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Mental health, well-being, and COVID-19 pandemic experiences: A mixed-methods study

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Background

- COVID-19 Pandemic Effects
 - Over 4 million confirmed global deaths (Johns Hopkins University, 2021)
 - Alarming mental health effects (e.g., Pfefferbaum & North, 2020), especially for those with pre-existing psychiatric diagnoses (Henssler et al., 2020)
- Mental health is not synonymous with well-being
 - Well-being as a multi-dimensional construct (e.g., Keyes, 2005)
 - Hedonic – Emotional
 - Eudaimonic – Psychological & social

Background

- Coping and adaptation in disaster situations
 - Coping: “Efforts to regulate emotions, behaviours, cognitions, psychophysiology, and environmental aspects” in response to stress (Morales-Rodriguez & Perez-Marmol, 2019, p. 2)
 - Resilience: “Positive adaptation” or an individual capacity to resume and maintain stable functioning despite adversity (Herrman et al., 2011, p. 259); also a socio-ecological construct (Walsh, 2020)

The Present Study

- Purpose: Examine psychotherapy clients' functioning and adaptation in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - **Aim 1**: Use person-centered analysis to identify distinct client subgroups on indicators of mental health and well-being
 - **Aim 2**: Use thematic analysis to describe client experiences during the early phase of the pandemic, including benefits, challenges, and new learning.

Methods

- Design: Mixed-methods, concurrent triangulation design (Hanson et al., 2005)
- Sample
 - $N = 94$ psychotherapy clients
 - 20-81 years old ($M = 41.53$, $SD = 15.35$)
 - Female (66%), male (27.7%), genderqueer (2.1%), transgender (1%), and other or more than one gender (3.2%)
 - Heterosexual (67%), bisexual (12.8%), gay (7.4%), lesbian (2.1%), pansexual (2.1%), asexual (1%), and other or more than one sexual orientation (7.4%)
 - White (76.6%), Asian American (6.4%), Black or African American (6.4%), Middle Eastern/North African (2.1%), biracial (4.3%), or unreported (4.3%).
 - 5.3% Hispanic or LatinX

Procedures

- Data collected between mid-May and mid-June 2020
- Assessment integrated into ongoing clinical routine outcome monitoring (Lambert et al., 2018)
 - Added 4 pandemic-related questions
- Link to measures sent by encrypted email
- Measures completed online in REDCap (Harris et al., 2019, 2009)

Measures

- Mental Health Symptoms
 - Depression: Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9; Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002)
 - Anxiety: Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7; Spitzer et al., 2006)
- Well-Being
 - Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF; Lamers et al., 2010)
 - Hedonic/emotional well-being
 - Eudaimonic/psychological well-being
 - Eudaimonic/social well-being

COVID-19 Questions

- A single, sliding scale item assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on clients' lives (*0 = negatively, 100 = positively*)
- Open-ended:
 - In your own words, what, if anything, has been most challenging about the ways the COVID-19 situation has impacted you?
 - In your own words, what, if anything, has been most beneficial about the ways the COVID-19 situation has impacted you?
 - In reflecting on the changes that have been involved in trying to deal with the COVID-19 situation, what have you been learning about yourself?

Analyses

- Quantitative: Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) on indicators of symptoms and well-being
 - Covariate analyses: COVID-19 impact, age, sexual orientation, race, gender
- Qualitative: Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) across each open-ended question
 - Full sample – 6 dimensions
 - Organized by subgroups identified by LPA

	Full Sample (N = 94)			Class 1 (n=15)	Class 2 (n=8)	Class 3 (n=28)	Class 4 (n=12)	Class 5 (n=31)
				Stagnant	Languishing	Flourishing	Resilient	Mobilized
Indicators	M	SD	Range	M	M	M	M	M
Anxiety	6.20	4.76	0-21	5.29 ^a	12.61 ^b	3.04 ^c	13.42 ^b	4.82 ^a
Depression	6.83	5.24	0-27	6.75 ^a	16.26 ^b	2.44 ^c	12.58 ^b	5.92 ^a
EWB	9.46	3.26	3-18	6.08 ^a	3.18 ^b	12.24 ^c	9.44 ^d	10.45 ^d
PWB	19.49	6.32	6-36	14.90 ^a	7.75 ^b	25.71 ^c	16.27 ^a	21.05 ^d
SWB	11.20	5.44	5-30	7.36 ^a	2.83 ^b	17.22 ^c	8.55 ^{ad}	11.18 ^d

