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CLINICAL AND THEORETICAL ADVANCES IN RESEARCH ON DISTRESS AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

This symposium aims to link together some recent Italian research contributions on the Covid pandemic with the goal of sharing and developing clinically, theoretically, and empirically informed knowledge to better understand and manage psychological distress.

A large amount of research currently conducted highlighted that the pandemic is having not only acute mental health effects but may have considerable long-term impacts on psychological distress and that some of these effects may overly affect some demographic groups more than others (i.e. children and young people).

For these reasons, it would be important to identify modifiable factors that could be targeted in order to design psychological and public health interventions that prevent negative long-term outcomes. Along this line, earlier studies confirmed the psychological impact of confinement due to COVID-19 on children, adolescents, and youth, as well as the relevance of the emotional strategies used to cope with the situation (Orgilés et al., 2021). On the other hand, several recent studies (Di Blasi et al., 2021; Schimmenti et al., 2020) attempted to understand the role of some new and well-established constructs (such as fear of Covid-19, intolerance of uncertainty, and emotion regulation) on mental health and how people may behave in response to them.

Knowing which factors interact and are mainly involved in psychological distress symptoms could help to improve adult and young people's well-being and buffer psychological problems related to future waves of COVID-19.

The topic will be discussed through four presentations based on data from recent Italian studies that will reflect the state of what is known and not known about specific target groups and some relevant variables: Di Blasi et al. (University of Palermo), Mazzeschi et al. (University of Perugia), Salcuni et al. (University of Palermo), Schimmenti et al. (University of Enna).

Psychological factors influencing the distress during the COVID-19 outbreak in Italy

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Abstract

Research on the COVID-19 outbreak showed a significant psychological impact of the pandemic among the general population. Specific vulnerability factors, such as intolerance of uncertainty, fear of COVID, emotion dys-regulation appeared related to elevated psychological distress during and post COVID-19 lockdown, showing that the development of tailored treatments should reduce the negative consequences of the outbreak. This contribution aims to review and discuss data from a multicentric longitudinal study started in Italy in April 2020 and still ongoing focused on which specific psychological factors might buffer or increase the individual's distress. The research involved 3,768 Italian adults (females 73.5%; M age = 36.49; SD = 14.79) that completed an online survey measuring variables such as depression, anxiety, stress, fear of COVID, intolerance of uncertainty, emotion regulation, and social support.

Multiple mediation model and network analysis approaches showed pathways that underlie some components of psychological distress and their changes over time. Specifically, findings highlight that individual with an elevated fear of COVID-19 and experiencing uncertainty may adopt dysfunctional emotion regulation strategies, which in turn heighten psychological distress. Moreover, depressive symptoms and their associations to other dimensions of individual distress were key factors in understanding the influence of pandemic on mental health both during and after home confinement due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Findings indicate that disentangling the role of protective and risk factors may expand our understanding of processes operating in COVID-19-related psychological distress, providing important indications for treatment and prevention. Results also suggest that early interventions focusing on enhancing social support and effective emotional coping strategies are likely to minimize the impact of COVID-related depressive symptomatology.

The psychological impact of COVID-19 quarantine on children and adolescents. Advice from first data of a cross-cultural longitudinal research

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated home confinement have profoundly impacted the lives of most people worldwide, including children and adolescents. Several studies have been focused on the effects of the confinement in adults; less attention has been given to psychological effects in children and adolescents. The aim of this contribution is to synthesize and discuss findings about COVID-19 psychological impact on children and adolescents from a cross-cultural longitudinal multicentric research (Italy, Spain and Portugal). Data collection started in March 2020 and it is still ongoing. The research involved parents of more than about 3000 subjects aged 3 to 18. Subjects have been recruited through a snowball sampling technique, and they were asked to fill out an online survey assessing different dimensions such as socio-demographic, housing conditions of the family, parental personal distress and concerns about COVID-19, children and adolescents' psychological and behavioral alterations during the pandemic. Results showed that over 80% of the parents perceived changes in their children's emotions and behaviors during the quarantine. Parental (i.e., perceived stress, working situation), children (i.e., age, previous psychological disorders), contextual/environmental (i.e. quality of the house) and cultural (i.e. country) risk factors are discussed. In reporting findings, a specific focus will be on the Italian population. Further studies on children and adolescent's psychological health on medium and long-term risk factors related to COVID-19 and the implemented measures are needed.

Psychological research on COVID-19: a lesson to learn

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Abstract

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on our work, relationships, and habits. This has also been reflected in psychological research, where the efforts of many scholars, including our research team, have been redirected on the psychological effects of the pandemic. After one year and a half from the beginning of the pandemic, we may learn some lessons from such psychological research. *Method:* Within this symposium, we will review basic research conducted by our groups on the psychological effects of the pandemic, to identify some key points that may serve for a better understanding on how dynamic and clinical psychology (DCP) might be helpful in the development of a healthier society.

Results. The following key points were extrapolated: (1) DCP is critical for better contextualizing and modeling the perceived distress during difficult times (research on fear and anxiety); (2) DCP is also critical for avoiding the pathologization of normal responses to distressing situations (research on depression, anxiety, excessive gaming and social media use, binge watching); (3) finally, DCP is critical for identifying at-risk groups that may need clinical interventions and for tailoring the specific objectives of these interventions (research on maladaptive daydreaming).

Conclusions: As the COVID-19 pandemic is hopefully passing by, there is an important lesson to learn from the cumulative research conducted on this topic: sometimes we can - and perhaps we should - direct our common research efforts where there is a societal need to properly intervene for improving the quality of life of people. When this is the case, our remuneration extends much beyond academic recognition, reaching the core of the society and its definitive understanding of a need for psychological approach to collective issues.

Adolescents & pandemic loop: the perpetuation of the COVID-19 social restrictions and their impact on pre-adolescents' and adolescents' well-being

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Abstract

Covid-19 has limited pre-adolescents and adolescents' growth in many aspects and particularly by the continuing restriction of their social life and interpersonal relationships, even though mediated by an increased smartphone use. Thus, the current study aimed at understanding how adolescents are experiencing the perpetuation of the social restrictions imposed, by investigating their subjective well-being, their fatigue and distress associated with the continuation of the pandemic, their perceived social support, their level of problematic smartphone use and of mindfulness reflection. Age differences and in school learning method were assessed. A total of 430 youngsters (M=15.58, SD=2.46) completed Satisfaction with Life Scale, Scale for Positive and Negative experience, Stress and Anxiety to Viral Epidemics-6 items, Smartphone Addiction Inventory, Fatigue Scale, Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support, and Mindful Attention Awareness Scale for Adolescents. Results showed that females have fewer positive experiences than males, showing significantly higher fatigue and distress to viral epidemics than males. Indeed, males present a significantly greater life satisfaction than females, showing a reduced smartphone use. Moreover, adolescents showed a significant lack of positive

experiences than pre-adolescents, also feeling more fatigue, reduced satisfaction with life, less supported by family, and increased smartphone use than pre-adolescents. Lastly, those who did distance learning have more negative experiences compared with those who attended school, and the same significant differences can be applied to feeling fatigue, being less satisfied with life, and less perceived social support. These findings lend support to Covid-19 and distance learning having a negative impact on youngsters' well-being and on their perceptions of positive experiences, highlighting the importance of their relationships with their peers for their psychosocial development.

CURRENT APPLIED DIMENSIONS OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY FACING PANDEMIC'S TEMPORAL AND SPACIAL CONTINGENCIES

Proposer

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Abstract

As professionals specialized in clinical psychology, we feel that a lively and thorough debate on the public role of our discipline - a role whose importance has clearly emerged in the attempt to tackle the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic - is now imperative. Indeed, the process of managing the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of both the general population and specific sub-groups who have been particularly affected (e.g., young people, or patients suffering from organic pathologies together with their families) has increasingly revealed the central role of clinical psychology - in terms of both the *specifics* of treatment and the policies regarding its *management*.

The new context in which treatment had to be offered has required us clinical psychologists to reflect on aspects of our discipline which, while not entirely new, needed to be re-thought creatively. Among these stands out the relationship with temporality and technology. Indeed, this particular historical period has prompted us to reflect afresh on the temporal dimension of therapy, in the light of an increasing need to carry it out in a short or pre-determined timespan. The same applies to the changes caused by our resorting to technological devices in order to treat our patients. At the same time, however, reflecting on these changes also sheds light on the fundamental and central role of the invariants that characterize clinical psychology and the epistemological model it is based on. Indeed, even when the clinical and/or psychotherapeutic encounter is carried out remotely or within a limited time frame, and despite the specific contextual nuances determined by temporality and the devices used, therapy remains centered on and orientated towards the relationship with the patient. As such, it will always be focused on helping the patient to creatively develop a meaning for the personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal events taking place in his/her internal world.

University of Florence: history of college counselling services

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Abstract

The Psychological Counseling Service for students of the University of Florence was set up in 1998, to provide free support for personal difficulties which, albeit minor, were perceived by students as having an impact on their well-being and psychosocial and relational equilibrium. From January 2015 to July 2019, there was a 113% rise in the number of students who sought help from the Service; moreover, in the first 8 months of 2019, more than 50% of the total cases were evaluated by trained psychologists as people requiring psycho-therapeutic treatment. Because of the increase in the demand for psychological help, a comprehensive overhaul of the service was called for, so as to exploit all the potential of services provided by clinical psychology and, at the same time, to respond to users' demand fully. A task force was opened with University governance, and the Board of Psychologists (Tuscany) was also involved. This led to the creation of the Centro di Servizi di Ateneo in Counseling Psicologico, Psicoterapia e Psicologia Clinica, which will offer services addressed to students enrolled in university courses, including psychological-clinical counseling, psychotherapy courses, training, coaching and health promotion interventions, paths linked to learning difficulties and cognitive and neuropsychological problems. Except for psychotherapy (considered as a teaching support service), all the interventions proposed by the Center are free of charge and are provided by the teaching and research staff on a voluntary basis. This contribution aims to highlight the psychological-clinical and support counseling interventions put in place by the staff belonging to the Service Center during the lockdown phase, in order to reflect on the changes that have become inescapable by virtue of the obliged use of technological devices, and on the invariant aspects of the clinical relationship in its computer-mediated version.

Psychological interventions and psychotherapies in the healthcare setting

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Abstract

During the last decades, the role of clinical psychology in healthcare settings has gained more and more emphasis, and the range of interventions provided by clinical psychologists to patients, families and healthcare professionals has grown increasingly. Indeed, clinical psychology can play a major role in

understanding illness behaviors, as well as the concept of positive and negative health. Implementing interventions in the healthcare setting is of vital importance for clinical psychology, particularly in the context of a pandemic that threatens the mental health of the global population worldwide. Thus, as professionals specialized in clinical psychology, we have to investigate the role, the development and the provision of care in such settings, starting from a reflection on the peculiar characteristics of psychological therapies in general, and notably psychotherapies. Within this framework, it is possible to underline the peculiar role of what is defined as “counseling”, intended not as a profession in itself, but as a function of clinical psychology as a profession.

How to rethink interventions in public health care without losing the psychoanalytic center of gravity

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Abstract

Nowadays an unprecedented withdrawing of psychoanalytic and psychodynamic interventions has taken place across the Italy's National Health Service, justified by a failure in provide evidence-based treatments and economic reasons. Despite a certain historical reluctance of psychoanalysis in providing empirical research and its traditional view as a “long wave” treatment, meta-analyses have shown a higher effectiveness of both long and short-term psychodynamic/psychoanalytic psychotherapies in certain mental disorders (e.g., somatic disorder, personality disorders). Convergent support for psychoanalytic approaches comes from interpersonal neurobiological studies which highlighted brain structural and functional changes after psychoanalytically oriented treatments both in individual and group setting. Considering that, we have proposed a Brief Psychoanalytic Group suitable to be used in public services. Our intervention has been designed to mend the rips caused by dissociation in patients with organic disease, restore a somatopsychic balance and foster “aliveness”. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a traumatic impact on public health services and its breath extended to the wider social context, producing remarkable “discontinuities”. This has forced us to rethink our intervention “learning quickly” how to reorganize care services through online communications and setting transformations. Moving far from our “comfort zone”, we have operated a transition from in-person sessions to online group psychoanalysis and have entered a technology-assisted clinical and team supervisions. In this adaptive path, we have encountered many ethical and concrete challenges, but we have never strayed from the psychoanalytic center of gravity: not leave people alone to face psychic pain, provide a concrete answer to their neglected emotional needs, recreate - albeit at a distance - the intra and interpersonal connections that sustain a feeling of trust in the other and in the outside world.

From death anxiety to generalized anxiety in the time of COVID-19: the worsening role of intolerance of uncertainty

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Abstract

Introduction: The life-threatening Covid-19 (C19) has challenged people's physical and mental health (e.g., anxiety, worry). C19 has potentially fatal outcomes and could intensify the specific Anxiety of Death (DA) that, in turn, could heighten the levels of pervasive Generalized Anxiety (GA) also in not-life-threatening situations.

The unprecedented C19 pandemic still has an unpredictable course, involving substantial uncertainty - about short- and long-term future - able to trigger anxious reactions. To note, people with high levels of dispositional Intolerance of Uncertainty (IU) are more prone to experience high GA.

Despite both DA and IU can trigger or worsen GA, literature about it is still scarce. Hence, this study aimed to test the literature-driven hypothesis that the relationship between DA and GA may depend on IU levels in the context of C19.

Methods: In a sample (N = 1034; mean age 49.9 ± 16.2 ; females 51%) representative of the Italian general population, DA, GA, and IU were respectively assessed with the: Death Anxiety Inventory (17 items); Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (7 items); Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (12 items).

A moderation model tested whether IU would be a moderator strengthening the path between DA and GA.

Results: Both DA ($b = .56$) and IU ($b = 1.55$, $p < .001$) predicted higher GA (both $p < .001$). The significant interaction of IU and DA ($b = .124$, $p < .001$) confirmed the moderating role of IU. In other words, at different increasing values of IU (moderator), DA has a larger effect (b) on GA.

Conclusions: The IU moderator strengthens the effect of DA on GA in relation to the context, predicting a generalized and pervasive anxiety state, thus worsening psychological distress.

The implications of these findings are useful for both clinical and research fields. First, psychological interventions in life-threatening situations (e.g., illness) could target DA and IU. Second, further research may deepen the intriguing relationship between DA and IU.

EATING DISORDERS AND NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY. A BODILY-BASED SOLUTION TO MANAGE EMOTIONS

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

Eating disorders (EDs) and non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) are considered self-injurious behaviors involving varying degrees of damage to one’s body. The high frequency of their co-occurrence, along with their body-focused dimension, has motivated researchers to investigate their potential shared pathogenesis. Theoretical and empirical data support that the body's individual experience may facilitate EDs and NSSI through various mechanisms. Body emotional disinvestment may promote the body as an object theater of complex internal dynamics, making it easier to harm it intentionally. Research suggests that EDs patients and self-injurers experience high levels of body disregard and report being less attuned to their body’s physiological cues. Alongside feelings of detachment from the body, lacking interoceptive awareness (inability to detect early bodily signals of negative emotions) may confer more vulnerability to such conditions: emotional experience may be interpreted to be aversive and generate the need to regulate the overwhelming emotions via the body, creating a tangible solution. As such, emotion dysregulation has been demonstrated to contribute to and maintain EDs and NSSI, supporting their emotion regulation function.

Expanding upon these assumptions, the current symposium attempts to identifying theoretical and empirical underpinnings regarding the etiology of EDs and NSSI and their co-occurrence. We propose to assemble clinicians and researchers to develop a more profound understanding of these body-focused disorders. In particular, we will discuss those aspects by way of psychoanalytic theory, stimulating a reflection above the meaning of negative attitudes toward the body and deficits in emotional experiences in EDs and NSSI in clinical and nonclinical samples, and discussing implications of group treatment. This session will also aim to lead to significant advancements in understanding these behaviors and preventing or stopping their occurrence.

The interplay between parental psychological control and alexithymia in dysregulated eating behaviours

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Abstract

Introduction: Emotional eating is a behavior aimed at handling emotional states by using food intake that has been consistently related to eating disorders. Consistent findings highlighted that both parental psychological control and alexithymia are crucial aspects of dysregulated eating behaviours, thereby suggesting the importance of assessing these aspects deeply. The current study sought to test a mediation model of alexithymia (A) in the relationship between parental psychological control (PPC), eating disorders (ED), and emotional eating (EE).

Methods: 200 participants aged between 18 and 30 years old ($M = 22.77$; $SD = 2.97$) filled a protocol comprising Psychological Control Scale (PCS), Alexithymia (TAS20), Dutch Eating Behavior Questionnaire (DEBQ) and Eating Disorder symptomatology (EAT26). Path analysis was conducted to test a model with PPC as predictor variable, A as mediator, and ED and EE as outcomes.

Results: The model showed good fit indices, $\chi^2(6) = 130.68$; $p < .001$, CFI = 1.00 SRMR = .00. Significant paths were found from PPC to A ($\beta = .29$) and EE ($\beta = .16$). In addition, significant paths were found from A to EE ($\beta = .24$) and ED ($\beta = .23$). Moreover, significant indirect effects were found from PPC to EA by A ($\beta = .07$) and from PPC to ED by A ($\beta = .07$).

Conclusions: Parental psychological control represent a set of intrusive parental practices aimed at pressuring the offspring to comply with parental expectations. Given that psychological control exploits parent/youth interactions to control the offspring, it reasonable that lower emotional clarity may be less likely to occur. In the long run, this may be translated into maladaptive compensatory strategies to handle distressing emotions, such as dysregulated eating behaviours.

Eating disorders and non-suicidal self-injury in adolescents: an examination of unique and shared correlates

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Abstract

Introduction: Eating disorder (ED) and non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) commonly co-occur, resulting in increasingly negative psychological and physical outcomes. Parental bonding, self-esteem, emotion dysregulation, and body-related concerns have been implicated in ED and NSSI, separately and in combination. However, little is known about how they contribute to their interrelationship. Thus, the present study investigates the degree to which those constructs represent shared or unique risk factors for NSSI and ED in Italian adolescents.

Methods: Participants – selected from a larger sample of 1905 students – were 167 middle and high school students ($M_{age} = 15.51$, $SD = 2.21$) screened by mixed methods. Based on a semi-structured interview and a clinical cut-off criterion, they were divided into three groups: NSSI ($n=64$), ED ($n=68$), and ED + NSSI ($n=35$). MANCOVAs with sex, age, and BMI as covariates were used to examine differences in the dependent measures. A series of stepwise logistic regressions were also used to investigate which of the dependent variables best predicted group membership.

Results: ED + NSSI scored significantly different on all measures compared to ED and NSSI only groups. Body investment and bodily shame significantly differentiated the ED group from the NSSI group. The presence of both ED and NSSI is influenced by parental overprotection and emotion dysregulation, whereas self-esteem, parental care, and bodily shame demonstrate unique patterns of association across groups.

Conclusions: Parental overprotection and difficulties in regulating emotions appear to be shared correlates for ED and NSSI, while body-related concerns have more salience to ED. Enhancing emotion regulation skills and promoting good parenting practices may be an effective intervention measure, also targeting self-esteem and body-based concerns according to the predominant condition. Further investigation of risk factors would result in more comprehensive etiological models.

Anaclitic and introjective profiles of self-injurers

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Abstract

Introduction: Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is not the only way people use to hurt themselves. Other behaviors, such as eating disorders (ED), can also be put in place in order to cause physical harm, albeit in a more indirect way. However, whether and how people engaging in direct self-injury differ from those engaging in indirect self-injury is still unclear. This study aims to explore the characteristics of patients with both NSSI and ED and of those with only ED.

Methods: Participants were 72 psychiatric patients (mean age= 32.12±10.67, range 19-58) recruited in eating disorders treatment facilities, with 36 presenting both NSSI and ED (Group 1) and 36 having only ED (Group 2). Both groups completed SCID-II, SCL-90, and EDI-3. Mann-Whitney U test was used to test for significant differences between the two groups in EDI-3 and SCL-90 subscales.

Results: No significant differences were found between the groups, except for the EDI-3 Low Self Esteem subscale (higher scores in Group 1). Clinically but not statistically significant differences were also observed, as follow: Group 1 showed higher prevalence of bulimia nervosa and of borderline personality disorder, together with higher mean scores in three EDI-3 subscales (Inadequacy, Affective Problems, and Interpersonal Problems) and in one SCL-90 subscale (Somatization); Group 2 showed higher prevalence of anorexia nervosa and of mixed personality disorder, together with higher scores in three EDI-3 subscales (Asceticism, Overcontrol Composite, and Personal Alienation), and in five SCL-90 subscales (Interpersonal Sensitivity, Hostility, Phobic Anxiety, Paranoia, and Psychoticism).

Conclusions: Results show two psychopathological profiles emerging from a self-injurious spectrum: a) an “impulsive-anaclitic” profile in patients with both NSSI (cutting) and ED (bulimia nervosa); b) an “overcontrolled-introjective” profile in patients with only ED (anorexia nervosa). Further research in larger clinical samples is needed.

From the soma of the subject to the body of the group. A pilot study on the role of a structured intervention on perfectionism on group climate of patients with eating disorders

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Abstract

Introduction: Several studies have shown the efficacy of group treatments for patients with eating disorders who have negative attitudes toward their body, also using the group climate as an indicator of process. Within this field of study, perfectionism has been examined as a factor that maintains eating disorders. The study proposes to comprehend what kind of treatment favours a better group climate, by providing a within-person comparison between two short group treatments of ED patients, where one was not focused on a specific topic and the other was structured around the topic of clinical perfectionism and body image.

Methods: Two groups of young adult patients with eating disorders were monitored for three months. Group climate was measured both with the Group Climate Questionnaire, that was administered at the end of each session, and through the clinical accounts written by a non-participating observer.

Results: The findings revealed that the perfectionism group, in comparison with the control group, presented a significantly higher level of engagement and avoidance, along with a lower level of conflict. In particular, the engagement increased along with the therapeutic process of the perfectionism group, while in the control group, it remained quite constant; the conflict decreases in both groups; avoidance increases alongside the sessions of the perfectionism group while it decreases in the control group. Furthermore, the perfectionism group was able to better focus and manage the theme of body perception compared to the control group.

Conclusions: The group on perfectionism, despite its enhanced high levels of avoidance, can be effective in promoting positive group climate. The clinical implications of structured group treatment for eating disorders which manage the theme of mind-body splitting will be discussed.

USE OF TIME, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND FUNCTIONING IMPAIRMENT IN SCHIZOPHRENIA SPECTRUM DISORDER PATIENTS: THE MULTICENTRE DIAPASON PROJECT

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

Schizophrenia spectrum disorders (SSDs) are usually associated with severe impairment at different level of functioning. Patients with a diagnosis of SSD often spend a very limited time in structured and social activities and tend to do nothing for a long time during the day. Last year, the research project DiAPAsOn (Daily activities, physical activities and interpersonal relationship) started in Italy with the aim to increase the knowledge about how people with SSD use their daily time, how this use is associated with symptoms, mood and quality of interpersonal relations.

In an innovative way, the project adopted different methodologies, including prospective and real-time assessments (Experience Sampling Method approach-ESM and the use of Actigraphy) in the evaluation of patients with SSD. The ESM approach guarantees an accurate and ecologically valid evaluation of time use compared to retrospective report. Recently, it was corroborated the feasibility, reliability, and validity of ESM methods in patients with SSD.

Nonetheless, the implementation of ESM methodologies posits a variety of difficulties and challenges that need to be monitored to ensure a good quality of data. The present symposium is aimed to present the DiAPAsOn project, to evaluate the sustainability and feasibility of the whole research protocol in SSD people, and to provide preliminary findings about the use of time of patients with SSD.

In particular, the contribution of Casiraghi et coll. is aimed to present the protocol of DiAPAsOn and to examine the difficulties encountered in its implementation and how they have been faced; the second contribution of Zarbo et coll. examined the usability of the instruments for ecological assessment in clinical and not clinical sample; finally, the contribution of Agosta and colleagues present preliminary findings concerning the use of time of in-patients and out-patients with SSD. Implication of findings for research and clinical services will be discussed.

Usability and compliance with experience sampling method (ESM) and actigraphy monitoring of patients with a diagnosis of schizophrenia spectrum disorder

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Abstract

Background: The application of innovative methodologies in psychiatry is promising, but the debate about their applicability and reliability is still open. Our aim was to investigate and compare usability and compliance of 7-days monitoring with Experience Sampling Method (ESM) and Actigraphy in a sample of individuals with a diagnosis of Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorder (SSD), both inpatients and outpatients, and paired healthy controls.

Method: 23 inpatients, 20 outpatients and 26 controls were enrolled in this study, as part of the 3-years project DiAPAsOn. Participants wore an Actigraphy and were evaluated for daily time use and mood employing ESM on a smartphone for 8 times a day. At the end of the monitoring, participants completed two questionnaires developed ad hoc for the assessment of usability of the devices, followed by a qualitative interview aimed at improving the understanding of those dimensions.

Results: Usability and compliance in the three groups was acceptable. MANOVAs analyses revealed significant differences for: 1) usability of Actigraphy ($p=.005$; $N^2=.149$), highlighting a higher usability score for inpatients compared to healthy participants; 2) compliance with ESM (i.e. number of answers to the APP's notifications; $p=.01$; $N^2=.130$), underlining a lower compliance of inpatients compared to healthy participants. None between groups effect was found for compliance with Actigraphy (i.e. % wear time) and usability of ESM. From qualitative interviews emerged two macro themes: benefits of the monitoring (e.g. for self, time use, time perception, and help perception) and reasons for non-compliance (e.g. complexity, negative emotions).

Conclusions: Our findings are promising for the application of ESM and Actigraphy monitoring in patients with SSD. Specific attention should be paid to inpatients, providing them support for the use of mobile phones. The role of multidisciplinary staff in RFs is crucial for guarantee the realization of such projects.

An Italian multicentre study of daily time use, physical activity, quality of care and interpersonal relationships of patients with schizophrenia spectrum disorder (SSD):

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Abstract

Background: Individuals with Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorder (SSD) are usually insufficiently engaged in activities, and this is related to the severity of negative symptoms. Daily time use (TU), symptomatology's severity, physical activity (PA) and quality of care in residential facilities (RF) seem connected and require further investigation. The DiAPAson project: a) explores symptomatology, quality of life, and TU in patients with SSD; b) investigates the link between quality of care, clinicians' wellbeing and quality of relationships in RF; c) conducts a real-time monitoring of TU, mood and PA of patients with SSD and general population. This challenging project combines standard assessments with the more innovative real-time monitoring. We present the protocol implementation, the goals we achieved, and the strategies we adopted to deal with the issues we encountered.

Method: The DiAPAson project is a multicentre national study involving 39 centres. Data collection is ongoing; it will include 300 SSD inpatients, 300 SSD outpatients, 100 clinicians and 100 healthy controls. The project combines the administration of questionnaires, the monitoring of TU, mood and PA.

Results: So far (May 18, 2021) 298 inpatients, 238 outpatients, 136 clinicians and 84 healthy controls have been recruited. The main factors that affected data collection have been so far: COVID-19 impact on RF accessibility and participants' activities; the engagement of clinicians in data collection; the heterogeneity in TU survey completion and support for real-time monitoring.

Conclusions: The complexity of data collection will be discussed. DiAPAson will arise awareness about the importance of daily time use, physical activity and quality of care/relationships in RF. Therefore, important clinical implications and reflection points for the treatment of severe patients will emerge from the project.

Autonomic regulation and personality functioning in patients at risk for psychotic onset

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Abstract

Autonomic Nervous System regulation is implicated in many psychopathologies. There are no studies investigating prodromal symptoms of schizophrenia, particularly Basic Symptoms, in relation to autonomic dysregulation and personality functioning.

This within-subjects study investigates this relationship with the aim of identifying specific psychophysiological markers for the early diagnosis and treatment of individuals at risk for psychotic onset.

We analyzed Respiratory Sinus Arrhythmia (RSA) and Heart Rate (HR) in 10 adolescent patients, requiring psychological support at a Department of Mental Health, during an initial resting condition (Baseline), but also during the administration of two Semi-Structured clinical interviews: the Schizophrenia Proneness Instrument, Child and Youth version (SPI-CY), and the module one of the Semi-Structured Clinical Interview for Diagnosis of Personality Disorders, Alternative Model of Personality Disorders (SCID-5-PD), and a final resting condition (Recovery).

The different experimental conditions elicited statistically significant changes in RSA [$F_{(6,54)}=7.159, p<.0005$, partial $\eta^2=0.443$], and in HR [$F_{(2,659,23.928)}=12.861, p<.0005$, partial $\eta^2=0.588$].

Our patients showed decreased vagal activation (<RSA) and increased sympathetic activation (>HR) during SPI-CY compared with assessment of the interpersonal dimension of SCID-5-PD and during the final resting recovery condition, highlighting decreased autonomic regulation during Basic Symptoms assessment.

This evidence corroborates the importance of integrating the autonomic assessment within clinical practice, such as during the psychiatric assessment. These preliminary results suggest that the identification of specific psychophysiological markers could aid early diagnosis of psychotic onset in association with existing instruments. Limitations of this study include the small sample size and the absence of a control sample. Therefore, further studies are needed to support these findings.

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR MEDICAL SETTINGS**Proposer***Lorys Castelli*¹¹Department of Psychology, University of Turin, Italy**Discussant***Maria Catena Ausilia Quattropani*²²Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Messina**Abstract**

The present symposium provides an update on the latest research in the field of clinical psychology in different medical settings. In particular, all four studies focused on the close interaction between psychological characteristics and biomedical aspects, and the complex role this dynamic plays in the onset, maintenance and outcome of chronic diseases.

In the first contribution, Conti and colleagues aimed to investigate the influence of the outbreak of Covid-19 on patients with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). In particular, patients with IBD recruited before or during the Covid-19 outbreak were compared to assess if pandemic-related living conditions, in addition to the clinical and psychological manifestations of the disease, had an additive impact on the health-related quality of life of these patients.

The following two contributions focus on the possible role that psychological factors could have on the development and maintenance of chronic pain disorders. In particular, Romeo and colleagues tried to unravel the complex interconnection between insecure attachment styles, inadequate parental care and alexithymia in the onset and maintenance of fibromyalgia (FM) symptoms. Further, Galli and colleagues focused on the impact that both early life traumas and recent stressful events could have on the outcome of a detoxification program in subjects overusing acute medication for chronic migraine and medication-overuse headache.

Finally, in the last contribution, Landi and colleagues focused on the effects of parental illness on youth and family functioning. In particular, parental illness severity, youth caregiving and stress, psychological flexibility, youth adjustment and family functioning were assessed in youth with parents affected by chronic illness, in order to investigate a moderated mediation model derived from the Family Ecology Framework.

Medication overuse headache: the negative prognostic value of early traumatic experiences and stressful events

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Abstract

Background: Early traumatic experiences and Stressful episodes appear to be associated to the development and perpetuation of chronic pain. *Objective:* The present study evaluated whether these factors can be predictors of the outcome of a detoxification treatment in patients suffering from chronic headache. *Methods:* Consecutive patients undergoing a detoxification program as therapy for treating chronic migraine and medication overuse headache at the Pavia Headache Center were analyzed. During this program all patients received the standard in-patient withdrawal protocol, which consisted in discontinuing abruptly the overused drug(s) and receiving daily detoxification therapy. Data on childhood traumatic events and recent stressful ones were analyzed by Childhood Trauma Questionnaire and Stressful life-events Questionnaire. Co-occurring psychopathology was assessed by the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM (SCID). *Results:* A total of 166 (80% females; mean age 44.7) patients completed the follow-up at 2 months after the detoxification program: of these 118 (71%) (78% females; mean age 44.7) stopped overuse and reverted to an episodic pattern of headache (Group A); 19 (11%) (89% females; mean age 41.3) kept overusing and maintained a chronic pattern of headache (Group B); and 29 (18%) (79% females; mean age 46.9) stopped overuse without any benefit on headache frequency (Group C). At the multivariate analyses, a higher number of early life emotional distress (OR 11.096; $p=0.037$) arose as a prognostic factor for the outcome in Group B, while major depression during lifetime (OR 3.703; $p=0.006$) and higher number of severe stressful episodes in the past 10 years (OR 1.679; $p = 0.045$) were prognostic factors for the outcome of Group C. *Conclusion:* The history of emotional childhood traumas is associated to the failure to cease overuse, whereas recent very serious life events are associated to the persistence of headache chronicity.

Adult attachment and parental bonding: the association with fibromyalgia and alexithymia

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Abstract

Fibromyalgia (FM) is a chronic pain syndrome, associated with different psychological conditions such as alexithymia. Insecure attachment styles and inadequate parental care appear to play an important role in the onset and maintenance of both alexithymia and chronic pain. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to examine the associations between attachment styles, parental bonding, and alexithymia among patients with FM compared with healthy controls (HC).

One hundred female with FM and 107 healthy women were recruited in the study and filled in the following questionnaires: The Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) to evaluate alexithymia, the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), and the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) to assess parental care and adult attachment styles, respectively. A first logistic regression model was tested to examine whether parental bonding, adult attachment styles, and alexithymia predict group membership (FM vs. HC). Results showed that “difficulty identifying feelings” (OR= 0.77; 95% CI= 0.71;0.84;) and “difficulty describing feelings” (OR=1.17; 95% CI= 1.04;1.33) subscales of TAS-20 were statistically significant predictors of group membership. The final model explained 56% of the variance and correctly classified 80% of the cases. A second logistic regression was run in order to examine the effects of parental bonding and attachment styles on the likelihood of having alexithymia (among patients with FM and HC). Results showed that “discomfort with closeness” (OR= 1.06; 95% CI= 1.01;1.12) and “relationships as secondary” (OR= 1.09; 95% CI= 1.02;1.17) subscales of ASQ were statistically significant predictors of the likelihood of having alexithymia. The final model explained 30% of the variance and correctly classified 81% of the cases. Taken together, these findings highlight both the relevance of alexithymic traits to the definition of FM and the centrality of an insecure attachment style to the manifestation of alexithymia.

Disease activity and health- related quality of life in inflammatory bowel disease patients during outbreak of COVID-19

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the extent to which health-related quality of life of patients with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) was influenced by the outbreak of Covid-19 while controlling for disease activity. Two samples of 195 (recruited before Covid-19 outbreak) and 707 patients (recruited during the Covid-19-related lockdown) were included. Psychological distress (Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, HADS), quality of life (Inflammatory Bowel Disease Questionnaire, IBDQ), and somatization (Patient Health Questionnaire, PHQ-12) were concurrently assessed. Patients with active IBD were more prevalently affected by ulcerative colitis (60.2%) and, expectedly, showed higher psychological distress (HADS, $d = 0.34$) and somatization (PHQ-12, $d = 0.39$), as well as poorer disease-specific health-related quality of life (effect sizes for the total and subscale IBDQ scores in the large range of $d > 0.50$). Hierarchical regression models revealed that setting (pre-Covid-19 outbreak vs. during lockdown) ($p < 0.001$) explained only a small portion (8%) of the IBDQ variance. IBD-related factors (ulcerative colitis and disease activity) and psychological factors (psychological distress and somatization) added a significant amount of 25 and 27%, respectively, to the explained IBDQ variance. The final model predicted 59% of the explained IBDQ variance. Clinical and psychological manifestations seem to be major impairments in IBD patients both before and during the Covid-19 outbreak. Furthermore, the quality of life of IBD patients seem to be more influenced by psychological and somatizing distressing symptoms than the pandemic-related living conditions.

