorders are as serious as that may jeopardize the very productive capacity of a community. The values found show us that there are significant differences between sexes, with the female students who experience more mental disorders, particularly depression. These results see in the line found in other studies (Piccinelli & Wilkinson, 2000).

It should be noted that there is a negative correlation between the dimensions employment outlook, certainty of exploration outcomes, intended and systematic exploration and anxiety dimension. And between dimensions employment outlook, certainty of exploration outcomes, external and internal search instrumentality and



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depression scale. That is, participants with higher levels of anxiety and depression are those with less perceived positive employment opportunities in your area of choice; just believe in coming to achieve a favorable position in the labor market; and seek little information about the environment and about him / herself in an intentional and systematic way. In addition, students with higher depression levels also seem to have more negative perceptions of employment opportunities in your area of choice; just believe in coming to achieve a favorable position in the labor market; low instrumental attribute values against the exploration of working life and exploration of him / herself.

One can also say that there is a positive relationship between the dimensions exploration stress, decision stress, and importance of preferred position and anxiety dimension. Yet was found a positive relationship between Intended and systematic exploration and depression. That is, participants who have higher levels of anxiety, it also presents a high degree of importance attributed to the implementation of vocational preference, higher levels of stress with the exploration and vocational decision. This may mean that the posture of the subjects before the process of career exploration may be conditioned by their levels of anxiety. These results are thus present in the literature review conducted for this purpose, where the vocational exploration is seen as a crucial and necessary factor in the career development process with more direct consequences in decision making (Taveira, 2000). According to Mota and Taveira (2010), for the successful resolution of the specific tasks of adolescence, it is extremely important that teens are actively involved in the exploration process. As a result of regression analysis showed that the contribution of the beliefs of exploration, including Employment outlook and Certainty of exploration outcomes were significant for either depression or for anxiety, whereas the contribution of reactions, stress in exploration and decision were significant for anxiety. This finding is partly consistent with results from other studies (Campagna & Curtis, 2007; Fuqua et al, 1987; Hardin et al, 2006), which examine the relationship between career indecision and chronic indecision and anxiety. For example, Campagna and Curtis (2007) found that state anxiety has more effect on career indecision than trait anxiety. This means that directors can affect the current state (state anxiety) of an individual more than his personality (trait anxiety). The survey also shows that anxiety causes anxious individuals have higher levels of indecision and consequently lower levels of career exploration. Therefore, it would be useful for people who need help to overcome anxiety if your anxiety is controlled and their indecision is examined as an appropriate intervention is taken. Accordingly, we conclude about the need to create the bridge between psychotherapeutic clinic and vocational career guidance. Activity of career counseling should be closely linked to the study of psychological consultation in general constituting itself as an integral part of their identity (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 1998). And, given the symbiotic relationship between work and mental health counselors should be able to provide both mental health counseling and career counseling services to clients (Niles & Pate, 1989). Also,



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Spokane (1991) states that, although the two domains, career and mental health, coexist, they do not intersect, except in time of anxiety or transition, as found in this study.

Career counseling typically focuses on helping people develop their skills in decision-making career (Hinkelman & Luzzo, 2007). In light of the results of this study, it seems necessary for counselors to develop skills such as stress management practices for their advice and counseling. Anxiety can also be reduced by the use of relaxation techniques and so the decision making process of improving an individual's career. According to Carroll and Ponterotto (1998) vocational counselors should be made aware of the possibility of facing anxiogenic individuals whose symptoms are exacerbated, with the need to be trained in psychological assessment and intervention skills and psychotherapy (Blustein & Spengler, 1995; Weinstein, 2006).

In addition to the issues that seem especially relevant to the practice of vocational guidance, we think it is important to mention some of the limitations of this research. Firstly, we present some considerations about the problems related to the method of sample selection. The fact that it is a small sample size and convenience is a limitation to the generalizability of the results. Another difficulty we face is related to the instrument used. Although the instrument is adapted to the Portuguese population, in that they are self-report, is subject to interpretation errors and social desirability factors. In future approaches will be convenient to consider the possibility of a review by a third party (e.g., physicians) or even a qualitative methodology. In future studies we suggest replication of this study with a larger group of participants and at different times in their career exploration.

Many questions remain unanswered, opening prospects for new lines of research. Emphasize some aspects of study particularly relevant in relation to the results obtained. For the concept of career exploration is also relevant to possible future research, the study of the influences of the peer group, since both are seen as key agents for the (re) construction of self of individuals, and thus should be included in process of career exploration in future studies.

In short, the need for more vocational studies associated with mental health issues is much needed in Portugal. We hope that this work has helped to encourage more multidisciplinary efforts in the study and intervention with people with mental health problems. Above all, we hope that this investigative trail has made it possible to demonstrate that the vocational psychological intervention with people with mental health problems is a necessity.

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