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Mental Health and the Covid-19 Lockdown: International Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The Coronavirus pandemic brought about a radical change in the way people live and interact. The purpose of the present study is to study the impact that the imposed stay-at-home and social distancing measures have had on people's mental health. Our theoretical framework was anchored on Positive Psychology and its goals.

Method: While still in lockdown mode, we designed a questionnaire of 45 items regarding the association between mental health and lockdown conditions. We first tested the questionnaire's pilot. We then incorporated in it the Big Five Personality Test as we wanted to find out to what extent the personality traits of each participant differentiated that participant from others during the stay-at-home and social distancing period. Last, we uploaded our questionnaire online and sent it to a sizeable, random sample in Greece and abroad. Once we had collected our data we subjected them to Descriptive, Factor, and ANOVA analyses.

Results: We received 284 responses to our questionnaire. 225 responses came from participants in Greece and 59 from participants in 22 European countries, the United States, Africa, and Asia. Our ANOVA analyses yielded interesting results. What is more, Positive Psychology's P.E.R.M.A. model was confirmed by our data's factor analysis albeit inversely: the emotions that stemmed from the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic were negative ones instead of positive, something that we found perfectly understandable.

Conclusion: The innovation of our study lies in the fact that not only did our research study the stay-at-home and social distance measures phenomenon during the very time that most countries worldwide were on lockdown but also recorded faithfully the psychological state of our questionnaire's respondents during that period. We believe that our work may prove useful to scientists working on the issues linked to COVID-19, should the pandemic manifest itself through another outbreak. Moreover, our research could possibly serve as a study that could be linked potentially to cases of people who are mandatorily incarcerated in institutions, such as correctional facilities, or to cases where lockdowns and social distancing measures need to be imposed due to conditions arising from war, armed conflicts, or natural disasters and other force majeure circumstances.

Keywords

Mental health, Social distancing, Stay-at-home, Lockdown, Coronavirus, COVID-19, P.E.R.M.A., Positive Psychology.

Introduction

When the COVID-19 (virus: SARS-CoV-2) pandemic descended on all continents of the globe, many were the countries which, in order to contain the lethal virus' spreading and dire impact, were forced to adopt a series of social distancing measures: citizens were advised to avoid physical contact that could encourage the virus to spread further; schools were shut down and so were retail shops, entertainment and dining venues, and public services where large gatherings could give the virus ample opportunity to spread; social and cultural events were shelved, travel was restricted or prohibited; and citizens were given instructions to stay at home and self-quarantine. Consequently, from one day to the next, the life of people around the world underwent a dramatic and radical change which impacted on their lifestyle but, more importantly, on their mental health. During the twentieth century there were other pandemics and epidemics which gave rise to the need for corresponding measures, with the most recent example being the 2003 SARS epidemic (virus: SARS-CoV-1) [1] whose outbreak manifested itself in Singapore [2,3]. While researching the issue, we came upon the realization that there was a dearth of bibliography entailing the impact that lockdown measures may have had on people's mental health.

However, apart from essaying to bridge that bibliographical gap, the present study may also prove its merit through the fact that its measurements were carried out in the period April 19-May 6, 2020, the time when, in an effort to contain the diaspora of the Coronavirus, practically the entire planet was under lockdown with citizens under stay-at-home instructions and clueless as to when they would be able to resume their normal pace of life. Thus, during that "across-the-board" critical period, when people were daily and acutely experiencing the impact that the lockdown and stay-at-home measures were having on their life, we decided to carry out the present study. We wished to record in its entirety the picture of the pandemic's impact on the mental health and psychological outlook of citizens, as well as the radical change that the pandemic wrought on their lives.

To implement the present study, we employed Positive Psychology and its goals as our theoretical framework while our research focused on the impact that the lockdown and social distancing measures set in motion due to the Coronavirus pandemic have had on the mental health of citizens.

