
research article

The pluralistic ontology in youth groups for mental health

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Mental problems in young people are increasing and recovery proposals from classic biomedical models are not always effective. One of the responses to this has been the Mutual Help Groups, groups made up of people who meet periodically to help each other based on principles such as trust, transversality, the creation of support networks and new possibilities for psychosocial recovery. These possibilities arise from the same people, with the help of others, to have new ways of understanding reality and approaching it, which is called the agency of possibilities. This research aims to understand the contribution that Mutual Aid Groups make to young people's mental health through group agency. For this, an analysis is carried out through the 'Event', an element of the pluralistic ontology of neo-monadism, which is defined as the unification of individualities based on incalculable networks that overlap with each other to generate new questions and new answers. Using thematic analysis as an analysis tool, in-depth interviews were conducted with six young people with mental problems belonging to a Mutual Help Group. There it was found that intentional states broadly explain world-to-mind, mind-to-world and mind-to-mind functional relationships and interactions, which contributes to ontological pluralism as a new paradigm for addressing social problems. Mental health care has long sought to control people. In this sense, negative adaptation guarantees recovery in vain. On the other hand, positive adaptation, from desires, from heterogeneous forces and beliefs, could be a more effective recovery path.

Keywords mental health • youth activities • social interaction • ontology • health policy (UNESCO)

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Introduction

Mutual Aid Groups: what are they and how do they work?

Mental health problems are on a progressive increase, especially in youth, where the prevalence of mental disorders reaches 11.3 per cent (Kieling et al, 2024). This intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, 2022). Despite this, recovery strategies are still far from achieving recovery (Patel et al, 2018).

Globally, the call has intensified to implement mental health services that reaffirm the participation and rights of people with mental disorders. The Brasilia Principles (World Health Organization, 2010) propose the establishment of community services, including Mutual Aid Groups (MAGs) or Peer Support Groups. This was reaffirmed by the Lancet Commission, which concluded that without mental health there is no sustainable development (Patel et al, 2018). This is supported by the work of Amartya Sen (2000), stating that development can only be achieved when people have real freedoms in their social contexts. Then, recovery recommendations point out that this process must be based on human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 2006) and must focus on the individual (Pan American Health Organization, 2022).

However, criticism of this concept has been noted, as people are not passive beneficiaries of rehabilitation services nor can the personal transformation inherent in recovery be programmed (Corcoran et al, 2019; Karadzhev, 2023). In addition, the relationship between mental health, socioeconomic status, social inequalities and exclusive social arrangements that affect people's recovery must be recognised (McNeill and Nicholas, 2019; Karadzhev, 2023).

Peer support services involve individual or group sessions led by individuals with personal experience, which they share for the benefit of others going through similar experiences (Richards, 2019; Agudelo-Hernández et al, 2023). Participation in the sessions is always voluntary, with prior informed consent. Participants are not obliged to continue receiving the offered support; rather, they decide based on their wishes, preferences and needs (Agudelo-Hernández and Rojas-Andrade, 2024).

Peer support may be effective in improving depressive symptoms, stress and anxiety among young adults (Richards, 2019). Some of the positive results reported include improvements in self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-management and recovery from disorders associated with psychoactive substances or grief (Richard et al, 2022; Evans, 2023). Although most studies point to an important effect on mental health problems (Richards, 2019; Evans, 2023), some studies do not show a non-statistically significant decrease in symptoms (Ali et al, 2015). On the other hand, it has been identified that peer support has the potential to help ethnic and sexual minorities, who prefer different health services than traditional ones (Segal et al, 1998).

Some studies have noted that community group interventions in mental health interventions lead to better outcomes compared to other interventions that use clinical care exclusively (Richards, 2019; Russell et al, 2023; Agudelo-Hernández et al, 2024; Pawlett Jackson, 2024). This was evidenced by a reduction in relapses and the ability for people to participate in society in a timely and proactive manner (Jamison et al, 2018).

However, this psychosocial strengthening must be understood beyond the biomedical or clinical, to focus on aspects of understanding the self, identity, social structures and the integration of disciplinary levels and structures (Frost and Jones,

2019). This calls for overcoming an exclusively positivist framework, where only what is observable and measurable is real, to think about paths of recovery that arise from ontological aspects and that are only seen materialised in individuals (Richards, 2019).

Within community interventions, MAGs have as central components the advocacy of rights, the creation of social networks and the empowerment of individuals, which makes them an ideal setting to promote mental health recovery, especially in young people (Agudelo-Hernández et al, 2023). MAGs arose from the civil rights movements (Chaudhary et al, 2013). They were proposed as a response to social health problems (Chaudhary et al, 2013). The structure of these groups may be related to official institutions or they may function completely autonomously (Borkman and Munn-Giddings, 2008).

