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COMUNICACIÓN NO VERBAL EN PANDEMIA: CUANDO LA VIDA NOS OBLIGÓ A MIRARNOS A LOS OJOS

Non-verbal communication in pandemic: when life forced us to look each other in the eyes

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El presente texto nace en el marco de la preparación de la tesis doctoral de la autora en la línea de investigación sobre Comunicación No Verbal en docencia.

Resumen

Cuando el 1 de enero de 2020 celebrábamos con mucha ilusión el inicio del nuevo año y también de la nueva década no podíamos ni imaginar, al menos fuera de Chi-na, que nuestra vida cambiaría de forma tan radical. Se modificaron muchas cosas, una de ellas fue la forma de comunicarnos. La expresión corporal y facial y la comunicación no verbal en todas sus formas: distancia interpersonal, gestos, posturas, expresiones faciales, tomaban una relevancia que hasta ese momento había pasado casi desapercibida.

Desde marzo de 2020 nuestra forma de comunicarnos fue mayoritariamente online con una focalización específica en el rostro que tomaba todo el protagonismo de la interacción. A través de diferentes aplicaciones podíamos vernos muy de cerca al igual que a nuestros interlocutores, dejando al descubierto de una manera muy precisa la expresión de las emociones básicas que se reflejan en la cara. En la comunicación presencial, el uso obligatorio de mascarillas propició mirarnos de forma directa a los ojos, y el tercio superior de la cara ahora pasaba a ser fuente esencial de in-formación. La mirada era la nueva palabra.

El dicho popular "los ojos son el reflejo del alma" cobró sentido. Las sucesivas olas de la pandemia requerían constantemente la vuelta a las relaciones por vías digitales y a penas mostrar nuestro rostro completo, sin duda estos han sido años de mirarnos a los ojos quizás como nunca antes se había hecho.

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El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar en detalle cómo ha sido durante este tiempo de pandemia nuestra comunicación no verbal, especialmente las expresiones faciales del rostro y particularmente los ojos. La pregunta a las que daremos respuesta es, ¿ha propiciado la pandemia que nuestras emociones básicas queden al descubierto e interaccionar con los demás con un *feedback* no verbal que hasta ahora quedaba eclipsado por la comunicación verbal, el aspecto físico y el cuerpo en su conjunto?, ¿qué hemos descubierto de nosotros y de los demás tras 2 años de cambios en nuestra comunicación? Utilizaremos los estudios de investigación sobre comunicación no verbal en pandemia publicados desde 2020.

Palabras clave:

Comunicación no verbal, Pandemia, Emociones, Emociones básicas, Expresiones faciales.

Abstract

When we celebrated the start of the new year and the new decade on 1 January 2020 with great excitement, we could not have imagined, at least outside Chi-na, that our lives would change so radically. Many things changed, one of them was the way we communicate. Body and facial expression and non-verbal communication in all its forms: interpersonal distance, gestures, postures, facial expressions, took on a relevance that until then had gone almost unnoticed.

Since March 2020, our way of communicating was mostly online, with a specific focus on the face, which took centre stage in the interaction. Through different applications we could see ourselves and our interlocutors very closely, revealing in a very precise way the expression of the basic emotions reflected in the face. In face-to-face communication, the mandatory use of face masks made it possible to look directly into each other's eyes, and the upper third of the face now became an essential source of information. The gaze was the new word.

The popular saying "the eyes are the reflection of the soul" made sense. With successive waves of the pandemic constantly requiring a return to digital relationships and barely showing our full face, these have certainly been years of looking into each other's eyes perhaps as never before.

This paper aims to analyse in detail how our non-verbal communication, especially the facial expressions of the face and particularly the eyes, has been during this time of pandemic. The question we will answer is, has the pandemic allowed us to uncover our basic emotions and interact with others with non-verbal feedback that until now has been overshadowed by verbal communication, physical appearance and the body as a whole? What have we discovered about ourselves and others after 2 years of changes in our communication? We will use research studies on non-verbal communication in pandemics published since 2020.