Method

In the first fortnight of March 2020, when the lockdown and quarantine measures in many countries were in full effect in an effort to contain the Coronavirus pandemic, we designed a questionnaire of 45 items which focused on the state of mind of people living under the conditions described above. As mentioned earlier, the theoretical framework on which we based our questionnaire's design was the key principles of Positive Psychology [4]. Following a pilot trial which included 20 respondents in Greece, we first scaled the questionnaire. In the second part, we added to it the Big Five Theory Personality Test which we had used in a previous study of ours [5]. Last, we complemented our questionnaire with some general items and items directly linked to our sample (Sex, Age, Studies, Number of Family Members, and Country of Residence).

We prefaced the questionnaire by listing the reasons for its implementation and complied with the ethics governing studies entailing questionnaires. As at the time we were under stay-athome instructions and unable to move about, we forwarded the questionnaire via e-mails and the social media to a large number of contacts we maintain in Greece and abroad. 30% of the people who received the questionnaire filled it out and forwarded it to us. Next, based on our measurements, we carried out a Descriptive Statistic, a Factor Analysis, a Correlation Analysis, and a Variance Analysis, all necessary in our familiarizing ourselves with our sample; in finding out whether our respondents' answers could be grouped; in correlating the variables; and in pinpointing those means that presented statistically significant differences.

Findings

Our sample consists of 284 respondents. In terms of the variable "Sex", 18.7% of the respondents were male and 81.3% were female. With regard to the variable "Age", 8.8% were 18-23 years old; 25% were 23-28 years old; 14.8% were 29-33 years old; 15.9% were 34-39 years old; 10.6% were 40-44 years old; 9.9% were 45-50 years old; 8.1% were 51-55 years old; 3.5% were 56-60 years old; and 3.5% were 61-66 years old.

79.2% of the questionnaire respondents, i.e., 225 individuals, resided in Greece. The remaining 20.8% of the sample, i.e., 58 individuals, came from the following countries: 11 respondents came from Latvia; 8 from Britain; 5 from France; 4 from Sweden; 4 from Italy; 3 from Cyprus; 3 from Portugal; 3 from the U.S.A.; 2 from Lithuania; 2 from Luxembourg; 2 from Albania; and 1 each from Switzerland, Lebanon, Bulgaria, Lebanon, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Jordan, Morocco, Denmark, and Germany. Last, with regard to the variable "Number of Family Members", 30.98% of the respondents had 1-2 members in the family; 40.5% had 3-4 members; 19% had 5-6 members; and 9.5% had over 6 family members.

Table 1 below shows the means in declining order:

As to the respondents' educational level, 24.65% were university students, 23.94% held a university degree, 46.59% had pursued postgraduate studies, 1.41% of the respondents were high school students, and 1.41% held a high school diploma.

The analysis of the 284 respondents' field of studies took the following form: 13 respondents had pursued Literature; 44 had an academic background in Formal Sciences; 89 had studies in the Health Sciences; 61 had selected Education as their field of study; 25 had followed Musical Studies; 26 had studied Economics; 7 had turned to Agricultural Studies; 3 had chosen Journalism; 9 had entered studies in the Humanities (Political Sciences, Sociology); 5 had pursued studies in Information Technologies; and 15 respondents had gone into various other study fields.

Next, we implemented a Factor Analysis (Varimax Normalized) and a Confirmatory Factor Analysis. The results of those two analyses are presented in Table II below where, in essence, we encounter again Dr. Seligman's P.E.R.M.A. Model. However, in our case, the lockdown measures due to the Coronavirus pandemic, instead of positive emotions, generated negative emotions something that, under the circumstances, we find entirely understandable.