An ontological response to implementation challenges

Despite being included in global mental health recovery policy and guidance (Patel et al, 2018; Pan American Health Organization, 2022; World Health Organization, 2022), psychosocial recovery strategies are not implemented and psychiatric services remain predominant (Jamison et al, 2018). In the case of MAGs and other community strategies, they are the least implemented (Richards, 2019), which implies little participation of people in their recovery processes (Karadzhov, 2023). This makes it necessary to orient recovery processes towards a political ontology that helps understand action as a potential for individuals to participate in a public sphere, leading to the construction of the political experience of plurality (Alvarado et al, 2014).

This emphasises the capacity of individuals to share a public space where plurality unfolds, and it is not defined by a pursuit of consensus, in which evidence-based practices are received that may not necessarily be accepted by people, both as collectives and as individuals (Agudelo-Hernández et al, 2023). In terms of Arendt (1998), the purpose of politics is not consensus but precisely the possibility of being different and plural, and that such divergence is feasible in the public sphere that she refers to as 'between us'.

In this vein, Tuomela (2016) mentions arguments in favour of creating cooperation structures, namely: they are possible and have received experimental support; they are functionally more effective and collective, and individually, they are more rewarding than individual actions; and, in several cases, they offer more stability, order and more flexibility than individual actions.

One way to conceptualise this call to the individual and the community as a centre of recovery is pluralistic ontology, through what Lazzarato (2000) calls *Event*. An Event is the opening of possibilities, which includes aspects of each person that are explored and strengthened from the MAG experience. The MAG, seen from the Event, goes beyond intersubjectivity, turning its members into active beings from their differences (Lazzarato, 2018).

These groups coincide with the psychodynamic proposal described by Foulkes, where differences and microcultural influences promote closeness and communication, instead of inhibiting it (de Mare, 1989). This has been described as transformation into psychic energy, through dialogue leading from hatred to the establishment of *koinonia*, or impersonal communion (de Mare, 1989). To this communion, Lazzarato (2005) calls creating bridges in dissent to find new ways of being together and being against.

It is the space (MAG) that enables the gathering of different possibilities that have been oppressed by a normalising and productive dynamic, in a society equipped with control and regulation mechanisms in the terms of Foucault (2004). It situates well-being as a social construct, arising from the interaction of living conditions and individual components (Martínez-Martínez et al, 2021).

In this sense, MAGs serve as catalysts for this Event, a space where, beyond mere occurrence, society becomes what Tarde (2006: 23) understands it to be: ‘What is a society? We could define it from our perspective: the reciprocal possession, under extremely varied forms, of all by each one.’ This is how, beyond improving participation, the politics of the Event applied to youth mental health proposes to overcome what Bourdieu (1985) proposes as an existence beyond people as instruments that perform functions and are extinguished in the performance of its function.

The Event, besides revealing what is intolerable within a society (Foucault, 2004), also enables the agency of possibilities (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000). The political event has four characteristics: it interrupts the possibilities of a given order, which makes it *im-possible*; it is productive because it creates conditions to be carried out; it is unsayable (in Derrida’s terms) because it does not necessarily have an ultimate foundation; and, as the research has highlighted, although with metaphysical precedents in monadology, it is materially situated (Ema López, 2005).

In the case of MAGs, this allows for an increase in agency, self-awareness, social networks, problem-solving skills and self-confidence (Agudelo-Hernández et al, 2023). Similarly, it could facilitate the transition to strategies for improving living conditions through the strengthening of aspects such as citizenship and taking action in the face of the world (Borkman and Munn-Giddings, 2008). At this juncture, the Event becomes not only a mechanism for improvement but also a tool for political action, and MAGs become the space where it happens, in the interstice.

This is reminiscent of a structural coupling, where the environment does not dictate social relationships, but it is the organisation of the unit or the basic system of relationships that determines the interaction with the environment. As Escobar (2018) puts it, this relationship is a key characteristic of both biological and social or cultural autonomy; systems can undergo structural changes and adopt different structures in response to interactions with the environment, but they have to maintain a basic organisation to remain as the units they are.

This is the fundamental idea of the pluralistic ontology that contributes novel elements to address phenomena and intervention in the social sphere, broadening our understanding of the actor or social actors. In Badiou’s terms (2021), what is presented is essentially multiple, what is presented is essentially *one*. Indeed, the reciprocity of the one and of being is the inaugural axiom of the philosophical discourse enunciated by Leibniz (Badiou, 2021). From this perspective, an individual with a mental health diagnosis would no longer be a ‘patient’ with a diagnosis in need of ‘control’, but rather an ‘agent’ with potentialities who may require ‘support, companionship’ from their various environments in order to recover.

This research

Public policies worldwide, especially in Latin America, have structured plans, programmes and strategies, framed in laws, resolutions and guidelines, which have

aimed to change a model that proposed recovery within psychiatric institutions, to a model that affirms that the community, with its power, should be at the centre. Despite the aforementioned, there are difficulties in the implementation of community strategies. This implementation has been carried out through both top-down and bottom-up approaches, without taking into account ontological aspects, which, especially in mental health, are fundamental to understanding mental illness and its recovery.