Keywords:

Non-verbal communication, Pandemic, Emotions, Basic emotions, Facial expressions

1. INTRODUCTION

As Maturana (2006) points out, human beings are social beings and therefore live our lives in permanent contact with others. In fact, in the first stage of our lives we are completely dependent beings, according to Gaitán (2006). Our experiences, in short, are individual experiences, but for the most part throughout our lives they are social.

In this relationship with others, two fundamental aspects have a determining influence, one is emotions and the other is communication, both verbal and, especially, non-verbal, which includes everything we say using our bodily expression, and it is precisely in this last aspect that the Pandemic of AIDS-19, a disease that crept into our lives in the first months of 2020 and which we are still suffering from, has had a determining influence.

The Pandemic has modified many aspects of our lives, it has changed health, social and educational patterns, but if there is one thing that has had an almost transcendental impact, especially in 2020 and 2021, it is the way we communicate with others.

It has become necessary to pay much more attention to the elements of the face not covered by the mask, such as the eyes, eyebrows and forehead, and new gestural patterns have been invented, such as different ways of greeting each other, as reported by Borja-Villanueva et al. (2021).

We begin to review the aspects that influence our human facet as social beings with the emotional dimension, Bericat Alastuey (2012) stresses that human emotions are fundamental in social phenomena, our emotions connect us with ourselves, but also with others. In the author's words, sociology must incorporate the analysis of the expression, identification and management of emotions.

As Fernández-Abascal and Montañés (2001) indicate, emotions have a very specific means of expression, which is through their reflection in the human face, following the postulates demonstrated by Ekman (1993) who, in addition to confirming the universality of emotions and their innate nature, established the so-called "AUI" or facial action units or coding of the facial movements that make up each basic emotion, concluding that the human face is the means of expression of basic or primary emotions. Ekman, in turn, demonstrated the postulates established 100 years ago by Darwin (1852), who, through the method of observation of both people and animals, especially domestic animals, traced the theory of the universality of emotions and their gestural manifestation through facial expressions.

The exercise of coding and describing the facial elements that are activated in the elicitation of each of the 7 primary emotions was detailed by Ekman and Friesen, (1978) where we highlight, in summary, the following guidelines:

- In the emotion of fear, the eyes open, revealing the eye-scenes, and the mouth tightens horizontally.
- In the emotion of sadness, the eyebrows are raised at the inner end and the mouth, which arches its lips towards the lower part, forming an inverted semi-circle.
- The emotion of anger involves the eyebrows forming vertical wrinkles, the forehead tensing and sometimes the mouth revealing the teeth, in a similar way to what Darwin had described of dogs and wolves.
- In the emotion of disgust, the nose wrinkles or contracts, causing wrinkles in the nose, revealing rejection, the main direct consequence of this emotion.
- In the emotion of surprise, manifested in a similar way to that of fear, the eyes open in a similar way, and the mouth also opens, unlike fear, where it closes and tightens.
- The emotion of joy involves the eyes, which partially close, causing wrinkles or marked folds on the outer lateral part, forming the so-called authentic smile or Duchenne smile.

- Ekman also introduces contempt as a basic or primary emotion, although it is the only one of this group that is not innate, as it is formed from the age of 6 or 7 years by comparison. Contempt involves the mouth, specifically the upper lip, which is slightly raised at one end.

Human beings are therefore social and emotional and our primary emotions are also expressed through our face. As Manghi (1999) points out, it is not possible not to be emotional and therefore not to declare them through the body.

Communication is another fundamental aspect of the human being as a social being, as the first axiom of the theory of human communication formulated by Watzlawick et al, (2011) states, we cannot not communicate. Our mere presence communicates, we transmit with our words, but we also transmit with everything we do not say, our body language and our voice not only accompany our speech, but it is also capable of reflecting what we feel and even what we are.

As Cestero Mancera (2014) points out, all verbal signs not only communicate, but are also fundamental when it comes to analysing our real intentions, since in most cases they are instinctive. According to the author, non-verbal signs are decisive for effective communication.

What we express through our body has an impact on others in an unconscious and therefore very profound way, to such an extent that, as Poyatos (1994) reflects, when there is incongruence between verbal language (words) and non-verbal language (postures, gestures, expressions...), we must keep the information reflected in the non-verbal language as it is the one that is directly connected to our emotion and therefore much more faithful to our real feelings.