A model of the effects of parental illness on youth adjustment and family functioning: the moderating effects of psychological flexibility on youth caregiving and stress

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Abstract

This study examined a moderated mediation model of the effects of parental illness on youth and family functioning derived from the Family Ecology Framework. Consistent with this model, we predicted that

youth caregiving and stress would serially mediate the adverse impacts of parental illness on youth adjustment and family functioning and that psychological flexibility would moderate these mediational mechanisms. A total of 387 youth, with parents affected by chronic illness, completed a questionnaire assessing parental illness severity, youth caregiving and stress, psychological flexibility, youth adjustment (i.e., internalizing and externalizing problems and psychological wellbeing), and family functioning. Path analyses indicated that the adverse effects of parental illness on youth adjustment and family functioning were serially mediated by youth caregiving and stress. Specifically, parental illness severity predicted higher internalizing problems (coeff =.40, $SE=.12$, 95% CI=.19, .66) and externalizing problems (coeff=.22, $SE=.07$, 95% CI=.11, .37), poorer family functioning (coeff=.01, $SE=.00$, 95% CI=.01, .22), and lower psychological wellbeing (coeff=-.20, $SE=.06$, 95% CI=-.33, -.09) serially via youth caregiving and stress. Psychological flexibility buffered the adverse effects of these serial mediators on youth internalizing problems and psychological wellbeing (index of moderated mediation for internalizing problems =-.01, $SE=.01$, 95% CI=-.03, -.00; for psychological wellbeing =.01, $SE=.01$, 95% CI=.00, .01). These findings identified three potential intervention targets: youth caregiving, related stress appraisals, and psychological flexibility. Given the large body of evidence showing that acceptance and commitment therapy fosters psychological flexibility, this intervention approach has the potential to address the psychosocial and mental health vulnerabilities of youth in the context of parental illness, which constitutes a serious public health issue.

DREAMING DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE STUDIES ON ITALIAN POPULATION

Proposer

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Discussant

*Silvia Salcuni*²

²Department of Developmental and Socialization Psychology, University of Padua.

Abstract

Several theories and studies, from both the psychoanalytic and the neuroscientific world, assert that dreams have psychological adaptive functions, like the ability to improve the dreamer's mastery over the events and emotions of waking life. In fact, it appears that the oneiric life has a continuous relationship with waking life, reflecting and elaborating thoughts, concerns, feelings, and experiences pertaining to it. Dreams were often studied after a collective traumatic or stressful event, such as natural disasters, terroristic attacks and societal events, to grasp the modifications that could happen in peoples' dreamwork after such disrupting experiences. The aim of this panel is to thoroughly explore the picture of Italian population's dream imagery, after the restrictions imposed to face the Covid-19 pandemic. The presentation, by Borghi et al., will focus on the thematic analysis of dreams had during the first pandemic wave, from which emerged a narrative structure: some of the sub-categories were found to be associated with depression and resilience or with exposure to the virus. The work by Sommantico et al. is based on a quali-quantitative study that studied the effects of lockdown on Italian population, using the Thematic Analysis of Elementary Contexts on dream reports. The presentation by Giovanardi et al., similarly to the preceding one, will present a study that used both qualitative and quantitative methods, to identify the main themes and emotions of dreams during lockdown, in addition to some quantitative information about dreams. Lastly, the fourth contribution, presented by Mariani et al. will be dedicated to a research that analyzed the dreams quality emotion by Referential Process, collected during quarantine and conducted a cluster analysis of dreams.

Dreaming at the time of the first lockdown for COVID-19 pandemic: a quali-quantitative analysis of the Italian population dreams

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Abstract

The study explores the emotional experiences related to the lockdown during the first COVID-19 pandemic wave, analyzing the dreams of the Italian population. The study aims are: 1) to explore the presence of common contents in the dreams of individuals during the first lockdown period; 2) to explore whether dream content differs in some subpopulations more exposed to COVID-19 and therefore potentially more at risk of showing an impact on mental health; 3) to assess any associations between dream content and psychological outcomes, such as resilience, stress, anxiety or depressive symptoms.

Through an online survey spread throughout the country between March 8th and May 4th 2020, participants completed the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21), the Resilience Scale (RS) and were asked to narrate a dream they had during the lockdown. The dreams were qualitatively analyzed through thematic analysis. Then, logistic regression analyses were performed to assess the possible association of the thematic categories that emerged with: 1) the emotions of the dream; 2) participants' degree of exposure to COVID-19; 3) psychological outcome variables (resilience, anxiety, depression, stress), above/below the cut-off.

A sample of 761 individuals (82.8% women; average age of 33 years, SD=12.41; 34.6% resided in Lombardy; 67% worked in contact with the public; 6.2% health professionals) were included. Analyzing the content of dreams, 8 thematic categories were identified (Places, Characters, Relationships, Actions, Danger, Death, Processes and Emotions) composed of specific sub-categories, which seem to compose a sort of narrative structure of the dream. Some sub-categories were found to be associated with depression and resilience or with exposure to COVID-19.

Dreams can be a valid tool both to understand the population's emotional experience regarding the pandemic and the related lockdown and to evaluate individuals at risk of developing distress in clinical practice.

Lockdown dreams: dream content and emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic in an Italian sample

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Abstract

Introduction In the current study, following the continuity hypothesis and considering the adaptive function of dreaming, dreams were investigated from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, focusing on how the COVID-19 restrictions impacted dream frequency, content, and emotions during the lockdown in an Italian sample [N=598, aged 18–70 years ($M = 30.9$; $SD = 10.9$)]. *Methods* The participants were recruited through an online survey in which they were asked to report one or two dreams they had during the lockdown, and to provide socio-demographical information. Levels of anxiety, depression and rumination were assessed. Questions also explored participants' perceived fear of contagion, dream recall frequency, and dream vividness. Dream reports were analyzed using thematic analysis, and quantitative analyses were conducted using chi-square tests, t-tests, ANOVA, and bivariate correlations. *Results* Several themes emerged from the content analysis, including relationships, the human and natural environment, and COVID-19. Higher levels of anxiety, depression, and rumination were found in young adults, compared to middle age and older participants. A positive correlation emerged between the frequency of dreams relating to COVID-19 and anxiety and fear of contagion. Moreover, in both male and female participants, higher fear of contagion corresponded to greater dream vividness during the lockdown. Results showed that women had greater dream recall than men and reported greater psychological distress and more dreams related to COVID-19. Concerning the emotional tone of participants' dreams, it was found a higher proportion of negative dream emotions relative to positive ones: fear/fright/terror and anxiety/anguish/worry were the most frequent emotions in the dream reports. *Conclusions* Results were discussed highlighting clinical implications. The current study suggests that a traumatic collective event such as the Covid-19 pandemic may have implications for dream life.

The emotional and symbolic quality of dreams during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown

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Abstract

AIM COronaVirus 2019 (COVID-19) spread throughout the world, prompting dramatic changes in all facets of everyday life and representing a collective traumatic experience that negatively impacted physical and psychological health. The effect of this trauma manifested itself in a variety of ways, including dreams. The aim of this research was analysing the Referential Process (RP, Bucci, 2021) of dreams that were recorded during quarantine. Dream samples were collected through a social blog called *Dreams Drawer*.

Linguistic analysis and clinical evaluation were conducted to explore the group's collective elaboration of such an unexpected event.

METHOD 68 people (22 males; mean age 26,16 ds. 7,68) contributed to a social blog, writing their dreams. 91 dreams were collected and systematized for Discourse Attributes Analysis Program (DAAP). Linguistic measures of RP were applied and a statistical cluster analysis was performed. In addition, each dream was evaluated by trained judges on three specific qualities of the RP (Arousal, Symbolizing, and Reflection/Reorganizing). A clinical comparison among cluster was performed.

RESULTS. Cluster Analysis results yielded three dream clusters. 26 dreams fell under cluster A; 16 into cluster B; and 49 dreams cluster C. Each cluster has specific characteristics of the referential process. Cluster A is characterized by the symbolization process, cluster B by arousal processes and cluster C by experience reorganization processes. The clinical and qualitative analysis of dreams highlights a prevalence of sensory and perceptual aspects in arousal dreams. While the dreams of symbolization express a variety of contents linked to subjective experience. Finally, dreams of reorganization show a connection with the difficult situation of external reality and the new conditions of life. The dreams collected through *Dreams Drawer* showed different emotional qualities, useful for specific function of emotional elaboration.

Dreaming during the COVID-19 lockdown: a comparison of Italian adolescents and adults

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Abstract

Findings of recent studies on populations subject to the restrictive measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic show their strong impact on dream content due to the emotional salience of the same. Thus, the authors studied the effects of lockdown measures on Italian adolescents' and adults' dreams. A sample of 475 subjects (73.9% women; 48.4% adolescents; ages 12-70 years, $M = 25.10$, $SD = 12.2$) was recruited via the Internet between April and May 2020. Participants were asked to provide socio-demographic data, to respond a Dream Questionnaire (Schredl, 2010; Settineri et al., 2019), and to report their Most Recent Dream (Hall & Van de Castle, 1966; Domhoff, 2003). The following statistical analyses were conducted: chi-squared test, ANOVA, and ordinal logistic regressions (p -value < .05). A Thematic Analysis of Elementary Contexts was performed on the text corpora. Results indicated that: adults' dreams were the longest and characterized by higher negative emotional intensity and higher presence of sensory

impressions; participants, especially adolescents, most directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic reported the strongest effects on their dreams; women recall dreams more often than men, report higher negative emotional intensity and higher presence of sensory impressions; adults' dreams seem to be centered, above all, on both pleasant memories linked to experiences that are now forbidden as well as on nightmares, while adolescents' dreams focused on relationships with others; and that both adults and adolescents reported dreams related to the experience of home confinement, which they described in terms of the negative emotions they experienced. In sum, the findings of this study indicate that the COVID-19 lockdown measures, understood as a contextual and catastrophic event, significantly affect people's oneiric lives, regardless of age, but differences in the dreams' content clearly point out different developmental tasks.

MOTHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND CHILD'S EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL FUNCTIONING: NEUROBIOLOGICAL, RELATIONAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

This symposium will focus on the neurobiological, relational, and psychological dimensions that characterize the perinatal period and their effects on parenting, the mother-child relationship and child's emotional and behavioral functioning.

Specifically, University of Rome's team will talk about the associations between selected somatic symptoms during pregnancy (as sleepiness, nausea, and vomiting) and the development of depressive and anxiety symptoms in the post-partum period (Castro et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2019).

University of Perugia's team will highlight the mutual regulating influence between mothers and infants in the co-definition of their relationship, focusing on the effects of infants' crying (Borelli, 2019; Firk et al., 2018).

University of Milan's team will discuss how adolescent mothers with a history of traumatic and adverse experiences show increased risk of poor parenting behavior and difficulties in their interaction with their infant (Bayley et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2017).

Finally, University of Cagliari's team will debate the association between maternal mental health problems and their child's internalizing and externalizing difficulties, in the context of infantile anorexia (Ammaniti et al., 2010; Lucarelli et al., 2018).

The research and clinical reflections upon the abovementioned conditions will allow to acknowledge the basis to derive insights into factors that may guide targeted interventions aimed at promoting the child's and her/his family's psychobiological health.

Transition to motherhood: a study on the association between somatic symptoms during pregnancy and postpartum anxiety and depression symptoms

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Abstract

The Stern's notion of the motherhood constellation symbolizes a “new psychic organization” and a process by which the woman acquires her own maternal role. This process begins during maternal pregnancy, a period in which the mother thinks about and modifies representations of herself as a woman and as a mother. At the same time during pregnancy, the mother experiences several bodily changes and could present some physical symptoms, such as excessive sleepiness, nausea and vomiting. Several authors have hypothesized that some somatic symptoms present during pregnancy might represent psychosomatic symptoms of an intrapsychic difficulty in acquiring the maternal role and be associated with a following psychopathological risk. The present study aimed to assess the associations between selected somatic symptoms during pregnancy (sleepiness, nausea, and vomiting) and the presence of postpartum depressive and anxiety symptoms. N = 150 mothers of children aged between 3 and 6 months were recruited. Mothers filled out questionnaires about anxiety and depression symptoms; in addition, a sociodemographic questionnaire was administered to assess the course of pregnancy and the presence of sleepiness, nausea and vomiting in the three trimesters of pregnancy separately. Results found an association between persistence of sleepiness and vomiting during pregnancy and postpartum depressive and anxiety symptoms. However, no associations have been found between these and persistence of nausea. To date, studies have jointly considered symptoms of nausea and vomiting. Based on our findings, we suggest that these symptoms should be considered separately. We hypothesize that vomiting may represent an expulsive acting out towards the changes that are occurring in the woman that, if not understood, may lead to subsequent psychopathological symptoms of anxiety/depression.

Psychological dimensions and physiological maternal responses to infant cry

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Abstract

Infant cry is an important behaviour related to attachment and a sign of child distress (Bowlby, 1969; Barr et al. 2014). Mothers have sensitive responses to infant distress during the postpartum period. Recent

studies show the significant role of neurobiological factors involved in maternal behaviour, such as oxytocin (OXT) and cortisol (CORT). OXT can facilitate the response to infant crying, increasing the physiological response and reducing the anxiety response (Riem et al., 2011). Greater concentration of CORT in mothers increases reactivity to crying, promoting more intense and positive nursing behaviours (Stallings et al., 2001; Laurent et al., 2011). However, there aren't studies that explore OXT and CORT activation together and its association with some psychological variables.

The present study aims to examine maternal OXT and CORT response to the infant cry and its correlation with postnatal maternal bonding (MPAS), parental reflective functioning (PRFQ), maternal anxiety and stress (STAI; PSI). 26 first-time mothers (N=34; M= 33, SD= 4.16) participated in an infant cry paradigm that assessed CORT and OXT levels through three saliva samples: before the paradigm, then 1 minute and 20 minutes after. Correlational analyses were performed to verify the relationship between OXT and CORT levels and psychological variables.

Results showed no changes in OXT levels yet CORT increased significantly from the baseline at 1 minute ($t_{(25)}=-3,03$; $p<.01$) and 20 minutes after ICP ($t_{(25)}=-2,91$; $p<.01$). MPAS and PRFQ didn't correlate with neurobiological factors. Instead, trait anxiety was negatively associated with CORT ($r=-.404$, $p<.05$). Parental stress was positively correlated with OXT activation at 1 ($r=.403$, $p<.05$) and 20 minutes ($r=.437$, $p<.05$). These results show the important interplay between neurobiological and psychopathological factors in maternal response to infant distress with implications for further research as well as clinical practice.

Maternal traumatic childhood experiences and adolescent and young mother-infant interaction at 3 months

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Abstract

Introduction: A history of maternal adverse childhood experiences is associated with and predictive of motherhood in adolescence and involves a high risk of negative physical and mental health outcomes for mothers and their children (Bayley et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2017).

Method: The aim of the study is to examine the effect of maternal traumatic experiences on the quality of mother-infant interaction in a sample of 70 adolescent and young mother-infant dyads. At 3 infant months, mother-infant interaction was video-recorded. MANCOVA has been used to evaluate differences between dyads with mothers with trauma and dyads with mothers without trauma; the effect

of cumulative traumatic experiences on the quality of mother-infant interaction has been evaluated by regression analysis.

Results: Mothers with traumatic experiences were younger than mothers with no traumatic experiences. Furthermore, adolescent and young mothers with traumatic experiences (vs. adolescent and young mothers without traumatic experiences) had less sensitive and more violent and intrusive behaviors. Infants with adolescent and young mothers with traumatic experiences (vs. infants with adolescent and young mothers without traumatic experiences) had more reactive and aggressive behaviors. Dyads with traumatic experiences were at high risk for infant and maternal negative behaviors. Moreover, cumulative traumatic experiences predicted less maternal sensibility and more maternal and infant negative behaviors.

Conclusion: Maternal childhood traumatic experiences have a negative effect on the quality of adolescent and young mother-infant interaction at infant 3 months, increasing the high-risk condition inherent in motherhood in adolescence. Interventions for adolescent and young mothers should support mother-infant dyads, also considering the presence of maternal traumatic experiences.

Maternal psychopathology and children's internalizing/externalizing problems: a longitudinal study

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Abstract

Introduction: Mothers of children with Infantile Anorexia (IA) have shown a psychopathological profile, characterized mainly by depression, anxiety and dysfunctional eating attitudes. In particular, maternal eating disorders have been associated with their child's emotional, behavioral, and cognitive problems. The aims of the present longitudinal study were to examine the relationships between maternal symptomatology and the internalizing/externalizing problems of their children with a history of IA.

Methods: 113 children (55 girls, 58 boy), originally diagnosed with IA, and their mothers were evaluated at two assessment points at the children's ages of 2 and 5. Mothers filled out the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/1½–5; Achenbach and Rescorla, 2000, 2001), the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90R; Derogatis, 1994) and the Eating-Attitudes Test (EAT-40; Garner, Garfinkel, 1979).

Results: Significant associations between the symptomatic profile of the mothers and the internalizing/externalizing problems of their children emerged at the two assessment points.

Conclusions: Our results point out that the developmental course of children with IA, who received limited psychosocial treatment, is characterized by increasing psychopathological symptoms in both the children and their mothers.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHYSICAL DISEASE CONDITIONS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS: HOW BODY AND MIND MUTUALLY INFORM ONE ANOTHER

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

The mind-body relationship has been capturing a high clinical interest for several decades. On the one hand studies have highlighted that, in several somatic-organic illness conditions, many psychological variables play a fundamental role in the exacerbation of perceived or observed physical symptoms, as well as on the decrease of functioning level in everyday life. This relationship has been observed in several illness conditions, spanning from chronic pain to oncological disorders, to neurodegenerative diseases. On the other hand, studies have highlighted that distress conditions, especially characterized by anxious and depressive symptoms, are very frequently mirrored by physiological correlates, such as skin conductance alterations, or anomalies in the so-called heart rate variability. Taken together, findings from these two lines of research would therefore suggest the existence of a circular relationship between body-related and psychological-related indices in maintaining, exacerbating or alleviating clinical symptoms in pathological conditions. Therefore, investigating this circular relationship would potentially be more informative in identifying new targets for a more efficient planning of early and individualized interventions, rather than investigating single organic or psychological symptoms, one at a time.

Therefore, the aim of the proposed symposium is (i) to offer novel insights into the investigation of this circular relationship through the use of cutting-edge statistical techniques, and (ii) to make the audience aware of the potential implications of such results and methods for a personalized, patient-centered clinical practice. The topics of the talks proposed by the speakers (prof. Antonucci, prof. Castelnuovo,

prof. Gentili) will specifically focus on chronic pain conditions, and on the relationship between dysthymia and heart rate variability.

Machine learning-based ability to classify chronic pain from healthy control individuals based on psycho-physical characteristics

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Abstract

Introduction: Chronic pain (CP) is a complex multidimensional experience severely affecting the quality of life of individuals. Multiple affective, emotional, cognitive and interpersonal factors play a crucial role in CP. Furthermore, the psychological and physical circumstances leading to CP show high inter-individual variability, thus making it difficult to identify core syndrome characteristics. Thus, in a biopsychosocial perspective, we aim at identifying a pattern of psycho-physical impairments that can reliably discriminate between CP individuals and healthy controls (HC) with high accuracy and estimated generalizability using machine learning, thus aiding diagnostic categorization.

Method: One-hundred and eighteen CP and 86 HC were recruited. All individuals were administered several scales assessing quality of life, physical and mental health, personal functioning, anxiety, depression, beliefs about medical treatments, and cognitive abilities. These features were trained to separate CP from HC using support vector classification and repeated nested cross-validation.

Results: A psycho-physical classifier could discriminate HC from CP with 86.5% Balanced Accuracy and significance (permuted significance, $p < 0.001$). The most reliable features characterizing CP were anxiety and depression scores, and beliefs of harm consequent to prolonged pharmacological treatments; for HP, the most reliable features were physical and occupational functioning, and vitality levels.

Conclusions: Our findings suggest that using psychological and physical assessments it is possible to classify CP from HC with high reliability and estimated generalizability via (i) a pattern of psychological symptoms and cognitive beliefs characterizing CP, and (ii) a pattern of intact physical abilities characterizing HC. We think that our algorithm carries novel insights about potential individualized targets for CP-related early intervention programs.

The use of Machine Learning on psychophysiological and kinetic signals as a discrimination tool in mental disorders.

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Abstract

In recent years the development of novel machine learning approaches has raised the possibility of their use as support system for diagnosis in mental disorders. These methods were widely used with different electrophysiological (mainly using electrocardiography (ECG), electroencephalography (EEG) and electrodermal activity (EDA)).

In this contribution we will discuss the results of the application of machine learning approach in different experimental set-ups.

In a first study we will show how using ECG activity it is possible to discriminate different clinical states in bipolar disorders. Through the use of a wearable system, we were able to discriminate depressive, maniac and euthymic state at a single subject level.

In a second study we adopted LASSO regression to estimate BDI scores in two groups of individuals with minor depression and healthy volunteers. How LASSO regression model predicts BDI with an accuracy over 90%.

In a third study we used Supported vector machine to discriminate individuals with depressive symptoms in a cohort of patients with acute coronary heart diseases showing a bad performance of machine learning. Finally, we will present the preliminary data of a multi-modal assessment using gait, movements, EEG and ECG in a real-life scenario to discriminate individuals with dysphoria from those without depressive symptoms.

The predictive role of pre-surgical psychological factors and post-surgical trajectories of pain and catastrophizing in the development of chronic pain after joint arthroplasty

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Abstract

Introduction: Pre-surgical biopsychosocial factors are known to influence the likelihood of incurring in chronic post-surgical pain. Little is known about the influence of post-surgical factors, such as post-surgical pain intensity and state catastrophizing, on chronic post-surgical pain.

Methods: We performed a prospective cohort study including patients listed for joint arthroplasty (total or partial knee arthroplasty, hip arthroplasty). Before surgery, patients filled questionnaires assessing pain intensity, catastrophizing, emotional distress and central sensitization. Post-surgical pain and catastrophizing trajectories were assessed using a 7-day post-surgical diary which included items about pain intensity and state catastrophizing. Pain intensity and interference after 3 months and 1 year from surgery was finally assessed by phone call. Trajectories of post-surgical pain and catastrophizing were separately identified using growth mixture models. The influence of pre-surgical factors and post-surgical pain intensity and catastrophizing trajectories on 3-months and 1-year pain intensity and interference were assessed using linear regressions.

Results: 187 patients were included (64.7% female, mean age= 63.5±9.4). Growth mixture models helped to identify four distinct acute post-surgical pain trajectories and three catastrophizing trajectories. Pre-surgical pain intensity and having a declining acute post-surgical pain trajectory, compared to having a flat trajectory, were associated with pain intensity after three months. Pre-surgical emotional distress and having a higher catastrophizing trajectory, compared to having a lower post-surgical catastrophizing trajectory, were associated with pain interference at three months. Pain intensity and interference after one year were not related to any measured predictor.

Discussion: Pre-surgical and post-surgical factors influence pain intensity and interference after three months from surgery. Preventive interventions administered after surgery might effectively reduce the intensity and interference of post-surgical pain in the medium term.

Adaptive coping strategies are associated with post-surgical distress reduction in women with breast cancer diagnosis: a pre-post study

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Abstract

Introduction: Breast cancer surgery may have a profound impact on women's needs and coping abilities. Additionally, a high percentage of breast cancer survivors report considerable levels of distress that might, however, elicit resilience and adaptive coping strategies, based on situational factors.

Hence, the present study aims at investigating pre-/post-surgery distress variation in women diagnosed with breast cancer, and at better characterizing the potential association between such variation and different types of coping strategies.

Methods: One hundred and fifty women diagnosed with breast cancer (mean age=59.37; SD= \pm 13.23) were administered the Distress Thermometer and the Brief COPE before (T_0) and after (T_1) the surgery (\pm 7days). Data were analyzed through: (1) the Wilcoxon S-R test, to detect changes in distress levels between T_0 and T_1 ; (2) factor analysis and multiple linear regression, allowing for the prediction of such changes based on types of coping strategies assessed through the Brief COPE. All p values were <0.05 .

Results: The Wilcoxon S-R test revealed a significant distress reduction from T_0 to T_1 ($T_W = -5.68 < -z_{\alpha/2} = -1.96$; $p < 0.001$). Factor analysis allowed to extract and rotate through Varimax five distinct components, i.e., 1. active coping and planning; 2. venting + use of emotional and instrumental support; 3. humor + positive reframing + self-blame; 4. denial + behavioral disengagement; 5. religion. Regression analysis revealed that, among these 5 components, lower distress levels at T_1 were significantly predicted by T_0 adaptive coping strategies (e.g., planning; use of emotional support) belonging to the first component ($p = 0.014$).

Conclusion: The present study revealed that T_0 adaptive coping strategies significantly contributed to distress reduction in T_1 . These findings highlight the crucial need of providing psychological support to breast cancer patients in the pre-intervention phase in a timely and individualized way.

TOWARDS PRECISION CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY: USING RECENT SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES TO INFORM DIAGNOSTIC SUBTYPING AND PERSONALIZED INTERVENTIONS

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

The concept of precision medicine is gradually expanding in psychiatry, with the aim to reduce the gap between scientific innovation and clinical application. This symposium will focus on increasing our understanding of mental health, by considering multiple levels of complexity, from biological vulnerability to behavior and sociocultural context. As first speaker, Dr. Martino Schettino will focus on a transdiagnostic risk factor that characterizes both hypo-motivational (e.g., depression) and hyper-motivational (e.g., addiction) disorders, namely repetitive intrusive thinking. Converging experimental and ecological evidence will be presented suggesting disregarded putative mechanisms underlying the maintenance and recurrence of such factor, with a particular emphasis on abnormalities in the functionality of positive valence systems. As second speaker, Dr. Tania Moretta will present a study using Event-Related Potentials to investigate reward processing and cue-reactivity to Facebook-related visual cues in problematic Social Network sites use. The presented original results will shed light on motivational and attentional factors implicated in the sensitized reward processing, with important implications for prevention programs. Lastly, Dr. Valeria Carola will present data on the unique association between depressive symptoms and heart rate variability (HRV) -a recognized transdiagnostic vulnerability factor for psychopathology- particularly in individuals who reported early-life traumatic experiences. Such association might be useful to better inform personalized treatments for stress-related disorders considering that incorporating ways to increase HRV enhances treatment efficacy in major depression. Prof. Giulia Buodo will discuss the presented findings, emphasizing the common goal to harness neurobiological scientific advances to select treatment options with the greatest likelihood of success.

Perseverative cognition alters the functionality of positive valence systems: an investigation with a multimodal approach

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Abstract

Growing evidence suggests that perseverative cognition (PC), a form of cognition characterized by repetitive, intrusive and uncontrollable thoughts, is a transdiagnostic risk factor for different psychiatric disorders. Although PC characterizes both hypo-motivational (e.g., depression) and hyper-motivational (e.g., addiction) disorders, it has been almost exclusively studied within the context of the negative valence systems and only anecdotal evidence exists about its effects on reward processing. The present study combined laboratory-based, computational and ecological assessments with the aim to fill this gap. Psychiatrically healthy individuals performed the Probabilistic Reward Task (PRT) before and after the experimental induction of PC (n = 22) or a waiting period (n = 24). The effects of PC on reward sensitivity and learning rate were dissociated by means of computational modeling. All participants then underwent a one-week Ecological Momentary Assessment of everyday occurrence of PC, as well as anticipatory and consummatory reward-related behavior. Increased response bias on the PRT appeared in response to the induction of PC (versus waiting), likely due to an increase in learning rate but not in reward sensitivity, as suggested by computational modeling. Daily episodes of PC increased the discrepancy between expected and obtained reward (reward prediction error). The current converging experimental and ecological evidence advises toward the value of investigating neurobiological alterations underpinning reward processing dysfunctions during PC as well as toward the implementation of ad hoc interventions to normalize positive valence systems dysfunctionality.

Motivated attention to stimuli related to social networking sites: a cue- reactivity study in problematic users

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Abstract

It has been argued that similar to addictive behaviors, problematic Social Network sites use (PSNSU) is characterized by sensitized reward processing and cue-reactivity. However, no study to our knowledge has yet investigated cue-reactivity in PSNSU. The present study aims at investigating cue-reactivity to Social Network sites (i.e., Facebook)-related visual cues in individuals identified as problematic vs. non-problematic Facebook users by the Problematic Facebook Use Scale. The Event-Related Potentials (ERPs) were recorded during the passive viewing of Facebook-related, pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral pictures in 27 problematic and 26 non-problematic users. Moreover, craving for Facebook usage was collected using a Likert scale. The results showed that despite problematic users were more likely to endorse higher craving than non-problematic ones, Facebook-related cues elicited larger ERP positivity (400-600 ms) than neutral, and comparable to unpleasant stimuli, in all Facebook users. Only in problematic users we found larger positivity (600-800 ms) to pleasant than unpleasant cues and higher craving to be related with lower later positivity (800-1000 ms) to pleasant and unpleasant cues. Regardless of whether Facebook usage is problematic or non-problematic, Facebook-related cues seem to be motivationally relevant stimuli that capture attentional resources in the earlier stages of “motivated” attentional allocation. Moreover, our results support the view that in higher-craving problematic users, reduced abilities to experience emotions would be the result of defective emotion regulation processes that allow craving states to capture more motivational/attentional resources at the expense of other emotional states. These findings may serve for inspiring possible prevention programs in young adults at risk to develop PSNSU.

Association between depressive symptoms and heart rate variability in individuals with early-life traumatic experiences.

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Abstract

Reduced heart rate variability (HRV) is a recognized transdiagnostic vulnerability factor for psychopathology (Beauchaine & Thayer, 2015), with medium-to-large sized associations particularly in mood and anxiety disorders (Koch et al., 2019). Such association is important considering the role of HRV in predicting psychotherapeutic success (Petrocchi & Cheli, 2019).

The present study aimed to investigate the role of early-life traumatic experiences in the relation between depressive symptoms and HRV to shed light on the putative antecedents of this clinically relevant

association. To so, HRV was recorded at rest for 5 minutes and the occurrence of early-life traumatic experiences, the perceived parental care levels, and current levels of depressive symptoms were assessed in a sample of young adults by self-report instruments (Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, Parental Bonding Instrument, and Symptom Check-List-90 Revised).

The results show that early traumatic experiences and type of parental care are independent predictors of resting HR. Notably, correlational analyses suggest that the association between HRV and depressive symptoms is significant only in the subgroup who reported early-life traumatic experiences, but not in those who did not have such experience.

These findings might be useful to better inform personalized treatments for stress-related disorders considering recent findings suggesting that incorporating ways to increase HRV enhances treatment efficacy in major depression.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY: FROM CLINICIANS' EXPERIENCE TO IN-SESSION COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTIONS

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

Qualitative research (QR) offers an interesting alternative to the application of quantitative methods which have been dominating the field of psychology. Rooted in constructivist-intepretativist epistemologies, QR assumes that reality is psychologically and socio-culturally shaped by our lived experiences (Erlebnis), which contribute to an ongoing process of meaning-making governing our feelings, emotions, thoughts and behaviors within social transactions. As a consequence of this, instead of attempting to explain (Erklären) phenomena by testing hypotheses on their underlying general laws, QR aims at understanding (Verstehen) how individual and social meanings shape our lives. To this aim, data are collected in a languaged form and analyzed through methodical hermeneutics within naturalistic designs. The present symposium aims at showing different ways QR can be applied in the field of clinical psychology. The first two contributions focus on the reconstruction of the clinicians' subjective experiences. Gelo et al. conducted a thematic analysis of interviews to explore what psychotherapists of different orientations consider to be relevant for clinical change. Lamiani & Rebecchi conducted a grounded theory analysis of interviews with psychologist to derive a model clients' adjustment after the first COVID-19 first wave. The third contribution focuses on the analysis of communicative (inter)actions within the therapeutic dialogue. More specifically, Esposito et al. adapted the Innovative Moments Coding System to groups setting in order to track markers of change during the treatment. Results will be discussed with regard of their implication for the development of qualitative research in the field of clinical psychology.

A new qualitative method for the analysis of narrative change in group intervention: the innovative moments coding system for group

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Abstract

Over the years, numerous qualitative coding systems have been developed to analyze change in individual psychotherapy, while there are only a few methods to study the process of change in group interventions. The Innovative Moment Coding System (IMCS; Gonçalves et al., 2011) is a reliable and valid method originally developed to track markers of change in individual psychotherapy, i.e. innovative moments (IMs). Based on previous research (Esposito et al., 2017; Garcia-Martínez et al., 2020), this methodological study proposes an adaptation of the IMCS, the Innovative Moments Coding System for Group (IMCS-G), to track IMs in group setting.

In a first study aimed to develop the IMCS-G, the transcripts of twenty-seven sessions of three counseling groups addressed to underachieving university students were analyzed by two reliable coders of the IMCS and seven categories of IMs were detected: three categories belonging to the Individual IMs (e.g. change was expressed by a single participant) and four categories to the group IMs (e.g. change was co-constructed by more than one participant). In a second study, the IMCS-G was used to code thirty-six sessions of further four counselling groups with different outcomes.

In both studies, a strong agreement between coders and a high reliability for IMs levels were detected; furthermore, good outcome groups presented a significant higher frequency of group IMs that increased along the sessions.

This study showed that IMCS-G is a reliable method that may respond to the need of developing qualitative methods to analyze process of change also in group interventions.

Therapeutic factors from clinicians' perspectives. A comparative qualitative study

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Abstract

Quantitative research has extensively investigated therapeutic factors. However, there is still little research using a qualitative approach. This is especially true for qualitative studies taking into account the perspective of psychotherapists. The present study attempts to contribute to fill this gap.

Participants were 20 psychotherapists of four therapeutic approaches (psychodynamic [PT], cognitive-behavioral [CBT], systemic [ST], and Gestalt [GT]; 5 for each approach). Data collection took place through a semi-structured interview adapted from the Change Interview. Data were analyzed through a combination of top-down and bottom-up thematic analysis. Results showed the following therapeutic factors in the overall sample: therapeutic operations and technical interventions (34%), new patient learning (24%), governance of the therapeutic relationship (21%), patient motivation and engagement (16%), active interventions on patient's environment (3%), and patient extra-therapeutic resources (2%). These factors were differently distributed across the therapeutic approaches, with therapeutic operations and technical interventions mostly prominent in CBT and ST and least in PT, new patient learning and patient motivation and engagement mostly present in CBT and rather equally in the others, governance of the therapeutic relationship similarly present in all the approaches, active interventions on patient's environment mostly present in ST, and patient extra-therapeutic resources characteristic of GT and ST. Our findings support the idea that therapeutic factors are both common and specific and can be ascribed to the therapist, client, and their relationship. Moreover, each different therapeutic approach seems to be characterized by a different configuration of common and specific factors. Future qualitative studies should further explore these issues in the context of a theory-building approach, while quantitative designs should attempt to test the emerging hypotheses.

“Repositioning in the face of a new reality”: grounded theory of the adjustment processes after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Abstract

Several studies reported anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms among the general population during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the adjustment process after the first wave of the pandemic remains under-investigated. We conducted a grounded theory to derive a model of the adjustment process based on the experience of psychologists who provided support to the population during the pandemic in Italy. In July 2020, 24 psychologists were progressively recruited

according to theoretical sampling and were invited to attend online focus groups. Two researchers analysed the focus group transcripts through a process of open, axial and selective coding. Data collection terminated once thematic saturation was reached. “Repositioning” emerged as the evolutionary task people had to face to resolve the adjustment process triggered by the “new reality”. Repositioning required an ongoing dialogue between the “emotional experiences” deriving from the lockdown and reopening, and the “strategies” to manage them. Repositioning was facilitated or hindered by contextual and individual “intervening conditions” and led to two “adjustment outcomes”: growth or block. Results suggest that if repositioning fails, a maladjustment outcome may occur. Proactive psychological interventions may support the population in repositioning in order to prevent maladjustment and encourage post-traumatic growth.