We then implemented an ANOVA Variance Analysis of the independent variables Sex, Age, Studies, Profession, Country of

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Do you believe that during your stay – at – home period you have moments when you feel frightened.4,722,69Do you believe that during your stay – at – home period there are moments you get angry with another member of your family or those around you.4,632,71Do you believe that the social distancing measures have led to new and improved living conditions for you.4,382,51Do you believe that you have been using your time creatively during the social distancing period.4,321,74Do you believe that you now know your friends a little better with the social distancing measures in place.4,262,33Do you believe that the social distancing period is a waste of your live.4,202,64How successful have you been in maintaining your social live with the social distancing measures in place.3,982,37Do you believe that social distancing measures have resulted in your losing touch with your friends.3,542,60Do you believe that the Coronavirus issue focuses on your country alone.2,131,92	Do you believe that the social distancing measures make you feel low – spirited.	4,75	2,50
Do you believe that during your stay – at – home period there are moments you get angry with another member of your family or those around you.4,632,71Do you believe that the social distancing measures have led to new and improved living conditions for you.4,382,51Do you believe that you have been using your time creatively during the social distancing period.4,321,74Do you believe that the pace of life will return to its previous state soon.4,262,33Do you believe that you now know your friends a little better with the social distancing measures in place.4,222,53Do you believe that the social distancing period is a waste of your live.4,202,64How successful have you been in maintaining your social live with the social distancing measures in place.3,982,37Do you believe that social distancing measures have resulted in your losing touch with your friends.3,542,60Do you believe that the Coronavirus issue focuses on your country alone.2,131,92	Do you believe that during your stay – at – home period you have moments when you feel frightened.	4,72	2,69
Do you believe that the social distancing measures have led to new and improved living conditions for you.4,382,51Do you believe that you have been using your time creatively during the social distancing period.4,321,74Do you believe that the pace of life will return to its previous state soon.4,262,33Do you believe that you now know your friends a little better with the social distancing measures in place.4,222,53Do you believe that the social distancing period is a waste of your live.4,202,64How successful have you been in maintaining your social live with the social distancing measures in place.3,982,37Do you believe that social distancing measures have resulted in your losing touch with your friends.3,542,60Do you believe that the Coronavirus issue focuses on your country alone.2,131,92	Do you believe that during your stay – at – home period there are moments you get angry with another member of your family or those around you.	4,63	2,71
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Do you believe that the pace of life will return to its previous state soon.4,262,33Do you believe that you now know your friends a little better with the social distancing measures in place.4,222,53Do you believe that the social distancing period is a waste of your live.4,202,64How successful have you been in maintaining your social live with the social distancing measures in place.3,982,37Do you believe that social distancing measures have resulted in your losing touch with your friends.3,542,60Do you believe that the Coronavirus issue focuses on your country alone.2,131,92	Do you believe that you have been using your time creatively during the social distancing period.	4,32	1,74
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Do you believe that the social distancing period is a waste of your live.4,202,64How successful have you been in maintaining your social live with the social distancing measures in place.3,982,37Do you believe that social distancing measures have resulted in your losing touch with your friends.3,542,60Do you believe that the Coronavirus issue focuses on your country alone.2,131,92	Do you believe that you now know your friends a little better with the social distancing measures in place.	4,22	2,53
How successful have you been in maintaining your social live with the social distancing measures in place.3,982,37Do you believe that social distancing measures have resulted in your losing touch with your friends.3,542,60Do you believe that the Coronavirus issue focuses on your country alone.2,131,92	Do you believe that the social distancing period is a waste of your live.	4,20	2,64
Do you believe that social distancing measures have resulted in your losing touch with your friends.3,542,60Do you believe that the Coronavirus issue focuses on your country alone.2,131,92	How successful have you been in maintaining your social live with the social distancing measures in place.	3,98	2,37
Do you believe that the Coronavirus issue focuses on your country alone.2,131,92	Do you believe that social distancing measures have resulted in your losing touch with your friends.	3,54	2,60
	Do you believe that the Coronavirus issue focuses on your country alone.	2,13	1,92

Table 1: Means.

Residence, and Number of Family Members, when seen in relation to the dependent variables of the questionnaire's 1^{st} part, shows the variables Sex, Age, and Country of Residence presenting a statistically significant change in their means. More specifically, Sex: F=33.529 and p=0.019<0.05; Age: F=1.375 and p=0.000; and Country of Residence: F=1.431 and p=0.000<0.05.