Based on this, the following questions are raised: how is the implementation of MAGs perceived by their participants at a political level, seen from the theory of the Event? What are the new arrangements, new possibilities of life, new ways of living time, body, work, communication, new ways of living time, body, work, communication, of being together and to be against?

The purpose of this research is to understand how aspects related to a pluralistic ontology could contribute to the understanding of mental health processes. In this way, it seeks to reaffirm the need for complementary approaches for the implementation of public policies in mental health: inside-up approaches. The present research addresses the usefulness of MAGs in the field of youth mental health. Likewise, it explores a broader argument about the interrelationship between structure and agency, to understand the broader social importance of these groups.

Methodology

Study type

This qualitative, phenomenological study aimed to gain insight into the experience of MAGs from its participants. Focus groups were utilised as a data collection technique. The following procedures were suggested: defining an objective; selecting participants through an invitation process; analysing registered participants to inform the development of probing questions; choosing moderators based on their familiarity with the groups; scheduling meetings at the group's designated location; obtaining informed consent on the day of the meeting; conducting the session with an explanation of the research and its objectives; summarising the conclusions; presenting the report to the group; and, ultimately, expressing gratitude on behalf of the research team (Escobar and Bonilla-Jiménez, 2011).

Procedure and participants

The participants were selected by convenience from a MAG: Red Expressarte, located in Caldas, Colombia, which supports various mental disorders (Table 1). The selection of the group was based on its national recognition in processes of social innovation and advocacy for the human rights of individuals with mental disorders (Canal Telecafé, 2021). Similarly, the selection of individuals was determined by their interest in participating in the research. The interviews focused on a specific theme proposed by the researcher and the group facilitator, with the aim of understanding forms of agency, the new possibilities that have arisen from the MAG, and the influence that a person has within their group. Emergent categories were allowed. This took place in the last semester of 2022.

Table 1: Focus group participants

Participant (Anonymous)	Age/ years old	Sex	Diagnosis	Profession/ occupation
Ca	25	Female	Anxiety disorder	Social communicator
A	28	Female	Depressive disorder	Architect
S	29	Male	Anxiety disorder	Psychologist
C	28	Male	Bipolar disorder	Visual designer
M	21	Female	Depressive disorder/dysthymia	Various occupations/ university student
J	28	Male	Obsessive-compulsive disorder	Lawyer
N (Facilitator)	26	Female	Bipolar disorder	Social worker

The focus group was accompanied by the leader of the MAG. The leader of the research team was recognised by the group for having participated in other social mobilisation processes. However, although he was a mental health professional, he had not provided clinical care to any member of this group.

The following questions were proposed for the focus group: What impact has participating in a MAG had on your life? How has your participation influenced other members of your MAG? How have you contributed to transforming other MAG participants? How does your MAG contribute to transforming society? Optional questions to consider include: In what ways does the group you belong to facilitate learning from one's own experience and that of others? How does the process for expressing feelings or emotions among MAG members take place? How are individual situations that could impact the group's functioning addressed within the group?

Analysis

Following the conclusion of this phase, the data underwent analysis utilising thematic analysis, a methodological approach pioneered by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). Thematic analysis entails the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns or themes within the collected data, for which it employs analytical categories. To ensure transparency and reliability, the organisation of the participants' contributions was shared with the group leader for them to relay it to their respective participants.

The participants' citations were systematically organised in a matrix for categorisation, ultimately forming themes based on the degree of saturation. The analysis concluded when no additional elements related to the study's objective emerged. Apart from the leadership group, the information was analysed by another community psychologist who had not interacted with the participants previously, as well as a social worker with a PhD in social sciences, who possessed knowledge of the mental health context.

Ethical considerations

This study was adapted to the recommendations for biomedical research of the Declaration of Helsinki of the World Medical Association and was approved by the

Ethics Committee with act CB022 of 2022, of the University of Manizales. The names of the study participants were kept in strict confidentiality.

Results

The theme *Core components of the Mutual Aid Groups* was identified as an emerging aspect. It consisted of *Sharing experiences*, *Acceptance of individual particularities*, *Being able to communicate*, *Search for company*, *Identification with others*, *Horizontal relationships* and *Need for the other* (Figure 1).

The theme The Event was reaffirmed in the analysis. Within this theme, there were emerging categories such as *Contribute to the group involuntarily*, *Coming to the people*, *Perception of permanent support* and *Together but with individuality* (Figure 2).

Core components of the Mutual Aid Groups

It is named in this way, alluding to the core components specified by [Agudelo-Hernández et al \(2023\)](#). Core components allude to techniques, strategies, recurring themes, but also virtues that make up the ethos of mutual aid groups and allow their operation, and they are those mentioned in the categories. In this section, these components will be analysed in light of what was mentioned in the interviews.