Group interventions for children having separates parents: the theoretical underpinnings of the italian “gruppi di parola”

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Abstract

Introduction: The *Gruppi di Parola* is an intervention group for children having separated parents which has been used in Italy since 2005. It can be defined as a short, preventive and support program which is meant for school-age children (6-12 years old) as well as for teenagers (13-17 years old). It is composed by four two-hour weekly meetings led by specifically trained experts and addressed to a group of children (8/10 maximum) sharing the experience of their parents' separation.

This intervention meets the children's need to be listened to, to be informed to the events related to the separation, to be reassured about their parents' love and presence. It allows the children not to feel as the only ones going through their parents' separation; to cope with the separation by expressing their thoughts, emotions, feelings linked to the event; to share the coping strategies.

Method: The aim of the current study was to discover the theoretical underpinnings of the Italian *Gruppi di Parola* according to a focused ethnographic perspective. The study involved 12 workers who have concluded their training at least 2 years before the research. They were interviewed and content analysis were conducted on their verbatim transcription. In particular, the qualitative analysis of the content (QRS*NVivo) and the thematic analysis of the elementary contexts (T-Lab) were done in a multimethodological perspective (triangulation).

Results: Our analysis demonstrates the ultimate presence of 4 thematic clusters showing that the intervention is rooted in both theoretical elements (the theoretical and conceptual references) as well as

in more practical ones (the way of leadership, the value of the group, the particular “use” of the words of participants).

Conclusions: Gruppi di Parola are based on different theoretical elements and these are connected to each other within an integrative perspective.

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND NEURODEGENERATIVE DISEASES: FROM PREVENTION TO INTERVENTION

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

Neurodegenerative diseases include a wide range of disorders in need of pharmacological treatments. Beyond neurological and cognitive symptoms, most people experience psychological symptoms related to mood and behaviour. Since neurodegenerative diseases impact on autonomy and activity of daily living, family carers suffer from burden and psychological symptoms. In this scenario, formal caregivers are involved in providing care too. In 2014 a World Health Organization and Alzheimer Disease Organization report considered dementia as a public health priority.

Both the Italian dementia national plan and regional plans specify the need to implement interventions addressing psychological needs of people with dementia or other neurodegenerative disorders, beyond those of informal and formal carers. In this regards, psychological symptoms are an important aspect of Parkinson's disease. Psychological factors are important both as predictive and diagnostic tools as well as target for interventions. In both dementia and Parkinson diseases, several instruments for psychological assessment and interventions are already available.

Furthermore, specific actions have been undertaken, at European level, to develop curricula to train a new generation of health workers on the topic of psychosocial care in dementia. The SIDECAR project (www.sidecarproject.eu) and ERASMUS plus project make available modules to teach and train in Higher education and other projects targeting the workforce.

The aim of the symposium is to contribute to the knowledge regarding specific domains such as psychological protective factors for mild cognitive impairment, the role of mood and behavior in Parkinson's disease, and the impact of dementia on people <65 years, formal and informal carers. The symposium is seen as a first step to set a collaborative network within clinical psychology related to research, teaching and the contribution to policy planning in the domain of neurodegenerative diseases.

Clinical assessment, prevalence and severity index of mild cognitive impairment: a comparison among different diagnostic criteria

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Abstract

Dementia represents one of the most important pathological conditions associated with aging, causing a significant decrease in quality of life. The Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) was proposed to identify the early stage of dementia. According to previous studies, the prevalence of MCI ranges from 3% to 42%. These mixed data depend on diagnostic criteria and instruments adopted for the diagnosis, the normative values considered, and the cognitive domains examined. The present study aims to show how different diagnostic and classification criteria identified different diffusion rates of MCI and tried to indicate the best protocol for the MCI diagnosis.

A neuropsychological assessment has been defined to quantify participants' performance in memory tests and other cognitive domains (i.e., language, praxis, reasoning, visual-spatial skills, attention, and executive functions).

One hundred and forty-seven adults (age range: 50-87) participated in the study. Different diagnostic criteria were adopted (i.e., cut-off scores standardized tests, 1.5 standard deviations from the sample mean score, a factorial classification of cognitive domains), and two classifications of MCI were considered (i.e., Petersen's classification and ad hoc classification focused on executive functioning).

Results showed a range of prevalence of MCI from 52.5% and 54.4% considering the adoption of the different diagnostic criteria. Moreover, the different classification criteria indicated a variety of expressions of the MCI.

Our results allow hypothesizing that the use of an extensive assessment battery may prove effective in identifying early diagnostic markers of dementia. The best approach to ensure a reliable diagnosis and prognosis appears to combine several cognitive measures. Finally, the adoption of factorial analysis to define the weight of different cognitive domains seems to be a useful tool that can be linked to a severity score of the cognitive impairment.

The impact of dementia on young people, their formal and informal caregivers

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Abstract

Young-onset dementia (YOD) affects people who are still working, having financial commitments, children to care for or dependent parents. The running duties and the feelings of physical power and competence strain these people, short-circuiting life plan and sociality. Expectations trap them either into self-induced isolation or out of health programs incapable of matching internal routines with specific age-related needs. In these horizons, the burden carried by people with YOD, families, and formal caregivers is heavy. Here, by modelling qualitative reports, we aim at spotting solutions fostering well-being in all the people impacted by the disease.

A convenient number of people living with YOD, informal caregivers and health service workers reported concerns about the condition, which we analysed qualitatively.

The analysis of what commented confirmed disease manifold impacts. YOD urges all the people interested in the condition to make new life plans and develop alternative coping strategies, which, unfortunately, barely match the essential assistance levels offered by health and welfare services. Although the families noticed that services mainly were for older people and that low services interconnection hampers personalised solutions, they appreciated respite moments. For what concerns the services workforce, they acknowledged that they are untrained for this form of dementia, subjected to compassion fatigue, and burned-out by the organisational barriers back-firing the fulfilment of the socio-economic aids these people deserve.

The main solutions must regard developing specific guidelines capable of tackling the YOD condition from various perspectives. They must include procedures for age-congruent interventions aimed at keeping people active in society, the involvement of the families in shared decision-making processes, the implementation of programs of development for the workforce regarding education and supervision, besides efforts to increase networking.

Behavioural and psychological symptoms of neurodegenerative disorders: new evidence in parkinson's disease

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Abstract

Parkinson's disease (PD) is an incurable, long-term neurodegenerative brain condition primarily affecting older adults with a typical age of onset between 60-65 years. Currently available dopamine replacement therapies (DRT) do offer PD patients valuable symptomatic relief from core motor features but, in an estimated 40% of PD patients, DRT trigger impulsive compulsive behaviours (ICBs). ICBs are experienced as overwhelming and irresistible impulses and compulsions to engage in behaviours that include gambling, sexual activity, eating, shopping. Not surprisingly, ICBs are the source of significant distress for those experiencing them, increase carer burden, and, when left unmanaged, ICBs increase frailty, precipitate relationship breakdown, nursing home admission and increase the direct and indirect costs of PD. However, DRT provides only a partial explanation of the ICB aetiology, as it fails to account for the ~60% of DRT medicated PD patients who do not develop a clinically significant ICB. The present study has been conducted in order to explore putative risk factors than may increase ICB vulnerability in PD patients. Analyzing the Parkinson's Progressive Marker Initiative (PPMI) database, data from 420 PD patients, 63 individuals with motor symptoms but without evidence of striatal dopaminergic depletion (SWEDD) and 196 healthy controls were analyzed. Measures of impulsivity, mood and cognition were compared at 3 time points (baseline, 12 months and 24 months). Results indicate higher baseline impulsivity and depression rates in the SWEDD group compared to both PD patients and healthy controls. Mixed effect models conducted on data collected at 12 and 24 months indicated that anxiety significantly predicted impulsivity in PD patients, whilst depression and anxiety predicted impulsivity in the SWEDD group. Taken together these results highlight the critical importance to consider anxiety and depressive symptoms as risk factors for the development of ICBs in PD.

Early detection of neurodegenerative risk: the importance of integrating psychological, cognitive and functional factors in the evaluation of elderly, and their association with burden among caregivers

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Abstract

Aging is a multidimensional process, thus the integrated evaluation of psychological, cognitive and functional factors denotes an effective goal to achieve. In line with this perspective, we conducted several cross-sectional studies, which involved a cohort of elderly outpatients. We additionally conducted a follow-up, by telephone, on the cognitive status and quality of life during the first national lockdown, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We initially showed that cognitive reserve, premorbid IQ and muscle strength contributed to cognitive performances. Additionally, patients who exhibited a cognitive worsening at follow-up were those with lower scores of cognitive reserve, lower cognitive performances, reduced motor performances and worse frailty at baseline.

Furthermore, we demonstrated that higher dispositional optimism, a flexible emotion regulation and lower frailty status were differently associated to better physical and mental components of quality of life; this evidence was confirmed also during the follow-up evaluation, where significantly lower levels of quality of life emerged.

As an additional novelty of our observations, we tested a multifactorial model to explain the frailty status of patients, by jointly including psychological, cognitive and functional contributors. The main findings was that higher dispositional optimism emerged as a psychological characteristic associated with frailty status, together with better cognitive performances.

Interestingly, we ultimately showed that lower levels of burden were perceived by family caregivers of those elderly patients who exhibited higher dispositional optimism and lower frailty status.

The integrated evaluation of psychological, cognitive and functional factors should be encouraged in clinical practice, and it may be a useful strategy especially in terms of prevention of age-related neurocognitive and functional negative outcomes; this joint evaluation may also enrich the understanding of clinical sources of burden among caregivers.

PARENTAL MENTALIZING AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: WHICH ROLE FOR FATHERS? ASSESSMENT APPROACHES AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS THROUGH THE LENS OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

The present panel aims to explore the role of parental mentalizing defined as the parent's capacity to hold the child's mental states in mind (Slade, 2005) as a key resource for child's development. Research suggests differences in the parental function carried out by the two parents: focusing on the specific role played by the paternal figure within child's development would help us enhance the knowledge of the multiple factors capable to influence child's emotional development and quality of attachment relationships within the family context.

Starting from these assumptions, this panel collecting four different studies tries to share theoretical aspects and research data related to parental mentalizing by presenting an empirical approach that holds together different components of the family system and their reciprocal connections during the lifetime.

1. The contribution of Agostini and colleagues from the University of Bologna focuses on the quality of parental mental representations and father-infant interactive styles in fathers after Assisted Reproductive Technologies treatments.
2. The contribution of Mazzeschi and Pazzagli from the University of Perugia focuses on parental mentalizing and emotional difficulties in the new fathers three months after the birth of the baby.
3. The contribution of Charpentier-Mora and colleagues from the University of Genoa investigates the differences between paternal and maternal mentalizing in relation to the other parent's mentalizing and parenting stress within families with school-aged children.
4. The contribution of Bastianoni and colleagues from the University of Rome investigates the mentalization abilities in both separated and united fathers and the family satisfaction reported by their adolescents.

These contributions expand attachment-based studies by involving the role of father within familiar and individual paths. Assessment methodologies and clinical implications are discussed.

The dimensions of the transition to parenthood in fathers after assisted reproductive technology

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Abstract

Perinatal transition represents a major life transition period for future parents for the activation of the caregiving system and the development of early parenting skills. This transition may be influenced by specific contexts of parenthood, such as infertility and the need to undergo Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART), which are known as highly stressful events. Nevertheless, literature on parenthood after ART has focused on mothers and less on fathers' experience. This study aimed to investigate the transition to parenthood in fathers after ART treatments, analysing the quality of both parental mental representations and father-infant interactive styles according to modality of conception (ART vs Spontaneous Conception, SC).

Forty-two fathers (17 ART, 25 SC) and their partners were recruited at Santa Maria Nuova Hospital (Reggio Emilia, Italy) during the antenatal period. The quality of parental representations was assessed at 32 gestational weeks and 3 months after childbirth, by the Semantic Differential of the IRMAG. Father-infant interactive patterns were also evaluated after birth during 5 minute-free interactions, coded by the CARE-Index.

Results showed similar mental representations between ART and SC fathers in individual (Child, Self-as-man, Partner) and parental (Self-as-parent, Own parent) characteristics. Nevertheless, ART fathers showed higher scores in Emotional Tendencies, suggesting a more intense involvement in the parenting role.

Father-infant interactions showed a similar level of sensitivity between ART and SC fathers and infants were cooperative in both groups. Anyway, considering the influence of the type of ART, infants whose fathers underwent ICSI procedure showed to be more passive.

Findings suggest the need to further investigate paternal experience during transition to parenthood after ART, to improve the understanding of fathers' difficulties and resources in developing their parental role and possibly to target specific parenting support.

Which associations between paternal mentalization and adolescents' family satisfaction? An exploratory pilot study on intact and separated families

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Abstract

Marital dissolution is characterized by high levels of stress for both parents and children. The impact of separation and divorce revealed that chronic and high levels of ex-marital conflict may represent a risk factor for children's psychosocial adjustment and for the quality of family well-being. Moreover, the complex redefinition of family roles and organization implicated within the separation process, may negatively impact child's relationship with the non-residential caregiver usually represented by the father (Amato, 2014). Within this framework, Parental Reflective Functioning (PRF; Slade, 2005) – parents' capacity to reason on their own and their children's behaviors in terms of internal states - could help parents creating an adequate space for holding in mind their children's affective needs. The present exploratory study aims to compare mentalization abilities in both separated and united fathers, also investigating the role displayed by paternal PRF in influencing family satisfaction reported by their adolescents. Participants were 144 fathers (30 divorced - 42 united; mean age = 51.43), and their 72 children (mean age = 15.54). Fathers' PRF was assessed through a multi-method approach including a short interview protocol, the *Reflective Functioning Five-Minute Speech Sample* and the *Parental Reflective Functioning Questionnaire*; adolescents completed the *Family Satisfaction Scale*. Results showed that divorced fathers presented significant lower levels of PRF. Additionally, an interaction effect between family organization (*Separated*) and fathers' PRF on adolescents' family satisfaction was found ($b = 3.34$, $SE = 1.35$, $p = .02$): the negative effect displayed by parents separation on adolescents' family satisfaction was significantly negative only for low levels of fathers PRF. Results suggested that PRF might be considered a protective factor during challenging family transitions. Clinical implications and future research perspectives are further discussed.

How does parental mentalizing protect against parenting stress within the parental dyad? A pilot study

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Abstract

Despite the evidence of the link between parental mentalizing (i.e., parent's ability to understand the child's mental states while keeping an attitude of curiosity and awareness of one's own limitations of knowledge connected to mental states' opaqueness; Slade, 2005) and parenting stress (i.e., negative psychological state experienced by a parent towards his role as a caregiver; Bornstein, 2002) few studies have investigated this area and the mutual role played by both parents. The present study aims to explore the moderating role that one parent's mentalizing could play on the link between the other parent's mentalizing – operationalized as *Parental Reflective Functioning* and *Parental Insightfulness* – and stress levels within a non-clinical sample composed by 86 parents (48 mothers and 38 fathers) of school-aged children. *Insightfulness Assessment Procedure* (Oppenheim & Koren-Karie, 2002) and *Parental Reflective Functioning Questionnaire* (Luyten et al., 2017) were used to evaluate parental mentalizing while *Parenting Stress Index-Short Form* (Abidin, 1995) was used to evaluate parenting stress. Results of the moderation analyses showed an interaction effect between mother's mentalizing deficits and father's Insightfulness on mother's parenting stress ($b=-21.61$, $SE=8.13$, $p=.01$): mother's mentalizing deficits positively predicted mother's parenting stress at low ($b=28.41$, $SE=9.46$, $p=.006$) but not at medium ($b=8.63$, $SE=6.69$, $p=.21$) and high ($b=-11.14$, $SE=10.53$, $p=.30$) levels of father's Insightfulness. However, no moderating role emerged with regard to mother's Insightfulness within the link between father's mentalizing deficits and father's parenting stress. Our findings indicate that paternal, but not maternal, mentalizing buffers the impact of the mother's mentalizing deficits on her own parental stress. Future studies should analyze differences and similarities between mother's and father's mentalizing. Clinical and research implications are discussed.

Parental reflective functioning and emotional difficulties in new fathers

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Abstract

Research on the Parental Reflective Functioning (PRF) - the ability of parents to understand, reflect and keep in mind the inner life of the child - has mainly involved mothers and only a few studies focused on fathers. Indeed, previous studies showed the important relationship between PRF and maternal emotional difficulties as emotional suppression and postnatal depression (Camoirano, 2017; Ensink et al., 2016; Heron-Delaney et al., 2016; Schultheis et al., 2019), but there are no empirical studies in the fathers. This study aims to explore the relationship between PRF and emotional regulation in Italian fathers. The Parental Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (PRFQ; Luyten et al., 2009), the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS; Cox et al., 1987) and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003) were administered to 47 new fathers three months after the birth of the baby. Socio-demographic variables were also collected. The results showed a significant positive correlation between the pre-mentalization subscale and the suppression scale ($r = .340, p < .05$). The subscale of Mental State Certainty correlates positively with the father's age ($r = .356, p < .05$). Finally, the Interest and curiosity subscale correlates negatively with the suppression scale ($r = -.365, p < .05$) and with postnatal depression ($r = -.344, p < .01$). These results suggest the important connection between father's emotional functioning and PRF.

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND CHRONIC DISEASE: ADVANCES AND PERSPECTIVES

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

The aim of the current symposium is highlighting the crucial relationship between Clinical Psychology and Chronic Disease. The subscriptions to this panel show psychological evaluation may contribute to a deeper understanding of psychological experience in chronic conditions in connection with the body-mind processes. It is known that chronic diseases may seriously impact on perceived quality of life due to both physical illness and psychological suffering. Particularly, psychological factors may affect individual behaviour, leading to the onset of chronic condition, which are strictly related to morbidity and mortality. Four contributions regarding how the most relevant psychological factors influence individuals' health will be presented. The first contribution to the symposium (Martino G., et al.) aims to explore the interrelations between mental health and thyroid-related quality of life in patients with Hashimoto's thyroiditis receiving levothyroxine replacement. A second contribution (Langher V., et al.) investigates the subjective perspective of physicians in relation to abortion and consciousness objection to a deeper comprehension of emotional dynamics related to environment and job's emotional experience. A third contribution (Conversano C., et al.) explores the effect of a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction intervention on fibromyalgic patients in relation with psychological variables such as anxiety, perceived stress, sleep quality and well-being. The fourth contribution (Di Giuseppe M. et al.) analyses the role of defence mechanisms in perceived stress and burnout in healthcare professionals working with chronic disease.

MBSR intervention for chronic fibromyalgic pain

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Abstract

Introduction: Fibromyalgia (FM) is a chronic syndrome characterized by widespread musculoskeletal pain, sleep disturbances, asthenia, fatigue, and a set of cognitive symptoms named "fibro fog". The quality of life of FM patients is significantly lower than in other rheumatic diseases. The most recent studies confirm the crucial role of chronic stress (distress) both in the etiology and in the maintenance of the syndrome, aggravating the already compromised condition of central sensitization. Given the clinical complexity of FM, the treatment requires a multidimensional approach; in this regard, the scientific community has recently become interested in the contribution of contemplative practices and mindfulness, as regards the reduction of stress. The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction intervention (MBSR) on FM patients. **Method:** Over a period of three years, four groups of women with FM (N=28) underwent an MBSR intervention, followed by psychological testing (pretest–posttest design), including: anxiety (SAS), perceived stress (PSS), mindfulness (MAAS), sleep quality (PSQI) and general well-being (PGWBI) measures. Given the sample size, t-test and other non-parametric tests were performed. **Results:** Overall, the findings showed a significant improvement after MBSR (PSS, SAS, PSQI, PGWBI <.05). Participants showed lower levels of stress and anxiety after the intervention, and an increasing of general wellbeing and sleep quality. **Conclusions:** The present pilot study confirmed the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in reducing stress and improving sleep awareness and quality in FM patients. Future studies should include control groups while increasing the sample size.

The effects of defensive functioning on perceived stress and burnout in the healthcare of chronic diseases

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Abstract

Working in the healthcare of chronic diseases affects healthcare professionals' (HP) well-being and their psychological response to perceived stress. Implicit emotional regulation, conceptualized as defensive functioning, mediates individual's reactions to internal and external stressors and is essential in protecting individuals from psychological distress. As symptoms of distress frequently occur in HP working with chronic medical conditions, our study aimed at exploring the relationship between defense mechanisms and perceived stress and burnout and how they change during the COVID-19 emergency.

A convenience sample of 126 HP working with chronic diseases responded to an online survey to test the impact of defense mechanisms on stress and burnout before (August 2020) and during (December 2020) the second wave of COVID-19 in Italy. Self-report assessment was conducted using the Defense Mechanisms Rating Scales-Self-Report-30 (DMRS-SR-30), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

Pearson correlations analyses showed significant association between overall defensive functioning (ODF) and psychological well-being in HP working with chronic medical conditions. In particular, immature defenses were found associated with higher levels of stress and burnout, while mature defenses were found associated with lower distress. Regression analyses showed that higher scores on ODF and mature defenses assessed before the second wave of COVID-19 predicted lower levels of stress and burnout during the second healthcare emergency for COVID-19.

Defense mechanisms play an important role in dealing with work-related psychological distress experienced in the healthcare of chronic diseases, especially during healthcare crises as the COVID-19 pandemic. The systematic assessment of defense mechanisms among healthcare professionals might help the early detection of vulnerable workers and the timely activation of psychological support.

Clinical psychology supporting medicine: job related emotional experience in gynaecologists practising or opposing abortion

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Abstract

Psychological and sociological research studies about abortion are usually related to the construct of "abortion stigma" and they are mainly focused on women's experiences than on providers' ones. The present study tries to understand the subjective perspective of physicians in relation to abortion and consciousness objection in order to deeper understand the emotional dynamics taking part to their workplace's and job's emotional experience. Structured interviews were administrated to 19

gynaecologists and trainees in Gynaecology to explore their feelings connected to their work with a focus on voluntary interruption of pregnancy and the choice of being or not and objector. We used Emotional Text Analysis to analyse the entire textual corpus of interviews in order to explore their affective symbolization. Statistical multidimensional analyses were conducted in order to detect thematic domains (clusters) and latent factors organizing the contraposition between them, considered as a mirror of emotional dynamics part of the context. We found out five clusters, referring to different emotional dimensions: Pregnancy as an indigestible problem (Cluster 1); The processual choice of becoming an objector (Cluster 2); The phantom of a powerful manhood (Cluster 3); The deserty hospital (Cluster 4) and the symbolic instrument of life: consciousness objection (Cluster 5). Moreover, four latent factors emerged from the analysis: The Anguish (Factor 1); The Incompetent Omnipotence (Factor 2); The Unwanted Pregnancy (Factor 3) and the foetus-woman or The Prenatal-woman? (Factor 4). All the results are discussed based on the previous literature.

Mental health, generic and thyroid-related quality of life in patients with Hashimoto's thyroiditis

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Abstract

The assessment of health-related quality of life (HR-QOL) in chronic conditions is relevant with specific regard to patients with hypothyroidism in comorbidity with depressive and anxious concerns. This pilot study aims at: 1) examining the correlations of thyroid-specific and generic measures of QOL in patients with Hashimoto's Thyroiditis (HT); 2) investigating the associations of generic and thyroid-specific measures of QOL with depression and anxiety in patients with HT; 3) comparing generic and thyroid-specific measure of QOL in patients with HT vs controls. Twenty-one patients serologically or ultrasonographically verified HT and 16 controls with non-toxic goiter or post-surgical hypothyroidism entered the study. Generic and disease-specific QOL were assessed by Health Survey Short Form-36 (SF-36) and Thyroid Patients Reported Outcome (ThyPro) questionnaires, respectively, while depression and anxiety were measured through Beck Depression Inventory-Second Edition and Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale, respectively.

Results showed that ThyPro and SF-36 scores were associated with each other only regarding the mental health domain, and that such QOL measures were consistently associated with depression levels but not

with anxiety. Besides, no statistically significant difference was found between patients with HT and controls with regard to generic and thyroid-specific QOL.

This data suggests that generic and disease-specific measures of QOL can sufficiently assess the mental functioning domain and capture depressive symptoms, but only thyroid-specific measures can provide an accurate examination of physical aspects of QOL and the overall disease impact in patients' lives.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MIND AND BODY: EXPERIMENTAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Proposer

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Discussant

*Mario Fulcheri*²

²Department of Psychological, Health and Territory Sciences, University “G. D’Annunzio” of Chieti-Pescara

Abstract

The body is able to show the suffering of the human being as well as being a gateway for treatment and for the discovery of new mechanisms. The symposium will see alternating different contributions that will address the connection between mind and body from different points of view. The contribution of Dr. Sara Carletto will present the Italian evaluation of the Emotional Style Questionnaire developed by prof. Richard Davidson, affective neuroscientist at the University of North Carolina, USA. The report will focus on the Emotional Style with its sub-dimensions, closely related to specific neurobiological circuits. Dr. Francesca Malandrone will present a pilot study conducted with patients suffering from Eating Disorder. In the study, a mindfulness technique was used as an emotional elicitation task to observe changes in Heart Rate Variability, with the aim of increasing knowledge on vagal functioning. In continuity with the population covered by this report, there is the contribution of Professor Chiara Conti, who will present a report on the mechanisms underlying food craving and binge eating in patients included in weight loss programs. The report by Dr. Cinzia Cecchetto will see the presentation of a study in which olfactory meta-cognitive abilities in relation to depressive, anxiety and social anxiety symptoms were examined. The study also investigated awareness of social odors, produced by the human body and containing a great variety of social information.

Olfactory meta-cognition in anxiety and depression: the different role of common and social odors

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Abstract

Abnormal olfactory abilities have been widely reported in depressive and anxiety disorders. Along with olfactory functioning, olfactory meta-cognitive abilities (i.e., odor awareness, olfactory imagery and importance of odors) are essential in shaping olfaction. Surprisingly, very few studies examined these meta-cognitive abilities in relation to depressive, anxiety, and social anxiety symptoms, and none of them considered the awareness of social odors, which are odors produced by the human body and are able to carry a wide variety of social information, making them essential in interpersonal relationships. This pre-registered study examined the relation between olfactory meta-cognitive abilities and depression, general anxiety, and social anxiety in 429 individuals. Self-report measures of depression, general anxiety, and social anxiety, along with self-report olfactory meta-cognitive scales, were collected using an online survey. Linear regression analyses revealed that olfactory awareness and the level of importance given to odors were significantly directly predicted by anxiety but not by depressive scores. Olfactory imagery was predicted neither by anxiety nor by depressive symptoms. When looking specifically into social odors, higher depression and lower social anxiety predicted increased awareness. To summarize, the present findings did not confirm our hypotheses of reduced awareness for odors in depression, but add to the limited literature about anxiety disorders, corroborating the importance of olfactory function in anxiety. These data support the notion of a close relation between emotion and olfaction, while future studies are needed to disentangle the different role of common and social odors in depressive and anxiety symptoms as well as their importance in full-blown psychiatric conditions. The study is partially supported by the project POTION funding under Horizon 2020 FET programme and by the grant TRAINED 2017L2RLZ2 PRIN 2017.

The Italian validation of the emotional style questionnaire: an indicator of emotional health

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Abstract

According to Richard Davidson's studies, the Emotional Style can be defined as a coherent way of reacting to life experiences, to which specific brain circuits contribute, and which includes six dimensions:

Perspective, Resilience, Social Intuition, Self-Awareness, Sensitivity to context and attention. The Emotional Style Questionnaire (ESQ) is a self-administered tool of 24 items aimed at identifying the emotional style and the six underlying dimensions.

The aim of the present study was the validation of the ESQ in Italian and the evaluation of the psychometric properties in the general population.

In study 1, the linguistic and cultural adaptation of the ESQ was carried out and the psychometric properties of the ESQ questionnaire were studied, administering the questionnaire to a group of 208 healthy volunteers. Test-retest reliability and convergent validity were assessed.

In study 2, conducted in the light of the results of the first study, linguistic changes were made to the items of the ESQ and the questionnaires used for the evaluation of convergent and divergent validity were modified, to better investigate the underlying constructs of each dimension. The questionnaires were administered to a group of 197 healthy volunteers stratified by age groups. Factor analysis identified five dimensions instead of the original six, with an overlap between Outlook and Resilience. The final version of the ESQ in Italian is therefore composed of 24 items that allow to identify five subscales and six constructs. The questionnaire was found to be a valid and reliable measure, with satisfactory psychometric properties. Furthermore, as for the original version, the Italian version can also be considered a measure of emotional well-being. Future studies should investigate the properties of ESQ in clinical samples and in correlation with neurobiological characteristics.

A mindfulness-based technique to underestimate the emotional response in eating disorder measured through heart rate variability

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Abstract

Recent studies have suggested that Eating Disorders (ED) present alterations in the autonomic sympathovagal balance. In this context, in addition to being a valid tool for the prevention and treatment of ED, Mindfulness has proved effective in modulating Heart Rate Variability (HRV), recognized as an index of the functionality of the autonomous nervous system (ANS).

The aim of the study is to observe how listening to a Mindfulness practice can act as an emotional elicitor by modifying the parameters related to HRV. A controlled study compared ED patients with healthy

subjects. After completing the initial evaluation questionnaires, participants were asked to listen to an audio track lasting 30 minutes articulated with an alternation of silences (resting states) and mindfulness practices.

This is the first study that investigated the functioning of the ANS, observed through HRV using Mindfulness practices. The results showed significant differences both within the subject, with differential activation variations between rest state and practice, and between groups. Whether preliminary results or insights, the study seems to give interesting insights to better understand the functioning of the ANS and the responses to Mindfulness-Based interventions.

Food craving and binge eating in obese outpatients in a weight-loss program

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Abstract

Introduction: Obesity is a significant global cause of morbidity, mortality, and disability.

Hence, investigating behavioural factors underlying maladaptive eating behaviour patterns has become of paramount importance for public health. This explorative study aims to investigate emotion regulation and food craving in a sample of obese subjects with and without binge eating (BE) and to explore the possible relationship between the general clinical presentation and BE.

Methods: Consecutive 212 obese outpatients were assessed at baseline and after 6 months for clinical characteristics (such as BMI, binge eating, alexithymia and food craving) and distress symptoms with validated scales.

Results: The mean age of subjects was 45.7 ± 14.2 years, 67.4% were women, and their mean BMI was 36.5 ± 7.7 kg/m². After 6 months of weight-loss program, 54% of patients lost more than 5% of their initial weight. Obese patients with BE reported significantly higher levels of distress symptoms, food craving ($p < .001$), and alexithymia ($p = .009$) than those without BE ($p < .001$) after 6 months of treatment.

Conclusions: Clinicians involved in the management of obesity should address the combination of eating patterns and emotional distress by planning effective client-focused interventions.

SETTING, THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP AND COVID-19: CHANGES, CHALLENGES AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

In the last decades telepsychotherapy has been a debated issue among professionals of mental health. With the spread of the Coronavirus Disease-19 (COVID-19) and the subsequent containment measures, in most cases online psychotherapy has become the only way to carry on the clinical work. Hence, the recent changes in the clinical setting introduced by the pandemic need to be deepened and discussed.

This symposium aims to offer an opportunity to reflect on such a topical issue, by means of four contributions which will deal with theoretical, research and clinical aspects of online consultation and psychotherapy.

In the first contribution, Trumello, Lombardi, Candelori, Favoloso and Babore analyse Italian psychologists’ and psychotherapists’ perceptions about the changes in the clinical work and their correlations with burnout and anxiety associated with COVID-19.

In the second contribution, Boldrini, Del Corno and Schiano Lomoriello aim at specifically exploring the predictors of the rate of interrupted treatments during the lockdown and the factors influencing psychotherapists’ satisfaction with the telepsychotherapy.

The third contribution presented by Craparo and La Rosa specifically focuses on the role of the body in the virtual setting of telepsychotherapy, by means of theoretical reflections and clinical cases.

With the fourth contribution by Pietrabissa, Bertuzzi and Castelnovo, the focus shifts to adolescents with weight-related issues and their caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the purpose to highlight factors that may guide health care professionals in providing support and guidance to this risk category of individuals.

Overall, the proposed symposium will offer a chance to compare and discuss different perspectives (research, clinical, theoretical) on the impact produced by the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological and psychotherapeutic work.

Online clinical work during the coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19) pandemic: a study on Italian psychologists' and psychotherapists' experience

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Abstract

In the past years, in Italy, psychological consultation and psychotherapy carried out online were not very frequent (Messina & Löffler-Stastka, 2021). After the spread of the COVID-19, they have allowed psychologists to continue clinical treatments.

The main aim of the current study was to explore Italian psychologists' and psychotherapists' perceptions about the changes in clinical work, during the pandemic.

Tools comprised standardised questionnaires evaluating burnout (ProQoL-V) and anxiety associated with COVID-19 (CAS) and an ad hoc questionnaire, which was developed to analyse in depth the professionals' feelings and impressions related to the online clinical work.

Participants comprised 470 Italian psychologists (88.1% females; mean age = 40.19 years; SD = 10.71); of them, 61.70% were also psychotherapists.

The theoretical orientations were as follows: 20.8% cognitive behavioural, 14.6% psychodynamic, 23.1% psychoanalytical, 18.7% systemic and 22.8% other types.

As for the levels of burnout, no differences were detected according to the economic levels, the geographical provenance or the theoretical orientations.

During the lockdown, more than half of participants (57.7%) continued their clinical work; most of them (67.5%) worked exclusively online and 24.7% in a mixed way.

Overall, psychologists considered themselves as very (11.2%), quite (64.0%), low (22.4%) or not (2.4%) satisfied by their clinical work during the lockdown.

Only 22.8% of participants had practiced online clinical work before the current pandemic but almost twice (44.8%) stated that they would like to continue to use it even after the emergency.

Most participants (71.2%) considered the online work as effective, but more than half (58.4%) judged it as less effective than in-presence one.

Results of this research showed a mixed picture, with an overall general positive evaluation of remote work but also a desire of professionals to return to meet in presence their patients.

Psychotherapy during COVID-19: how the clinical practice of Italian psychotherapists changed during the pandemic

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Abstract

Aims: Italy was one of the first countries to be significantly affected by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, determining a unique scenario for Italian psychotherapists to consider changing the modality in which they deliver treatment. The present study aimed at studying which factors related to psychotherapists and their clinical practice had a major role in predicting two main outcomes: (1) the rate of interrupted treatments during lockdown and (2) psychotherapists' satisfaction with the telepsychotherapy (TP) modality. *Methods:* An online survey was administered to licensed psychotherapists ($n = 306$), who worked mainly as private practitioners, between April 5 and May 10, 2020 (i.e., the peak of the pandemic in Italy). *Results:* Psychotherapists reported that 42.1% (SD = 28.9) of their treatments had been interrupted, suggesting that Italy faced an important undersupply of psychotherapy during the lockdown. Using the Akaike information criterion (AIC) model selection, we identified three predictors of the rate of interrupted treatments: (1) psychotherapists' lack of experience with TP prior to the lockdown, (2) their theoretical orientation (with cognitive behavioral psychotherapists reporting a higher rate of interrupted treatments), and (3) patients' lack of privacy at home, as reported to the psychotherapists. Furthermore, we found significant predictors of psychotherapists' satisfaction with the TP modality. *Conclusion:* The following recommendations can help policy makers, professional associations, and practitioners in promoting the continuity of psychotherapy treatments during the COVID-19 outbreak and in future emergencies: (i) disseminating training programs for practitioners on TP, (ii) supporting patients to pragmatically access a private space at home, (iii) encouraging practitioners to use video-conferencing (instead of telephone) to deliver remote therapy, and (iv) increasing the acceptance of TP among both clinicians and the general public.