Pandemic Experience Themes

Domain	Challenges	Benefits	Learning
Psychological	Disorienting uncertainties	Clarifying values	Strengths & vulnerabilities
Emotional	Fear, anxiety, & worry	Less stress, anxiety, & guilt	Facing difficult emotions
Relational	Inability to gather	More alone time	Need for more/less social time
Physical	Less healthcare access	More sleep	Effects of stress on health
Ecological	Home as constricting	Home as safe haven	Appreciation for home
Behavioral/lifestyle	Vocational disruption	Slower, simpler routines	Need for structure

Pandemic Experience: **Stagnant**

(mid-range symptoms, mid-range well-being)

■ Challenges

- Fear, anxiety, & worry
- Leaving home as difficult/threatening
- **Relational isolation/loneliness**
- Loss of routine/coping
- Home as constricting

■ Benefits

- Independence/alone time
- Connecting through technology

- Connecting with nature

- **Slower pace/simpler routine**

■ Learning

- Reframing/adapting
- Need for/value of relationships
- Need for/value of alone time
- Personal strengths
- Facing difficult emotions

Pandemic Experience: **Languishing**

(high symptoms, low well-being)

■ Challenges

- Relational isolation/loneliness
- Home as constricting
- Mental toll/burden

■ Benefits

- Slower pace/simpler routine
- Time/opportunity for reflection
- Physical health
- Nothing

■ Learning

- Personal vulnerabilities

Pandemic Experiences: **Flourishing**

(low symptoms, high well-being)

■ Challenges

- Inability to gather
- Vocational/educational disruption
- Loss of coping/routine
- Fear, anxiety, & worry

■ Benefits

- **Time/stronger bonds w/“pods”**
- Slower pace/simpler routine
- Activities, projects, & learning

- Gratitude & hope

■ Learning

- **Personal strengths**

Pandemic Experiences: **Resilient**

(high symptoms, mid-range well-being)

■ Challenges

- Fear, anxiety, & worry
- Loss of coping/routine
- Vocational/education disruption
- **Relational strain**

■ Benefits

- **Activities, projects, & learning**
- Vocational/educational changes & working from home
- Time with quarantine “pod”

■ Learning

- Appreciation for structure
- Personal vulnerabilities
- Changing values, beliefs, & identity
- Difficult emotions

Pandemic Experiences: **Mobilized**

(mid-range symptoms, high well-being)

■ Challenges

- Inability to gather
- Vocational/educational disruptions
- Loss of coping/routine
- Fear, anxiety, and worry

■ Benefits

- Connecting through technology
- Time with quarantine “pods”
- Relational connections & support
- **Activities, projects, and learning**

■ Learning

- Need for/value of relationships
- Need for/value of alone time

Discussion

- Supports research documenting a complex relationship between mental health and well-being (Keyes, 2005; Lamers et al., 2010; O'Connor et al., 2012, 2015)
 - Eudaimonic dimensions (psychological & social) as protective?

- Privilege in flourishing

Discussion

- Insight into pandemic's effects on psychotherapy clients
- Coping and adaptation
 - Active coping
 - Meaning-based coping
 - Social support

Limitations

- Small ($N = 94$), relatively homogenous sample
- Timing of data collection and underestimation of distress?
- Cross-sectional

Future Directions

- Monitor symptom, well-being, and experience over time as the pandemic's circumstances continue to change
- Inquire about specific coping behaviors and resilience capacities, as well as unique stressors and resources, to estimate relationships with functioning
- Effects of psychotherapy in promoting or sustaining positive mental health

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