Figure 1: Configuration of core components of the Mutual Aid Groups

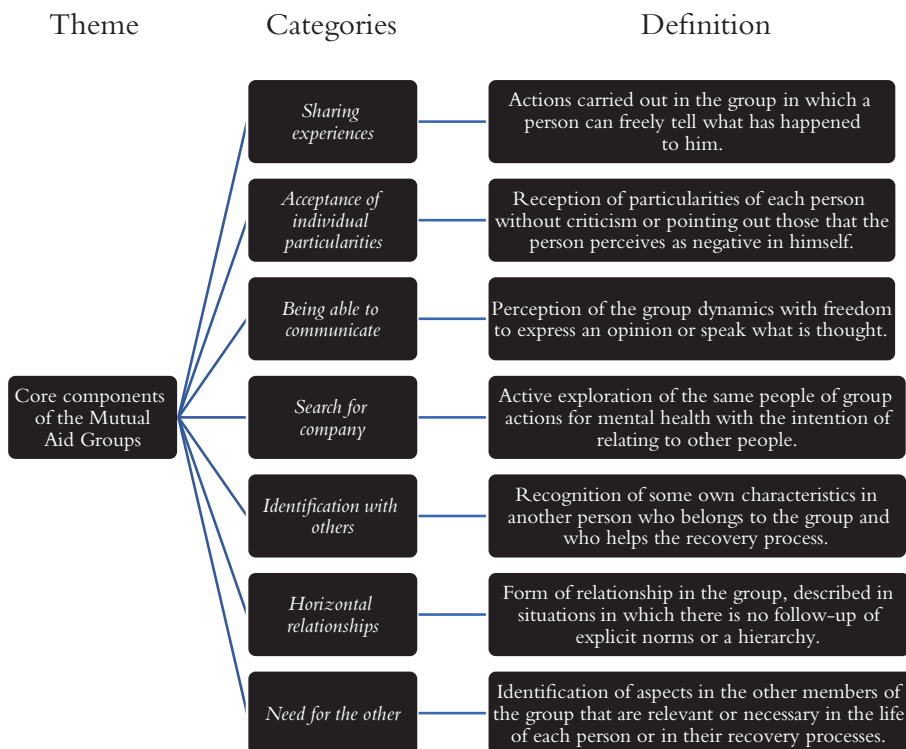
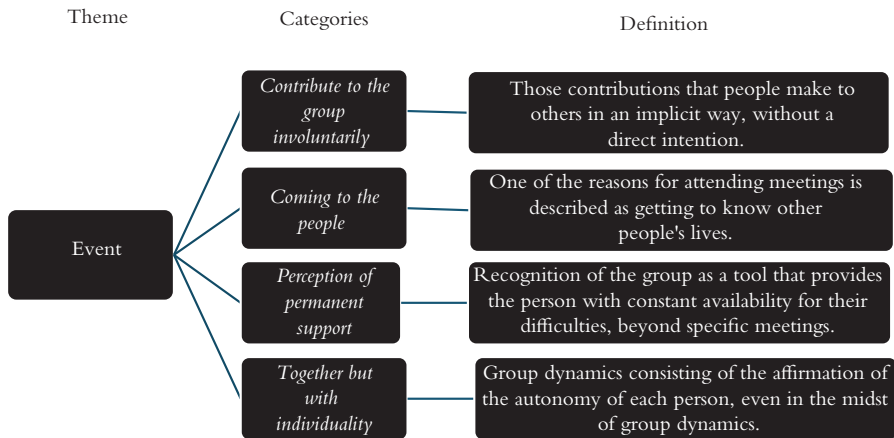


Figure 2: Event configuration

Notes: Event configuration. Own elaboration.

A MAG, according to the concepts of Tuomela (2016), presupposes the voluntary entry, the voluntary exit, and the voluntary and internally free formation of the ethos. However, the more liberal description of *us-mode* groups accepts many more cases. Initially, groups are understood here in a very general sense as collections of people willing to function as a whole, which implies, at a minimum, a shared goal or belief. Among what is shared in a MAG, 'Ca' recognises: 'At the MAG, we always provide feedback with each other's cases, of success, of failure, we encourage each other. We are happy because one of us is well or it went well with something, or we get sad ... we also help each other to get ahead.'

The correct social scientific framework should give an important role to social groups, but the central problem here is whether its descriptions of group behaviour can, at some level, be reduced to descriptions of individual intentional behaviour. It can be affirmed that the social world cannot be adequately explained and rationally understood without postulating groups as intentional agents (Tuomela, 2016). Regarding group action, from an individual voice, 'A' states: 'I think it is one of the secrets of the groups, that the strategies become constant ... one goes out and practices them and the things that become constant, one acts with the tools from the group, and turns it into tools for day to day.'

MAGs seek social inclusion, and this occurs through the acceptance of people, which improves the self-confidence and self-esteem of those who participate (Burke and Stets, 2009). This facilitates self-regulation, coping skills and problem solving (Sample et al, 2018; Agudelo-Hernández et al, 2023), aspects also indicated as components in the review of the literature that addresses this thesis, and reaffirmed in the interviews by 'S': 'The participants can express themselves freely and be heard, so they tell anecdotes about their lives, they tell problems, situations, calamities, sometimes then that generates a lot of empathy.'