The role of the body in the online therapeutic setting: clinical reflections and future perspectives

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic, together with social distancing and lockdown measures to contain the infection, had a severe impact on people's mental health. In particular, the pandemic has emphasized the importance of the body and especially the sensations and traumatic emotions that affect it. In order to reduce the spread of the contagion, many psychotherapists had to switch to online psychotherapy both to continue the therapeutic courses already started and deal with the psychological consequences of COVID-19 and the lockdown measures. In this scenario, the online psychotherapeutic setting showed its effectiveness in providing support to people who presented and still present with psychosomatic symptoms associated with the pandemic condition. Furthermore, recent studies on this topic showed that psychotherapists identified a somewhat positive attitude toward online psychotherapy, suggesting they were likely to use online psychotherapy in the future. Although the physical body of the therapist and the patient are absent in online psychotherapy, it is still possible to experience the other's body through sensory stimulation linked to the voice and the gaze. In addition, language allows us to experience a subjectivized and embodied body also in the online setting. Therefore, the body is not excluded from the therapeutic relationship, and the online setting will undoubtedly be a valuable clinical resource even after the end of the pandemic.

The impact of social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental health: the lived experience of adolescents with obesity and their caregivers

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Abstract

Background: Adolescence is a complex developmental phase, made more complex by obesity and the social isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature related to the impact of social isolation on obesity self-management in adolescents is scant and inconsistent. This paper describes the phenomenon

from the perspectives of a sample of adolescents with obesity enrolled in an inpatients' multidisciplinary rehabilitation program for weight-loss and their caregivers, and its impact on different life domains.

Methods: Individual semi-structured ad hoc interviews were conducted with 10 adolescent-caregiver dyads, and narratives were qualitatively investigated using an interpretative phenomenology approach to data. Twenty participants took part in the study.

Results: The major themes that emerged from this study fall into five basic categories: (1) COVID-19 as an opportunity to reconsider what makes a good life; (2) Persistence in life; (3) Empowering relationship; (4) Daily routine in quarantine; (5) Lives on hold.

Conclusions: Understandings drawn from this study may assist health care professionals in providing holistic support, and guidance to adolescents with weight-related issues and their caregivers who experience social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

HOMOGENEITY AND HETEROGENEITY OF THE BEHAVIORAL ADDICTION CATEGORY: WHICH PROCESS ACCOUNT FOR?

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

In the last decades, the clinical and scientific community paid a growing attention to a new cluster of psychopathological conditions, namely, behavioral addictions. To date, only gambling disorder is considered by the DSM-5 as a non-substance addiction, being the prototype of this new category. Among the wide range of potential behavioral addiction, some deserved more attention than others as such as online gaming, smartphone, and internet addictions. Of note, the classification of gambling disorder as an addiction has been principally justified by behavioral or neurobiological evidences and the specular issues surrounding other types of behavioral addictions is strongly impacted by similar empirical data. However, it appears central, in order to formulate useful clinical indications, to extend the study of the psychological and psychopathological processes that can account for both the existence and the heterogeneity of an extended nosographic category including different clinical pictures of behavioral addictions. In that sense, a reference to some transdiagnostic psychopathological processes appear to be a useful framework to shed light on this issue. In this panel, we will question the utility to consider the multidimensionality of the construct related to the regulatory capacity of the individual to simultaneously evidence the elements that are shared by and that discriminate between different behavioral addictions. Starting with a contribution about the relevance of both pathological personality and deficit in emotion regulation capacities in gambling disorder, the symposium deals with two others behavioral addictions. Two contribution looks at the Problematic smartphone use (PSU) investigating the first the role of alexithymic traits and childhood traumatic experiences in PSU and the second the pathway model of PSU. Instead, the last study is focused on the topic of love addiction examining the role of emotion dysregulation and attachment styles.

A test of the pathway model of problematic smartphone use

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Abstract

Background and aims. Problematic smartphone use (PSU) has been described as a growing public health issue. In the current study, we aimed to provide a unique and comprehensive test of the pathway model of PSU (addictive, dangerous and antisocial use). This model posits three distinct developmental pathways leading to PSU: (1) the *excessive reassurance* pathway, (2) the *impulsive* pathway and (3) the *extraversion* pathway.

Methods. Undergraduate students (n = 795, 69.8% female, mean age = 23.80 years, sd = 3.02) completed online self-report measures of PSU (addictive use, antisocial use and dangerous use) and the psychological features (personality traits and psychopathological symptoms) underlying the three pathways.

Results. Bayesian analyses revealed that addictive use is mainly driven by the excessive reassurance pathway and the impulsive pathway, for which candidate etiopathological factors include heightened negative urgency, a hyperactive behavioural inhibition system and symptoms of social anxiety. Dangerous and antisocial use are mainly driven by the impulsive pathway and the extraversion pathway, for which candidate etiopathological factors include specific impulsivity components (lack of premeditation and sensation seeking) and primary psychopathy (inclination to lie, lack of remorse, callousness and manipulativeness).

Discussion and Conclusions. The present study constitutes the first comprehensive test of the pathway model of PSU. We provide robust and original results regarding the psychological dimensions associated with each of the postulated pathways of PSU, which should be taken into account when considering regulation of smartphone use or tailoring prevention protocols to reduce problematic usage patterns.

Does emotion dysregulation mediate the relationship between pathological personality and gambling disorder severity? An empirical study

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Abstract

Background: Past studies showed high prevalence of personality disorders among individuals with Gambling Disorder (GD). However, few studies investigated the role of pathological personality facets in GD. *Methods:* We administered to a group of individuals with GD (n = 79) and a group of community participants (n = 101) the South Oaks Gambling Screen, The Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (PID-5), the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). *Results:* Individuals with GD, compared to community participants, scored significantly higher on several DERS' subscales, on the Suppression dimension of the ERQ and on the five main domains of the PID-5 whereas they obtained lower scores on the Reappraisal subscale of the ERQ. In addition, some facets of pathological personality, emotion dysregulation and lack of cognitive reappraisal, significantly predict GD's severity. Finally, emotion dysregulation levels and lack of cognitive reappraisal partially mediated the relationship between pathological personality facets and GD's severity. *Conclusions:* Our results supported the relevance of both pathological personality and deficit in emotion regulation capacities in GD. Specifically, Impulsivity, Lack of Perseverance and Suspiciousness may be important predictors of GD severity. Moreover, emotion dysregulation and lack of adaptive emotion regulation strategies partially explained such relationship. Therefore, training for emotion regulation abilities may be strategically useful in the treatment of individuals with GD with pathological personality traits.

No words for feelings in social media: the mediating role of alexithymia in the relationship between childhood trauma and problematic social media use

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Abstract

Research showed that childhood trauma and alexithymia are linked to technological overuse, including problematic social media use. This study investigated the mediating role of alexithymic traits in the relationships between different types of childhood traumatic experiences and problematic social media use. 729 community-dwelling adults (453 females, 62.1%) aged between 18 and 68 years old (M= 29.75; SD= 10.98) were recruited via an online survey. Participants completed self-report measures assessing childhood traumatic experiences, alexithymic traits and problematic social media use. First, we tested sex differences and we examined associations among variables. Predictors of problematic social media use were investigated through regression analysis, and a multiple mediation analysis was computed to test the mediating role of alexithymic traits. Sociodemographic characteristics and time spent on social media were included as covariates into the mediation model. We found that difficulties identifying feelings fully

mediated the association between emotional abuse and problematic social media use. Results suggest that emotional abuse might impair the ability to identify feelings, increasing the risk of using social media as a dysfunctional emotion regulation strategy. Thus, clinical interventions focused on improving emotion regulation abilities could reduce the tendency to overuse social media in emotionally abused patients.

The mediating role of emotion dysregulation in the relationship between attachment styles and love addiction

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Abstract

Background: In the last decade, a growing number of studies investigated the psychopathological mechanisms underlying a specific type of behavioral addiction that is love addiction. Of note, emotion dysregulation has been pointed out as a central factor underlying both behavioral addictions and interpersonal problems. Moreover, pathological interpersonal styles have been often explained in the light of the attachment theory. However, there is still a paucity of studies investigating the interplay between attachment styles and emotion dysregulation in relation to love addiction.

Methods: We administered to a sample of Italian adults (N= 170, 33.6% males; $M_{age} = 28.69$; $SD = 11.26$) a battery of self-report questionnaires including the Love Addiction Inventory (LAI), the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) and the Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ).

Results: Partial correlations, controlling for age and gender, evidenced that most of the LAI facets significantly correlated with several DERS' subscales and that love addiction was only significantly associated with the Need for Approval and Preoccupation with relationships subscales of the ASQ. Furthermore, mediation analyses indicated that DERS scores totally mediated the relationship between Need for approval and LAI scores whereas no mediation effect was observed regarding the relation between Preoccupation for relationship and LAI's scores.

Conclusions: Anxious attachment styles and emotion dysregulation appeared to be relevant factors in the explanation of love addiction mechanisms. This is in line with past studies documenting the role of these variables in both behavioral addictions and interpersonal problems. Further studies are required to investigate the role of potential moderating variables.

ADVANCES IN RESEARCH ON DIGITAL BEHAVIORS**Proposer***Valentina Boursier*¹¹ Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II**Discussant***Adriano Schimmenti*²² Facoltà di Scienze dell'Uomo e della Società, UKE - Università Kore di Enna**Abstract**

The increasing interest in research on the psychological correlates of use and misuse of digital worlds testifies of the relevance of ICT for contemporary society. Just to provide some examples here, children are starting to use digital devices (e.g., tablets and smartphones) at a very young age. Consequently, the need for timely detection of risks and consequences of an early digital screen use among children is becoming more of a necessity (Joshi et al., 2019). Additionally, mixed findings have highlighted a need for parental engagement in technology-related practices for young people (Nielsen et al., 2019), the critical role of emotional dysregulation in individuals' problematic online behaviors (Gioia et al., 2021a), and has shown that excessive Internet use and problematic social media use are strictly associated to disruptions in attachment relationships during childhood, difficulty in processing traumatic experiences and uncertain reflective functioning (D'Arienzo et al., 2019; Musetti et al., 2021; Schimmenti et al., 2019). Furthermore, one year of COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions demonstrated that the Internet and digital technologies served essential functions of connection (Wiederhold, 2020) representing a temporary and compensatory coping strategy (Billieux et al, 2015; Kardefelt-Winther et al, 2017), although potentially leading to unhealthy behaviors (Boursier et al., 2020; Giardina et al., 2021; Gioia et al., 2021b). However, the presence of some contradictory findings in research suggests the need for a better and updated understanding of the multifaceted phenomena concerning ICT use. This topic will be discussed in four presentations, based on recent research in different Italian contexts: Bochicchio et al. (University of Calabria), Salerno et al. (University of Palermo), Musetti et al. (University of Parma), Rollo et al. (University of Salento).

The “digital bubble effect”: digital play inhibits self-regulatory private speech use in preschool children.

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Abstract

Introduction: Preschoolers are spending more and more of their time with digital media, and previous research finds that digital play appears to inhibit language production. A relevant type of language production in preschoolers is private speech (PS), i.e., self-talk that children use during play and problem solving, and this study examined the same children’s PS use during the same task administered twice – once with traditional physical materials and once on a tablet.

Method: Twenty-nine, Italian 5-yr-old children individually completed the exact same Tower of London task twice - once as a material version and once on a tablet. Order of task type was counterbalanced. The game had three levels of increasing difficulty. Speech was transcribed from videos, and utterances were coded as private vs. social, and coded by task relevancy and degree of internalization. Repeated-measures ANOVAs involving task type and level of difficulty were performed.

Results: The main results indicated that children used significantly more overall PS during the material version of the task compared to the digital version, $F(1,20) = 8.65, p < .01$. Furthermore, there was a significant difficulty-by-task modality interaction, $F(1,20) = 5.46, p < .05$, indicating that PS increased in frequency as the item levels got more difficult during the physical version of the tower task. However, the opposite pattern was seen for the digital version with linearly decreasing PS use as the task progressed.

Conclusions: We interpreted these findings hypothesizing that digital devices create a sort of “digital bubble” that leads to a condition of communicative isolation, where other individuals and activities are artificially “blocked out” and rendered somewhat inaudible and invisible, and therefore inhibits the production of PS for self-regulatory purposes. Clinical, developmental, and psychodynamic implications of this heuristic hypothesis will be discussed.

Problematic social networking site use from an attachment perspective

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to present an updated and systematic review of the literature about the direct and indirect associations between attachment patterns and problematic social networking site use (PSNSU). Following the PRISMA guidelines, 292 eligible articles published in peer-reviewed English-language journals since 2004 were identified. Twenty-six articles reporting on 14,737 subjects from different adolescent and adult populations were included in the review. We categorized the studies according to the attachment model that they endorsed: general model (attachment as a single general personality characteristic) and contextual model (attachment patterns as relationship-specific stable characteristics). The results showed that researchers who adopted the general model of attachment found a positive association between insecure attachment patterns and PSNSU. There were mixed findings about the relationship between PSNSU and attachment patterns among studies that relied on the contextual model of attachment. The latter is due, at least in part, to the different significance levels reported for different relational attachment contexts (i.e., parents, friends and romantic partners). Multiple factors (e.g., self-esteem, fear of missing out and emotion dysregulation) mediated the relationship between attachment patterns and PSNSU. These findings advance our understanding of the psychological factors that contribute to PSNSU. Mentalizing and attachment-based interventions may help in the prevention and treatment of PSNSU.

The meaning of being online at the time of COVID-19 and its relationship with well-being. A qualitative study based on young adults' narratives

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Abstract

During COVID-19 outbreak, stay-at-home orders and physical distancing were among the main strategies adopted to contrast virus diffusion. As result, a global increase in Internet use has been reported and its impact on people well-being has been debated in research communities.

Framed with a Semiotic Cultural Psychosocial Theory, the study aims to examine what kind of semiotic resources college students possess to represent the crisis and to use the Internet in a healthy manner.

An anonymous online survey was available in the first period of imposed self-isolation in Italy. An open question – Being online in the time of COVID-19... – was chosen to gain access to the people's subjective experience; furthermore, participants were asked to connotate their Internet use and to complete the Flourishing scale. A total of 323 questionnaires were collected among college students (Meanage=22.78; SD=2.70).

An Automatic Content Analysis procedure (ACASM; Salvatore et al., 2017) was adopted to map main Dimensions of Meaning (DM) characterizing the texts of narrative responses; ANOVA was performed to examine differences between DM related to Internet connotations; Pearson's correlations for the relationships between DM and well-being.

Two factorial dimensions – corresponding to the DM – were extracted. Specifically, the first dimension represents the relationship between being online and the daily life context (Rupture vs Continuity); the second, the Internet functions during the pandemic (Health emergency vs Daily activity). Respondents that were positioned on Daily activity connoted Internet as resource and showed higher levels of well-being; whereas the ones positioned on Health emergency reported Internet as refuge and lower levels of well-being.

Findings highlight that Internet use and its impact on well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic might depend on the cultural, social and personal meanings attributed to being online that define a connotation and motivation for use.

Parental mediation and smartphone overuse: a study on mother/father/adolescent triads

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Abstract

Parental mediation refers to any strategy that parents use to control, supervise or mitigate adolescents' smartphone overuse. Although previous studies have focused their attention on the role of parental mediation in preventing adolescents' smartphone overuse, the underlying mechanisms of successful parental mediation are currently still unclear. The present study aims to investigate the role of parental own smartphone overuse as well as parents' perceived severity (i.e., perceived severity of the consequences of smartphone overuse) and susceptibility (i.e., parental perception of their own offspring susceptibility to the risk of smartphone overuse) as predictors of parental mediation. Moreover, the study

aims to examine the relationship between parental mediation and adolescents' smartphone overuse. This cross-sectional study involved a total of 275 adolescent (age: $M = 13.64$, $SD = .94$; 59.6% females) /mother (age: $M = 43.96$, $SD = 4.55$) /father (age: $M = 47.64$, $SD = 5.29$) triads. Participants completed self-administered measures of smartphone overuse, parental mediation and perceived smartphone overuse severity and susceptibility. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was used to test the hypotheses of the study. Results showed that parents (both mothers and fathers) with high levels of smartphone overuse perceived less severity about their children's smartphone use ($p < .05$). Moreover, higher parental perceived severity of their offspring smartphone overuse is related to higher parental mediation ($p < .05$). No direct relationships were found between parental mediation and adolescents' smartphone overuse. The results of the study underline the role of parents' perceived severity and suggest that parent-based interventions should take into account this variable in order to encourage effective parents' mediation behaviors. Also, future studies should evaluate the complex influence of peers, friends and family on adolescent's smartphone overuse.

MENTAL CARE NEEDS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PERSPECTIVES FROM THERAPISTS AND CLIENTS

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendously disruptive impact on our lives, especially in terms of enhanced psychological suffering among the general population. Such a situation has determined an increased demand for psychological interventions carried out in different contexts. At the same time, one of the greatest challenges implied by such a scenario has been that of reorganizing several aspects related to the treatment delivery setting. The present symposium aims at addressing these issues. More specifically, we intend to explore some forms of psychological interventions carried out in different contexts and through different delivery settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first contribution of Fanti et al. presents an app-based group intervention, the “Italia Ti Ascolto” (ITA), and discusses some preliminary data on its usability. Data collected on N = 134 clients provide encouraging results regarding the online implementation of psychological intervention to promote emotional regulation. The contribution of Gritti et al. explores the attitudes of psychotherapists toward telematic treatment. Data collected from a sample of N = 281 licensed psychotherapists who filled out an online survey showed a generally favorable attitude toward telematic psychotherapy, although they reported also some negative aspects. Finally, the contribution of Brusadelli et al. focuses on an online support group as a social intervention to face the COVID lockdown. Fifty-two subjects (psychotherapists, psychology trainees and students, and community people) participated in supportive focus groups. The analysis of the focus groups’ transcripts allowed us to identify the main features related to the crisis response, and those social roles were associated with different ways of experiencing and sharing emotions. These results are discussed concerning their general potential in the field of mental health.

Being close from a distance: psychotherapists' attitudinal profile toward telematic treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 and consequent extreme restrictions led to unique challenges to the psychotherapeutic practice, and psychotherapists had to abruptly and rapidly change their working modality. The current study aims to assess psychotherapists' attitude toward telematic psychotherapy, further describing the characteristics of psychotherapists with a Favorable *vs* Unfavorable attitude, in order to inform future practitioners who are considering using telematic treatments as a routine component of psychotherapeutic care.

An online survey was administered to N = 281 licensed psychotherapists ($M_{age} = 45.15$; $SD = 10.2$; 83,6% Females) between April 5 and May 10, 2020. The survey comprised *ad-hoc* questions and a Semantic Differential comprising 23 bipolar adjectives to evaluate psychotherapists' attitude. A factor analysis was performed, and four factors were extracted from the Semantic Differential items, and defined as Affective Availability, Attitude Predisposition, Tranquility, and Interventionism. The three former factors were used to develop the two polarities of psychotherapists attitude, and Chi-squared statistics was used to investigate differences between the two profiles.

The Semantic Differential showed an overall favorable trend of psychotherapists attitude toward telematic psychotherapy, although they also reported being more fatigued, directive, and talkative during therapy than before the lockdown period. By comparing the two profiles it emerges that those with a more Favorable profile reported greater satisfaction with the telematic modality and perceived that their patients were more able to maintain privacy during therapy. Furthermore, those within the more Favorable profile resulted to have fewer years of experience as licensed psychotherapists. These findings are useful to support psychotherapists and their practice, particularly considering the prolonging of the pandemic and related social restrictions.

Online supportive group as social intervention to face COVID lockdown. A qualitative study on psychotherapists, psychology trainees and students, and community people

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Abstract

Several psychological interventions have been activated to help people during the coronavirus pandemic, and research highlights the crucial role of group interventions as a space for sharing and processing the psychological experiences linked to this emergency and the consequent changes in people's lifestyles. In this context, psychologists are mostly providers of this kind of service more than users. This study aimed at investigating and comparing post-hoc the subjective experience of psychotherapists, psychology trainees & students, and individuals of the general population who participated in a psychodynamically-oriented supportive group intervention.

Fifty-two subjects were enrolled to participate to focus groups aimed at exploring participants' decision to participate, their perceptions on how the support group influenced their elaboration of the psychological effects of pandemic/lockdown, and their feedback on its utility. Transcripts of the focus groups were analyzed with the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC). Differences in the use of words/linguistic categories between groups were tested through chi-square tests. Content analysis was conducted by independent judges who extracted the most relevant comments. Preliminary results showed the main features related to the crisis response, and how belonging to different social roles was associated with different ways of experiencing and sharing emotions. Clinical implications on the use of this data for future treatment planning will also be discussed.

Italia ti ascolto [Italy, I am listening]: An app-based group intervention during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought disruptive changes in everyday life, representing a major transversal stressor for the worldwide population, affecting communities at economic, political, psychological, and social levels. The research highlighted the overspread amongst people of pervasive anxiety about the risk of infection, the fear of worsening physical symptoms, and the experience of isolation and loneliness due to lockdowns and governments' rules: all of those above often lead to several psychological consequences, namely anxiety, depression, and psychological distress.

In line with previous studies, the current situation calls for new technological tools which may foster the sense of connection between individuals and help to decrease mental and emotional negative states related to COVID-19.

This contribution aims to present "Italia Ti Ascolto" (ITA), a group-based online intervention developed to offer an online response to the negative psychological impact of the pandemic and discuss preliminary data on the usability of this new tool. Participants ($n = 134$) completed baseline assessment on emotion regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression), psychological stress, anxiety, depression, and perceived social support, before enrolling in an hour-long group session tailored to a specific population (e.g., parents, young adults, positive individuals). After the group session, participants were asked to complete a quick users' satisfaction survey ($n = 54$). Our study provides encouraging results on implementing online psychological interventions to promote emotion regulation and overall psychological health and underscores the critical role of technology during the pandemic. Future developments and implications for clinical practice and treatment are discussed.

Impact of COVID-19 on health care professions: assessment of burnout and protective factors in a longitudinal study

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Abstract

Health care professions are exposed to a higher level of vulnerability and likelihood of developing and experiencing burnout. Especially, working with children and adolescents may be challenging because it requires a huge component of physical and emotional endurance. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic

had negatively impacted both the organization and work within the residential therapeutic communities, as well as the lifestyle of the workers. Indeed, some studies suggest a relationship between the pandemic situation and the increase of burnout in health professionals.

The research aims to analyze this relationship and the role of protective factors, by investigating some personal and professional features in a sample of 100 healthcare professionals working in residential therapeutic communities for adolescents. The observation, conducted in February 2019 and in April 2021, included an anamnestic form and four questionnaires: MBI for burnout assessment, TAS_20 for exploring alexithymic features, COPE_NVI to assess the coping strategies, and the FDS_R to analyze the emotional intolerance.

Results suggest increased distress, in term of emotional exhaustion and frustrating experience. Functional coping strategies have a role in mediating burnout risk. Social support, a positive attitude and the ability to recognize and describe feelings can reduce the negative effects caused by the Covid-19 pandemic on employees.

CURING COVID: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUFFERING OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic exposed healthcare professionals working in hospitals to unprecedented challenges. This symposium aims to explore and give voice to the psychological suffering that the pandemic has had on the healthcare professionals involved, moving beyond idealization and demystification observed in the public opinion. The different contributions, while describing the psychological distress observed among healthcare professionals, will also highlight the protective factors associated to well-being. A first contribution by Bertuzzi et al, will report the results of a survey conducted among healthcare professionals at the onset of the pandemic, highlighting high levels of burnouts. Increased workload, the constant contact with COVID-19 patients and the psychological aspects related to their care were positively associated with the levels of burnout. A second contribution by Perlini & Del Piccolo, will describe the psychological distress and factors related to work exhaustion of healthcare professionals working in obstetrics and the individual, interpersonal and organizational related factors. A third contribution by Lamiani & Biscardi will focus on the trajectories of moral distress of emergency and critical care physicians one year after the pandemic outbreak, highlighting the pivotal interplay between individual and organizational responses in modulating moral distress. The results of these contributions highlight how distress and resilience during the pandemic are influenced by personal and organizational surroundings. Implications for interventions at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels will be discussed.

The psychological impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on health professionals: a cross-sectional study

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Abstract

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic had a massive impact on health care systems, increasing the risks of psychological distress in health professionals. This study aims at assessing the prevalence of burnout and psychopathological conditions in health professionals working in a health institution in the Northern Italy, and to identify socio-demographic, work-related and psychological predictors of burnout.

Methods: Health professionals working in the hospitals of the Istituto Auxologico Italiano were asked to participate to an online anonymous survey investigating socio-demographic data, COVID-19 emergency-related work and psychological factors, state anxiety, psychological distress, post-traumatic symptoms, and burnout. Predictors of the three components of burnout were assessed using elastic net regression models.

Results: Three hundred and thirty health professionals participated to the online survey. Two hundred and thirty-five health professionals (71.2%) had scores of state anxiety above the clinical cutoff, 88 (26.8%) had clinical levels of depression, 103 (31.3%) of anxiety, 113 (34.3%) of stress, 121 (36.7%) of post-traumatic stress. Regarding burnout, 107 (35.7%) had moderate and 105 (31.9%) severe levels of emotional exhaustion; 46 (14.0%) had moderate and 40 (12.1%) severe levels of depersonalization; 132 (40.1%) had moderate and 113 (34.3%) severe levels of reduced personal accomplishment. Predictors of all the three components of burnout were work hours, psychological comorbidities, fear of infection and perceived support by friends. Predictors of both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were female gender, being a nurse, working in the hospital, being in contact with COVID-19 patients. Reduced personal accomplishment was also predicted by age.

Conclusions: Health professionals had high levels of burnout and psychological symptoms during the COVID-19 emergency. Monitoring and timely treatment of these conditions is needed.

The role of cognitive and affective aspects in work exhaustion in obstetrics during the COVID-19 pandemic: a model based on path analysis

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Abstract

High levels of distress have been described in healthcare providers (HCPs) involved in the COVID-19 pandemic, but the obstetric context was understudied so far. Aims of the present study were to: 1) assess the level of psychological distress and work exhaustion (WE) in HCPs working in the field of obstetrics; 2) investigate the role of cognitive and affective dimensions in determining WE.

Five-hundred and seventy (570) gynecologists, residents in gynecology and obstetrics, and midwives working at four Italian University Hospitals (Verona, Rome, Varese, Brescia) were invited to complete the "Impatto PSicologico COVID-19 in Ostetricia" (IPSICO) online survey in May 2020. A theoretical model was built and tested with path analysis which included age, risk perception, negative affects (NA) measured with the PANAS, COVID-related contextual factors, and WE. Positive affects (PA) were not included in the model since they were not associated with WE in preliminary analyses.

The HCPs response rate was high (84.4%). Fifty-one (51) % of the HCPs reported a clinically significant level of psychological distress (GHQ-12>3). The mean±ds WE level was 12.16±5.8 on a 3-30 range score. The final model explains 32.2% of the variance in WE. NA has a mediating role between risk perception and WE. Whereas NA scores were mainly predicted by individual factors (psychological well-being before the pandemic, current COVID or not COVID-related stressful events, use of dysfunctional coping style and being female), WE was influenced by individual (work perceived as a duty; current stressful events), interpersonal (support received by colleagues), and organizational (adoption of shift strategy to ensure adequate rest and staff always available) factors.

Results have practical implications for planning psychological intervention in HCPs before, during and after a sanitary crisis, taking into account individual, interpersonal and organizational levels.

Redefining the professional role: grounded theory of the moral distress trajectories of intensive care and emergency physicians during COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted emergency and critical care physicians with unprecedented ethically challenging situations. The aim of this paper was to explore physicians' experience of moral distress during the pandemic. Through a theoretical sampling, we progressively recruited emergency and critical care physicians from the province of Lodi, Bergamo, Brescia, Cremona and Milan, Italy with different levels of responsibility and involvement in triage. In-depth semi-structured interviews about the experience of moral distress were conducted online. The transcripts were analyzed through an open, axial and selective coding according to the principles of Grounded Theory. Between October 2020 and February 2021, 15 physicians were interviewed (60% women; mean age=46; 33% ER and 67% ICU; 67% with triage experience; 20% unit directors). Physicians described different causes of moral distress during the pandemic such as resource scarcity, triage for allocation of healthcare resources, changeable selective criteria, administration of therapies in the context of limited medical knowledge, and absence of family members. To cope with the experience of moral distress, physicians tried to redefine their caregiving role through different strategies, such as avoidance, adhesion, integration, opposition. The organizational response to the range of strategies adopted was decisive in enhancing or reducing the physicians' perceived moral distress. The results suggest that in order to address the negative outcomes of moral distress during the pandemic, it was important to be able to redefine one's professional role, preserving its value, and belonging to a cooperative organizational culture.

PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS IN COVID-19 SCENARIOS: THE ROLE OF MENTALIZATION AND EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS IN CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR CAREGIVERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

Italy has been the first nation outside of Asia to struggle COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, also in terms of confirmed cases and deaths. To contain the transmission of the virus infection, by March 10th, 2020, a national lockdown was imposed by Authorities. Although children and adolescents seemed to be less prone to be infected by Covid-19, the pandemic might have several psychological consequences on younger individuals due to the unpredictable closure of schools, the interruption of in-person relationships with peers, the breakdown of daily routines, fewer opportunities to discharge their physical energy and a higher level of distress experienced in prolonged home confinement. Both community and referred youth could manage this unfamiliar and prolonged stressful scenario. Moreover, also health professionals working with children and adolescents and their caregivers could be emotionally affected by the Covid-pandemic.

This symposium aimed to explore risk and protective factors, such as emotional symptoms and mentalization in youth and their caregiver in facing the outburst of Coronavirus pandemic in Italy.

The contributions of Dr Locati and Dr Cristofanelli discussed the role of mentalization in coping with the increased distress in not referred adolescents and and health professionals working in residential therapeutic communities for youth.

The contribution of Dr Spaggiari and Dr Raffagnato debated about psychological symptoms in groups of asthmatic children and youth with neuropsychiatric disorders. Moreover, their assessed also the emotional fatigue of their parents.

Italian COVID-19 lockdown: how did it affect burnout in health professionals working with adolescents?

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Abstract

Covid-19 health crisis is strongly affecting general population mental health. In particular, pandemic has required an exponential increase in personal and professional commitment in social and health professions. During lockdown, this was a crucial aspect for social and health professionals working in residential therapeutic communities for adolescents, given the increase of health worries, unstable working conditions, school closures, and altered or suspended psychological services for children. Some studies suggest a correlation between this situation and an increased risk for burnout, which has already appeared to be associated with psychological distress.

The present study aims to examine and specify the connections between burnout, empathy, metacognitive self-reflective functions and understanding of other's state of mind, basing on the assumption that increased metacognitive functions can lead to a lower risk of burnout.

The sample consisted of 100 healthcare professionals working in residential TC for adolescents. This research is part of a broader study and measures, administered both in February 2019 and April 2021, included: an anamnestic form, MBI for the evaluation and quantification of burnout, IRI to measure empathy, FDS-R to quantify frustration intolerance at work, FFMQ to investigate the various aspects related to awareness and emotional regulation.

Our results showed that the pandemic period has strongly burdened working conditions and personal experience of the employees, with expected results of elevated level of frustration and emotional exhaustion. Self-efficacy, the ability to act with awareness and to regulate one's emotional states, prove to be protective factors against burnout. Empathy seems to play an unclear protective role against burnout risk.

The psychological impact of COVID-19 on 7-14-year-old asthmatic children and their parents: a study of the short and long-term effects of home confinement

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Abstract

Italy was the first European country to fight the Covid-19 outbreak. To limit the transmission of the virus, the Italian Government imposed strict domestic quarantine policies and temporary closure of non-essential businesses and schools from March 10th,2020. Although more and more literature is exploring the impact of the pandemic on non-referred children and families, only a few studies are focused on the psychosocial impact of Covid-19 in chronically ill children and their caregivers. The present study investigates asthma control and children and mothers' psychological functioning (i.e.: psychological well-being, fear of contagion, and mothers' Covid-19 related fears) in 45 asthmatic children aged 7-to-14, compared to a control sample. The subjects were administered an online survey after the lockdown (from 28th May to 23rd August 2020). The analysis shows that asthmatic children presented higher concern in relation to contagion, however, no difference in psychological functioning was displayed between the two cohorts. Mothers reported more Covid-19 related fears, and greater worries according to the resumption of their children's activities. Moreover, they indicated a global worsening of their psychological well-being during the lockdown. Furthermore, regarding the clinical sample, the multivariate regression model showed that a worsening of mothers' psychological and children's physical well-being was associated with a worsening of children's psychological well-being during the lockdown. The results of this study indicate that mothers of asthmatic children can be more prone to experience psychological fatigue in a pandemic scenario. Special programs should be developed to support caregivers of chronically ill children.

Adolescence in lockdown: the protective role of mentalizing

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Abstract

Mentalization involves both self-reflective and interpersonal components: namely, the ability to interpret one's own behavior, as well as the behaviors of others, as caused by intentional inner mental states. Epistemic trust, the authenticity and personal relevance of interpersonally transmitted information, is one of the key components of mentalization. Mature mental representations of the self and others allow people to think about and cope with external and internal stressors.

There is growing evidence that the social isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic situation is highly stressful for most people, especially for adolescents. On these grounds, here we aim to understand

how mentalization and epistemic trust are involved in regulating and coping with emotional distress in adolescence during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Participants were 131 non-clinical adolescents from 12 to 18 y.o. evaluated during the first lockdown in Italy. Adolescents were assessed with the Reflective Functioning Questionnaire for Youth, Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, Perceived stress scale, and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale.

Results from network analysis showed that epistemic trust in peers and emotion dysregulation were the nodes with the highest strength centrality. In particular, confusion regarding mental states was found to be connected with perceived stress and emotion dysregulation. Moreover, trust toward father was negatively connected with perceived stress and emotion dysregulation. Finally, trust towards peer and mother were negatively connected with emotion dysregulation.

Overall, these findings suggest that the ability to mentalize is compromised in adolescents during lockdown, likely because of the increased stress induced by this situation, where high levels of confusion regarding mental states are associated with emotion dysregulation. On the contrary, epistemic trust is the mentalization component able to play a protective role during the lockdown.

The emotional-behavioral sequelae for children and adolescents with neuropsychiatric disorders and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic: a longitudinal study

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Abstract

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the well-being of adults, children and families profoundly. Moreover, it has been well documented that pre-existing vulnerabilities constitute risk factors for psychological sequelae, especially for children and adolescents who suffer from pre-existing mental health problems. **Methods:** This study aims to: a) investigate the emotional-behavioural state in a group of children and adolescents with psychiatric disorders (clinical group) during lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic (T0); b) evaluate the psycho-behavioural status of the parents of children with neuropsychiatric disorders during the same time (T0); c) investigate the evolution longitudinally overtime of the psycho-behavioural state in these children and their parents. Fifty-six patients (aged 6-18 years) with a neuropsychiatric disorder and their 112 parents were evaluated during COVID-19 lockdown (T0), after 4-months (T1) and after 8-months (T2). Sixty-three children and adolescents without psychopathology and their 126 parents were involved, too. An ad hoc datasheet, YSR11-18, CBCL6-18, DASS-21, were administered. **Results:** The clinical group was largely characterized by children and

adolescents with internalizing problems who exhibited a good adaptation to the pandemic context at T0, contrarily to the healthy group, which showed more significant discomfort in some of the variables considered. Between the parents of the two groups, the same trend was observed. Subjects with externalizing disorders obtained higher CBCL scales' scores at both T0 and T1. No differences were observed between T1 and T2; however, mothers perceive a greater severity in the behavioural outcomes in T1 compared to T2. Both mothers and fathers of the healthy group have more stress-related symptoms than the parents of the case group in T1 and T2. Conclusions: This study suggests dedicating telepsychiatry for patients with internalizing mental health problems while maintaining direct clinical interventions for children with externalizing disorders.