To understand the human being, it is necessary to understand all the disciplines that make up Nonverbal Communication, for this we will analyse all the parts that make it up based on the postulates described by Knapp, (1999).

On the one hand, kinesics (from the Greek kinesis meaning movement) which encompasses our postures, gestures (dynamic postures) or body actions in movement and facial micro-expressions which, as we have already mentioned, reflect basic emotions.

On the other hand, proxemics, the discipline that studies interpersonal and object distance. The distance used to communicate with others is of enormous importance and value. As a general rule, we tend to move closer to what attracts us and move away as a sign of rejection or disagreement.

The distances of personal interaction have been studied from many fields and scientific fields, highlighting anthropology with the postulates of Hall (1972), who established the rules of interaction space in each of the types of human relationships:

- Intimate distance would place people in a space of less than 45 cm.
- The personal distance between 45 and 120 cm, which we would maintain with people close to us.
- The social distance between 120 and 200 cm that we would maintain in social relations, a term that acquired special relevance during the Pandemic that began in 2020 and that placed this distance as the appropriate distance to relate to any person in order to achieve an optimum degree of protection.
- And finally, the public distance or distance between speakers and audience for example, which is between 200 and 400 or 700 cm depending on the context and situation.

Also of special relevance is the third large block that makes up Non-Verbal Communication, paralanguage or paralinguistics, which analyses all the nuances of our voice, since, according to Blanco (2007), how something is said is much more important and impactful than what is said. The analysis of rhythm, tone, prosody, volume and also of pauses or silences is decisive when it comes to putting context and drawing cognitive and emotional conclusions from the intervention as a whole. Everything that accompanies the words, therefore, matters as much or more than the words themselves.

But all this, which until 2020 we had been studying and analysing when we wanted to understand human behaviour in detail, changed almost radically with the Pandemic caused by a new disease, Covid-19, a respiratory virus that started in China and spread first to Europe and then to the rest of the world, leaving in its wake dramatic consequences in the form of deaths, Confinement and mobility limitations arrived, as well as a new way of relating and communicating with each other. If anything, the Pandemic has changed the way in which we had communicated up to that point, Guirado and García (2020) summarise the main changes in communication:

The masks or face masks that have made during all this time since March 2020 where it began to be compulsory at the beginning in all spaces and subsequently only in enclosed spaces, meant that we only had visibility over a part of the face (the upper third) and the eyes, eyebrows and forehead were our only focus of attention on people. From them, we had to extract all the non-verbal information from the face, and as we saw in the previous description of the expression of emotions, we had to interpret the whole face through one of its parts, as indicated by Poyatos (2020).

The enormous importance of relationships through the Internet during the pandemic (cyber-relationships), which became a primary source of contact outside the sphere of cohabiting people and affected multiple facets: social, educational, training and work. Teleworking took off on a massive scale during 2020, moving towards blended or semi-distance models during 2021. At the educational level, it meant a radical change and required great effort and new demands at all educational levels.

In general, it was not always easy to adapt to screens, with some communication platforms constantly looking at us bringing some problems including a new disorder called zoom dysmorphia or also the widespread mental and emotional fatigue caused by so much online exposure. Ibarra, (2021) describes this effect and many others known as maladaptations that further dented a mental health already eroded by the fear and insecurity of the moment.

Once again, we saw only our faces for many hours and our attention was once again focused on our faces at all times, leaving our basic emotions exposed, something that was much more diluted in pre-pandemic face-to-face contacts.

Telemedicine, previously unimagined, also arrived, and diagnoses with online examinations, tele-consultations, Petracchi and Cuberli (2020) explain the changes in doctor-patient relations and how they developed especially at the beginning of the pandemic.