As reasons for permanence, trust has been associated as one of the main factors, especially among young people. The formation of group attitudes requires members to function as members of the group and, psychologically, to have sufficient

confidence in the functioning of other members in a similarly group-oriented manner. Members of MAG form an informal network that is different from the doctor–patient relationship, in which young people follow the doctor’s instructions and have less power (Kelly et al, 2019).

In this regard, ‘C’ mentions: ‘The health system may not consider its own way of solving problems.’ However, in the MAG ‘understanding and humanity could face the fact that it is difficult to have psychological problems and be surrounded by people who only see you as one more patient, as a person with one more problem’, as it is noted by ‘M’.

This trust is needed for the collective construction of a group ethos (spirit), since this conceptually implies an explicit or implicit agreement (although not always the activity of making agreements) between the participants, which is related to a collective commitment to satisfy the content of the agreement. Although collective acceptance is sometimes an attitude, it also implies an acceptance action, that is, acting in the correct way with respect to the accepted content in order to validate it (Tuomela, 2016).

The foregoing reaffirms two other characteristics of the MAGs that had been called nuclear or core components, which consist of being democratic and autonomous (free from external domination), capable of deciding on their internal affairs or matters (for example, their ethics and other objectives and points of view). As ‘C’ mentions:

Control is achieved not so much by a person but by respect, unity, the affection that is generated. But affection through something that seems organised, not as happened to us with another group that I had, a group of talks [conferences given by an expert]. That’s why I was telling you that in this group I express myself and I feel comfortable.

For Giddens (1993) this trust would be equivalent to what he calls reliability, the act of trusting or an attitude of faith towards the other and for the other, not to the systems but to the behaviour of others. The author defines it ‘as confidence in some qualities or attributes of a person or thing, or in the truth of a statement’ (Giddens, 1993: 46). In this regard, ‘H’ states:

Each person has a story and it’s like you never think that this person is going through such a thing and it’s very interesting and at the same time impressive and very cool. Because we can all talk about what we feel inside without feeling judged, that is what is magic there.

This is how the issue of maintaining such groups has practical elements such as commemorations, group meetings and alliances with other groups (Mao et al, 2021). In the words of ‘Ca’, when inquiring about the values or principles (read core component) of the group:

As if to be able to share something, I would say that the things that brought us together were common interests, a similarity in tastes between us. It is this interest and like, this desire to help each other and to belong to a group, that we all give each other support in the illness. That it is completely normal that it can happen to anyone and that by being together we can get ahead, and so, together, it’s easier.

This unconditional acceptance is a sincere, non-instrumental acceptance, which can be based on an emotion such as joy. These relationships have been associated with the appearance of a collective identity, where components such as honesty and solidarity also mediate, both inside and outside the MAG. This supports the conceptualisation of identity as multidimensional and fluid between internal and external aspects, which authors such as Longden et al (2018) propose as a key to understand the action mechanism of mutual aid.

A description of a solidarity group must be able to explain or at least outline an explanation of the following five characteristics that explain the solidarity of the group as an agent: cooperation, equity, promotion of the group ethos, reliability and loyalty (Tuomela, 2016). This is ratified in the words of 'Ca':

We have the same condition of vulnerability and ups and downs and that the three of us came to the group looking for help. So, when you know that there are people who are looking for help just like you, that makes you feel in a more humane condition, more than we are in the same.

Or, in similar terms, in the words of 'M', when in the interview he was asked: 'Which aspect of the group would you find the best?'

I think that everyone who has helped us is very human, they are not one of those who. If, for example, a person of the group stagnated, they would start to take him overboard, no, here it is the norm to be sensitive because not everyone responds the same to things, I think that would be, humility and humanity.

The attitude or action of the people within the framework of the group in general is formed or generated by the attitudes and actions of the members in a manner that is compatible with the ethos of the group and its previously accepted reasons and principles for the formation of attitudes and actions. This is reaffirmed by Giddens (1986), where group action provides the conditions that will determine the change or continuity of the structures that form the system where action and structure are unified. Without denying the structural influence on individual action, he does not believe that it is decisive either, that is, the last word belongs to the individual (Peralta-Duque, 2016), even when what speaks is the ethos of the group and, this way, allows multiplicities, becomings, affects, events (Deleuze and Parnet, 1997).

As 'C' says, when asked what the MAG had done that helped him be so connected to it: "The activities keep the team going, doing things ... even if you do them alone, you know that you can share them in the group, you can think about them."