MENTALIZATION NEIGHBORHOOD: LATEST THEORIES AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

The broad concept of mentalization, intended as the individual's ability to perceive himself/herself and others as agents characterized by independent mental states, entails several dimensions that have been investigated lately in their relationship with other psychological constructs. Specifically, reflective functioning (RF) is the operationalization of mentalization which has been evaluated with interviews and self-report measures. Recently some authors have investigated the role of mentalization not only in the client's functioning, but also in the therapist's one. In addition, among the related dimensions, epistemic trust (ET) is one of the latest theorizations introduced by Fonagy in the mentalization theoretical framework, referring to ET as the individual's mental openness to social transmitted knowledge, which plays a fundamental in psychotherapy process. Also, Jurist's recent theorization of mentalized affectivity (MA) permits to underpin the central role of mentalization in emotion regulation process. All in all, this symposium aims at presenting the latest theorizations around the mentalization concept and their implications in the assessment process. Specifically, the first presentation will highlight some features of the Mentalization-Based Treatment Adherence and Competence Scale (MBT-ACS), a coding system for sessions transcripts developed to assess the mentalizing abilities of the therapist in his/her interventions. Subsequently, the second presentation will present data about the Italian version of a self-report measure for the assessment of ET, the Epistemic Trust Mistrust Credulity Questionnaire (ETMCQ), and some considerations about the relation of ET with reflective functioning and psychopathology. In the end, the third presentation will underline some characteristics of the Italian version of the Brief Mentalized Affectivity Scale (B-MAS), a self-report measure for the assessment of MA, and its relationship with other psychological dimensions.

The Italian validation of the Brief Mentalized Affectivity Scale (B-MAS)

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Abstract

Introduction: The concept of “mentalized affectivity” describes the capacity to reflect on, process, and express emotions through the prism of autobiographical memory. It is a bridge concept that integrates previous contributions on emotion regulation and mentalization. It requires the ability to reflect on various factors that could influence emotional experiences, such as thoughts and beliefs, personality traits, previous experiences, or the relational context. The first aim of this study was to validate a brief (12 items) Italian version of the Mentalized Affectivity Scale, a self-report instrument developed by Greenberg and colleagues in 2017. Secondly, the study explored the correlations between mentalized affectivity and various constructs and experiences.

Methods: Data was collected through a survey online via a website hosted by SurveyMonkey. The survey included the ETMCQ, the Childhood Traumatic Questionnaire (CTQ), the Brief Symptom Index (BSI), the short form of the Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ-8), the brief version of the Mentalized Affectivity Scale (B-MAS) and the Experience in Close Relationships Scale-Revised (ECR-R). Participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

Results: Statistical analysis has shown a three-component structure underlying mentalized affectivity: Identifying, Processing, and Expressing emotions. Convergent validity was assessed correlating the subscales to empathy and reflective functioning. Moreover, mentalized affectivity was found to be correlated with several affective systems (e.g., SEEK and CARE).

Conclusions: The results of our study show that the B-MAS is a reliable instrument to assess mentalized affectivity. Its brevity makes it easily administered and thus particularly useful both with clinical and non-clinical samples.

How important is mentalizing in psychotherapeutic work? Reliability and validity study on adherence and competence scale (MBT-ACS)

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Abstract

Introduction: There is growing evidence to suggest the importance of the role played by the psychotherapist during treatment. The MBT-ACS is focused on it supporting learning and acquisition of clinical skills. The use of this instrument allows to identify the domains of the MBT. Thus, the MBT-ACS provides a measure of treatment integrity, i.e., the degree of consistency between the therapist's actual performance and the theory, ideals, intentions, and norms underlying the reference manual. This work aims to assess the reliability and validity of the instrument. *Method:* 10 psychotherapy sessions will be considered. 5 therapists will be involved, each providing two sessions (one considered high quality and one low quality). The inclusion criteria are to select patients with borderline personality disorder aged 20-30 years. In addition, 6 independent evaluators will code the recordings of the MBT treatment sessions. The following analyses will be used: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Internal Item Correlation, Reliability Analysis (Cronbach Alpha) and Inter-Class Correlation Index (ICC). *Results:* The research group expects that the results obtained from the implementation of the scale will confirm the reliability and validity of the scale. Specifically, for the EFA it is expected that 5 factors will be extracted: structure of mentalization, the position of non-knowledge, mentalizing process, non-mentalizing modalities, mentalization of affective narratives, relational mentalization. In addition, item saturations for each factor are expected to be $\geq .30$ and a Cronbach Alpha $\geq .70$ is obtained. We also provide that the ICC confirms the level of reliability and stability of the scores assigned by the independent assessors ($r .70$). *Conclusion:* The validation of the MBT-ACS could be the first step towards a future contribution focused on the relationship between therapeutic integrity and improvements in the patient's level of mentalization.

Epistemic trust, mistrust and credulity: the Italian validation of the ETMCQ

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Abstract

Introduction: Epistemic trust (ET; Fonagy & Allison, 2014), defined as “an individual’s willingness to consider new knowledge from another person as trustworthy, generalizable, and relevant to the self”, is one of the most promising concepts that emerged in recent psychological literature. Several studies

highlighted its importance in clinical and developmental psychology. However, it was not operationalized until the development of the Epistemic Trust Mistrust and Credulity Questionnaire (ETMCQ; Campbell et al., 2021). The ETMCQ has 15 items and a three-factor structure: Trust, Mistrust and Credulity. The UK validation found that Mistrust and Credulity correlated with childhood adversity and higher scores on the global psychopathology severity index. Our first aim was to validate the Italian version of the ETMCQ and to study the correlations of its subscales with adverse experiences, general psychological functioning, reflective functioning, mentalized affectivity and attachment styles.

Methods: Data was collected through a survey online via a website hosted by SurveyMonkey. The survey included the ETMCQ, the Childhood Traumatic Questionnaire (CTQ), the Brief Symptom Index (BSI), the short form of the Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ-8), the brief version of the Mentalized Affectivity Scale (B-MAS) and the Experience in Close Relationships Scale-Revised (ECR-R). Participants were recruited through snowball sampling.

Results: Statistical analysis confirmed the three-component structure: Trust, Mistrust and Credulity. Moreover, several correlations were found between ETMCQ subscales and the other variables.

Conclusions: Our results show that the ETMCQ is a reliable instrument to assess epistemic trust (and the lack thereof) in the Italian population. The associations between the scores of the subscales and other important dimensions of psychological functioning make the ETMCQ a significant tool also for clinical use.

CRITICAL EVALUTION OF DIGITALISED INTERVENTIONS TO ENHANCE, SCALE UP AND DISSEMINATE PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENTS

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

The aim of the symposium is to describe and discuss the use of digitalised psychological interventions to target unhelpful behaviours and emotional responses. The first talk will discuss the use of “Food-T”, a mobile application to deliver food-specific inhibitory control training and reduce loss of control over eating. Food-T was tested in a randomised controlled trial among the general population in Italy, during COVID-19. The protocol, methods and findings of the trial will be discussed by Dr Cardi and Dr Di Rosa. The second intervention will present a novel online guided self-help intervention for people with anorexia nervosa and their carers. The digitalised intervention, “ECHOMANTRA” consists of written resources, a library of short videoclips and online chat-based patient, carers and joint patient-carer groups. Dr Albano will describe protocol, methods and contents of the randomised controlled trial which is testing ECHOMANTRA in the UK. The third intervention will focus on a critical discussion of the evidence base for the use of interventions to treat insomnia. In particular, the potential and efficacy of digitalised cognitive behaviour therapies to target insomnia will be discussed by Prof. Baglioni. Finally, Prof Lombardo will describe and discuss the use of emotion regulation trainings on psychological and physiological outcomes. Data collected using self-reported questionnaires, momentary ecological assessments and heart rate variability will be presented for healthy participants allocated to three experimental conditions, including self-regulation training, breathing training and waiting list. Preliminary findings for the use of 9 sessions of emotion regulation training in a sample of individuals with binge eating will also be discussed. This symposium will encourage a critical discussion around the feasibility,

efficacy and scalability of digitalised psychological interventions to target unhelpful behaviours and emotions.

The evaluation of a food-specific inhibitory control training to reduce eating disorder psychopathology in people with binge eating

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Abstract

Over the last decade, it has been suggested that digitalised interventions might be useful adjuncts to enhance the efficacy of standard psychological treatments. Standard psychological treatment for binge eating is effective for approximately 50% of individuals. The aim of this study was to test the feasibility, acceptability and efficacy of a food-specific inhibitory control training delivered through the mobile App FoodT, to reduce binge eating among the general population. Secondary outcomes included perceived hunger and liking and wanting of high palatable foods. One hundred one adults (18 years-old or older) were recruited through social media in Italy during the COVID-19 Pandemic (between May and October 2020). Inclusion criteria included a body mass index greater than 18.5 kg/m², self-reported episodes of loss of control over eating and normal visual acuity. Participants completed online questionnaires to measure eating disorder psychopathology. Following baseline assessment, they were randomised to one of two groups: (1) completion of FoodT for two weeks (N=50) or (2) waiting list for two weeks (N=51). At the end of the two weeks, participants completed the end-of-treatment online questionnaires (N=38 in the FoodT group and N=45 in the waiting list group). Compared to waiting list, those in the FoodT condition reported significantly lower levels of hunger and lower liking related to some categories of high palatable foods. The qualitative feedback provided by those in the FoodT condition indicated that the training was feasible and acceptable for participants. FoodT might be of some benefit for people suffering from loss of control over eating. Future studies should test who might benefit from this intervention the most.

Online guided self-help for people with anorexia nervosa and their families: the triangle trial

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Abstract

The eating disorders community recommends the use of guided self-help interventions to healthcare, aiming to involve both patients and families. Guided self-help interventions for people suffering from anorexia nervosa are associated with significantly lower drop-out rates compared to a control condition, and with an improvement in carers' wellbeing. TRIANGLE is a multicentre trial investigating whether enhancing treatment as usual (TAU) with a novel online guided self-help intervention for patients and carers (ECHOMANTRA) improves clinical outcomes for people with anorexia nervosa (AN). ECHOMANTRA is based on the cognitive interpersonal model of AN and includes workbooks, videos, and online groups for patients and carers. People receiving intensive hospital treatment (N = 380) are randomised to TAU or TAU plus ECHOMANTRA. Participants are assessed over an 18-month period following randomisation. The primary outcome is patient psychological wellbeing at 12 months post randomisation. Secondary outcomes include patient's weight, eating disorder symptoms, motivation to change, quality of life, number of days in hospital at 12 months post randomisation and carer's psychological wellbeing. The results from this trial will establish the effectiveness of ECHOMANTRA to enhance outcomes from inpatient treatment. Previous research, conducted by the same team, has demonstrated the effectiveness of an online guided self-help intervention for outpatients with AN. The intervention was delivered in addition to outpatient treatment and associated with reduced anxiety, and with increased confidence to change and therapeutic alliance with the therapist at the outpatient service, compared to treatment as usual alone.

Efficacy of digitalised cognitive behaviour therapy for insomnia

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Abstract

Insomnia is one of the most prevalent disorders in the general population and its persistence confers heightened risk for the deterioration of psychological and physical health. The recent European guidelines for the treatment of insomnia are based on meta-analyses and systematic reviews of the literature, and on the evidence from randomised clinical trials of interventions. According to this evidence, cognitive behaviour therapy is the most effective intervention for the treatment of insomnia (i.e., Cognitive Behaviour Treatment for Insomnia, CBT-I). Pharmacological therapy can be prescribed when CBT-I is

not available or when CBT-I does not produce benefits. Furthermore, CBT appears to be patient's favourite treatment choice. However, only a smaller proportion of patients suffering from insomnia receive CBT-I in Italy and in Europe, due to poor availability of clinicians trained for its delivery. This implies that pharmacological treatment is still the treatment of choice in clinical settings. Recent meta-analyses indicate that CBT-I is effective also when delivered remotely, as digitalised intervention. The evidence suggests that digitalised CBT-I is most effective for younger people and for people with medium-to-high socio-economic status. Overall, digitalised CBT-I is associated with general improvement in symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, fatigue, and social functioning. Digitalised CBT-I is less effective for individuals with multiple comorbidities. It follows that digitalised interventions for the treatment of insomnia could be offered as part of a stepped-care model of treatment, based on intervention's availability, clinical characteristics and patient preferences.

On-line interventions promoting emotional and behavioural self-regulation

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Abstract

Introduction: During COVID-19 pandemic prevalence rates of depression, anxiety, distress and insomnia are increasing. Moreover, vulnerable populations (e.g., people with mental disorders) may have had difficulties accessing care, stressing the need for effective interventions that may be administered online.

Method: Two studies will be described. The first evaluated the efficacy of an emotion regulation training in 122 healthy participants. Emotion regulation, depression, anxiety, worry, rumination, insomnia, and heart rate variability (HRV) were assessed using questionnaires and ecological momentary assessment. Participants were randomly assigned to three different groups: Regulatory Flexibility Training (RFT), Breathing Training (BT) or Waiting List (WL). Results show that as compared to both other groups, participants in the RFT group showed greater flexibility in adjusting emotion regulation strategies according to the context and their goals. Moreover, they reported feeling more effective in implementing emotion regulation strategies. Participants in the BT group showed higher HRV compared to both RFT and WL. Results evidenced that both online RFT and BT were effective. The second study, still ongoing, aims to assess the efficacy of an eating behavior regulation training including the regulation of emotions and emotional eating in patients with binge eating and disordered eating. To date, 17 patients were enrolled. Training consists of 9 sessions that use Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) techniques plus 1-month

follow up session. Measures of binge and emotional eating, and eating self-efficacy were administered. Preliminary results show significant pre- post-training positive changes in the target variables.

Conclusions: Both studies confirm that interventions addressing self-regulation of the emotions and behavior may be effectively delivered online, thus bridging the gap between the need for effective interventions and obstacles to face-to-face administration.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND HEALTH

Proposer

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¹Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology, University of Padova,

Discussant

*Maria Francesca Freda*²

²Department of Humanities, Federico II University, Naples

Abstract

One of the reasons that make the use of qualitative research particularly relevant, is the shift it allows from the researcher perspective to that of the actors involved. This is a core requirement for clinical health psychology since beliefs, emotions, preferences and subjective responses to treatments may influence patient outcomes, staff well-being and healthcare quality. Qualitative research may help in generating explanatory models and theories, in describing and interpreting complex phenomena and may then serve to devise new interventions, tailored to specific needs and meanings.

This symposium provides an overview of available qualitative methods for analyzing patient's, parent's and caregiver's narratives and their experience of suffering.

It compares theory-driven methods, anchored to conceptual framework for selecting analysis criteria, to data-driven methods, oriented at inferring analysis criteria from data themselves.

It allows reflection on some of the various constructs that can be brought into focus with qualitative analysis methodologies: thematic and content analysis, discursive repertoires and identity positionings.

Thank you to the confrontation between experts, researches and between investigated constructs, it will therefore be possible to access an articulated image of the potential, in terms of knowledge, made it possible through qualitative methods. Finally, it will be possible to reflect on the role of the researcher when he acts in first person, and on the implications of his involvement in terms of reflexivity.

The clinical areas considered will range from eating disorders (Research Group1, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano) to breast cancer (Research Group 2, Department of Humanities, Federico II University, Naples) to primary immunodeficiencies, until acquired brain injuries (Research Group 3, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology, University of Padova)

The Maudsley family-based treatment for anorexia: a qualitative analysis of the therapeutic process

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Abstract

Introduction: The Maudsley family-based treatment for anorexia aims at engaging the parents of the patient as an important resource in the therapeutic process. This approach aims at improving the quality of the support provided by the parents to their child and involves 7 two-hour weekly group sessions with parents. Given this background, the present study aimed at examining the therapeutic process by exploring the themes emerged during the sessions, with a specific focus on whether parents' representations about the eating disorders change over time.

Methods: Participants were 5 parental couples whose daughter was treated for anorexia at an Italian public hospital. Each session was videotaped and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analyzed using T-LAB, a software for text analysis that allows an in-depth qualitative exploration of the language used by participants within the therapeutic process.

Results: Specificity analysis revealed differences between the fathers and the mothers who participated in the intervention. Specifically, the fathers displayed a more energetic and aggressive behavior, whereas the mothers were more likely to express feeling and emotions, such as concern, fear, and emotional suffering. Correspondence analysis showed remarkable differences between the first and the last session with regards to the main theme emerged during the group sessions. Specifically, during the first session, participant interaction was more focused on the symptoms of the eating disorder, whereas in the last session the parents spoke about the importance of considering their own emotions, as well as the feelings of the needs of their daughter. In addition, they showed a deeper connection with their inner world, along with greater sensitivity and awareness in the interaction with the other participants.

Conclusions: This study findings may provide useful suggestion for future research and for clinical practice in the context of eating disorders.

Processing breast cancer experience in younger women: longitudinal trajectories of narrative sense-making functions

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²Clinical Psychology Unit, INT G. Pascale Foundation, Naples

Abstract

The onset of breast cancer is considered a potential critical event associated with physical and psychological effects in particular when it occurs at the age below 50. Cancer narration is an elective tool to construct sensemaking processes aimed at supporting coping and adaptation to the experience.

The literature lacks a longitudinal narrative sensemaking exploration of breast cancer experience in younger women.

We administered to 10 breast cancer women below 50 years old an *ad hoc* narrative interview during four psychic turning-point phases of medical path: pre-hospitalization (T1); post-operative counseling (T2); adjuvant therapy (T3) and follow-up (T4). The research was conducted at the National Cancer Institute of Naples -Fondazione G. Pascale in the frame of STAR Program.

Through an hoc qualitative analysis based on narrative functions *organization of temporality*, *search for meaning*, *emotional regulation*, *orientation to action*, as modes of psychic functioning of narrative thinking, results highlight the way in which the functions are articulated during the four phases.

The functions highlight the natural flow of sense-making the experience from an initial narrative disorganization and suspension to the possibility to connect the experience within self-story. Narrative functions give the opportunity to observe also dimensions of risk during a specific phase as in the case of *emotional regulation* that in T2 undergo to a disconnection between emotion and experience that remain in T3 and T4. From a clinical health psychology perspective, the results suggest the construction of a personalized narrative intervention to promote all narrative functions and build adaptation resources during the whole cancer experience.

Identity (re)constructions after Acquired Brain Injuries

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Abstract

An Acquired Brain Injury (stroke, ischemia, or physical trauma) is a very complex phenomenon, with various effects and implications involving many dimensions of the person's life (WHO, 1996).

Through the analysis of positioning (Harrè and Van Langenhove, 1999; Riessman, 2004) this research investigates the narratives of 30 people with acquired brain injury and their families. They were collected through a semi-structured interview on topics such as: individual and relational processes at the basis of

the reconstruction of the self, identity, body image and negotiation of roles different from the previous ones, in the various contexts of daily life.

The findings revealed how the identity of people affected by ABI is built on narratives of drastic change, a sense of loss of self and one's abilities, and how this has pragmatic implications in terms of discomfort and ineffectiveness, perceptions of worthlessness, and dependence on intimate people. The identity fracture between past and present time is connected to a peculiar vision of the future, which in some cases is avoided and/or imagined as even more critical than the current moment. However, additional positionings emerge that include a vision of possibilities toward building other roles or toward managing fallout.

The results allow to highlight the potential of narrative and positioning analysis regarding the construction of identity and of the relationship between psychology and neurology, emphasizing all those narratives that can facilitate rehabilitation and/or the construction of new roles and coping strategies from a global health promotion perspective.

Discourses that construct the identity of the “sick person”. A research on the management of Primary Immunodeficiencies (PIDS)

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Abstract

Some researches have investigated the effect of primary immunodeficiencies (PIDs) on the quality of life of people diagnosed with them. Based the literature, some variables would play a significant role in the quality of life self-reported by people with PIDs; among these is the presence of a social support network. We have chosen to address the topic of PIDs, starting from how the different actors of the social network contribute to generating the experience of those affected by PIDs. The objective of our research was to explore the discourses that contribute to construct the experience lived by the person with PIDs. The texts collected were analyzed according to the Methodology of Textual Analysis of Computerized Data (MADIT). From the results, it emerges that a person with PIDs describes themselves and is described by others mainly as a patient, and the different aspects of their life are traced back to the pathology. People with PIDs and often their whole support network live the relationship with the disease in a passive way. Furthermore, the disease is suffered and not managed, for example, by practicing other social roles. We highlight the importance of counteracting the admixture of organic pathology and psychological experience and the implementation of interventions that allow people with PIDs to live experiences and

practice roles using which a person can be healthy (psychological and relational dimensions), even in the presence of a serious illness (organic dimension).

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN DIFFERENT POPULATIONS AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

Since the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic the world has undergone many changes, forced to impose new social rules and restriction. People had to adapt to social isolation and to rethink the way of living relationships, in different contexts, as home and workplaces. After more than one year, we are now addressing the consequences of the psychological impact of the pandemic on the mental well-being of people.

The aim of this symposium is to describe the outcomes of lockdown and social distancing on the general and specific populations, such as parents, couples, and families, highlighting the clinical implications and suggesting future direction for psychological and therapeutic interventions.

The first relation will address the consequences of the pandemic on the general population, through a longitudinal methodology, aiming to assess changes in depression, stress, and anxiety levels during and after the lockdown, by Paolo Roma and colleagues. Then, Daniela Marchetti and colleagues' presentation will explore risk and protective factors affecting parents' mental health status and their offspring, highlight the effects of lockdown and home-schooling on parental burn-out. The third presentation, by Francesco Craig and colleagues, will focus on the levels of depression, anxiety, and Covid-19 related worry on the prenatal attachment patterns in pregnant women. The last relation, presented by Giacomo Ciocca, will assess the changes in the ways of living intimacy in couples and the psychological and emotional correlates.

These researches' results may help clinicians and professional identifying persons and situations at greater risk of suffering from psychological distress, and inform psychological interventions targeting post-traumatic symptoms due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic among pregnant women

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Abstract

The potential impact of the current pandemic on mental health should not be neglected, especially in vulnerable populations like pregnant women. In this study, we sought to assess the effect of psychological distress on prenatal attachment in an Italian sample of pregnant women.

An anonymous online survey was carried out on pregnant women, collecting socio-demographic and obstetric data, and risk perception to COVID-19. The Prenatal Attachment Inventory (PAI) was used to measure prenatal attachment, while the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II) and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI-Y) were used to measure psychological distress. Data were collected from March 2020 to April 2020 referring to the national lockdown period.

It was found that prenatal attachment negatively correlates with state anxiety and depression, while it positively correlates with COVID-19-risk perception, although the effect depends on the actual condition of anxiety. In the multivariable analyses, state anxiety was shown to be significant predictors ($p < .0001$) of prenatal attachment after adjusting for the other socio-demographic and obstetric information. The COVID-19-risk perception positively moderate the relationship between trait anxiety and prenatal attachment ($p = .0008$), indicating that when COVID-19-risk perception is high, the effects of trait anxiety on prenatal attachment is attenuated.

This study expands our knowledge on the effects of psychological distress and COVID-19-related stress exposure on the prenatal attachment process in pregnant women. It is important that women identified as 'at risk' during early pregnancy are followed throughout the prenatal and postpartum period and appropriate support or referral provided when necessary. In addition, it is important to promote functional coping strategies to manage COVID-19-perceived risk, in order to enhance pregnant women's sense of security during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Italian parents and children psychological well-being

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² Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo

Abstract

The restrictions adopted by the Italian Government to face the Covid-19 pandemic, have imposed many changes to the families, with psychological consequences on parents and their offspring. Parents have been forced to manage new routines as working from home and take care of children in home-schooling, in a time of social distancing and lockdown. Nevertheless, the psychological effects on parents are not the same for everyone, because they are closely related to sociodemographic factors, child characteristics, and personality traits.

We have conducted a web-based survey on a broad sample of Italian parents, during the first week of the lockdown imposed in the spring of 2020. The aim of the research was to explore risk and protective factors influencing parents’ mental health and well-being, and which factors exerted the most detrimental impact on the psychological condition of their offspring aged between 0 to 13 years. Parents were asked about their sociodemographic information and Covid-19 experiences, their mental health status (psychological distress, emotional exhaustion), the adoption of verbal hostility during that period against children, main personality traits, and possible resources (social connection, parental resilience).

Overall, a significant proportion of parents present high to moderate levels of emotional exhaustion and, specifically, mothers who exhibit poor social connections, parental resilience, with more of one child or with special needs children are more at risk of developing emotional fatigue. Neuroticism and extroversion also play an important role on the manifestation of parental psychological distress, which in turn influences the expression of behavioral and emotional problems of the offspring.

The results highlight which variables taking into account in the development of preventive and therapeutic programs to reduce the negative psychological outcomes of the pandemic in parents and children.

Psychological distress among Italian people during the COVID-19 lockdown

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Abstract

On 30 January 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern. Many governments issued exceptional measures to contain the virus. A first online survey, administered online from 18-22 March 2020 (T0), aimed to establish the prevalence of psychiatric symptoms and identify risk and protective factors for psychological distress in the general population (n = 2766). Subsequently, an online follow-up was administered to 439 participants (out of 2766), between 28 April and 3 May 2020 (T1) with the aim to assess changes in depression, stress, and anxiety levels during the lockdown period, and the associated factors. Results showed a high prevalence of psychological symptomatology in the general population. Female gender and the personality domains of negative affect and detachment were associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Having an infected acquaintance was associated with increased depression and stress. Prior experience of stressful situations and a history of medical problems were associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety. Finally, having an infected family member and young adults who had to commute to their workplace showed higher levels of anxiety and stress, respectively. Multivariate regression models examined associations between sociodemographic variables, personality traits, coping strategies, depression, and stress. Results showed an increase in stress and depression over the lockdown, but not anxiety. Negative affect and detachment were associated with higher levels of depression and stress. Higher levels of depression at T0, fewer coping strategies, and childlessness were associated with increased depression at T1; higher levels of stress at T0 and younger age were associated with higher stress at T1. These results may help us identify persons at greater risk of suffering from psychological distress, and inform psychological interventions targeting post-traumatic symptoms.

Couple intimacy during COVID-19

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns and social isolation had a significant impact on psychological, relational and sexual functioning. The dimension of intimate relationships, in particular, has undergone considerable changes on the behavioral and emotional level that numerous researches investigated from

different perspectives, also highlighting new ways of living one's intimacy. The aim of the following study was to carry out a mini-review of the literature on the basis of keywords such as attachment, intimacy and sexuality during the Covid-19 pandemic, researched on PubMed.

The results of the literature review showed 11 scientific products related to the keywords "attachment styles and Covid-19", 129 products related to the keywords "sexual function and Covid-19" and 25 products related to the keywords "intimacy and Covid- 19 ".

A further screening based on the titles and abstract of the products detected led to a final review of the literature based on 60 scientific articles identified on PubMed.

Overall results of this mini-review showed that sexuality is affected by pandemic, but at the same time sexual activity improves psychological wellbeing, while insecure attachment style is described as risk factor for psychological distress in the Covid-Era.

In conclusion, mostly of scientific literature revealed that Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown significantly impacted on intimacy of single and couple with relevant repercussion on relational and sexual life. In this scenario a secure attachment style played a central role to protect people against psychological and relational issues.

CRITICAL EVENTS AND PREVENTION IN SEXOLOGY**Proposer***Chiara Simonelli*¹¹Università di Padova**Discussant***Mario Fulcheri*¹¹Università “G. D’Annunzio” di Chieti**Abstract**

Critical and traumatic events have a significant impact on psychological, relational and sexual functioning. Starting to the Freudian theory it is discussed about the role of trauma on an eventual develop of psychological suffering. Also, the contemporary psychopathology considers critical and traumatic events as an important etiological and risk factor for a mental disease. In this panel authors discuss about the role of critical events on sexual and relational life, also hypothesizing prevention and protective strategies. The first presenter, Lilybeth Fontanesi, specifically will focus on the people’s quality life during COVID-19 pandemic. In this presentation will be examined the impact of the first lockdown on couples’ sexuality using both self-report measures and focus groups.

Filippo Nimbi in the second presentation will speak about the concept of harm reduction in psychosexology, through a literature review on the main scientific database on the application of harm reduction policies on sexual health in the last 10 years.

Daniele Mollaioli will show the impact of the community-wide containment and consequent social distancing during COVID-19 pandemic on the intrapsychic, relational, and sexual health through a large national cross-sectional study.

Giacomo Ciocca will show the specific relationship between trauma and problematic sexuality through original data and literature evidences, also highlighting the different trauma types on the psychological and sexological wellbeing.

The last presentation, by Erika Limoncin, will aim to investigate if sexuality and relational quality might appear to be protective for the psychological wellbeing of the elderly population.

Changes in sexuality and quality of couple relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is heavily influencing people's general well-being worldwide. Since its outbreak, many studies have explored the population's general psychological well-being, while only a few studies have addressed how the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown are affecting sexuality. The present research, using a longitudinal and mixed methodology, aimed to understand if and how the Italian couple's sexuality has changed since the spread of COVID-19, and which variables were influencing relationship quality during the COVID-19 lockdown. A set of questionnaires, investigating the changes in sexual behavior, sexual desire and satisfaction, and the quality of relationship, reserved especially for cohabiting couples, was administered online from April 11 to May 5, 2020, the 5th and 8th weeks, respectively, after the start of the lockdown. The results were discussed in a series of focus groups. Despite the pandemic's psychological consequences, when asked directly, most couples responded that they did not perceive any differences in their sexuality. However, some participants did report a decrease in pleasure, satisfaction, desire, and arousal. The main reasons behind the changes in sexuality, especially in women, therefore, appear to be worried, lack of privacy, and stress. Even when participants seemed to show high levels of resilience, the negative aspects of lockdown could affect their quality of sexual life. The results will serve to better address population needs and experiences and provide ad hoc interventions during this unprecedented time of crisis.

Harm reduction in psycho-sexology

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Abstract

Introduction: Harm reduction refers to a wide variety of policies, programs and practices aiming to diminish negative health and social impact of risky behaviors. It assumes the free self-determination of people in many risky behaviors, and it is grounded in human rights.

Methods: A critical review was conducted on the main scientific database on the application of Harm reduction policies on sexual health in the last 10 years.

Results: Finding its roots in drug users support services and practices, the main focus of harm reduction is on positive change and on working with people to reach a higher level of health without judgement, coercion, discrimination, and recognizing that quitting the risky behavior may be an unreachable and undesired solution for many people. HIV and STIs, unwanted pregnancies, and sexualized drug use are only some examples in which harm reduction strategies may be efficiently applied to Psycho-Sexology practice. The present contribution will highlight some effective strategies that are cost-effective, evidence-based and have a positive impact on individual and community health. In addition, the psychological aspects that limit the application of these practices by clinicians and the community will be discussed.

Conclusion: Harm reduction is being widely recognized as a major tool to be combined with the well-known prevention practices to minimize harm and reach a safer, healthier, and more satisfying sexual life.

Benefits of sexual activity on psychological, relational, and sexual health during the COVID-19 breakout

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Abstract

Background: The COVID-19–related lockdown has profoundly changed human behaviors and habits, impairing general and psychological well-being. Along with psychosocial consequences, it is possible that sexual behavior was also affected. We evaluated the impact of the community-wide containment and consequent social distancing on the intrapsychic, relational, and sexual health through standardized psychometric tools.

Methods: A case-control study was performed through a web-based survey and comparing subjects of both genders with (group A, N = 2,608) and without (group B, N = 4,213) sexual activity during lockdown on anxiety, depression, quality of relationship and sexual quality of life.

Results: Anxiety and depression scores were significantly lower in subjects sexually active during lockdown. Analysis of covariance identified gender, sexual activity, and living without partner during lockdown as significantly affecting anxiety and depression scores. Logistic regression models showed that lack of sexual activity during lockdown was associated with a significantly higher risk of developing

anxiety and depression. Structural equation modeling evidenced the protective role of sexual activity toward psychological distress, relational health and sexual health, both directly, and indirectly.

Conclusions: COVID-19 lockdown dramatically impacted on psychological, relational, and sexual health of the population. In this scenario, sexual activity played a protective effect, in both genders, on the quarantine-related plague of anxiety and mood disorders. Moreover, the study demonstrated a mutual influence of sexual health on psychological and relational health that could direct the clinical community toward a reinterpretation of the relationship among these factors.

The psycho-sexual and emotional well-being of elderly people during the Italian lockdown due to the COVID pandemic

Erika Limoncin^{1,2}

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Abstract

Introduction: The general psycho-sexological and emotional well-being of Italian persons subjected to the lockdown due to the COVID pandemic in the period ranging from March to May 2020 was dramatically worsened. Specifically, elderly people were negatively affected by several conditions strictly related to the pandemic and to this specific period of life. For example, higher risk to contract the virus, higher mortality rate, isolation, depression, anxiety, loneliness. Since previous evidence have shown that sexuality may represent a protective factor towards depression and anxiety, we aimed at investigating if sexuality and relational quality might appear to be protective also of the elderly population.

Methods: Administration of the International index of erectile Function (IIEF-5), of the Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI), of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) and of the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7).

Results: A group of 94 elderly subjects declaring to have a stable relationship was recruited online. Of these, 72 were males and 22 females. Interestingly, the frequency of sexual intercourse was significantly inversely related to depression/anxiety levels. In addition, dyadic satisfaction appeared to mediate the association between anxiety levels and the ability to experience the orgasm.

Conclusions: Both sexual frequency and dyadic satisfaction may protect elderly people from anxiety and depression.

THE ROLE OF ALEXITHYMIA IN THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRONIC ILLNESSES**Proposer***Luca Iani*¹¹ Department of Human Sciences, European University of Rome**Discussant***Adriana Lis*¹¹ Università di Padova**Abstract**

Individuals high in alexithymia are more vulnerable to developing a physical illness, although there is no clear evidence that alexithymia is a causal risk factor for any illness. A number of studies with chronically ill patients have shown that alexithymia may affect the course of various illnesses. The aim of this Symposium is to present some researches on the role of alexithymia in the experience of different chronic illnesses. In the first contribution, Porcelli and colleagues examine the relationship of alexithymia with chronic gastrointestinal disorders (functional gastrointestinal disorders and inflammatory bowel diseases) and liver diseases (chronic hepatitis C, cirrhosis, and liver transplantation). The second presentation by Quinto and Iani examines the role of alexithymia, illness anxiety, and psychological inflexibility as predictors of psychological well-being and distress in patients with moderate/high somatization attending general practitioner. The third contribution by Craparo and La Rosa describes the prevalence of post-traumatic distress, alexithymia, dissociation, and addictive behaviors during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy. The final contribution by Guccione et al. examines Respiratory Sinus Arrhythmia and Heart Rate during resting and stressful conditions in preadolescents with Vasovagal Syncope diagnosis.

Traumatic distress, alexithymia, dissociation, and risk of addiction during the first wave of COVID-19 in Italy. Results from a cross-sectional online survey on a non-clinical adult sample*Giuseppe Craparo*¹, *Valentina Lucia La Rosa*²¹ Facoltà di Scienze dell'Uomo e della Società, Università degli Studi di Enna "Kore"² Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione, Università degli Studi di Catania

Abstract

Introduction: Social distancing and lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic can be associated with stress and uncertainty and anxiety and depressive symptoms, and the most vulnerable subjects may be more likely to cope with these feelings through addictive behaviors. This study aimed to explore the prevalence of post-traumatic distress, alexithymia, dissociation, and addictive behaviors during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy. It also aimed to determine whether trauma, alexithymia, and dissociation can effectively predict the risk of addiction in non-clinical subjects during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: 219 subjects without a clinical diagnosis of addiction (age: 37.55 ± 12.7 ; males: 30.6%; females: 69.4%) completed a web survey, including the Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R), the Dissociative Experience Scale-II (DES-II), and the Addictive Behavior Questionnaire (ABQ).

