

REFLECTION



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Could there be a Good Side to the COVID-19 Pandemic?

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ABSTRACT

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, resulting in loss of lives, burnout, anxiety, and depression related to social distancing and quarantine measures, some positive changes have been reported at the individual, interpersonal, and community level. Self-reflection, social connectedness, resilience, and innovation have emerged as positive values that may contribute to a decrease in burnout during the post-COVID pandemic era.

Keywords: COVID-19, social connectedness, pandemic, self-reflection, resilience, innovation

INTRODUCTION

An outbreak of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) began in Wuhan, China in December 2019, and spread on an international scale via person-to-person transmission (Holshue et al., 2020). Due to the severity of the COVID-19 outbreak and its potential spread, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a global health emergency on January 31, 2020. Subsequently, the WHO declared it a pandemic situation on March 11, 2020 (Dhama et al., 2020). Since then, 580,837 deaths have been reported in the United States year-to-date because of COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Individuals with comorbidities (obesity, hypertension, congestive heart failure, diabetes, asthma, chronic kidney disease, cancer, other immune disorders), and those older than 65 years reported the greatest mortality (Carbone et al., 2021).

Notwithstanding the devastation and extraordinary loss globally, many people have experienced changes in several aspects of their lives for more than one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many have reported significant loss of loved ones, changes in social activities, and loss of livelihood. Their usual way of life has dramatically been altered from their previous way of living to a “new normal.” However, a variety of benefits have also transpired in an array of areas.

A review of anecdotal reports and empirical findings suggest that there have been some positive changes as a result of the pandemic that may lead to positive long-term outcomes for some individuals, families, and communities.

SELF-REFLECTION

In a survey by the Pew Research Center, while the majority of participants reported more negative effects on their lives during the pandemic, 73% identified at least one unanticipated positive aspect (Van Kessel et al., 2021). The survey elicited anecdotal comments describing beneficial outcomes including having more personal time, engaging in leisure activities such as reading, acquiring new hobbies, completing unfinished home projects, and participating in conversations about difficult and controversial topics. Others reported time for self-reflection and introspection, a slower pace of life, a renewed appreciation for the outdoors, the ability to sleep in, more compassion and empathy, and an increase in clarity (Van Kessel et al., 2021).

The pandemic offered a new perspective on things that we may have taken for granted, including leisure, connections, work, family, and friends (Haski-Leventhal, 2020). There is a new sense of appreciation and gratitude as new insights arise from COVID-19, and this has been

extended to first responders and healthcare workers. Many have reassessed priorities, leading to subsequent changes in daily life. There has been increased awareness of the primary importance of health, above all, leading to increased willingness to make sacrifices to protect self and others. Consequently, the probability of engaging in healthier lifestyle changes may become a trend.

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Social connectedness, or the empathic connection with others, may serve as a mediator role in the relationship between coronavirus stress and burnout (Yildirim et al., 2021). With social connectedness, individuals get to share resources, learn to cope with anxiety and depression, and increase their sense of satisfaction with life (Arslan, 2018; Taylor et al., 2020). There have been many creative ways that individuals have connected with others and assisted neighbors through food drives, singing on balconies, drive-by birthday parties and graduation celebrations, and reaching out to senior citizens and others via phone. Consequently, there has been a renewed sense of community and solidarity during the coronavirus lockdown.

The quality and quantity of this social connectedness has translated into physical or online presence, and this has become quite evident during the pandemic. Social media has been utilized to create and maintain personal relationships. The use of the online platform has served in innovative ways to deliver a wide range of services, ranging from online education for children and adults, to grocery shopping, faith-based services, and transition of the workforce to remote mode.

Americans have described in their own words the struggles and silver linings of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most Americans were able to think of at least one silver lining. Younger and more educated Americans were more likely to mention silver linings than older Americans. Some reported a sense of life slowing down, drawing family and friends to spend more time together (Van Kessel et al., 2021).

RESILIENCE

Psychological resilience has been evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Psychologists

define resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors (American Psychological Association [APA], 2012). There is great concern about the psychological consequences of the pandemic, especially the short- and long-term impact on the mental health of both the general population and individuals already suffering from a psychiatric disease (Moreno et al., 2020; Vieta et al., 2020).

Some individuals have been more psychologically resilient to adversity than others, and patterns of vulnerability or resilience differ (Sominisky et al., 2020). There is an inverse relationship between psychological resilience and psychological distress, especially in natural disasters (Blanc et al., 2016). An aspect associated with psychological resilience and adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic is represented by affective temperaments. Temperaments are conceived as early-appearing individual differences in emotional reactivity, with biological solid underpinnings and stability across the lifespan (Moccia et al., 2020). Therefore, affective temperaments might mediate adaptive functioning, promoting better coping mechanisms to environmental stressors, thus influencing resiliency (Akiskal & Akiskal, 2005). Other individuals could also have personality traits such as motivation, hope, humor, talents, skills, and interest that may protect from life difficulties (Verdolini et al., 2021). The COVID-19 shutdown mandates and social isolations have an effect on resilience. Resilience also relies on functional, supporting, and meaningful social networks and positive bonds (Ayed et al., 2019).