If agency is understood as a union of *possibles*, as a gear (of monads, in the sense of Tarde), for Giddens (1993) the agency precedes the action, but not in a temporal sense but in an analytical-theoretical one that, subsequently (or potentially) will become an action. The agency is, then, a condition of possibility, while the action is understood as a process and as a flow of current from the chain of acts that allow us to speak of action, acts that, at the same time, generate or subvert connections to generate new meanings and new possibilities (Ema-López, 2005). A group that has formed to generate changes is considered as an agent itself, almost as a subject, which

has the capacity to produce actions through individual events (Tuomela, 2016), as proposed by 'C':

It's wonderful because it gave me a much broader picture of the problem that I had. It gave me tools to be able to have control or to do more things in front of my problem and even for the problems of others that one ends up appreciating or even loving.

In line with the previous idea, three central characteristics have been proposed to be able to speak of an adequate group functioning from the social ontology, namely, the group reason consists of that perception of being in the same boat, which denotes a collective commitment. These elements unify people and modify their behaviour in other contexts, even outside the group, when groups move from mental health information to become political and even economic devices, in other words, from learning to empowerment, through awareness of difficulties, the acquisition of objective knowledge, learning from the experiences of others and discovering new perspectives on life and on oneself (Stang and Mittelmark, 2008).

The supportive interaction given in the MAG provides a unique sense of community, unconditional acceptance, information, empowerment, greater self-confidence and a sense of self-determination in those who participate in them (Sample et al, 2018). The components of this type of interaction assume that people who have similar experiences can relate better and, consequently, can offer more authentic empathy and validation. These differences mean that socio-emotional support is frequently accompanied by instrumental support to achieve a desired social or personal change (Repper and Carter, 2011). Farmer (2013) argues that accompaniment or connection is essential for recovery. Hence the need to think of mental problems as a problem that, although it may result in a clinical component at times, always requires a social solution. In this regard, "C" mentions:

I wish that everyone could have these interesting support models, it's just that we all need that in life. Whatever our condition, to have those open-hearted groups where you are you, where your soul is completely naked, where you don't need pretending that you are, that you have, that you don't have. ... Where, apart from helping you to be, they help you get where you want.

The Event

This category will be considered as that dynamic that allows the MAG to be seen as a tool that provides the person with constant availability for their difficulties, beyond specific meetings or contacts. This allows contributions to be made to the group involuntarily (although not against intention). This is how the multiplicity of motor, affective and intellectual relationships produce encounters between bodies and spirits, and constitute the source of individual changes. In Lazzarato's terms (2018: 134), 'the intercerebral relationship is thus manifested, the infinity of monstrosities that constitute the background of every being'.

In the MAG, people come together, contain each other, empower themselves, without ever losing their identity, their autonomy, the possibility of being others

outside of the groups, although without knowing where this multiplicity begins and where it ends. It is described by 'J', when investigating the differences between the actions in the group and outside of it: 'In the group I also come to seek peace of mind to face a reality because when you listen to the people who participate, and understand the cases, you see yourself reflected there in that person, they are like mirrors.' In intercerebral cooperation, it goes from infinitesimal and infinite gradations of the automaton to the genius, from sensorimotor activity to intellectual and affective activity, while in the pin factory everything works by dualisms. It is through affectability, through pure feeling, a common fund of desires and beliefs, that Tarde describes the difference, both in nature and degree, between the activities of creation and reproduction (Lazzarato, 2018). 'Ca' mentions it:

Later they told me that Jaime (a group member) was looking for people with whom he could share etc, etc, and then 'A' (a group member) arrived and we made the group, we rehearsed once and there we got hooked on that need, but it's like I don't know, that's like a crush, it's like a crush on people who have to meet and who have difficulties but can get ahead because they don't know each other and the group gives you that great opportunity.

Identity is understood in this sense as something multidimensional and fluid, which is key to understanding the mechanism of action of a MAG. In this sense, beyond specific affiliations, what strengthens the functioning of MAGs is the feeling of belonging and at the same time feeling that you can decide where to belong. As 'D' mentions: 'The possibility of being divergent.' As described by 'H', when referring to the influence of the group in daily life:

It seems that this group had always been there waiting for me, that it was there for me, not the people, but the moments that I live, it's something difficult to explain, it's not so much the people, although I love them very much, it's the situations, like one thing. ... I know that someone or something is there to support me in what I need, for me.

The MAG, like any event, produces a mutation of subjectivity, that is, of the way of feeling: what was previously supported is no longer supported, producing a 'change in the soul'. Saying 'no' is the minimal form of resistance. The latter must open a process of creation, of transformation of the situation, of active participation in the process.

This is reflected in comments such as those of 'C', which he mentions when asked how he came to join the group: 'I arrived tired of mental health professionals who tell me things that I at some point say like no, why am I going to do that or believe that.' This implies world–mind, mind–mind and mind–world connections, making a group agent made up of interdependent and interacting individuals.

List and Pettit (2011) mention that these functional group agents supervene their members holistically, which gives groups autonomy and irreducibility: supervening group facts cannot be strictly reduced by definition to individual facts. For this reason, the MAG could be understood as having a reflective component that does not abandon the dynamics of the group, without neglecting a performative component.