The third point, with a huge impact on all of us, has been the changes in proxemics, i.e. our communication distance. The term social distance has become widespread and has even been called safety distance, as it served as protection against disease. A distance of 1.5 to 2 metres, which used to be maintained with little-known people, mainly in professional or social environments, has become the minimum distance required for any face-to-face personal interaction, even between

non-cohabitating family members and close friends. New forms of greeting have even been invented, such as hitting other people with hard parts of our body, like bumping elbows, knuckles, etc. or some much more emotional gestures like putting our hand on our heart or bowing slightly with our head.

The pandemic has promoted a lack of contact for protection, especially of the most vulnerable, protecting physical health, but in many cases to the detriment of mental and emotional health. As Fernández and Araújo (2020) point out, physical contact and displays of affection promote and are a fundamental part of connecting with others and undoubtedly foster empathy. Social phobia during the Pandemic has also become evident, distancing measures with the aim of protecting against the virus have had an impact on the already patent social individualism, causing authentic rejection of physical contact and even in extreme cases of social interaction, Leguizamóna and Ramos (2020), analyse this phenomenon.

In this scenario, sometimes so uncertain, we have been moving for 2 years now, the question is whether we have turned the look into the new word, its importance has been fundamental in face-to-face relationships, and in the case of long-distance relationships, whether we have turned the face into the new personal reference and therefore into our letter of introduction and main representative of our whole body.

The great challenge is to take advantage of everything we have learned about our own gestural communication and reinforce it when the measures are relaxed and the Pandemic gives way to a more endemic disease and therefore to social normalisation.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to analyse the role of emotional expression in times of pandemic. To do so, we will review in detail the changes in human communication since 2020 and up to the present day, their effects and lessons.

The aim of these actions is to highlight the prominence of Non-Verbal Communication in both face-to-face and online interactions since the beginning of the Pandemic and the gestural, postural and facial changes suffered, as well as in the physical relationship determined by the new patterns of interpersonal space.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this work has been the literature review, through the detailed analysis of research studies published during 2020, 2021 and the first quarter of 2022 in the context of Nonverbal Communication in times of Pandemic, especially its emotional effects and its connection with body and gestural expression of emotions.

This is a review of research published from the start of the Pandemic in March 2020 to March 2022.

The searches were carried out by combining the broad search term: Nonverbal Communication, and the specific ones: Proxemics and Kinesics, together with the Keywords: Pandemic and Covid-19, with the aim of finding research that analyses the changes produced in this period in these two disciplines. Especially how our gestures and facial micro-expressions have changed and how the

new codes of interpersonal distance have affected both face-to-face relationships and online relationships (the majority during a large part of 2020).

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH

Since March 2020, some 16,300 academic publications have been published that include research articles on Nonverbal Communication in times of Pandemic, the objective has been to filter out those in which an effect on the change in gestural, facial and interpersonal space communication has been verified. The general search criteria Pandemic was combined with two of the main disciplines of Non-Verbal Communication: Kinesics and Proxemics, and those that review and revise some of the effects, changes, modifications and incidence in any of these disciplines were rescued.

The main modifications collected have a bearing on how corporal and gestural expression has changed in this time and its interpretation and meaning. Also its influence in the field of emotions and emotional and mental health.

We have collected research articles published from March 2020 to the first quarter of 2022 at a global level, both in Spain and in the rest of the world, with the keywords #Communication, #NonVerbalCommunication and with phrases such as "Communicative changes during the Pandemic", "Distance relationships in Pandemics" and "Nonverbal Communication in Pandemics" and in broad agreement with the terms Kinesics and Proxemics.

It is especially important to highlight how we have adapted to these changes and the implications for the future at times of the Pandemic when the disease is more under control and also in the post-Pandemic era, some elements we already know are destined to disappear, such as masks, where their mandatory use has already been eliminated in some countries from the beginning of 2022 and is destined to gradually become extinct depending on the evolution of the disease in the rest. But others, such as teleworking and online or blended learning, are perhaps here to stay with slight or perhaps no modifications, with their positive aspects of speed, convenience, immediacy, but also negative aspects such as lack of empathy and less socialisation.

Among the changes in our gestures, some studies show a change in the expression of our gestures, we were less expressive in intensity and in the number of gestures requested, as well as in the number of words and the more nuanced way in which they were expressed.