Results: Females reported higher levels of COVID-19-related traumatic stress than males ($p=0.009$). A greater fear of getting COVID-19 was associated with significantly high IES-R scores ($p<0.0005$). IES-R total score was significantly lower in the "not internet-addicted" group than in the "internet-addicted" group ($p<0.0005$). Furthermore, DES-II total score was significantly higher in the "internet-addicted" group than in the "non-internet addicted" group ($p<0.0005$). No statistically significant scores differences were highlighted in the "alcohol" group. The logistic regression procedure has highlighted no statistically significant relations.

Conclusions: Future research with longitudinal studies and larger samples will have to clarify whether trauma, alexithymia, and dissociation can effectively predict the risk of addiction in non-clinical subjects during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Understanding somatization in primary care during the COVID-19 pandemic: the role of alexithymia, illness anxiety, and psychological inflexibility as predictors of psychological well-being and distress

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Abstract

Somatization is a relevant issue for medical management. Patients reporting medically unexplained symptoms are prevalent in primary care, and experience significant functional impairment. In this cross-sectional study we compared patients with absent/low somatization with those with moderate/high somatization attending the general practitioner during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study enrolled 162

patients (55 males and 107 females). About 75% ($n = 121$) of the sample reported moderate/high somatization and higher levels of alexithymia, psychological distress, psychological inflexibility, brooding, and illness anxiety, as well as lower psychological well-being, as compared to patients with absent/low somatization. We also investigated which psychological variables were associated with psychological well-being and distress in patients with moderate/high somatization. Difficulty in identifying emotions, difficulty in describing emotions, treatment experiences, sensitivity to bodily sensations, symptoms that interfere with normal daily activities, worries about having specific illness, mental inflexibility, and brooding, entered as independent variables in two hierarchical regressions. Our results showed that no variables predicted psychological distress in patients with moderate/high somatization, whereas high levels of difficulties to describing emotions, mental inflexibility, and symptoms effects, were associated with low levels of psychological well-being among these patients. These findings suggest the importance of focusing on somatization among primary care patients, in order to lead to a better understanding of the reported physical symptoms, treating also psychological aspects that may hinder subjective well-being.

Autonomic regulation and emotional dysregulation in vasovagal syncope: vagal and sympathetic activity during separation anxiety and social perception tasks in a sample of preadolescents

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Abstract

Vasovagal Syncope (VVS) is a neurally mediated syncope induced by pain, fear or standing. Dysfunction neural regulation of the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) is crucial in the pathogenesis of VVS. The ANS regulation is deeply linked to the attachment system, as both are involved with the responses to environmental demands.

This within-subjects study analyzed Respiratory Sinus Arrhythmia (RSA) and Heart Rate (HR) during resting conditions (baseline and recovery), and stressful conditions (the Separation Anxiety Test - SAT and the Social Perception Domain of NEPSY-II) in 23 preadolescents with VVS diagnosis.

The one-way repeated measures ANOVA showed that RSA and HR were statistically significantly different between the SAT moderate tables [RSA: $F_{(1.727, 37.990)}=14.485$, $p<.0005$, partial $\eta^2=.397$; HR: $F_{(2.066, 45.459)}= 6.075$, $p=.004$, partial $\eta^2=.216$], the SAT severe tables [RSA: $F_{(1.854, 40.783)}=13.094$, $p<.0005$, partial

$\eta^2=.373$; HR: $F_{(1.858, 40.885)}=6.484$, $p=.004$, partial $\eta^2=.228$], and the Social Perception Tasks of NEPSY-II [RSA: $F_{(1.772, 38.974)}=11.107$, $p<.0005$, partial $\eta^2=.335$; HR: $F_{(1.856, 40.832)}=4.016$, $p=.028$, partial $\eta^2=.154$].

Specifically, RSA was significantly decreased during tasks that evoke separation anxiety in severe and moderate conditions compared with resting conditions. These findings suggest that our patients were not vagally regulated under relational stress conditions, which could lead to a predisposition to fainting. RSA was also decreased during social perception tasks compared with the recovery condition, suggesting a reduction in autonomic regulation during tasks requiring cognitive investment in managing external social situations. Concurrently, HR increased during the experimental conditions compared to the resting condition, suggesting an increase in sympathetic activity. These results highlight the importance of considering autonomic regulation in psychological treatment to strengthen the psychophysiological resources of the developing subject.

Alexithymia in chronic gastrointestinal and hepatologic diseases

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Abstract

Alexithymia, a multifaceted personality construct that represents a deficit in the cognitive processing of emotions, is currently understood to be related to a variety of medical and psychiatric conditions. In the present paper, the relationship of alexithymia with chronic gastrointestinal (GI) disorders as functional gastrointestinal disorders (FGID, as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and functional dyspepsia) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) [ulcerative colitis (UC) and Crohn's disease (CD)] and liver diseases as chronic hepatitis C (CHC), cirrhosis, and liver transplantation. Alexithymia is mostly investigated with the 20-item Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) and the studies reviewed in this paper are those that used this scale for allowing cross-comparisons. The prevalence of alexithymia is higher in FGID (more than two third of patients) than IBD and liver diseases (from one third to 50% of patients, consistent with other chronic non-GI diseases) than general population (10–15%). The role of alexithymia in the different disorders is partly overlapping and partly distinct. In functional GI disorders, alexithymia may be viewed as a primary driver for higher visceral perception, symptom reporting, health care use, symptom persistence, and negative treatment outcomes, even when a comorbid GI condition as cholelithiasis and UC is present. Also, it has been found associated with psychological distress and specific GI-related forms of anxiety in predicting symptom severity as well as post-treatment outcomes and is associated with several psychological factors increasing the burden of disease and impairing levels of quality of life. In chronic GI diseases, alexithymia may predict somatization symptoms, even

independently of the primary medical condition, likely because of difficulty identifying and communicating the underlying distress emotions.

PRENATAL PARENTING: CONTEXTS, PATHWAYS AND RISKS ACROSS TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD

Proposer

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Abstract

Decades of studies demonstrate the importance of the prenatal experience in child development. Also, parenting is molded by the complex bio-psychological processes taking place between the mother and the unborn baby, as well as surrounding the dyad's experience. The present panel will discuss the multifaceted influences on parenting that characterize pregnancy and post-partum, presenting complementary perspectives on the contexts, pathways and risks interesting the parental experience in such vulnerable window.

The first presentation focuses on the establishment of the mother-fetus relationship, investigating the multiple characteristics of pregnancy supporting such bond and showing its role in post-natal maternal caregiving. Complementarily, the second contribution examines the association between mother-fetus attachment and postnatal mother-child attachment, innovatively exploring the contribution of maternal parental reflective functioning. The third presentation enlarges the perspective and investigates the mutual influences between the parental couple's partners. This work shows how maternal stress in pregnancy is influenced by the partner's mental health and his perceived level of couple satisfaction. The last work presented describes the challenges posed to parenting by a well-known perinatal risk condition: prematurity. This work points at the trajectories of parental perinatal depression in mothers and fathers of preterm newborns, evidencing the role of severity of preterm birth and parental role.

Overall, the four contributions integrate different research focuses, methodological approaches and clinical perspectives allowing to a complex description of the key elements of prenatal parenting. For the clinical intervention contexts, the panel illustrates the centrality of the trajectories in the mother-infant bond, the transactions within the family members, and the potential difficulties that perinatal clinical conditions propose to parents.

Trajectories of perinatal depressive symptoms in preterm infants' parents: the influence of severity of prematurity and of parental role

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Abstract

Prematurity is widely recognized as a significant risk factor for both maternal and paternal perinatal depression (PND). Nevertheless, little is known about the PND course during the first year of preterm infant's life in both parents. Furthermore, literature usually focuses on parents of Very Low Birth Weight-VLBW babies (birth weight <1500 grams), while less attention is paid to Extremely Low Birth Weight-ELBW infants (<1000 grams), that represents a population of great clinical relevance, given the constant increase of their survival rate, the higher risk condition for later behavioural difficulties and for maternal depression. Given these premises, the aim of the study was to explore trajectories of PND in preterm mothers and fathers, according to severity of prematurity and parental role.

For the study 177 mothers and 177 fathers were recruited. According to infant birth weight, 38 parental couples were included in ELBW group, 56 couples in VLBW group and 83 in Full Term-FT group (birth weight >2500 g; gestational age >36 weeks). All parents fulfilled the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) at 3, 9 and 12 months of infants age (corrected for preterm infants). Trajectories were tested by Growth Curve Models.

Results showed that, when birth weight was included in the models, ELBW parents had higher PND levels at 3 months and a greater decrease of symptoms over time compared to VLBW and FT groups. As a function of birth weight and parental role, the higher scores at 3 months and the greater decrease over time were evident only for ELBW mothers compared to VLBW and FT mothers and fathers; no differences emerged for ELBW fathers.

Findings suggest that severity of preterm birth and parental role may lead to different affective dysregulations across time, with ELBW mothers being at higher risk for PND especially in the first months after discharge. Clinical implications for intervention on parenthood in the perinatal period will be discussed.

Exploratory study of antenatal and postnatal factors: postnatal maternal attachment and parental reflective functioning

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Abstract

During the perinatal period, the establishment of the attachment relationship with the fetus and subsequently with the real child is crucial for the mother–child relationship, as well as the development of the mother’s postnatal capacity to mentalize about and reflect upon their actual and evolving relationship with the child. Studies examining the determinants of postnatal maternal attachment (MPA) and of maternal parental reflective functioning (PRF) rarely have focused on both prenatal and postnatal periods. Furthermore, no studies have investigated the relationship between the two constructs.

Aim of the present study was to identify antenatal and postnatal factors associated with MPA and PRF. One hundred mothers awaiting their first child were recruited for a prospective study, with the first stage (3rd trimester of pregnancy) and the second (three months after delivery). Mothers completed questionnaires assessing: their relationship with the child (MAAS - MPAS by Condon; PRFQ by Luyten et al.); individual variables (ASQ by Feeney et al.; ERQ by Gross & John; EPDS by Cox et al.; STAI by Spielberg et al.; PSI by Abidin); relational and contextual variables (DAS by Spanier; MSPSS by Zimet et al.; PAM by Abidin & Konold). Socio-demographic and obstetric variables were also collected.

Pearson’s correlation analyses showed moderate to high correlations between MPAS and PRF. In addition, significant correlations emerged between MPA and PRF and the antenatal and postnatal factors assessed. Hierarchical regressions showed that the most important factors for MPA included maternal antenatal attachment, parenting stress and PRF; whereas trait anxiety, age and parenting stress were significant for PRF.

These preliminary findings, including individual, relational and contextual variables, can be useful for clinical purposes, providing information for the implementation of screening processes and interventions aimed at enhancing mother-child relationship starting from pregnancy.

The maternal-fetal attachment and the association with post-natal maternal caregiving

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Abstract

Introduction: Parenting begins before birth: research has identified pregnancy as a valuable window for maternal and fetal health, as well as for the emergence of key determinants of the mother–infant relationship. Maternal–Fetal Attachment (MFA) describes the representational, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the mother–fetus relationship that develops during pregnancy. In this contribution, we present a study on MFA conducted with pregnant Italian women to investigate: i) the associations of MFA with maternal mental health, couple’s relationship and perceived care in childhood during 3rd

trimester of pregnancy; ii) the predictive role of MFA on maternal parenting during the first months of the infant's life.

Method: During 3rd trimester, 113 pregnant Italian women were assessed on MFA (Maternal Antenatal Attachment Scale, MAAS), maternal depression (Beck Depression Inventory-II, BDI-II), maternal anxiety (State Trait Anxiety Inventory – State version, STAI), adjustment of the couple (Dyadic Adjustment Scale, DAS), and perceived parental care (The Parental Bonding Instrument, PBI). At 4 months of infant's life, 29 mother–infant pairs were followed up to assess observational variables of maternal caregiving through the Emotional Availability Scale (EAS) and to test for an association with MFA.

Results: The study showed a significant association between MFA and the quality of the couple relationship and between MFA and the recall of memories of care received in childhood during pregnancy. Also, the results showed a predictive effect of MFA on maternal structuring observed during mother–infant interactions.

Conclusion: The study points out relevant relationship contexts that might receive care and support throughout pregnancy to protect MFA. The findings also provide thoughtful insights on the role of MFA in early maternal caregiving, suggesting that MFA might be a candidate as one putative antecedent of mother–infant interaction processes.

A dyadic perspective on the roles of perceived stress, marital satisfaction and risk of prenatal depression in first-time parents: an actor-partner interdependence mediation mode

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Abstract

Introduction: In the field of perinatal clinical psychology, most studies focus on mothers' psychological states during pregnancy, neglecting the role of their partners. This study used an Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model to evaluate the mediating role of dyadic satisfaction on the relationship between perceived stress and prenatal depressive symptomatology in both members of marital couples who were expecting their first child. *Method:* 138 couples in their third trimester of pregnancy were asked to complete questionnaires about perceived stress, dyadic adjustment, and

depression. *Results:* The model revealed that there was an intrapersonal indirect effect of fathers' perceived stress on prenatal paternal depression through their marital satisfaction. Moreover, an interpersonal indirect effect was found with mothers' perceived stress being associated with prenatal paternal depression through fathers' dyadic satisfaction. Maternal indirect effects were all non-significant, suggesting that their dyadic satisfaction and that of their partner did not mediate the relation between their perceived stress and that of their partner and their prenatal depression. *Conclusions:* Findings support the importance of assessing the dyadic satisfaction of couples during pregnancy, especially in expectant fathers, and targeting it in the psychological support offered to couples as a way of improving their prenatal distress, and consequently, their mental health.

UNIVERSITY PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING: THE “EMERGING” SERVICES FACING THE CHALLENGING OF PANDEMIC

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

Literature acknowledged that university psychological counseling allows to respond to students' difficulties in order to reduce delays or dropout of studies, as well as to preventively recognize and face the onset of any psychological disorders, improving their health and wellbeing (Østergård et al., 2017; Patrizi et al., 2019). As a previous panel at the 2019 AIP showed, in Italy there are some large universities (e.g., Sapienza, Padua, etc.) in which psychological counseling services have been scheduled, organized and well established since long time. However, in the last decade, psychological counseling services have been arisen in several Universities, and they are characterized by a heterogeneity in terms of users, devoted personnel, services provided, and structures used. Moreover, all the universities psychological services had to face the incredible challenging provoked by pandemic and the following restrictions. The aim of this symposium is to give space to the emerging university psychological counseling services in Italy, in order to discuss on: 1) recent challenges and changes due to the pandemic, 2) research data on users' profile, 3) services' characteristics. The first contribution (Guicciardi et al.) investigates the reduction of anxiety and depression in students who benefited from online counselling at the University of Cagliari, supported by specialization's trainees in Health Psychology. The second contribution (Bizzi et al.) compares psychological profiles of students who required counselling at the University of Genova before and during the pandemic. The third contribution (Celia et al.) describes psychological difficulties in students who asked for help to counseling service established at University of Foggia at the beginning of pandemic. The fourth contribution (Quattropani et al.) from University of Messina identifies psychological problems in both university students and general population who received counseling from March to June 2020.

Users' psychological profile accessing counseling service at the university of genoa: comparing pre and during pandemic data

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Abstract

Introduction: In recent years, there has been a high rate of psychological distress among university students, ranging from «typical» developmental difficulties to more severe mental disorders. Moreover, the pandemic has been perceived as a stressful event that has aggravated the students' psychological conditions, increasing their requests for psychological help.

Method: The present study aimed to investigate the psychological profiles of 78 students ($M_{age} = 22.90$, $SD = 2.76$; 27% male) who accessed the Counselling Service at the University of Genoa before and during the pandemic period. The total group was divided into two subgroups: students ($N = 43$) who required psychological help before the pandemic (BPG) and those ($N = 35$) who required during the pandemic (DPG). All participants completed the following measures: the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-Positive (DERS-P), the Hope Questionnaire (HOPE), the Impulsive Behavior Scale (UPPS-P), and the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (PID-5).

Results: Results showed that DPG obtained significantly higher in some DERS (Lack of Emotional Awareness), UPPS-P (Negative Urgency), and PID-5 (Suspiciousness) subscales with respect to the BPG.

Conclusions: Although findings should be considered preliminary, they show an emotional fragility of the university students during the pandemic. Counselling interventions are discussed to improve their health and wellbeing.

The psychological counseling service of Foggia: safeguarding the psychological well-being of the university population during the pandemic

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Abstract

On the 20th of March 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Psychological Counseling Service of the University of Foggia was established. The Service offers online psychological counseling in order to safeguard the well-being of the entire university population (students, teaching staff and non-teaching staff). From the 27th of April 2020, our service, in collaboration with Italian Association of Psychology, has been available to accept the requests that are part of the second level of psychological counseling of the initiative promoted by the Ministry of Health (COVID-19 Psychological Support).

Our Counseling Service immediately highlighted a need linked to the pandemic emergency, or to respond actively and in a specialized way to the exponential growth of emotional suffering.

The Counseling Service offered a pre-established cycle of interviews, usually up to 5, with a weekly frequency. The service also provided for a follow-up session after some time to verify that the results achieved have been maintained.

We have observed in the subjects who have turned to our service, especially after the restrictive measures taken by the government, an increase in depressive and anxiety symptoms, social isolation and fear of infection. In addition to anxiety about the contagion, in some of them, especially the youngest, fears were accompanied by confusion and a sense of uncertainty about the future.

We also found that students had difficulty concentrating, insomnia, memory difficulties, irritability, restlessness and confusion, as well as the fear of getting sick and / or losing loved one. Also, they were afraid of a deterioration in their profit when switching from face-to-face to remote mode for lessons and exams.

The high number of requests obtained and interviews conducted allowed us to collect a substantial amount of data and develop important reflections on the topic of psychological well-being and college counseling.

The online psychological counseling: A professionalizing experience in health psychology

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Abstract

The Covid-19 health emergency has entailed the need to reorganize academia's research, teaching and third mission activities as well as its services for students. Adapting to distance learning, in association with social restrictions, has led to an increase in university students' distress and levels of anxiety and

depression. From November 2020, the Psychological Counseling Service of the University of Cagliari has shifted to the online mode, supported by two trainees of the University's School of Specialization in Health Psychology.

The online counseling mostly follows the in-person model, which consists of a first interview to collect both general socio-demographic information and to identify the reasons for seeking help; then, four sessions and a follow up session after three months are offered. Questionnaires are administered throughout the process to monitor the individual's state and progresses.

The trainees were included in the monthly planned activities under the supervision of the structured psychologist.

During the psychological counseling, the trainees have helped the students to increase their self-awareness, to clarify and redefine the meaning of their emotional experiences and to activate their individual resources, with particular attention to the impact of the forced social isolation due to Covid-19 on their psychophysical wellbeing.

Indeed, the enhancement of life skills and resilience, the development of autonomy, and fostering functional, cognitive and metacognitive strategies are fundamental in the prevention and promotion of health and wellbeing.

The results show a significant improvement in the aforementioned dimensions and in the reduction of the students' levels of anxiety and depression. Moreover, they confirm the need for a psychological support service for students and suggest the implementation of further activities aimed at improving the level of psychological wellbeing, and at reducing mental distress and university dropouts.

From university psychological counseling service to online psychological intervention for students and general population during the COVID-19 outbreak: the university of Messina experience

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak is severely impacted the university students during the Italian lockdown. The adopted restrictive measures hampered the spread of the virus, even though psychological consequences remain unknown. Undoubtedly, stress factors related to isolation from others and feeling of uncertainty due to the fact that all the didactic activities were provided online might lead to experience psychological concerns or exacerbation of pre-existing psychopathology. Indeed, early studies conducted during the first lockdown in March 2020 have reported higher levels of distress among individuals forcing to study

at home. Over this period, the Center of Research and Psychological Intervention (CeRIP) of the University of Messina has continuously guaranteed psychological counseling for students. The CeRIP is a specific unit of the University of Messina aiming to provide psychological services for the academic community and the population, together with the promotion of research supporting the empirical bases of psychological practice and prevention. A staff composed of faculty members and licensed professionals in developmental and clinical psychology was involved. Throughout the massive lockdown, the general population can take advantage of this service too. At the request of the Civil Protection of Messina and the Ministry of Health, an online service was set up also aimed at the general adult population, children and adolescents. The service has also increased the collaboration of external psychotherapist professionals to guarantee continuous support also to health professionals working in Covid-19 hospitals, to patients and their families.

From March to June 2020 more than two hundred individuals have received counseling and psychological support. The most frequent reason was anxiety and fear of contagion, followed by uncertainty about the future, aggravation of pre-existing psychopathology (e.g., obsessive-compulsive disorder, mood disorders, eating disorders), aloneness, and social isolation. Results highlighted the need for psychological service to promptly identify psychological problems individuals who are adversely affected by the consequences of the restrictive measures. Notably, university psychological services such as CeRIP, in addition to improving resilience among university students and increasing academic performance, could prove useful to the general population in improving mental health and promoting basic psychological well-being.

INDIVIDUAL AND COUPLE WELLBEING IN LGBT+ PEOPLE**Proposer**

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Abstract

Research (Frost, 2020; Kennedy & Dalla, 2020) shows that social stigma against LGBT+ people could influence their psychological and physical wellbeing and how they build significant relationships, start families, and become parents (Meyer, 2003). In particular, experienced minority stress seems to impact the quality of the romantic relationship and, consequently, the perceived satisfaction within the couple. The present panel will discuss which factors influence the individual and couple's wellbeing of the LGBT+ minorities.

The contribution of Scandurra and colleagues, through the minority stress model, explored the complex relation between distal and proximal stressors, and mental health among bisexual people in Italy. Discrimination and internalized binegativity were found to negatively affect psychological wellbeing, while a negative association between resilience and mental health was found.

The work by Lampis and colleagues assessed the association between dyadic adjustment, family support, and psychological distress among transgender Italian people. Their findings demonstrated a negative association between these variables, supporting the main role of relational factors in predicting individual psychological wellbeing among gender minorities.

The contribution of Isolani and colleagues focuses on the relationship between Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence (SSIPV) and individual and dyadic aspects of partners, finding that partners perceive to perpetrate different amount of psychological violence, but not of physical SSIPV, sexual coercion and injuries.

The work of Tognasso and colleagues deepen the perspective studying the association between internalized homonegativity, adult attachment, and same-sex intimate partner violence. Violence was found to be influenced by adult attachment and not by internalized homonegativity.

In general, the symposium provides a comprehensive view of the perceived wellbeing of LGBT+ minorities.

Intimate partner violence in same-sex couples: a preliminary analysis

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Abstract

Introduction: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is any behavior within a couple that involves behaviors of physical, sexual, emotional and/or psychological abuse, and controlling behavior. Despite the efforts made so far, there is a lack of study on IPV in same-sex couple. Our aim is to fill this gap in literature and try to better understand LGB couples functioning.

Method: An online-based survey was administered to 40 Italian same-sex couples (n=80) aged from 18 and 58 years (M=28.01; SD=7.41). Correlation analysis has been conducted to evaluate the association between IPV and other individual and dyadic variables. Paired-samples T-test and ANOVA has been used for our preliminary investigation.

Results: ANOVA analysis showed no differences in total IPV perpetration between male and female same-sex couples. Paired-samples T-test results showed significant differences between partner only in perpetration of psychological IPV, $t(39)=-2.683$; $p<.05$. Correlation analysis showed a negative significant correlation between couple satisfaction with physical and psychological IPV (respectively $r=-.271$, $p<.01$ and $r=-.461$, $p<.001$) and a positive significant correlation between economic control towards the partner with physical and psychological IPV (respectively $r=.184$, $p<.05$ and $r=.332$, $p<.001$). Moreover, sexual coercion showed a significant positive correlation with malevolent sexism towards female ($r=.204$; $p<.05$).

Conclusions: Preliminary analysis of our study confirmed that IPV is correlated to some individuals and dyadic variables, and that it can influence other form of violence, such as control of the partner. It seems that partners have the perception to perpetrate different amount of psychological violence, but not for what concern physical IPV, sexual coercion and partner's injuries resulting from fights.

The role of dyadic adjustment and family support in predicting psychological distress in a sample of Italian transgender individuals

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Abstract

The psychological studies on transgender individuals mainly focus on the mental health of this population. However, this extremely narrow focus on mental health outcomes may result in the over-pathologization of a vulnerable population that may experience normative responses to pervasive discrimination, violence, and exclusion. Furthermore, the emphasis placed exclusively on individual problems denotes the risk of the continued neglect of relational, social, and political contexts from which suffering emerges, acquires significance, and can be treated.

The main objective of the present study was to analyse the role of the dyadic adjustment and social support on the levels of psychological distress in a sample of 102 Italian transgender individuals (28.6% defined themselves as transgender women, 51.3% defined themselves as transgender men, 5.9% provided no response) with an average age of 30,75 years. A hierarchical linear multiple regression analysis was conducted to test hypothesis.

The tested model was significant ($F = 6.44, p < .001$). The total proportion of variance in the psychological distress explained by all of the independent variables was 41,4%. According to the standardized regression coefficient high levels of global psychological distress were associated with low levels of family support ($\beta = -.313, p < .005$) and dyadic adjustment ($\beta = -.376, p < .001$).

The data confirmed that the support and acceptance of one's partner and family of origin represent an important protective factor with respect to negative psychological health outcomes. The findings emphasize the need to develop specific clinical and social practices for transgender individuals and their families and suggest that building family- and partner-centered policies and programs is particularly important to enable transgender individuals to avoid paying the emotional and psychological costs associated with rejection and non-acceptance.

Minority stress, resilience, and mental health in a sample of Italian bisexual people

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Abstract

Introduction: Bisexual people are a strongly stigmatized population experiencing health disparities caused by social stigmatization, against which resilience may be exercised. The predominant framework helping to understand these health disparities is the minority stress theory. In Italy, studies assessing this model in bisexual populations are scarce.

Method: A cross-sectional web-based survey was administered to 381 Italian bisexual participants (62 men and 319 women) aged from 18 to 60 years ($M = 25.16$, $SD = 6.75$). A structural equation modeling (SEM) approach was used to test the effects of distal (i.e., anti-bisexual discrimination) and proximal stressors (i.e., anticipated binegativity, internalized binegativity, and outness) on mental health. Furthermore, we tested the mediating role of proximal stressors in the relationship between distal stressors and mental health, as well as the moderating role of resilience.

Results: Anti-bisexual discrimination ($b = .30$, $p < .001$) and internalized binegativity ($b = .13$, $p < .001$), but not outness, were positively associated with mental health problems, and resilience was negatively associated with negative health outcomes ($b = -.46$, $p < .001$). The mediation analysis highlighted only one indirect effect linking anti-bisexual discrimination with mental health through internalized binegativity ($b = .02$, $p < .05$). No moderating effect of resilience was found. With respect to control variables, political activism was associated with high levels of anti-bisexual discrimination ($b = .33$, $p < .001$) and outness ($b = .50$, $p < .001$), whereas having one or more partners was associated with higher levels of resilience ($b = .32$, $p < .001$).

Conclusions: This is the first study which thoroughly applied minority stress in Italian bisexual people, providing Italian clinicians and researchers with an outline of the associations between minority stress, stigma, resilience, and mental health within this population.

Minority stress, adult attachment and same-sex intimate partner violence in Italy

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Abstract

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a widespread phenomenon that affects millions of people regardless of sociocultural background and gender of victims and perpetrators. However, Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence (SSIPV) has received little attention until few decades ago, and further studies are needed to explore specific and a-specific risk factors related to violence in same-sex couples. Accordingly, the current study explores the association between internalized homonegativity, adult attachment, and SSIPV.

Participants were 230 (63.5% women), aged between 20-59 years ($M=29.8$, $SD= 7.9$) and in a same-sex relationship for at least one year. All the participants fulfilled: a) the *CTS-2S* to assess IPV; b) the *ECR-R* to assess individual differences concerning attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related

avoidance; c) the *MISS-LG* to assess internalized homonegativity; d) the *DAS* to assess individual's perception of the relationship with an intimate partner.

The prevalence of psychological SSIPV perpetration and victimization was 66.4% and 61.6%, respectively. Much less participants in the study perpetrated or suffered physical SSIPV (perpetration: 6.5%; victimization: 9.1%). The results highlight a significant positive association between attachment anxiety and psychological, but not physical, SSIPV perpetration ($Exp(B)=1.885$, $p=.004$). In addition, attachment avoidance was positively related with physical SSIPV victimization ($Exp(B)=2.216$, $p=.006$). Internalized homonegativity was not associated with SSIPV perpetration or victimization.

These findings provide first insights on similarities and differences between IPV in heterosexual couples and SSIPV, in Italy. While somewhat surprisingly, internalized homonegativity was not related with SSIPV, the significant association between adult attachment and couple violence supports a conceptualization of (SS)IPV as a dysfunctional mechanism of emotional and interpersonal distance regulation.

THE CORE OF PERSONALITY: LEVELS OF FUNCTIONING AND TRAITS IN THE ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR PERSONALITY DISORDERS (AMPD)

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

The Alternative Model for Personality Disorders (AMPD: APA, 2013) represents an innovative attempt to overcome the limits of traditional categorical diagnostic systems and integrate two fundamental aspects of personality: level of organization and traits. These domains are reflected in the two AMPD domains of Level of personality functioning (Criterion A) and Pathological traits (Criterion B). Several investigations are currently extending the available knowledge on the AMPD, in particular to define the incremental validity and clinical utility of the two criteria and, more in general, the connections between level of personality functioning and traits.

In the present panel, we will present four talks addressing current issues regarding personality functioning and pathological traits. Preti will start discussing personality pathology assessment within the framework of the object-relations approach and its similarities with the AMPD. Gritti and de Carli will examine several aspects of the AMPD, such as relationships of A and B criteria with external constructs, temporal stability, and change as a function of age. Tanzilli and Cibelli will therefore illustrate the relationship between specific maladaptive personality traits assessed using the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 Brief Form (PID-5-BF) and four distinct defensive styles during the lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic emergency. Finally, Benzi, Fontana and Di Pierro will present the Adolescent Personality Structure Questionnaire (APS-Q), a self-report measure to capture core aspects of personality functioning in adolescence. The Authors will also present data on the associations between the APS-Q and maladaptive personality traits.

We will discuss the usefulness, both in clinical and research terms, of considering personality functioning and pathological personality traits in the assessment of personality pathology in adults and adolescents.

Emerging personality in adolescence: dimensional perspectives

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Abstract

Adolescence is a crucial period for the development of (mal)adaptive personality. In this regard, the Alternative Model for Personality Disorders in DSM-5 and the novel ICD-11 suggest effective approaches to personality pathology stressing self and interpersonal functioning and the role of maladaptive traits. These approaches are in line with the psychodynamic focus on personality functioning and its dimensions.

Our contribution presents data on the Adolescent Personality Structure Questionnaire (APS-Q), a self-report measure to capture core aspects of personality functioning in adolescence. On two large samples of adolescents (total $N=1,664$), we investigated the psychometric properties of the APS-Q. We explored its factor structure and construct and incremental validity in the first sample, testing specific associations with existing measures of severity of personality pathology (SIPP-118), maladaptive personality traits (PID-5), and psychological distress. In the second sample, we confirmed its factor structure, assessing gender and age invariance. In particular, data highlighted significant associations between the APS-Q sense of self dimension and PID-5 internalizing traits (Negative Affectivity and Detachment) and Disinhibition and Psychoticism. Also, we found significant associations between Aggression and externalizing traits (Antagonism and Disinhibition) and between the quality of relationships (with friends and family) and Detachment.

Overall, our findings focus on developmentally vital dimensions such as self-functioning (encompassing mental and bodily changes and considering the dimension of sexuality), interpersonal functioning (discriminating the dimensions of family and peers), and emotion regulation, in line with the AMPD approach. Clinical implications and future research trajectories are discussed.

Level of functioning and “style” in personality: an empirical investigation of the AMPD

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Abstract

To the aim of systematizing empirical evidence and clinical contributions on the assessment of personality (Clark, 2007; Westen & Shedler, 1999; Widiger & Trull, 2007) as well as overcoming the limits of traditional categorical approaches, the Alternative Model for Personality Disorders (AMPD: APA, 2013) has been proposed in the current edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders (DSM-5). The availability of an up-to-date, dimensional, assessment model also enables to more efficiently address currently unanswered questions such as the trajectory of personality across the lifespan (Costa et al., 2019). Although the AMPD is receiving increasing empirical support, further research is needed on its psychometric properties and utility, and examinations of assessment instruments for AMPD Criterion A (level of personality organization) and B (pathological traits) are warranted (Ro & Clark, 2013; Zimmermann et al., 2015).

The present study relied on a sample of 412 nonclinical adults to examine, through self-report methods such as the LPFS-BF 2.0 (Weekers et al., 2019) and the PID5BF+M (Bach et al., 2020), the relationships between the AMPD domains and several psychological constructs (e.g., object representations), psychiatric symptoms, and well-being. Temporal stability of both AMPD criteria and their relationship with age has been tested as well.

Data analyses have been conducted through Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression.

Results show distinct patterns of association between level of personality functioning, dysfunctional traits and external constructs, together with optimal temporal stability for both AMPD criteria. Moreover, the Self domain of criterion A tended to reflect more adaptive levels with increasing age ($b = -.064, p < .001$) and diversified trajectories emerged for maladaptive traits.

An object-relations approach to personality pathology assessment

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Abstract

Objectives: The object-relations model of personality structure pathology identifies three levels of personality organization along a continuum of severity, from the lower psychotic level, through the borderline level, to the higher neurotic level. This model is particularly in keeping with the idea of impairment in personality functioning proposed by the DSM-5 AMPD. The Structured Interview of Personality Organization-Revised (STIPO-R) is a semi-structured interview that guides the clinical evaluation of personality disorders, providing a diagnosis that informs treatment planning and predicts

clinical course. STIPO assessment has a particular focus on the domains of self and interpersonal functioning, making it particularly in keeping with the idea of impairment in personality functioning proposed by the DSM-5 AMPD. In this talk we will introduce structural diagnosis through the Structured Interview of Personality Organization and its relations to DSM5 Alternative Model for Personality Disorders (AMPD). Methods: We reviewed relevant research related to the STIPO and to the object-relations model of personality pathology. Results: Our results highlight the clinical usefulness of an object-relations approach to personality pathology assessment. Research also showed the application of STIPO assessment to the DSM5 Level of Personality Functioning Scale (LPFS). Conclusions: The STIPO and its Revised form are thus proposed as candidate measures for personality functioning in line with DSM5 AMPD.

Personality traits and defensive styles during the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic, as a cumulative traumatic experience, has had a notable effect on the lives of people around the world and considerably impacted their overall psychological health. This study investigated the behavioral styles with which Italians have faced lockdown periods and all restrictive measures developed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, focusing on the role of personality and defensive strategies.

An online survey, including several measures such as the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 Brief Form and the Defense Mechanism Rating Scales-Short Form-30, was developed to collect demographic data and information related to the COVID-19 experience, personality traits, defenses, and symptom patterns of 380 individuals (70% women, 30% men; $M_{age} = 34.25$, $SD = 11.95$).