In a MAG, a member functions as a member of the group and participates in the group's action whenever the group acts. Their action is intrinsically connected to the

action of the group: when a member acts as a member in a MAG, the group also acts through their action. As 'C' states when asked about what is in the group that is not found elsewhere: 'What is always there is not the person, it is the network. Each one has their own process; each one lives it in their own way ... but they also live it on the network.'

In this sense, functional groups as social systems (interconnected structures formed from individuals and their interrelationships) generally appear to be ontologically emergent (that is, they imply qualitatively new characteristics compared to the individualistic base) and irreducible in relation to the individualistic. The same 'H' continues in the interview: 'Something else that is there [in the MAG] are networks. I agree that what are useful are the networks, but with empathy and horizontality' (these last characteristics arise from individuality). To which 'J' complements: 'Then another fundamental ingredient that seems to me to have been key in making the group work is that this group has no competition, that we are not competition.'

These associations of people, while dealing with specific health problems, could be a good place to start the search for these new channels of civic life (Chaudhary et al, 2013). And it is at this point where a mental health strategy that considers each person as the owner of infinite possibilities could become a space for political action. When asked what does the MAG have that other scenarios do not have, 'D' replied: 'It is impossible to say that someone has nothing to contribute here. In the group, even if you don't do anything else, the others help you to be yourself.'

Even if these groups do not directly constitute social movements, group action that can become political and even economic action proposes a new way of doing things, of carrying out new arrangements that, otherwise, with mental illness without attention, could not be generated. Health processes are, by excellence, participatory processes. It seems that it will complement 'D': 'In addition, people who have mental health difficulties are all divergent, but in the group, we are common, we are strength.'

Discussion

MAG have been proposed as a fundamental strategy in the global mental health policy (Pan American Health Organization, 2022; World Health Organization, 2022), however, the development of this strategy has not been carried out satisfactorily or as proposed in said policy. People with mental disorders are often assumed to be 'patients', and this has been associated with the absence of individuals (of Being) in the design and implementation of recovery processes. MAGs are identified as environments that help overcome these two challenges. First, they enhance autonomy and strengthen social networks, which has an impact on symptoms. Second, they become a platform for asserting the potentials that mental illness and barriers within the healthcare system had previously diminished, thus enabling individuals as political agents with rights. The present study aimed to understand, from the perspective of MAG participants, the mechanisms through which ontological aspects contribute to mental health processes.

The institutions, the health system in this case, which make the Event visible to promote action from a social ontology, must have these forms of resistance, which they must listen to, accompany and even support. The objective is to convert hitherto isolated sands into connected sands of action, in the sense that the processes in both strands become interdependent for the participating actors (Real Dato, 2017; Richards, 2019). This is evidenced in the MAG of Red Expressarte, where there is a co-design of complex units, which Escobar (2018) himself defines as co-ontogenies.

Another of the components that constituted the main findings of the present investigation was active agency, which is closely related to other objectives/processes that MAGs have raised, especially with empowerment and with the reinforcement of citizenship. This does not imply a loss of identity, but rather an opening to new possibilities. It is evident how the other, from their autonomy and because of it, contributes to the construction of group actions that strengthen individuality, that empower it and make it more possible, as proposed by the politics of the Event and the contributions of social ontology. In the words of Badiou (2004: 117), 'an event is nothing but a part of a given situation, nothing except a fragment of being'.

The foregoing even allows this research to point out youth MAGs as a claim strategy in the face of increasingly strong ontological affirmations at an ethnic, cultural, sexual level, and so on. Which goes beyond a clinical function and is installed in a strategy for improving living conditions, exclusion and inequities, even deeper aspects than what is indicated by health-related statistics, ultimately is an effective way to impact well-being. These conditions have been analysed as components of well-being, where symptom reduction is just one part of a construct formed by autonomy, social support and living conditions (Martínez-Martínez et al, 2021; Pawlett Jackson, 2024). The MAGs are consequently positioned as a political setting (Chaudhary et al, 2013), both as an objective and a process. They serve as a space where potentialities are negotiated, and nothing is entirely predetermined, not by the conventional psychiatric discourse, nor by societal stigma. It is a setting where the construction of well-being is facilitated from various perspectives.

An event, as indicated in the MAG studied, is also the space in which 'the unification of the monads is made from the network form and the systems constitute an incalculable number of networks that overlap each other' (Lazzarato, 2006: 35). In the MAG, seen from a pluralist ontology, each person can abolish the performance of the functions that even the same society has assigned them based on the stigma for mental illness (for example, crazy) or of health (for example, patient). In this regard, Bourdieu adds:

All of which equals to reduce the objective duality of social conditions to the duality of the modes of existence that they obviously favor in a very unequal way; and, at the same time, to consider both those who 'abandon' themselves to the 'inauthentic' existence responsible for what they are, some for their 'resolution' that tears them from ordinary existence to open up the field of possibilities, and another for that 'resignation' that condemns them to 'decline' and 'social assistance'. (Bourdieu, 1985: 123)

In this way, according to the findings of the present investigation, the MAGs constitute an ideal scenario for the claim of rights of people with mental problems or disorders. Likewise, Event policies are constituted as a propitious approach to youth political action, beyond conditions of illness or disability. The Event as a form of political action constitutes a place of resistance, even beyond the public sphere: from the privacy of a MAG. From there, the interrogation of social norms such as mental illness, madness and the role of patient is shown, an interrogation that seeks, apart from problematising, to move the limits established between the political and the psychosocial.