Several resources became available to enhance resilience during this COVID-19 pandemic crisis. These resources included strategies to promote resiliency, tips for coping and practicing resilience, stories of creativity and resilience, and resilience quotes. Resilience has been evident throughout this pandemic by individuals worldwide, sharing their personal stories of hope, resiliency, and inspiration. Also, the pandemic brought for many the opportunities to learn new skills. For example, a large part of the Lebanese people, who were affected by the challenging economic crisis and the confinement decreed in the face of the virus, joined hands with the United States and raised one million dollars in

an hour to help the most disadvantaged in Lebanon (APA, 2020).

Another example of resilience is a physiotherapist in France specializing in orthopedics, who was assigned to work with COVID-19 patients. He used mindfulness to regulate his emotions, while providing care to COVID-19 patients needing breathing therapy. He also carried index cards with positive thoughts that made him feel strong, such as the "FORCE is with me." He practiced mindfulness when placing on his personal protective equipment, telling himself he was safe. As a result of his practicing mindfulness, he expressed feeling stronger, and everything going well towards the end of his day (APA, 2020).

In the work setting, some managers and supervisors promoted the resilience of their employees by encouraging them to share their personal experiences with the pandemic during business meetings. Managers also shared their reflections on personal growth as they dealt with the COVID-19 crisis (Basso, 2020). India's young people demonstrated resilience through their courage and relentless determination to help those around them achieve a healthier, safer, and equal world. They showcased their adaptability and resilience in this challenging time by reaching one million people to advocate for complete immunization of children under five years. They also assisted children to continue their learning even as schools were closed and raised awareness about child safety and protection. The youth provided a moving library using a scooter on wheels, making it available so that no child should be deprived of access to learning (Sundararajan, 2021).

INNOVATION

While the pandemic has had a negative impact in many areas of life for individuals, families, communities, and businesses, there have been a number of opportunities as well. Through creativity and innovative ideas and approaches, many made changes in how organizations and companies operate to meet personal, familial, financial, and community needs. New service companies and product brands have emerged due to entrepreneurial work to meet these needs in the midst of the global pandemic. Some of the services entered into by entrepreneurs include cleaning delivery, remote fitness classes, after party clean-up, home care, pet sitting, and online resellers. For those with special skills or

knowledge popular ventures included translation, cybersecurity consultation, e-commerce or online shopping, freelance copywriter, online teaching and/or tutoring, ghost kitchen/healthy food delivery, video editing, social media marketing, e-book writing, affiliate marketing, bookkeeping, accounting, and sustainable sales and service (Watson, 2021).

Kapoor and Kaufman (2020) discussed ways in which to mitigate the negative influence of the pandemic as it related to social distancing, quarantine, or lockdown measures. Strategies to mitigate these effects, including participation in creative activities, hobbies, or interests have served as effective means of providing relief during this crisis. Furthermore, there has been an increase in day-to-day creativity and innovation highlighted through social media. More individuals have had opportunities to carry out and approach daily activities and chores in a new and different approach. Consequently, more homebound individuals have overcome the challenges related to the pandemic with ingenuity, creativity, and innovation.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought global challenges, devastation, and loss of lives. Many experienced fear and grief as they learned to cope with the loss of loved ones and recovered from the infection and its related complications. For others, the pandemic had a silver lining. People became creative in seeking alternative ways to stay connected to loved ones and carry on responsibilities through distance learning or remote labor. In other instances, it brought people and communities to support each other through the loneliness and seclusion due to quarantine measures. Many reevaluated health options and renewed commitments to live healthier. People have engaged in different activities, demonstrating their resilience and ability to be innovative during this challenging COVID-19 pandemic.

As we continue to transition through the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be important to continue building resilience and drawing from the positive lifestyle changes resulting from the pandemic and its containment-related measures. Social connectedness, self-reflection, and gratitude are important catalysts to resolve the burnout, anxiety, and depression resulting from the social distancing and quarantine-related

measures. While there is ongoing uncertainty with the dwindling of restrictive measures as the number of cases drop, and the possibility of future waves and different coronavirus strains, it is our hope that positive changes resulting from the first pandemic will continue to serve as a buffer as we transition through the various waves of COVID-19 and the post-pandemic era. The long-term outcomes of this pandemic remain to be seen.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the content and writing of the paper.

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