Four distinct behavioral patterns were identified: adaptive introvert, adaptive extrovert, maladaptive introvert, and maladaptive extrovert styles. The maladaptive introvert style significantly correlated with negative affectivity and detachment, whereas maladaptive extrovert style correlated with antagonism, disinhibition and psychoticism. Moreover, individuals with maladaptive introvert style typically used immature defenses such as autistic fantasy, rationalization, and dissociation, whereas individuals with maladaptive extrovert style used defenses of disavowal and image distortion. The other two defensive styles did not show significant correlations with distinct personality traits but were related to obsessional and mature defenses.

The study highlights the crucial role of individual personality characteristics and defensive strategies in adjusting to unexpected and traumatic events and changing circumstances, along with coping effectively when confronted with uncertain and stressful situations. These results emphasize the need to develop effective psychological intervention programs based on individual' psychological functioning in order to promote their mental health and well-being.

PEOPLE'S RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC: SYMBOLIC RESOURCES, SENSEMAKING PROCESSES AND SPECIFIC CHALLENGES IN DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic was a sudden, disruptive event which has strained the health system response capacity, distressed local populations and had huge repercussions on both the social and economic plane, due to the sudden breakdown of habits, routine, and economic activities (Bride et al., 2020). Previous research has suggested the role of psychosocial conditions and meaning-making processes both in moderating the psychological impact of the pandemic on well-being (Bambra et al., 2020; Marinaci et al., 2020) and in influencing people's attitude to trusting and complying with government-recommended preventive measures, two particularly relevant issues in managing the pandemic in the medium term (Dias Neto et al., 2021).

The symposium provides insight into variations in the experience and responses to the crisis that Italian citizens mobilised in different stages of the pandemic, taking into account the specific challenges and psychosocial factors related to the micro and macro social sphere.

A.M. Petito and colleagues prompt us to reflect on the psychological impact of the emergency on health workers with a focus on the gender differences related to the specific challenges faced by the women.

R. De Luca Picione and colleagues focus on the sensemaking processes activated in the effort to deal with the liminal condition related to the national lockdown in the first stage of the crisis and identify different patterns of psycho-social perception of the risk and affective evaluation.

A. Gennaro and colleagues examine the impact of cultural models on people's evaluation of the crisis management and adherence to health measures, based on data collected during the second wave of the COVID emergency.

Finally, T. Marinaci and C. Venuleo highlight (dis)similarities in the ways people make sense of the crisis between the first wave of the crisis and the beginning of the second wave, based on the longitudinal analysis of collected diaries on "my life in the last weeks".

On the whole, the research contributions into the interpretative categories which underpinned people's responses to the pandemic allow us to comprehend what favoured or hindered an adaptive response to the crisis, and to design a more effective future health emergency plan.

The intra/inter-subjective effort of sensemaking in dealing with the liminality of pandemic crisis in its early phase

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Abstract

In March 2020, the sudden irruption of the COVID-19 health emergency generated a condition of intra-inter-subjective liminality characterized by intense feelings: fear, anguish, disorientation, uncertainty about the future, the feeling of powerless in the face of unknown dangers, the feeling of helpless, the inability to give meaning to what was happening. An intense work of sensemaking processes was triggered in an effort to cope with the crisis of meaning, uncertainty and the rupture of daily routines. This contribution is aimed at presenting and discussing the results of a research carried out during the 'first lockdown' in Italy (so called "Phase 1" - March / May 2020) through an *ad hoc* on line questionnaire aimed at exploring the perception of the pandemic crisis and the related processes of sensemaking of the Italian population (Number of participants = 2122). The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part includes items aimed at extensively exploring the experienced affects, the perception of risk, the adopted behaviors, the assessment of aspects related to the spread of the virus, and which social and belief systems (i.e., politics, religious faith, spiritual experience, trust in scientific knowledge and research) are more involved and invested in value. The second part refers to socio-demographic variables (age, gender, profession, education, geographical origin). Data analysis has been addressed to the detection of different patterns of psycho-social perception of the risk and affective evaluation in referring COVID-19 crisis. Patterns has been identified by means of a Cluster Analysis procedure (CA) by hierarchical classification method. Four clusters with specific psycho-social organizations emerged. Each cluster represents a semiotic configurations of affective dimensions (along a continuum of greater or lesser anxiety, worry, disorientation and indecision), variable trust in supra-individual systems (government, science, religion), different sense of one's own action (in individualistic, community or mass homogenization terms), and optimistic or pessimistic evaluation with respect to future scenarios. Implications from results are discussed in terms of intra-inter subjective dynamics.

The role of cultures in affecting individual's views about COVID 19 pandemic management and the adherence government contrast measure

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Abstract

Social and cultural aspect (e.g., political decision making and discourses in the public sphere; cultural models and people's mentalities) can play a crucial role in the ways people respond to the crisis. Framed with the Semiotic Cultural Psycho-social Theory (SCPT), the present work focused how individual's perception of government's measures aimed to manage the pandemic and individual's adherence to enacted measures change according to the different individual's cultural positioning. An online survey was disseminated from January to April 2021. Retrieved questionnaires (N=378) were analyzed through a multidimensional analysis procedure. A multiple correspondence analysis allowed to describe respondent's cultural views according to extracted factors. Individual's positioning in the factor's space were adopted as criterion to evaluate – through ANOVA and chi square tests- how cultural views affects respondent's evaluations about government's pandemic management, personal adherence to the defined measure, and affective state. Results offers insight about the role of deep-rooted cultural views in defining personal government's measures evaluation and adherence capacity. The research work suggests the importance to consider individual's cultural views for public health officials and policy makers in order to comprehend what favoured or hindered an adaptive response to the crisis, and design more effective strategies to imply people in successful measures designed to protect public health.

How Italian citizens made sense of the COVID-19 crisis between the first wave and the beginning of the second wave. A longitudinal study based on a collection of diaries

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the crucial role of people's compliance for the success of measures designed to protect public health. Within the frame of Semiotic Cultural Psycho-social Theory, we argue that people's capacity to represent the systemic dimension of the crisis and to frame it

in a medium-term temporal perspective is crucial to coping with the challenges imposed by it. This study aimed to gain insight into the ways Italian adults made sense of what was happening in the first wave of the pandemic and how the interpretation of the crisis varied until the beginning of the second wave.

Diaries were collected for six months, from 11 April to 3 November 2021. Participants were periodically asked to talk about their life ‘in the last weeks’. A total number of 606 diaries were collected. The Automated Method for Content Analysis (ACASM) procedure was applied to the texts to detect the factorial dimensions – interpreted as the markers of latent dimensions of meanings underpinning (dis)similarities in the respondents’ discourses. We examined via ANOVA the dissimilarities in the association between factorial dimensions and production time, considering three phases, defined on the basis of the temporal evolution of the pandemic in Italy and health measures established by the Government.

The two main factorial dimensions were interpreted. The first dimension represents the contrast through two different units of observation: personal daily life versus crisis scenario; the second dimension represents the contrast through two different ways of representing the challenges presented by the crisis: returning to normality versus making sense. The analysis of the diaries’ production time shows that significant transitions occurred over time in the two dimensions. Whereas the first stage was characterized by a focus on one’s own daily life and the attempt to make sense of the changes occurring, in the following phases the socio-economic impact of the crisis is brought to the fore. This increasing awareness does not boost the search for new ways of thinking and acting in collective life but fuels the expectation of returning as soon as possible to the “normality” of the pre-rupture scenario. The implications for post-crisis management will be discussed.

The psychological impact of the emergency on the front-line health workers: focus on the gender differences

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic represents a massive global emergency which can put a strain on our ability to cope with stressful and traumatic events. Healthcare professionals are exposed to various stressors which could affect their psychological well-being. The aim of this study is to evaluate the psychological impact

of COVID-19 on healthcare workers, identifying which of them are most vulnerable to adverse consequences.

During March 2020, 518 Italian healthcare workers were asked to complete an online survey. Psychosocial Index (PSI) was used to assess stress, well-being, distress, illness behaviour, and quality of life; the distress caused by traumatic events was evaluated with the Impact of Event Scale – Revised (IES-R) and resilience was measured with the Connor-Davidson resilience scale (CD RISC). Data were analysed using descriptive methods, Pearson correlation and ANOVA.

The prevalence of post-traumatic stress symptoms in our sample was 44.21%. The ANOVA revealed that female groups of nurses showed higher psychological distress ($p < 0.0001$), more abnormal illness behaviour ($p < 0.0001$) and more symptoms of post-traumatic stress ($p < 0.001$) compared to other groups. Furthermore, Pearson correlation showed that higher scores on CD-RISC were associated with lower levels of psychological distress ($p = 0.004$) and lower levels of symptoms of post-traumatic stress ($p = 0.005$) in female group.

Our results point out that depression and anxiety symptoms, stress reactions and health and bodily preoccupations are more frequent in female nurses. Moreover, higher levels of resilience seem to have a protective role for psychological wellness. These findings are useful for clinical practice. Providing personalized strength based psychological interventions during a threat to public health could be a valid strategy to reduce the risk of developing PTSD in the most exposed healthcare professionals, improving the effectiveness and clinical utility of the intervention.

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR WELL-BEING IN LGBTQI+ PEOPLE BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

LGBTQIA+ people are more likely to suffer from psychosocial distress than cisgender and straight people due to the effects of minority stress. Research in the last decades has increased more exploring risk and protective factors for well-being in LGBTQIA+ people. Vulnerable populations have been among the most affected by the psychosocial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; in fact, distal and proximal stressors can be amplified for LGBTQIA+ individuals in situations of isolation due to COVID-19 restrictions.

This symposium aims to deepen factors related to general well-being for LGBTQIA+ people and within the framework of COVID-19 Pandemic.

In a cross-cultural investigation, Scandurra and colleagues highlight how the impact of socio-psychological constructs on mental health in LGB people can significantly vary in different cultural settings, emphasizing the need for more in-depth cross-cultural studies on LGB themes. Giovanardi and colleagues report the validation of an Italian version of the Gender Diversity Questionnaire. The study illustrates how new concepts of gender affect various dimensions of young gender variant people's experience and how clinical services should acknowledge emerging self-definitions of gender identity in order to offer appropriate care to the community.

Mirabella and colleagues discuss COVID-19 effects on transgender and non-binary Italian population, reporting, in addition to negative outcomes in psychological well-being (depressive and anxious symptoms), also difficulties that transgender and non-binary people may face in accessing health facilities and living with their family during the lockdown.

Finally, Miscioscia and colleagues illustrate their study, which explores the psychosocial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictive measures on the well-being of LGBTQIA+ people in Italy,

suggesting a mediating role of family climate on the impact of the pandemic on depressive, anxiety, and stress symptoms.

A cross-cultural comparison between Italian and Taiwanese LGB+ people on minority stress, resilience, and health

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Abstract

Introduction: According to the minority stress perspective, stigma might affect lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB+) people's mental health both directly and indirectly (e.g., through internalized sexual stigma [ISS] or rumination), while resilience might reduce the effect of stigma on health. As cross-cultural studies in this field are scarce, the present study assessed the role of ISS and rumination as mediators between discrimination and health, and resilience as a moderator, exploring potential differences between Italian and Taiwanese LGB+ people.

Method: An online survey was administered to 508 LGB+ participants (270 Italian and 238 Taiwanese) aged from 18 to 70 years ($M = 37.93$, $SD = 13.53$). A moderated mediation model was tested through a series of path analyses stratified by group nationality.

Results: Italian participants reported higher discrimination ($t = 2.70$, $p < .001$) and resilience ($t = 3.82$, $p < .001$), but lower ISS ($t = 9.07$, $p < .001$), rumination ($t = 10.88$, $p < .001$), and health problems ($t = 3.86$, $p < .001$) compared to Taiwanese participants. The only common path between groups was the direct effect of discrimination on negative health outcomes ($b = -0.20$, $p < .001$ and $b = -0.24$, $p < .01$, respectively). The relationship between discrimination and health was mediated by rumination ($B = -.04$, $p = .027$), but not ISS ($p = .081$), and resilience moderated the relation between discrimination and ISS only in the Italian group ($B = .26$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of discrimination on health via ISS was significant only in Italian participants ($B = -.04$, $p = .038$).

Conclusions: The findings suggest that typical mediators and moderators used to evaluate the effects of minority stress on health are significant only for Italian participants, and this may be due to the differences

between cultures (e.g., individualistic vs. collectivist). Culturally sensitive research in the field of LGB+ health is needed.

Reflections on gender diversity in young people today: the Italian validation of the Gender Diversity Questionnaire (GDQ)

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Abstract

Introduction: In recent years, gender diverse young people have developed new ways of describing their gender and different shapes of gender identities have been portrayed in literature. However, although the awareness of new concepts of gender, little is known about these evolving concepts and how they can impact the clinical care of gender diverse young people presenting to specialized gender clinics. Aim of the present study was to validate the Italian version of the Gender Diversity Questionnaire developed by the GIDS of London, an instrument which investigates the range of different ways gender variant people identify in regard to their gender and describes how gender identity is expressed. *Methods:* The Gender Diversity Questionnaire (GDQ) explored the gender identity and gender expressions of people who access the Service for the Adjustment between Physical and Physic Identity (SAIFIP) of Rome. *Results:* A total of 116 responses of adolescents aged 12 to 18 were collected. Among the sample, the 29.3% of the total respondents were AMAB and 70.7% were AFAB. Categories of trans (66.4%), male (59.5%), female (26.7%) and agender (4.3%) emerged. The 80.2% of the sample identified as binary and the 19.8% identified as nonbinary. Differences among gender fluidity and self-defined identities emerged based on assigned gender and age. Body uneasiness, family, friends, social media and meeting trans* people were described as factors influencing one's gender expression. Harsh experiences related to gender expressions such as transphobic and appearance related bullying, were reported by the 55.2% of the sample. *Conclusions:* The findings provide a framework of how the gender diverse population referring to specialist gender services is changing, reflecting broader social and cultural shifts in thinking about gender. Specifically, the study highlights the need to acknowledge these new concepts in order to provide better support and care.

Psychological well-being of trans* people in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic: critical issues and personal experiences

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Abstract

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic represents a risk not only for physical health but also for the psychological well-being of the entire population. Specifically, it causes significant concerns among individuals who belong to minoritized communities, such as transgender/non-binary individuals. The study investigates how transgender/nonbinary people in Italy addressed the COVID-19 situation and identifies risk factors that, in this context, may have exerted a negative impact on their psychological well-being and physical health.

Methods: An ad hoc online questionnaire was developed to investigate the psychological status, access to medical health services, and factors that can be predictors of risk outcomes in transgender/nonbinary people during lockdown restrictions. The responses collected ($n = 256$) were analyzed through descriptive analysis, univariate analysis of variance, and *t*-test.

Results: Respondents confirmed facing several issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Depression, anxiety, irritability, worries toward the future (58.2%), lack of positive emotions (46.9%), and uncertainty about one's self (52.7%) emerged. Difficulties in undertaking hormone therapy and access to health facilities were reported. Moreover, living with family members during the lockdown restrictions represented a significant stressor for psychological well-being, whereas lack of support from LGBT+ communities was reported.

Conclusions: The findings provide a framework of the critical aspects that transgender/nonbinary individuals have faced during the COVID-19 outbreak. Specifically, the study evidences the high vulnerability of this population underlining the multiple (e.g psychological, social, physical) difficulties encountered.

Psychological sequelae in LGBTQIA+ Italian young adults during COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Introduction: Since the spread of Covid-19 pandemic worldwide, numerous researchers have shown their concern on the effects of restrictive measures on minority populations, such as the LGBTQIA+ community. In fact, besides the difficulties that global population has faced during the various pandemic waves, LGBTQIA + people have been more likely to experience adjunctive distress given by several factors, such as being isolated at home with an unsupportive family, feeling disconnected from the LGBTQIA + community or exacerbating by pre-existing distressed conditions as effects of minority stress. *Methods:* The present study is part of an international investigation that aims at investigating the extent to which the psychosocial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are associated with symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety in LGBTQIA+ young adults. Italian participants (18-35y; N=480) were recruited via an online survey in two waves: the first one lasted three months, started immediately after the first phase of lockdown on the 25th of April 2020 and ended on the 31st July 2020. The second wave started on the 1st of December 2020 and ended on the 1st of March 2021. *Results:* Hierarchical regression models revealed that age, working conditions, the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the individuals' daily routine and emotions, and a negative family climate were associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress, explaining the 29%, 27% and 28%, respectively, of the variance of the outcome variables. Moreover, family climate mediated the association between the individual pandemic impact and depression ($\beta=0.10$; $p<.001$), anxiety ($\beta=0.09$; $p<.001$) and stress ($\beta=0.08$; $p<.001$). *Conclusion:* Family climate emerges as an important aspect of vulnerability for adaptation to psychosocial and well-being issues during COVID-19.

HOW ARE THE YOUTH?" DATA AND CLINICAL REFLECTIONS ON ADOLESCENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL OUTCOMES ALONG ONE YEAR OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Proposer

*Cecilia Serena Pace*¹

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Discussant

*Alessandra Simonelli*²

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak and the “stay-at-home” measures have importantly impacted on societies worldwide, especially on youth (Caffo et al., 2020; Dumas et al., 2020). In Italy, schools and most of sports and indoor events’ places were physically closed, obliging most of students to move all these activities into digital modalities. Therefore, adolescents have been identified as a high-risk population being especially vulnerable to psychological consequences of the pandemic (Qi et al., 2020; Rosen et al., 2020). Indeed, reduction of social interactions, adaptation to new digital learning modalities and heightened exposure to pre-existing family risk factors, have been pointed out as specific stressors likely to undermine adolescents’ psychological well-being (Ragavan et al., 2020). However, several questions concerning specific psychological outcomes and underlying mechanisms -in terms of risk and protective factors (Wade et al., 2020)- need still to be answered. This panel aims to present some key research and theoretical contributions shedding light on these COVID-related themes. The first contribution from Sapienza University of Rome (Di Trani, Di Monte) critically analysed literature on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents, in the light of health promotion perspective. The second study from University of Genoa (Rogier et al.) investigated changes in symptoms and emotion regulation strategies occurred in 100 community adolescents through a longitudinal-brief research. The third study from University of Perugia (Delvecchio, Liang) involved 1053 parents of adolescents for assessing adolescents’ anxiety and depressive symptoms and the role of parental’s distress and expressive suppression through a longitudinal study. The fourth study from University Federico II of Naples (Boursier, Gioia) explored the complex relationship among COVID-19-related fears, perceived loneliness and relational closeness on feelings of depression of 544 adolescents.

Adolescents' emotional states and relational closeness to friends during the COVID-19 third wave

Valentina Boursier¹, Francesca Gioia¹

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced people to face distressing situations and experiences of social distancing, deeply impacting on daily habits, relationships, and feelings, especially among adolescents. Furthermore, the pandemic has generated intense COVID-19-related fears (C-RF) among many individuals, strictly related to negative emotional states, such as depression and loneliness. In this regard, the use of social media during the pandemic fulfilled the pivotal function of connection, supporting relational closeness (RC) to the others via online social interactions. Scientific findings widely report risks associated with Internet-related behaviors, however, the positive effects of social media use have been also demonstrated, as they may promote positive functioning, alleviate negative emotions and foster positive feelings, allowing young individuals to feel that they are not alone but part of a community. This study aimed at exploring the direct and indirect effects of C-RF on adolescents' feelings of depression, evaluating the mediating effect of perceived loneliness and the moderating effect of RC. We involved 544 adolescents (72% females; mean age=16,2±1.834) and we tested a moderated mediation model in which loneliness mediated the relationships between C-RF and depression, and RC moderated the relationship between loneliness and depression. In the model C-RF showed a significant direct and indirect effect, via loneliness, on depression ($R^2=.46$; $p<.001$), and RC significantly moderated the relationship between loneliness and depression. This study demonstrated how C-RF significantly lead to higher negative emotional state in our adolescents and loneliness mediated this relationship. Concurrently, the perceived closeness to own online friends buffered the relationship between adolescents' loneliness and depression. This study contributes to the ongoing scientific debate on risk and protective factors in facing COVID-19 in adolescence.

Parental stress due to COVID-19: a risk for adolescents' internalizing disorders

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Abstract

COVID-19 challenges imposed massive changes in adolescents' routines which had a crucial impact on their mental health. Terranova et al. (2009) suggested that adolescents face a greater risk during major events due to the possible interaction between normal adolescence-related distress and their more accurate perception of the seriousness of the situation. Zhou et al. (2020) showed a higher prevalence of adolescents' anxiety and depressive symptoms during the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, studies displayed positive associations between parental stress due to COVID-19 and internalizing symptoms in kids (Orgilés et al., 2020). This study is aimed: 1) to assess adolescents' anxiety and depressive symptoms across time; 2) to explore the role of parental's distress and expressive suppression strategy on adolescents' internalizing symptoms. This longitudinal study includes 1053 parents of adolescents ($M=14.13$, $Sd=2.25$, 49.1 % girls) who were asked to fill in online surveys (March-May 2020). Analysis of variance and regression models were run. Results showed that (1) parents reported that their adolescents' anxiety and depression symptoms were more severe at T2 than at T1. Although decreasing at T3, they were still higher than at T1. At T3, 31.9% and 17.7% of adolescents, respectively, presented anxiety and depressive symptoms at clinical level. (2) After controlling adolescents' age and symptoms at T2, parental's stress was associated positively with expressive suppression, and adolescents' anxiety and depression symptoms at T3. Expressive suppression was positively related to internalizing symptoms. In addition, expressive suppression mediated the association between parental's stress and adolescents' symptoms. To conclude, COVID-19 have caused adolescents' internalizing symptoms to be higher than usual, especially as the time of restriction increased. Family climate needs to be considered to prevent adolescents' maladjustment.

Supporting adolescents during COVID-19 pandemic: what literature highlight on psychological interventions.

Michela Di Trani¹, Cinzia Di Monte¹

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Abstract

Several studies showed that adolescents in all countries are seriously suffering from the consequences of the pandemic. COVID-19-related measures are having a profound effect on their well-being, and for some the impact will be lifelong.

The present contribution aims to critically analyze literature on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on adolescences, with specific attention on how psychology has intervened, and how it could take actions in future, in the light of health promotion prospective. Recent evidence showed high prevalence of anxiety

and depressive symptoms in adolescents, due to the pandemic itself, to social isolation and to parents' stress. Specific socio-demographic characteristics, such as female gender and living in low-income families, represent risk factors for developing psychiatric symptoms.

Psychological distress can be reduced by maintaining contact with peers through social networks. Regarding support interventions, international literature showed that online resources, such as information about mental health education, and medical and psychological video-counselling, can be useful to reduce the psychosocial effects of COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, helping parents in building positive relationship and in contrasting negative behaviors resulted an effective support strategy. In Italy, no specific national policies, providing guidelines for targeted psychological interventions in this population, have been made. COVID-19 pandemic could represent an opportunity to implement services in order to reduce psychological impact of health and social crisis, for general population and, in particular, for children and adolescents. Promoting skills that support the elaboration processes of the pandemic traumatic event (such as the ability in identifying and expressing one's emotions, social support, supportive relationships within the educational system, etc.) could be useful for preventing the consequences of the pandemic, in the short and long term.

Emotion regulation and symptoms' changes among Ligurian adolescents during pandemic outbreak: a brief-longitudinal study

Guyonne Rogier¹, Stefania Muzi¹, Lara Lia Meinero¹, Pace Cecilia Serena¹

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Abstract

Background: Several experts underlined the potential risk of the outbreak related measures for adolescents' mental health (Racine et al., 2020). However, longitudinal data investigating and explaining this issue is still lacking.

Methods: Between March and June 2021 (Time 1) -when "stay-at-home" measures were severe- and after four months (Time 2) -when they became softer- 100 community Ligurian adolescents ($M_{age}=14.94$; $SD=1.64$; 45% males) fulfilled self-report questionnaires for measuring their psychological symptoms (i.e., internalizing and externalizing symptoms, binge eating, social media disorder) and emotion regulation (i.e., expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal strategies, alexithymia, reflective functioning).

Results: ANOVA for repeated measures showed a decreased in symptoms levels except for binge eating that remains stable. Surprisingly, moderation analyses showed that individuals classified as alexithymic experienced a higher reduction of internalizing symptoms, that higher levels of both expressive

suppression and alexithymia were predictive of higher reduction of social media disorder, and that lower levels of reflective functioning predict the reduction of externalizing symptomatology.

Discussion: Results suggests that Ligurian adolescents' mental health generally benefits from the end of severe "stay-at-home" measures. In particular, adolescents with poor emotion regulation capacities experienced more benefits from a return to normality, underlying their vulnerability to external stressors. This stresses the interaction between emotion regulation capacities and contextual factors in the prediction of psychopathology.

THE ‘DETERMINANTS OF PARENTING’ IN THE TIME OF COVID-19**Proposer***Pietro De Carli*¹¹Dipartimento di Psicologia, Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca**Discussant***Riccardo Williams*²²Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, and Health Studies, Sapienza University of Rome**Abstract**

Belsky's (1984) model of the determinants of parenting presumes that parental functioning is multiply determined, that sources of contextual stress and support can directly affect parenting or indirectly affect parenting by first influencing individual psychological well-being. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic globally represented an acute threat to the well-being of parents and children due to challenges related to social disruption such as financial insecurity, caregiving burden, and confinement-related stress. The personal psychological resources of the parent are more effective in buffering or exposing the parent-child relation from stress, especially when other contextual sources of support are lacking due to public health measures, such as school suspension. The current symposium explores different determinants of parenting in time of COVID-19, considering crucial moments of parents' life (e.g., transition to motherhood, early childhood), different characteristics of the parents (e.g., mental health, family functioning) and different contexts (e.g., parent-child interactions). Specifically, the first study (De Carli) explores the hypothesis of an augmented prevalence of child maltreatment during the pandemic and the most powerful risk factors for harsh parenting in a cross cultural perspective. The second study (Sacchi) presents data from a large cohort of mothers in regard to pre and post-natal maternal mental health and the effects on child development at six months of age. The third study (Marzilli & Cimino) focuses on the mechanisms that sustain the association between the COVID-19 stress of the parents and children symptomatology, such as parents' couple adjustment and parenting stress. Finally, the fourth study (Erriu & Cerniglia) longitudinally observed the quality of the feeding mother child interactions pre and post pandemic in a large sample, exploring the pandemic effects on the quality of maternal behaviors and as well as on child symptomatology.

Harsh parenting during COVID-19: infodemiology and cross-cultural perspectives*Pietro De Carli*¹¹ Dipartimento di Psicologia dello Sviluppo e della Socializzazione, Università degli Studi di Padova**Abstract**

COVID-19 pandemic led to heightened psychological distress and, in turn, an augmented risk for less effective parenting practices and potentially even child abuse or neglect with negative impact upon children's wellbeing. The aims of the current study are twofold.

First, we explored the prevalence of internet searches indicative of abusive parental behaviors before and after the pandemic declaration, as indirect test of the hypothesized augmented risk for child abuse and neglect. Using Google Trends Analysis, we inferred the search trends from 28/12/2018 to 28/12/2020 for maltreatment-related queries derived from the Conflict Tactics Scale. The findings indicate a strong increase in internet searches relating to occurrence, causes or consequences of harsh parenting since the lockdown measure were imposed worldwide.

Second, we studied the risk and protective factors associated with impaired parenting during the COVID-19 lockdown in three different countries, China, Italy and the Netherlands. The sample consisted of 900 Dutch, 641 Italian, and 922 Chinese mothers (age $M=36.74$, $SD=5.58$) who completed an online questionnaire during the lockdown. Results showed that although marital conflict and psychopathology were shared risk factors predicting maternal harsh parenting in each of the three countries, a unique risk factor model was found for each country. In The Netherlands and China, but not in Italy, work-related stressors were considered risk factors. In China, support from father and grandparents for mothers with a young child were protective factors. Conclusions. Our results show that it is likely to be observed an increased risk for child maltreatment worldwide. However, the constellation of factors predicting maternal harshness during COVID-19 is not identical across countries, possibly due to cultural differences in family structures. In general, our findings show that shared childrearing can buffer against risks for harsh parenting during COVID-19.

The peak and the slope: prenatal maternal mental health and infant development across a pandemic year*Chiara Sacchi*¹¹ Dipartimento di Psicologia dello Sviluppo e della Socializzazione, Università degli Studi di Padova

Abstract

Pregnant women are among the groups most vulnerable to the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, with potential long term effects on women mental health and child development. The aims of the present longitudinal study are (1) to appraise the prevalence of self-reported mental health symptomatology in a sample of Italian women exposed to COVID-19 stress during pregnancy and six months postpartum and (2) to explore the association between prenatal maternal mental health symptomatology and child development at six months.

A web-based survey was conducted from April 8th to May 4th, 2020 involving 2445 pregnant women and a subsequent follow up produced 830 valid responses at 6 months postpartum. Maternal self-reported mental-health symptomatology measures were: Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale for depression; State and Trait Anxiety Inventory-State for anxiety and the PTSD checklist for DSM-5 for PTSD risk. Child temperament was reported by the mothers, via the Infant Behavior Questionnaire, Very Short Form.

During pregnancy, the prevalence of depression was 21.0%, while anxiety was reported by 50.7% of women and PTSD risk by 17.5 to 20.3%. At six months postpartum, depression was present in the 30.0% of the sample, anxiety in the 55.7%, while PTSD ranged from 20.0 to 22.2 %. In regard to child temperament at six months, child negative affect is predicted by antenatal anxiety depression and PTSD, with effects sizes ranging from small to small-intermediate. Effortful control is negatively associated with antenatal anxiety and depression, no effects on surgency were found.

The study provides methodologically sound evidences of the vulnerability to the pandemic stress of the Italian women in the perinatal period and suggests a long-term association of prenatal stress exposure with child development. COVID-19 agenda should take into consideration maternal mental health during the perinatal period and invest into the prevention of the likely consequences onto child development.

The quality of mother-child feeding interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic: a longitudinal study

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Abstract

Individuals' lives have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in work, education, and interpersonal interactions. Despite the fact that several studies have looked into the impact of the pandemic on caregiving behaviors, none have focused on the impact of the sanitary emergency on the quality of mother-child exchanges during feeding. This was the goal of the current study, which included 479

mothers and children from the general population. The SVIA was used to assess the quality of the dyadic feeding interactions, while the SCL-90/R and the BSFC were used to assess the psychopathological risk and caregiving distress of the mothers. The CBCL 1,5-5 was used to assess how mothers felt about their children's emotional and behavioral functioning. All measurements were taken when the children were 18 months old (T1) and 36 months old (T2) (respectively pre-pandemic and during the pandemic periods). The quality of the feeding interactions deteriorated from T1 to T2, according to our findings. Mothers' psychopathological risk, maternal depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive-compulsion scores, as well as caregiving distress, all increased significantly. During the pandemic, children's emotional/behavioral functioning deteriorated, with significantly higher Internalizing and Externalizing scores. The quality of mother-child feeding interactions during the pandemic is the subject of this study, which is the first of its kind. This exploratory study adds to our understanding of Covid-19 potential negative effects on family life and caregiving.

Parental peritraumatic distress in relation to COVID-19 and children's emotional-behavioral symptoms: the mediation role of couple adjustment and parenting stress

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¹Sapienza, Università di Roma, Dipartimento di Psicologia Dinamica, Clinica e Salute

²Università Telematica Internazionale Uninettuno, Facoltà di Psicologia

Abstract

The COVID-19 and restrictions associated has caused a great impact on global economy and mental health, with short- and long-term effects on parents and children well-being. International research has reported that parental psychopathological impact of COVID-19 may lead to higher levels of children's emotional-behavioral symptoms. An increase of parenting stress and a worse quality of couple adjustment has also been reported. However, no study has yet explored the possible complex interplay between parental peritraumatic impact of COVID-19, marital adjustment, parenting stress, and children emotional-behavioral problems. During the second wave of COVID-19, via an online survey, we recruited N=126 parents (56.6% mothers) with school-aged children aged 5-11 years (M=7.68; SD=2.14). We assessed parental COVID-19 peritraumatic distress, parenting stress, dyadic adjustment, and children's emotional-behavioral functioning through self-report and report-form instruments. Results showed significant associations between parental peritraumatic distress both with parenting stress, dyadic adjustment, and children's emotional and conduct problems. Moreover, dyadic adjustment and parenting stress serial mediated the relationship between parental peritraumatic distress and

children's emotional and conduct problems. These findings had important clinical implication on the planning of prevention programs aimed at promoting children's well-being in the family.

UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICES AIMED AT STUDENTS DURING THE COVID PERIOD: PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND ONLINE INTERVENTION

Proposer

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Discussant

*Cristina Verrocchio*²

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Abstract

The pandemic Covid-19 has increased online psychological counselling intervention, including those aimed at university students. Online counseling aimed at university students has been tested in recent years with mixed results regarding to its effectiveness compared to face-to-face counseling interventions (Zeren et al., 2019; Chan, 2020).

The symposium aims to consider the use of online counseling during the pandemic period. First, the students' profile who turned to university counseling services in that period is considered, taking into consideration psychological distress, life satisfaction, attachment styles and personality traits.

Then, the effectiveness of these interventions is considered with respect to psychological distress, life satisfaction and the difficulties that motivated the requests.

The lecture by Cerutti et al., comparing a group of students who required counseling before the pandemic and a group of students who required it during the pandemic period, shows that Pandemic group reported higher scores in Global Severity Index and in Obsessive-Compulsive, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Depression, Anxiety, Hostility and Psychoticism domains (SCL-90-R) than Pre-pandemic group.

The lecture by Riva Crugnola et al., comparing a group of students who carried out an online psychodynamic counseling with a group of students who used a face-to-face psychodynamic counselling, highlights how counseling online intervention is effective in reducing anxiety and feelings of relational inadequacy.

The lecture by Guidetti et al., shows that short-term psychological counselling has proved effective in the covid period for all the difficulties encountered so far by users, among them anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, stress management, self-esteem, and in the last period "fears and anxieties of returning to a normal life".

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on university students seeking help at Sapienza psychological counselling service

Rita Cerutti¹, Valentina Spensieri¹, Giuseppe Stefano Biuso¹, Alessia Renzi¹, Renata Tambelli¹

¹ Dipartimento di Psicologia Dinamica, Clinica e Salute, “Sapienza” Università di Roma, Roma

Abstract

During last decades there has been a growing interest in research on university students seeking psychological help. The COVID-19 pandemic has added further stressors for young adults so leading to an increased risk for mental health disorders in this population. The present study aimed to investigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on university students' psychological health. More specifically we compared maladaptive personality traits, psychopathological symptoms and psychological distress of two samples of university students who contacted “Sapienza Psychological Counselling Centre” before and during COVID-19 pandemic (Pre-pandemic and Pandemic group respectively). A total of 200 university students (66% females; aged 18 to 30 years) have compiled the Personality Inventory-Brief Form (PID-5-BF), the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R) and the Outcome Questionnaire-45(OQ-45) before starting the clinical sessions. Results showed that Pandemic group reported higher scores in Global Severity Index (SCL 90-R) than Pre-pandemic group ($F=8.01$; $p<.01$). Furthermore, the Pandemic group showed higher scores in Obsessive-Compulsive, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Depression, Anxiety, Hostility and Psychoticism domains (SCL-90-R) than Pre-pandemic group. No differences between groups emerged as regards personality traits. These results pointed out that COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted on students' psychological health, therefore it appeared important to monitor the mental health status of university students. Present findings may be used to plan psychological interventions aimed to promote the mental health in university contexts to prevent long-term psychopathological disorders influencing students' academic and global functioning. In this direction during the pandemic a further psychological counselling service has started to be offered to support also the mental health of university workers.

Effectiveness of an online psychodynamic counselling intervention aimed at university students

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¹ Dipartimento di Psicologia, Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca

Abstract

Introduction: The pandemic COVID-19 has increased online counselling interventions, including those aimed at university students. The effectiveness of these interventions compared with the face-to-face counseling interventions are mixed (Chan, 2020; Zeren et al., 2020).