At the public level, we have also analysed politicians, people who are permanently exposed and have the capacity to make decisions at the most critical moments, detecting changes in non-verbal language in the different stages and circumstances of the Pandemic.

4.1. The eyes are the mirror of the soul and our main point of contact in physical relations.

One of the elements that has undoubtedly marked the pandemic and which has become the main and indispensable element for going out into the street at the beginning of the pandemic and by the end of 2021 for accessing enclosed places, has been the mask or face mask. Volosín (2020) calls it our personal trench in the social war we are waging against COVID-19 an element of protection that partially covers the face, specifically the lower two thirds, leaving only the upper third of the face, consisting of the forehead, eyebrows and eyes, uncovered. This allows us to focus our attention on the eyes in a much deeper and more extensive way than we had been doing until then

in our usual interactions, whether personal or family, and this has an impact on our gestures and, of course, on the interpretation we make of the emotional expression of others.

The eyes are one of the main elements of emotional expression, the eyes are elements or units of visual action according to Ekman and Oster (1979) our gaze and the placement of our eyelids, pupil and sclera intervene directly in the elicitation of fear and surprise, our eyebrows in the expression of sadness and our forehead in that of anger, as well as of course in the expression of the authentic smile linked to the emotion of joy, in which the eyes are partially closed, configuring the so-called Duchenne smile or authentic smile. On this point

Hombach (2021) indicates that it is possible to hear the smile hidden behind a mask and that the eyes are the revealers of sincere smiles.

In other words, not only have face masks not limited the emotional connection in our daily lives, but they have even been able to enhance it by attending longer and more intensely to the visible elements of the face. In this sense, Loreto (2021), analyses the expressive potential of the face and how the parts not covered by the mask have helped to understand, complete and give context to information that was sometimes transmitted in an incomplete or fragmented way due to the difficulties of the mask and the greater social distance, with the eyes being the protagonists and true rescuers of communication. In the same sense and line of thought, Guirado and García (2020) highlight the importance of gestures to replace words when it comes to establishing productive relationships and fruitful communication, and the importance of the visible parts of the face to replace the non-visible or covered parts when it comes to connecting emotionally.

A research study by Borja-Villanueva *et al.* (2021), endorses these postulates indicating that in general during the Pandemic, more facial gestures were made to achieve the same level of communication by enhancing facial expressions with the eyes to convey smiles, acceptance and positive emotions.

Hess *et al.* (2020) indicate that in addition to transmitting joy or acceptance, the partial closure of the eyes also managed to relax tense environments and helped to bring us closer to others, even to make up for the lack of physical contact, especially in the first stage of the Pandemic. It also highlights how fear and surprise, two emotions that share their facial expression in the part of the eyes, could be perceived much more clearly and sharply when the rest of the face was covered and when we focused our attention on the other person's eyes. They also point out that, for example, attention to the eyes made it possible to identify autistic patients by their avoidance of gaze and avoidance of eye contact.

There are areas where, however, having the face hidden has been a barrier both communicatively and socially, as for example in the healthcare field, where according to Villalobos and Calvanese, (2021) it detracted empathy in the doctor-patient relationship, which failed to replace the visible part of the face, i.e. neither eyes nor gaze, as the mask has not only been a facial shield in the healthcare sector, but also an emotional shield.

Some research studies, including one carried out by Professor Lewis's team at Cardiff University, have stated after interviewing participants in the United Kingdom during 2021 that we look much more attractive with a face mask, the reason being that we project and reconstruct ourselves through the visible part of the face, mainly the eyes. Hies and Lewis (2022) conclude in their research that

ultimately looking into our eyes with our attention focused on that part of the face makes us look much more attractive and we construct in our imagination a more beautiful face of our interlocutors.

In certain groups, the mask represented a real communication barrier, such as deaf-mutes, stutterers and people with hearing difficulties. In this sense, a study by Ángeles-Hernández (2021) stands out, where visual elements such as videos helped to make up for the hearing deficiencies of deaf people or those with mild or severe hearing loss. In this sense, and in order to make up for hearing deficiencies through the visual channel, there are also efforts by hospitals, universities, centres for the deaf and associations for the deaf and dumb to achieve transparent masks that minimise communication barriers for those cases in which the gaze is unable to make up for the full expression.