The Event, as Lazzarato indicates, shows what is intolerable about an era, that is, it questions the natural order and previously accepted categories, to propose to the world something that seemed impossible before: that people with mental illnesses have a voice, reasons and contributions to the recovery of yourself and others, just to mention an example. This characteristic gives elements of feasibility to community strategies as public policy strategies.

Young people in general, even more so young people with mental problems or disorders, who have suffered from imaginary or painful memories, require a concrete implementation of the public policies that concern them. These elements were evidenced from the nuclear components and reaffirmed throughout the course of the investigation, through topics such as Active Agency or even Support Interaction; or in results such as Improvement in the Quality of Life and Hope.

This is how possibilities open up, to build bridges in the dissent between the old positions that stigmatised or oppressed people with mental problems, as this research shows, where even the group participants themselves, tired of the health system and public policies (of their lack of implementation, most of the time), suggest that the union with the institutional framework is key to the recovery of mental health (Chaudhary et al, 2013; Patel et al, 2018). At the cognitive, linguistic and symbolic levels, precognitive, prelinguistic and presymbolic forces act as forces of association and disjunction (de Mare, 1989). Furthermore, they act as forces of attraction and dispersion, of constitution and dissipation of diversified assemblages (Lazzarato, 2018). In this sense, the Event as a policy could reconfigure or recreate the elements of public policy that have failed or have not even been implemented. As Ema-López (2007: 71) states: 'Thus, we would not only speak of a leap between the new and the old of the subverted situation, but also of the tension between different normative configurations and conditions of possibility for the production of new subjectivities, rules and places for political life.'

As limitations, a small and homogeneous sample is recognised. Inadequate contextualisation of the included samples, in terms of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, housing situation and others, limits the ability to critically examine the extent to which those findings apply to groups experiencing various forms of social disadvantage and inequalities (Karadzhev, 2023). Although most studies indicate that qualitative approaches such as that of the present study are required (Richards et al, 2022; Evans, 2023), future studies could incorporate mixed methods, to incorporate quantitative variables in the analyses and facilitate the implementation of these groups at the level of guidelines. or public policies. Likewise, to transcend hegemonic models that study well-being, analyses of what youth psychosocial recovery entails must be increased. This implies deepening the analyses from the micro, meso and macrosocial (Corcoran et al, 2019), and integrating them with ontological aspects.

In conclusion, the MAG that has been described initially worked outside the health system, even despite the flaws in this system. However, it was noted that this group helped to facilitate clinical processes later, from a framework of participation and human rights. Despite being recommended in the legislative, scientific and technical elements, community interventions for mental health, like other types of interventions, have had difficulties in their implementation. Something that was also pointed out in the interviews is that, given these conditions, the MAGs can dialogue with the health system, which they strengthen

with the sensitivity required to address mental health and with elements of recovery based on scientific evidence.

This proposes the MAG as a facilitator between what is recognised to be done, what is actually done and what causes changes in the person. MAGs could be key elements in the implementation of mental health plans, strategies or policies. For this reason, the traditional health system, when seeking to integrate them, must consider that they could work *against, despite or because of their failures*, and even so, be useful to people.

Ontological pluralism constitutes a novel and successful paradigm to address social problems, as an epistemic, methodological and hermeneutic paradigm that enables a comprehensive reading of reality, and integrated research and intervention processes. It is something that challenges professionals in the social sciences and health to seek viable alternatives from an interdisciplinary perspective that implies an opening of the discourses and methods traditionally used to meet the requirements that today's society demands of them.

Through ontological understanding, a mental health strategy can become a new form of political action in mental health that allows collective action to recover well-being and to respond to difficulties in living conditions. At the same time, it is established as a way of understanding a new path of political action in mental health that allows group agency and points out new possibilities for the individual with mental problems or disorders, as a link between the concepts of global mental health with political reality, which allows addressing a theoretical problem with practical implications through the development of strategies based on scientific evidence that public policies recommend.

As implications of this approach for practice, we found that for a long time mental health care sought to control people as its objective. In this sense, negative adaptation guarantees recovery in vain. On the other hand, the positive adaptation, from the desires, from the forces and heterogeneous beliefs, reaffirms freedom from the categories proposed by Sen (2000): converting capabilities into functions. The MAGs, from their structure and possibilities, are proposed as essential elements in the search for this freedom.

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Conflict of interest

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