Our next step was to carry out a Variance Analysis of the questionnaire's independent variables that relate to personality

(2ndpart) and compare it with the dependent variables of the same questionnaire (1st part). The comparison led us to the following statistically significant differences in the means. For "I am a likeable person," F=1.508 and p=0.000<0.05; for "I am an organized person," F=1.256 and p=0.035<0.05; for "I suffer from depression," F=1.364 and p=0.007<0.05; for "I am self-confident," F=1.260 and p=0.033<0.05; for "I have an artistic flair," F=1.367 and p=0.006<0.05; and for "I have values," F=1.415 and p=0.003<0.05.

	Emotions	Engagement	Relations	Meaning	Accomplishment
Do you believe that during your stay-at-home period you experience moments when you feel disappointment?	-0.82				
Do you believe that the social distancing measures make you feel low- spirited?	-0.80				
Do you believe that during your stay-at-home period there are moments when you feel angry over what is happening?	-0.75				
Do you believe that feeling solidarity towards others is what has made you comply with the orders/instructions issued by the state?		0.79			
How successful are your in faithfully complying with the warnings and instructions issued by the state		0.78			
Do you worry over the safety of the people you care about?		0.72			
Do you believe that the social distancing measures have led to new and improved living conditions for you?			0.81		
Do you believe that social distancing measures have helped you in getting to know yourself better?			0.79		
Do you believe that social distancing measures have brought you closer to your loved ones?			0.60		
Do you believe that you can be productive in a new way with the social distancing measures in place?				0.83	
Do you believe that have been able to cultivate new skills during this social distancing period				0.78	
Do you believe that you have been using your time creatively during the social distancing period?				0.78	
How successful are you in responding to your professional obligations with the social distancing measures in place?					0.91
To what extent have been able to carry on with your work with the social distancing measures in place?					0.90
How successful are you in maintaining your professional contacts with the social distancing measures in place?					0.90
Expl. Var	2.01	1.89	1.82	2.05	2.55
Prp.Total	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.14	0.17

Table 2: Results of Factor Analysis.

We concluded our analyses with the graphs of some of the Covariance Analyses that presented statistical significance so that we may examine the impact that Sex and Age have on the following variables' covariance: "I am a likeable person"; "I am an organized person"; "I suffer from depression"; "I am self confident"; "I have an artistic flair"; "I have values".

In the following graphs and for the variable "Age", we obtained the following numbers. 12-17 age bracket: 1 respondent; 18-22 age bracket: 2 respondents; 23-28 age bracket: 3 respondents; 29-33 age bracket: 4 respondents; 34-39 age bracket: 5 respondents; 40-44 age bracket: 6 respondents; 45-50 age bracket: 7 respondents; 51-55 age bracket: 8 respondents; 56-60 age bracket: 9 respondents; and 61-66 age bracket: 10 respondents.

The table below (Table 3) shows the covariance means for graphs 1 through 10:

Variable	Covariance Mean
"I am an organized person"	4.81
"I have values"	4.59
"I am a likeable person"	3.83
"I am self-confident"	3.53
"I have an artistic flair"	3.31
"I suffer from depression"	2.26

 Table 3: Covariance Means - Graphs 1-11.

With regard to the question "**Do you believe that during your stay-at-home period there are moments you get angry with another member of your family or those around you?**" Graph 1 tells us that the females of the sample who were younger did feel angry with some member of their family. However, when it came to the sample's males, that feeling of anger was experienced by the males who were older.

When it came to the question "**Do you believe that during your stay-at-home period you experience moments when you feel disappointment?**" Graph 2 below shows that the times when the sample's females felt disappointment while staying at home present steady means for all age brackets, while the males' corresponding instances change depending on age.

Graph 3 below entails the question **«Do you believe that during your stay-at-home period you have moments when you feel frightened?»** and shows that our sample's younger females did experience fear during their stay-at-home period while males did so only at specific older ages.