In teaching, the gestures of teachers through body language and especially facial expression have supported their voice and have also had to make up for the vocal distortions caused by the mask. Non-verbal communication has become fundamental in the classroom during these two years of the pandemic, García Lechuga (2021) analyses this aspect in detail, indicating that in these times we have basically reduced our face to our eyes.

One of the direct consequences of the pandemic on non-verbal communication is a change in patterns in the use and expression of gestures. Some studies, such as that of Borja-Villanueva et al. (2021), conclude that the pandemic led to a decrease in the number of gestures and also in the intensity of our body gestures, as well as in the number of words and greater nuance in the components of the voice: rhythm, volume and tone. However, there was an increase in facial expressions, the most communicatively exposed part.

In the case of politicians, highly exposed people and a special focus of attention during the first months of the Pandemic, Fernández-Hoya and Cáceres-Zapatero (2022), analyse the expressive differences in the communication of the President of the Spanish Government during the ups and downs of the curve at the beginning of the Pandemic (March and April 2020), with a change in his facial expression where eyebrow raising and head tilting as well as general forward body posture have a much higher frequency than in later phases of the Pandemic (April to June 2020).

Lähde and Lenguas (2021) also review the change in posture, gestures and facial expressions of world political leaders during the onset of the Pandemic, highlighting, for example, the case of Trump, President of the USA, observing in his case a decrease in non-verbal gestures with respect to his usual behaviour.

4.2. The face in the spotlight in online relationships

If we had to summarise our relationships in the Pandemic era, they would undoubtedly be called "cyber-relationships", we have communicated mainly by telematic means and by tools and applications for both messaging and remote interaction. 2020 and 2021 are the so-called "Zoom years" or video-calls, in our personal relationships we use telepresence more than ever and not only for pleasure, but also in other areas such as education and, of course, work, especially in 2020 as the only modality and later as a mixed or combined modality, teleworking was imposed.

Arzuaga-Williams et al. (2021) report and highlight this measure as one of the main actions of companies to prevent the spread of the virus. But this communicative change also had an impact

on us and also made us see both our bodies, especially our faces, and those of others in a very different way.

The use of screens focuses all our attention, previously dispersed all over the body, primarily on the face. The face occupies the whole screen and, therefore, all our attention, revealing in a much more explicit way the expression of the 6 (or 7 if we include contempt) basic emotions. We are more aware of how our interlocutors are emotional and which main emotion they are connecting with.

Also of how and when they express it, as well as of our own expression, seeing our face on screen all the time, as described by Saldaña-Vázquez (2021).

A priori, this should be an advantage since, according to Muñoz-Zapata and Chaves (2013), identifying and regulating emotions is a basic factor for enhancing empathy, since the better the communication and emotional recognition of oneself and others, and the greater the self-regulation of emotions, the greater the empathic capacity.

However, the permanent use of screens has not only brought advantages, as the well-known emotional fatigue caused by the Pandemic has been joined by the so-called zoom fatigue or exposure for long hours and permanently to videoconferencing platforms and devices. Ibañez, (2021) explain its consequences and how to try to alleviate or even avoid it. They point out that we use them for a long time with the resulting cognitive load, that the platforms themselves distort our image and that of our interlocutors with larger faces and not always adjusted to our exact features, which also has a negative emotional load, we are observing and above all, we are observing ourselves in a detailed way, This is far from helping us, it is limiting us, exhausting us and, to an extreme degree, even upsetting us, creating a new maladaptive behaviour known as zoom dysmorphia or, as the author defines it, a digital mental disorder derived from exposure to these platforms over a long period of time.

On the other hand, Bailenson (2021) refers to video calls as a mirror that haunts us throughout the day and where we see ourselves permanently reflected, observing ourselves in a way that is sometimes not very objective and without context.

In the field of education, several research studies have echoed the different emotions and moods experienced in Pandemic and how they have been transferred and reflected through video call platforms.