In Graph 4 and with regard to the question "How successful are your in faithfully complying with the warnings and instructions

issued by the state?" it is evident that the younger females of the sample did better at following the state's warnings and instructions than the males who, in contrast, did comply with the state's measures but were successful in doing so at older ages.

In Graph 5, which depicts the analysis of the question "**Do you** believe that social media play an important and useful role during this social distancing period?" it appears that our female respondents, consistently throughout the age spectrum, considered the social media useful while the importance of the social media for our male respondents depends on the age group they belong to.



Gra	nh	1
UIA	pп	1



Graph 2

F(360, 1721,5)=1,1877, p=,01557 -2 <u>→</u> Male Female Age



Graph 6 regards the question "**Do you believe that the social distancing period is a waste of your life?**"It shows that our sample's males, especially 45-50-year-old respondents, considered the period during which social distancing measures were in place a wasted time period of their life. On the other hand, the sample's females, although of the same mind as the males, belonged to the age brackets of 51 and over.

In analyzing the question "**Do you believe that you have been using your time creatively during the social distancing period?**", Graph 7 makes it evident that it was mostly the males who were able to exercise their creativity during the time the social distancing measures were in place, with the exception of those who fell in the age bracket 18-22 and of those who were in the 56 and over age brackets.

In terms of the questionnaire item "**Do you believe that you can maintain a climate of calmness with your family and with those around you?**"Graph 8 reveals that it was our sample's male respondents who succeeded in maintaining a positive climate within the family and with their friends.

According to Graph 9 which presents the results of the question "**Do you believe that your knowledge of technology has improved?**" it seems that it was mostly the female respondents who believed across their age spectrum that they did hone their IT skills. Last, Graph 10 shows the results ensuing from the question "**Do** you believe that social distancing measures have helped in combating the pandemic?" and reveals that the means for males over 34 are much higher than the means for females, with the exception of the 23-33 age group where the means for females are the ones which are higher.

Conclusion

So far and to the best of our knowledge, the present study is the first to be carried out during the restrictions and lockdown which went into effect to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As an aside, we would also like to note that the existing literature on the mental health of people under such conditions is scant and that is precisely the aim of our study: it records the conditions and feelings the respondents experienced during that period of lockdown.

It also led to a series of interesting findings and observations. The observation worthy of note is that, although we forwarded the questionnaire to an equal number of females and males, the number of male respondents was by far smaller than that of women respondents. The reason for that difference is unknown to us.

Once we had collected the responses to our questionnaire, we



















ran a Factor Analysis which confirmed the P.E.R.M.A. model's Positive Emotions core element albeit in reverse. In other words, the feelings that our respondents experienced during the lockdown were negative instead of positive. It was also evident from the answers we received, that our respondents also confirmed the remaining core elements of Dr. Seligman's P.E.R.M.A. model.

For one thing, respondents did follow the instructions issued by the state and honored their commitment as citizens (Engagement). For another, not only were they able to maintain their relationship with others but they also succeeded in improving their selfcommunication (Relationships). Third, they found a number of pastimes that gave meaning to their life during the lockdown period (Meaning). Last, they gave their life a sense of accomplishment by honoring their obligations (Accomplishment).

This observation of ours may prove of value to those who work in the field of mental health as they could focus on improving the P.E.R.M.A. model's core elements, i.e., Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment; and, quite likely, succeed in lessening the negative emotions that people living under conditions of a lockdown may be experiencing.

Next, through a series of Variance (ANOVA) and Covariance Analyses we compiled our results which we then examined. We were thus able to track how the male and female respondents' means, which ensued from a series of questions, differed in statistically significant ways. In that manner, we were able to shed some light on and approach the differences in how our male and female respondents dealt with the lockdown.

The results of the present study may prove in the future a great challenge for and of enormous interest to us as well as other researchers: linking a number of this study's findings with the data and measurements of samples potentially stemming from other "lockdown" environments such as those found in correctional facilities where the issue of social isolation is also present may lead to ways of confronting the negative emotions such environments engender.

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