Monjarás-Rodríguez and Romeo-Godínez (2021) highlighted above all that the main concern of the schoolchildren was worry about their families' illness and not being able to play. Meanwhile, Romo and Sánchez (2022) focus on the joy transmitted by the students at being able to communicate with their classmates and teachers despite the circumstances, and they valued the online classes very positively as an alternative to be able to see each other and maintain direct contact.

For their part, García and Pascucci (2022) analysed online teaching through video-call tools in university environments; the conclusions of their research are that the development of learning and the resolution of doubts is similar in online education compared to face-to-face education, with a slightly higher rate of distraction in distance classes.

In another field, healthcare, Morillo-Romero (2022) analyses the so-called "telemedicine" or medicine where consultations are carried out online, gathering research studies from various countries in Europe, Asia and America, the research concludes that it was a novel but very positive initiative, which streamlined processes and allowed us to approach the healthcare system in a different way with a high level of trust and avoiding fears of contagion that existed in a pandemic environment, the results augur the future and continuity of these practices.

4.3 The new proxemics and its impact on the most vulnerable

Society has had to get used for almost 2 years, especially between March 2020 and the end of the summer of 2021, to new norms of social distance, which has affected family relationships and friendships in a special way, with negative effects in the case of vulnerable groups, Luengoc et al., (2022) in a study with elderly people confined to nursing homes, stresses that loneliness and lack of physical contact have had negative effects on their mental and physical health that make psychosocial intervention programmes necessary for their recovery. In this same sense, Bravo and Wong (2021) highlight the great emotional affectation that has also had repercussions on the physical quality of the elderly isolated from contact during the Pandemic, the analysis of 2020 concludes that Emotional Intelligence is a powerful ally and a great help to alleviate the effects of the lack of contact that caused a feeling of loneliness that led in many cases to depressive problems and mood alteration.

Parra et al. (2021) highlight how the intervention through visual and kinaesthetic Neurolinguistic Programming techniques in customer service in times of social distance caused by the Pandemic helped to improve attention and communication, highlighting that the absence of contact must be made up for so as not to cause frustration in customers.

5. CONCLUSIONES

That the Pandemic produced by COVID-19 has changed our lives is a fact, as is the fact that we have tried to adapt in the best way possible, and after the first months of the pandemic between March and summer 2020, we have tried to normalise the situation, going on with our lives, although with limitations that have undoubtedly marked and affected us.

We are emotional beings, and we have included the new elements imposed by the situation to our emotional expression and to the connection with the emotions of others in order to have a richer and more fruitful communication. With the masks we have replaced the hidden part of the face with all the information that the upper third of the face, especially the eyes, offered us. In online relationships or cyber-relationships through connection technology or video calls, we have also achieved a good communicative and emotional level, we have been able to work, study and develop our leisure time online, interacting on a personal level, although not without fatigue, as many researchers point out, and sometimes this fatigue has led to certain distortions or image disorders, new disorders have appeared such as the so-called Zoom fatigue and others such as body dysmorphia have been accentuated, especially in relation to the face. We have spent hours of online communication with our basic emotions much more exposed and this has led to a mental and emotional exhaustion that has contributed to the so-called Pandemic Fatigue.

We have been able to integrate a new way of living by being able to express ourselves and make ourselves understood, making up for what we lacked with the elements we had, enhancing and completing them, even significantly improving the knowledge and exploitation we had until then.

But this has had an effect on our communication, as we have reduced the intensity and number of gestures and their vigour, power and magnitude, and also of words, not only in volume but also in tone, rhythm and volume, which have become less intense; however, the effort of expression has focused on the face, especially on the eyes, the centre of transmission of positive emotions, above all, the smile and affirmation.

The social distance imposed on the closest personal relationships has created problems among the most vulnerable, especially the elderly, and also in people with a primarily kinaesthetic representational model, the lack of contact has led to a drop in hormones such as oxytocin,

In any case, we are still in Pandemic and many of these elements are here to stay, like the masks only in reduced environments and in people with a high level of risk, but if one thing is increasingly clear is that the development of digitalisation produced will remain and will expand in the future, and the new non-verbal codes remain to be seen if they will be incorporated into our catalogue of gestures.

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