Method: 172 students who requested psychodynamic counseling before Covid-19 have been compared with 63 students who requested online psychodynamic counseling during the pandemic. Psychological distress, attachment style, and life satisfaction were assessed before the intervention. In addition, the effectiveness of the online counseling intervention during the pandemic has been evaluated (N = 23) and compared to the effectiveness of the face-to-face intervention.

Results: Psychological distress is elevated in both groups (40-50% falls in the clinical and subclinical range) with no differences in the General Severity Index of the SCL-90 R. Avoidant attachment is more frequent in the counseling group during Covid-19 than in the counseling group before Covid-19, in which anxious attachment is more frequent. There are no significant differences for secure/insecure attachment, adverse childhood experiences and life satisfaction. The face-to-face counseling intervention is effective in reducing psychological distress in all subscales and in the total scale of the SCL-90 R and in increasing the level of life satisfaction. The online counseling intervention is effective - at a significant trend level - in reducing the scores of the interpersonal sensitivity and anxiety subscales and in the total scale of the SCL-90 R.

Conclusions: Students seeking counseling, both before and during the pandemic, show similar levels of psychological distress. The online psychodynamic counseling intervention is particularly effective in reducing anxiety and feelings of relational inadequacy, while the face-to-face psychodynamic counselling intervention is effective with respect to a wider spectrum of discomfort.

The effectiveness of university psychological support services for student well-being: a comparison before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

In 2019, a collaboration was launched between the School of Specialization in Health Psychology and the University of Turin with the aim of promoting a Counselling Corner (CC), run by trainees and lecturers from the School itself. The same CC opened one year before for students of Turin Polytechnic

and it has recently (May 2021) been extended also to the Conservatory and Art Academy of Turin. The interviews were conducted in-person before the COVID emergency and then online to the present.

Since March 2020, 3651 persons requested a psychological counselling. Psychological counselling is intended to meet a wide demand for support and listening to a wide and complex target group, such as university students, but not only, thus encouraging them to ask for support even on non-academic related issues.

Comparing the consultation requests from the pre-covid period to date, requests "for stress related to the academic pathway", "anxiety", "relationship difficulties", "depression", "stress management", "self-esteem and identity issues" and "panic attacks" increased. On the other hand, topics such as 'difficulties related to academic adaptation' and 'eating disorders' decreased. In the majority of cases the students, at the end of the psychological counselling, declare that "their health has improved a lot at the end of the course", that "they would recommend a counselling session to other students" and that "they learned new ways to deal with problems in general" and to "reflect on interpersonal relationships".

Short-term psychological counselling has proved effective in both the pre-covid and covid periods for all the difficulties encountered so far by users. In the last few months, probably also due to the loosening of the lock down restrictions for the pandemic, the requests from a good number of users are focusing on the "fears and anxieties of returning to a normal life" with the resumption of contacts with classmates as well as returning to classes.

UNDERSTANDING THE BENEFITS OF SLEEP IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

Proposer

*Christian Franceschini*¹

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Discussant

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²Department of Psychology, Catholic University of Milan (IT)

³Istituto Auxologico Italiano IRCCS, Clinical Psychology Lab and Service, Milan (IT)

Abstract

Adequate sleep is essential for good health, physical functioning, cognitive performance, and self-regulatory processes. In contrast, poor sleep affects multiple aspects of an individual's life, including daytime activity, social interactions, mood, and quality of life. A complex, likely bidirectional, relationship is documented between sleep problems and mental health problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, traumatic stress disorders). Potential sleep disorders can also interfere with current mental health therapies, and treatment can improve a patient's quality of life and adherence to therapy, as well as the severity of their psychological symptoms.

Clinical and research experts widely agree that sleep assessment cannot be limited to a recollection of information about the patient's sleep habits but should rather integrate different aspects of the patient's specific situation and general health.

Main purpose of this Open Discussion is to present what researchers learned about research in sleep psychology and sleep disorders to promote an educational and awareness training, particularly intended for psychologists and their daily clinical practice. We secondarily aim to advance the discussion about to the necessity of including such training skills when educating every healthcare professional.

Given the need to understand normal sleep and sleep disorders within general clinical psychology practice, in the present symposium Franceschini will evaluate the current training provided to graduate students in approved clinical psychology programs. In the second presentation, Plazzi will examine the recommendations regarding the sleep duration that promotes optimal health during the lifespan and the major sleep disorders. Ballesio will present the tools necessary for a clinical record of sleep disorder assessment. Finally, Palagini will examine how insomnia not only impair resilience but also the regulatory processes related to stress that contribute to psychopathology throughout life.

Which kind of training in sleep disorders have the Italian clinical psychological degree?

*Christian Franceschini*¹

¹Department of Medicine and Surgery, University of Parma, Parma, Italy

Abstract

Knowledge about sleep and sleep disorders is still poorly enhanced among psychologists. There is a significant disparity in education and training for the diagnosis and treatment of waking disorders, including physical and mental health disorders. Several are the reasons to train clinical psychologists in sleep and sleep disorders. First of all, the high prevalence of sleep disturbances problems in adults and children. A complex bidirectional relationship exists between sleep problems and mental health problems (documented especially during this pandemic), including depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress.

Given the need to understand normal sleep and sleep disorders within general clinical psychology practice, the purpose of this Open Discussion is to evaluate the current training provided to graduate students in approved clinical psychology program.

I would therefore like to bring to audience's attention the data relating to a survey of study programs and specialists in sleep in the best three-year and master's degree courses of state and non-state universities according to Censis Institute.

This information will help us understand what kind of sleep disorder training is available as part of clinical psychology training programs, as well as what resources, educational or personnel, could be invested to integrate a sleep curriculum into their programs.

Sleep patterns and sleep disorders throughout individuals' life span

*Giuseppe Plazzi*¹

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Abstract

Sleep is a homeostatic need essential to maintain a healthy organism: physical and mental well-being are in fact strongly affected by it.

Quantitative and distributional changes in rapid eye movement (REM) and non-REM (NREM) sleep are associated with physical, behavioral, metabolic, and cognitive impairment, all factors linked to increased risk of developing chronic diseases. A joint consensus statement of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and Sleep Research Society recommends at least seven hours of sleep for adults each night.

Quality is also important: frequently waking during the night, not feeling rested after a full night of sleep or episodes of snoring or gasping for air may indicate a serious sleep disorder.

It is well known that in humans, sleep goes through an ontogenetic process of alterations that starts in the newborn and lasts for the entire lifespan. With increasing age, the sleep architecture changes in sleep time, proportions of each sleep stage and occurrence of sleep associated events. In general, increase in sleep latency, stages N1 and N2 percentage and wake after sleep onset (WASO), as well as a decrease in total sleep time (TST), sleep efficiency, slow wave sleep and REM sleep have been associated with aging. The purpose of this presentation is to show sleep patterns and biochemical profile throughout individuals' life span and to offer an overview of the most common and interesting sleep disorders.

The assessment of sleep in mental disorders

Andrea Ballesio¹, Andrea Zagaria¹

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Abstract

One aim of clinical and health psychology is to assess the psychological and physiological correlates of mental disorders. Sleep disturbances are highly prevalent among individuals with mental disorders. The assessment of subjective and objective sleep variables is therefore utmost important in clinical settings, and the inclusion of sleep disorders measures in patients' clinical records is encouraged. Several tools have been developed and validated in empirical research to reach this aim. This contribute will provide a description of the state-of-the-art on sleep variables measurement in individuals with clinical conditions. The gold standard tool to assess objective sleep parameters is polysomnography, that is a composite measure including electroencephalogram, electromyogram, and electrooculogram, and is able to detect different sleep stages. Actigraphy provides a valid, reliable and ecological assessment of physiologically measured sleep and wake duration. Clinical interviews and sleep diaries are recommended in clinical guidelines for the diagnostic assessment of sleep disorders. Self-reported questionnaires are frequently adopted to screen for the presence of sleep disturbances such as chronic insomnia and circadian rhythm disorders. Following the most influential behavioural and cognitive models of the pathophysiology of insomnia, we will introduce self-report measures assessing classical perpetuating factors of sleep disturbances such as dysfunctional beliefs and attitudes about sleep, sleep-related worry and rumination, pre-sleep cognitive intrusions, pre-sleep cognitive and somatic arousal, meta-cognitive beliefs about sleep, and adherence to sleep hygiene practices.

Sleep disturbances and the stress vulnerability-resilience dimension*Laura Palagini*¹¹ Psychiatric Clinic, Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Pisa, Italy.**Abstract**

The experience of stressful life events is a common occurrence and includes traumatic experiences stressors in the aftermath of trauma and personal and network events. A wealth of literature demonstrates a relationship between these events and psychopathology. However, many individuals cope well, and are generally termed “resilient.” Because Sleep disturbances may cause an allostatic overload and may impair the stress system, we aimed to review the literature about insomnia, the stress vulnerability-resilience framework and psychopathology in particular relation to emotion regulation. Insomnia as a reflection but also a cause of allostatic over-load may impair the of stress-comprised regulatory processes contributing to psychopathology thorough emotion dysregulation. Sleep disturbances may impair resilience and the ability to cope and emotion regulation contributing to psychopathology. Addressing sleep disturbances, in particular insomnia, may contribute to reduce the stress allostatic over-load and support resilience, regulate emotion reducing the risk to develop psychopathology.

FROM A SYMPTOM-CENTERED TO A PERSON-BASED APPROACH IN TREATING PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS IN ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF EMERGING PERSONALITY STYLES AND SYNDROMES

Proposer

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Discussant

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Abstract

A growing body of evidence suggests that emerging personality syndromes in adolescence and young adulthood are both highly prevalent and persistent. These dysfunctional and maladaptive personality patterns typically co-occur with several psychiatric disorders and various forms of impairment, predicting a range of pathological outcomes. Research supports the need to investigate personality characteristics in young people, considering the meaningful effect of individual psychological features on treatment compliance and psychotherapy success. A careful understanding of young people’s personality patterns (i.e., enduring ways of thought, feeling, motivation, and behavior) can clarify the meaning and function of various symptom patterns, psychopathological conditions, and adjustment difficulties, as well as provide a road map for individualized interventions.

This panel consists of four studies that shed light on some of the critical issues in the field.

The first contribution by Rossi, Meliante, Oasi, Percudani, Barbera and Malvini examines the role of personality traits in individuals at high clinical risk of first-episode psychosis, suggesting its potential influence on transition to psychotic disorder.

The second contribution by Williams, Frattini and Moselli focuses on the impact of emerging personality patterns on suicide risk in adolescence, and explores the role of personality in distinguishing distinct motivations that may lead from the ideational phase to the suicidal act.

The third contribution of Tanzilli, Fiorentino and Gualco identifies distinct personality profiles in adolescents with depressive disorders, providing a nuanced view of therapists’ emotional reactions evoked by these patients in psychotherapy.

The fourth contribution of Parolin, Ultini and Cristofalo describes specific personality subtypes in young adults with substance use disorders, extending knowledge on therapeutic alliance in their treatment. The clinical implications will be discussed.

Identifying the psychosis: relationships between pid-5 personality traits and mental states in Uhr population

*Chiara Rossi*¹, *Maria Meliante*², *Osmano Oasi*¹, *Mauro Pecudani*², *Simona Barbera*², *Lara Malvini*²

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Abstract

Introduction: Early intervention in mental health, initially born to respond quickly to the care needs of the first psychotic episode, has expanded by developing criteria and assessment tools screening for the identification of subjects at (ultra) high risk of psychosis. In particular, some recent studies have investigated the relationship between personality features (traits) and psychosis onset to prevent or intervene early. On these bases, a retrospective and cross-sectional study was conducted with the main aim to explore how the PID5 domains and facets related to the AMPD illustrated in DSM5, section III can discriminate among patients who ask help to Mental Health Service. *Method:* A total of 60 young adults were selected from new patients at their first access in 2019 near the Community Mental Health Service of Niguarda Hospital, Milan (Italy). Participants completed an assessment that included the Social and Occupational Functioning Assessment Scale (SOFAS), the Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF), the 16-item Version of the Prodromal Questionnaire (PQ-16), the Personality Inventory for DSM5 (PID-5), and a clinical session. Statistical analysis was performed by SPSS 25.0. *Results:* Findings showed a negative significant correlation between the detachment domain and the GAF scores. Other correlational analyses highlighted that all PID-5 domains, except for the antagonism, had positive correlations with high scores in the PQ-16. Finally, the multivariate analysis of variance showed that patients diagnosed as psychotic versus without a psychotic disorder significantly differed on detachment, antagonism, and psychoticism PID-5 domains. *Conclusion:* The results underlined the involvement and the influence of some personality traits in psychopathological development. Further researches are needed to improve the possibility of predicting the emergence and progression of a number of mental disorders, as well as providing new ways of intervention.

Personality and therapist-patient relationship in young adults with severe drug addiction. A preliminary study on personality subtypes and therapeutic alliance.

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² Comunità Terapeutica Villa Renata di Venezia

Abstract

Introduction: It is clinically and empirically well-acknowledged that personality disorders often co-occur with drug-addiction and working alliance is often difficult to establish, increasing the risk of unfavorable outcome of treatment, which presents substantial challenges especially in young age. Nevertheless, to date, research on these topics related to young adults in residential treatment for substance use is limited. The present study aims to extend knowledge on personality subtypes and therapeutic alliance in this specific and severe clinical group.

Method: 174 young adults (aged 18-30) admitted voluntarily to a residential treatment (Therapeutic Community) for severe substance use disorders were assessed applying the Shedler-Westen Assessment Procedure–200 (SWAP-200). The working Alliance Inventory – Therapist form (WAI-T) was completed by individual psychotherapists after 6 weeks of program; data were available for 52 participants. Q-factor analysis, validation analysis and correlations were performed.

Results: Q-factor analysis yielded 3 personality subtypes (labeled as: dysregulated-dependent; constricted-inhibited; hostile-psychopath). Validation analysis reported strong associations with DSM – PD-T personality disorders for each subtype and identified the predictor role of maltreatment/abuse experiences in developmental age and of drug misuse onset. Preliminary results on working alliance showed a significant negative correlation with the psychopath subtype and a tendency toward negative correlation with the dysregulated pattern.

Conclusion: All the three detected subtypes showed highly dysfunctional personality patterns with impaired functioning, posing significant challenges for treatment. The preliminary results on therapeutic alliance indicate poor levels of collaborative therapist-client relationship, even in the case of voluntary seek of treatment; further investigation is required.

Studying the role of motivation for suicide in adolescence: the impact of personality emerging patterns

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Abstract

Introduction: Personality pathology is a significant risk factor for suicide in adolescence, but only little evidence has shed light on the differential role of specific personality emerging patterns for this outcome. Current views posit that the role of each risk factor has to be understood within the ongoing suicidal process being sustained by specific motivations. In this study we propose that specific emerging patterns of personality pathology in adolescence shape specific motivations for suicide as classified according to the Motivational Interview for Suicide (MIS), an instrument of investigation of motivations for suicide. Two objectives are investigated: 1) to verify the differential impact of specific personality pathological traits as dimensionally assessed by the SCID II, predict suicidality in a sample of adolescence referred for suicidal risk as assessed by the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (CSSRS); 2) to verify the association between specific pathological personality traits and the categories of motivations as assessed by the MIS.

Methods: A sample of 100 adolescents referred for suicidal risk have been administered at the intake the SCID II, CSSRS, MIS. All group of adolescents were controlled for the emergence for suicidal conducts after six months. Regressions among intensity and severity of suicidal ideation, presence and number of attempted suicides, potential lethality of the attempts, SCID II number of criteria for each personality disorders, scores for each motivational areas were reckoned.

Results: Significant statistical and clinically relevant associations emerge between number of criteria for personality disorders and motivational areas for suicide. **CONCLUSION:** the importance to study personality pathology for suicidal risk is confirmed, identifying the peculiar impact of each personality emerging pattern can be related to the elaboration of specific motivation for suicide in the individual adolescence.

Personality styles, depressive disorders and therapist responses in adolescent psychotherapy: a PDM-2 empirically oriented and clinically meaningful investigation

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² Center for Individual and Couple Therapy, Genoa, Italy

Abstract

Introduction: The assessment of personality pathology and depressive disorders in adolescence is very challenging due to the high prevalence and comorbidity of these psychopathological conditions in young people. This study explored the relationship among personality patterns, depressive disorders, and therapists' responses in adolescent treatment according to the PDM-2 diagnostic framework.

Method: Fifty clinicians completed the Psychodiagnostic Chart-Adolescent, the Shedler-Westen Assessment Procedure-II for Adolescents and the Therapist Response Questionnaire for Adolescents to provide a comprehensive assessment of psychological functioning and countertransference responses of an adolescent patient in their care.

Results: Four emerging personality profiles related to depressive pathology in adolescence were identified: depressive/introjective, anxious–avoidant, emotionally dysregulated, and narcissistic. The latter two subtypes significantly correlated with a borderline personality organization, whereas the others showed a trend toward significance with a neurotic level of personality organization. Moreover, adolescents presenting with emotionally dysregulated and narcissistic personality patterns tended to evoke negative emotional reactions characterized by anger, irritation, worry, and sense of inadequacy. Patients with depressive/introjective pattern elicited less intense and negative countertransference reactions, whereas patients with anxious–avoidant pattern tended to evoke protective reactions in their clinicians.

Conclusions: The study extends knowledge on emerging personality patterns related to depressive disorders in adolescents, and provides a nuanced view of countertransference reactions evoked by these patients in psychotherapy. Therapists should use the information derived from the therapeutic relationship to generate clinically meaningful diagnosis and promote treatments tailored on adolescents' psychological functioning.

CARDIOLOGY AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY: UNCOVERING THE LINKS**Proposer***Federica Galli*¹¹ Dipartimento di Psicologia Dinamica, Clinica, e Salute- Sapienza Università di Roma**Discussant***Nelson Mauro Maldonato*²² Dipartimento di Neuroscienze e Scienze Riproduttive e Odontostomatologiche -Università di Napoli Federico II**Abstract**

The American Heart Association recently published a scientific statement to promote the role of clinical psychology in the field of cardiology. According to this statement cardiovascular disease (CVD) should not be addressed as an isolated entity, but rather as a part of an integrated system in which mind, heart, and body are interconnected. The connections of heart and mind are being progressively recognized by research, highlighting the essential role of clinical psychology in the field of cardiology. Both well-being and psychopathology appear to affect cardiovascular health and prognosis directly. The aim of the proposed symposium is giving a picture of current lines of research in psychocardiology, from the role of psychological mechanisms in the etiopathogenesis of CVD (the role of early traumas and autonomic function) to psychological interventions (on depression in patients with coronary syndrome or in cardiac surgery).

The link between pre-operative symptoms of anxiety and depression on length of hospital stay and long-term quality of life in patients undergoing cardiac surgery*Alessandra Gorini*¹, *Mattia Giuliani*²¹ Dipartimento di Oncologia ed Emato-Oncologia, Università degli Studi di Milano² I.R.C.C.S. Centro Cardiologico Monzino, Milano**Abstract**

There is a well-known, frequent association between anxiety and depression cardiovascular diseases. Nevertheless, few studies have investigated psychological effects of anxious and depressive symptoms on immediate and long-term cardiac surgery-related outcomes, such as length of hospital stay (LOS), and long-term health-related quality of life (HRQoL).

Starting from this observation, the aim of this study is twofold: (a) to investigate the role of preoperative symptoms of anxiety and depression in predicting LOS in a sample of surgical patients; and (b) to evaluate the impact of preoperative symptoms of anxiety and depression on the patients' HRQoL 3 months after surgery.

To reach these aims, 151 patients with a cardiac disease waiting for surgery were included in the study. The day before the operation, patients were asked to complete the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale to evaluate their experienced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to evaluate the impact of both clinical and psychological factors on LOS, whereas quantile regression was performed to assess their effect on the patients' HRQoL 3 months after surgery. The multiple regression showed that EuroSCORE, length of endotracheal intubation, and anxiety symptoms predict LOS. The multiple quantile regression analyses also underlined that both symptoms of anxiety and depression predict a negative HRQoL up to 3 months after surgery.

From these results we can conclude that preoperative symptoms of anxiety predict the patients' LOS, and both symptoms of anxiety and depression predict a scarce HRQoL 3 months after surgery. These data suggest the need for implementing presurgical in-hospital screening procedures for both symptoms of anxiety and depression. Moreover, focused psychological interventions should be implemented for reducing inpatients' hospital LOS and improving their future quality of life.

The sequential combination of cognitive-behavioral treatment and well-being therapy in depressed patients with acute coronary syndrome: findings from a randomized controlled trial, the treated-ACS study

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Abstract

Introduction: Randomized controlled trials (RCT) on psychological interventions have addressed depression and demoralization associated with Acute Coronary Syndrome (ACS). The present trial introduced psychological well-being, an increasingly recognized factor in cardiovascular health, as a therapeutic target. This study aimed to determine whether the sequential combination of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Well-Being Therapy (WBT), associated with lifestyle suggestions, may yield more beneficial outcomes than an active control group (Clinical Management, CM), and to identify subgroups of patients at greater risk for cardiac negative outcomes. *Methods:* This multicenter RCT compared CBT/WBT sequential combination versus CM, with up to 30-month follow-up. 100 consecutive depressed and/or demoralized patients (out of 740 initially screened by cardiologists after a

first episode of ACS) were randomized to either CBT/WBT (N= 50) or CM (N= 50). Main outcome measures included severity of depressive symptoms according to Clinical Interview for Depression (CID), changes in subclinical psychological distress, well-being and biomarkers, as well as negative cardiac events. *Results:* CBT/WBT was associated with a significant improvement in depressive symptoms compared to CM. In both groups, benefits persisted at follow-up, even though differences faded. Unlike CM, CBT/WBT sequential combination was significantly associated with decrease of guilt, pessimism, fatigue, early insomnia (CID). CBT/WBT was also related to significant improvement of biomarkers (platelet count, HDL, d-dimer), whereas the two groups showed similar frequencies of adverse cardiac events. *Conclusions:* Addressing psychological well-being in the psychotherapeutic approach to ACS patients with depressive symptoms was found to entail important clinical benefits. It is argued that lifestyle changes geared to cardiovascular health may be facilitated by a personalized approach that targets well-being.

Psychological traumas and cardiovascular disease: a controlled study.

Chiara Ciacchella¹, Teresa Gregorini², Gaia Romana Pellicano¹, Daniela Sambucini¹, Carlo Lai¹

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² UOC Cardiology, ASST SS. Paolo e Carlo, S. Paolo Hospital, Milan, Italy

Abstract

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are currently regarded as the leading cause of death in the world. Hence it is necessary to outline prevention strategies that take into account the risk factors involved in their development. Adverse childhood experiences are well-known to play an important role in increasing psychological and physical distress in adulthood, but currently there is little evidence about the impact these experiences would have in the development of CVDs.

The aim of the present study was to verify the association between traumatic experiences and the onset of the CVDs. It was hypothesized that patients with CVDs would report more childhood traumas and that this association would be stronger in women than men.

For the clinical group, 75 patients (20 women) with a first-time diagnosis of CVD carried out by the Cardiology Unit of the San Paolo hospital (Milan) were enrolled in the study. For the control group, 84 healthy participants (48 women) were randomly recruited from the general population. The Traumatic Experience Checklist was administered to assess the traumatic events.

The analyses of variance and the planned comparisons performed showed that the clinical group reported a significant higher number and impact of childhood trauma compared to the control group. Moreover,

the women of the clinical group showed more childhood traumatic experiences compared to the men of the same group and to the women of the control group.

These findings highlight the role of childhood traumatic experiences as risk factors for CVDs in adulthood, particularly in women. These results have important implications for clinical practice, underlining the need of adopting an integrated approach in patient care through intervention and prevention strategies that take into account the psychological risk factors.

Psychological milieu and autonomic function in Takotsubo Syndrome long after the acute episode: A controlled study.

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²IRCCS Fondazione Don C. Gnocchi, Milano, Firenze

Abstract

Background: The role of psychological factors in determining the acute autonomic dysfunction that characterizes the acute phase of Takotsubo Syndrome (TS) has been hypothesized, but few data have been provided regarding the relationship between psychological and autonomic patterns long after the acute event.

Objective: The aim of the present study was to evaluate psychological and autonomic status in patients with a past episode of Takotsubo Syndrome.

Methods: The experimental group was composed of 10 patients suffering from TS (12-24 months before), and 9 matched subjects were used as control sample. Cardiovascular examination was composed by clinical visit and the assessment of heart rate variability. A psychological examination by 16 Personality Factors–C Form (16 PF), Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced (COPE), State Trait Anxiety Inventory Y-1, Y-2 was made during the clinical investigation.

Results: TS showed a significant higher score of STAI-Y2 and 16 PF Q4 compared to control group; COPE test showed a significant difference between samples only in transcendental orientation scale. Moreover, lower heart rate variability was found in TS patients compared to controls. Analyzing differences among groups, a significant inverse correlation between sympathetic tone (LF/HF ratio) and coping orientations (cope score) was found.

Conclusion: Elevated perceived anxiety, high emotive tension and a specific religious coping strategy were associated with autonomic dysfunction in TS patients long after the acute phase.

EATING DISORDERS AND THE PERSON WITHIN: IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL AND RELATIONSHIP FACTORS TO TARGET IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Proposer

*Vittorio Lingiardi*¹

¹ Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, and Health Studies, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Discussant

*Angelo Compare*¹

¹ Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Bergamo, Italy

Abstract

Patients with eating disorders (EDs) typically present a history of negative therapy experiences and treatment failure, ranging from dropout to relapse. To overcome these clinical challenges, most practice guidelines suggest the need to identify relevant individual and interpersonal factors that can explain meaningful variance in the onset, maintenance, symptomatic presentation, and recovery rates of ED patients. However, to date, research on these variables related has yielded limited results. The goal of this panel is to present findings from studies that include a combination of measures of eating pathology, individual and relationship factors that could be helpful in developing patient-tailored avenues for this population.

The first study by Aloï and colleagues explored the associations between childhood trauma, interoceptive awareness and emotion regulation in ED patients, showing that childhood emotional abuse and worse interoceptive awareness could be relevant dimensions to target in psychotherapy.

The second study by Cardi aimed at exploring different facets of interpersonal functioning in adolescents with EDs compared to a control group, suggesting that interpretation bias towards social stimuli play a mediating role in the relationship between interpersonal sensitivity and severity of ED psychopathology. The third study by Muzi and colleagues investigated the role of psychological well-being, personality, and overall mental functioning and therapeutic change in these psychological dimensions after a residential treatment program for ED patients, suggesting that both mental health and psychopathology should be considered in outcome studies.

The fourth and last study by Albano and colleagues explored the effectiveness of a six-week online guided self-help program (RecoveryMANTRA) for patients with Anorexia Nervosa (AN), showing the importance of both trait-alliance and state-alliance within the student or peer mentor/patient dyads in reducing ED symptoms.

Patient and mentor/peer mentor's contributions to the relationship between working alliance and eating disorder symptoms in an online guided self-help intervention for anorexia nervosa

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⁵ Department of Psychology, Dickinson College, USA

Abstract

This is a secondary data analysis of findings from a randomized clinical trial for outpatients with a diagnosis of anorexia nervosa (AN), who were given access to a six-week online guided self-help intervention (RecoveryMantra) in addition to treatment as usual. Those allocated to RecoveryMANTRA had access to self-help materials (videoclips and workbook) and received online chat-based guidance from a trained mentor (i.e., psychology graduate) or a peer mentor (i.e., a person with lived experience of eating disorders). In this study, we explored the relationship between patient-mentor working alliance and eating disorder symptoms. We predicted that: (1) stronger working alliance with the mentor across sessions would be associated with lower eating disorder symptoms; (2) previous session's working alliance would be related to later eating disorder symptoms. Ninety-nine patients with anorexia nervosa and 26 mentors were recruited; patients rated eating disorder symptoms (EDE-Q), and perceived alliance with the peer mentor/mentor weekly. The random intercepts cross-lagged panel model was used to examine the relationship between patient-mentor/peer mentor working alliance and eating disorder symptoms. For patient-peer mentor dyads, working alliance in the previous session predicted lower eating symptoms in the next session. For patient-student mentor dyads, there were no session-by-session associations between working alliance and eating psychopathology. However, higher working alliance with the student mentor across sessions was associated with lower eating symptoms. These findings suggest that the characteristics of the mentor delivering guidance are associated with different pathways to change in guided self-help, further supporting the relevance of differentiating between state-like and trait-like dimensions of working alliance.

Which role for childhood trauma and interoceptive awareness in emotion dysregulation across eating disorders

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Abstract

Introduction: Emotion dysregulation has been implicated in the psychopathology and outcome of eating disorders (EDs). However, the role of different psychological processes contributing to this construct has been poorly investigated. The aim of the current research was to explore the association between childhood trauma, interoceptive awareness and emotion regulation, in light of current depressive symptoms.

Method: A total of 113 patients with EDs (AN 33, BN 25, BED 55) completed self-report questionnaires on difficulties in emotion regulation, interoceptive awareness, depression, and childhood trauma. Groups were compared in variables of interest through one-way ANOVA. Eta squared and Bonferroni post-hoc tests were applied for significant results. A forward stepwise linear regression analysis was run to investigate the association between interoceptive awareness, depression, childhood trauma and emotion dysregulation.

Results: Emotion dysregulation was significantly different among groups, with BN being more impaired. Results from regression analysis, explaining 60% of the variance, revealed that childhood emotional abuse and worse interoceptive awareness (not worrying, self-regulation, trusting) were associated with emotion dysregulation, independent of depressive symptoms.

Conclusions: Present results suggest a role of childhood trauma, specifically emotional abuse, and individual’s incapability to cope with, trust, and appraise bodily sensations as helpful for decision-making in emotion dysregulation across EDs. Although preliminary, these results support the need for the assessment of interoceptive awareness and childhood trauma in the psychotherapy setting in order to help patients with EDs to become more aware of their internal state and learn strategies to adaptively managing emotions.

Rethinking treatment outcome in eating disorders: measuring therapeutic change in psychological well-being, personality, and overall mental functioning

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Abstract

Widely used criteria for quantify treatment response in eating disorders (EDs) are typically focused on the reduction of overall symptomatology and modifications of physical or nutritional aspects. However, effective interventions for ED patients should also target other psychological dimensions relevant to a broader definition of mental health, such as empathy, autonomy, self-acceptance, meaning in life, relationships' quality, and affective regulation, among others.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a residential treatment program for EDs applying a comprehensive definition of therapeutic change, which include symptom reduction as well as changes in psychological well-being, personality, and overall mental functioning.

Eighty-four ED patients were evaluated at both treatment onset and discharge using the Shedler-Westen Assessment Procedure-200 (SWAP-200) and the Psychodiagnostic Chart-2 (PDC-2)—a clinician-rated tool derived from the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual (PDM-2). At the same time points, patients were asked to complete the Psychological Well-being Scales (PWB), the Eating Disorder Inventory-3 (EDI-3), and the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II).

Findings showed a statistically significant pre-post symptom reduction, with moderate to large effect sizes, especially on overall eating disorder risk and depressive symptoms severity. Pre-post comparisons also showed significant gains in all PWB dimensions, as well as improvements in SWAP-200 healthy personality functioning and PDC-2 overall mental functioning. Higher baseline ED symptom severity, an earlier age of ED onset, and a greater number of dietary restrictions per week were negatively related to pre-post change in psychological well-being and personality functioning.

These results suggest that the combination of measures of both mental health and psychopathology could provide a comprehensive perspective of therapeutic change with maximal clinical utility.

Interpersonal sensitivity, cognitive bias to social stimuli and reactivity to virtual ostracism in eating disorders

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²Department of Psychological Medicine, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, King's College London, UK

Abstract

Problems in interpersonal functioning are involved in the onset and maintenance of eating disorders. Social isolation, heightened sensitivity to social threat and poor assertiveness are some of the difficulties that adults with eating disorders experience. The extent of these problems in adolescents with eating disorders is largely unknown. The aim of this study was to explore different facets of interpersonal functioning in adolescents with eating disorders (i.e., clinical group), compared to adolescents with no lifetime psychiatric disorders (i.e., control group). One hundred fifty-eight adolescents were recruited (N=80 in the clinical sample and N=78 in the control sample) and completed measures of interpersonal sensitivity, attention and interpretation bias towards social stimuli, reactivity to virtual social ostracism and eating disorder psychopathology. Differences between groups were investigated, as well as the relationships between interpersonal sensitivity, cognitive bias and eating disorder psychopathology through a mediation model. Findings indicated that the clinical group had higher levels of interpersonal sensitivity (large effect size), more frequent negative interpretation bias towards social stimuli (large effect size) and lower self-esteem following virtual ostracism (medium effect size) compared to the control sample. The mediation model demonstrated that interpretation bias partially explained the relationship between interpersonal sensitivity and severity of eating disorder psychopathology. These results suggest that the use of cognitive bias modification trainings to remediate negative interpretation bias could contribute to tackle eating disorder psychopathology.

MENTALIZING IN CLINICAL PRACTICE: PROCESS AND OUTCOME RESEARCH**Proposer***Antonello Colli*¹¹ Department of Humanities, “Carlo Bo” University of Urbino**Discussant***Piero Porcelli*²² Dipartimento di Scienze Psicologiche, della Salute e del Territorio, Università di Chieti**Abstract**

Mentalization, which can be defined as the capacity to interpret our own and others' behaviors in terms of mental states such as beliefs, desires, emotions and thoughts (Bateman & Fonagy, 2016), is considered a central factor in relation to the development and treatment of personality disorders.

Despite the amount of research conducted in relation to the construct the relationship between mentalization and outcome, and between mentalization and psychotherapeutic techniques is still not clear. At the same time the relationship between specific mentalization impairments and personality pathology still needs further exploration. This symposium has the aim to develop a fruitful exchange, based on the results of the studies that will be presented, in order to develop a deeper contribution of the facets of mentalization, and to investigate the mechanisms of change which underlie the construct. The authors will present different studies which will vary in relation to their objectives and methodology, but which share a common focus on the outcome of therapies and on the diagnostic facets of the construct. The aim of the presented works is to understand the changes in mentalization throughout psychotherapy from the diagnostic phase of treatments to the outcome of therapies.

Changes in mentalization during Sequential Brief – Adlerian Psychodynamic Psychotherapy (SB-APP): the role of therapists' technique and countertransference*Andrea Ferrero*¹, *Salvatore Gullo*², *Barbara Simonelli*^{1,3}, *Giulia Gagliardini*⁴, *Simona Fassina*^{1,3}, *Antonello Colli*⁴¹Adlerian Psychodynamic Psychotherapy – Training & Research, Torino;² Department of Psychology, Educational Science and Human Movement, University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy; ³Mental Health Department, ASL Torino 4;⁴Department of Humanities, “Carlo Bo” University of Urbino

Abstract

Introduction: Mentalization represents a core mental capacity in relation to personality functioning and may represent a target of different psychotherapeutic treatments, whether explicitly stated or not.

Method: Forty therapists completed a series of measures which included the following: Modes of Mentalization Scale (MMS), Mentalization Imbalances Scale (MIS), Comparative Psychotherapy Process Scale – Therapists (CPPS-T) and Therapist Response Questionnaire (TRQ). We analyzed changes in mentalization throughout the psychotherapeutic process of patients treated with sequential brief Adlerian psychodynamic psychotherapy (SB-APP) during different time of the 40-session long therapy (first and last sessions). We then applied a cross lagged analysis and analyzed the interaction between patients' mentalization and therapists' technique and countertransference.

Results: Our results indicated that different problematic facets of patients' mentalization improved throughout therapy, especially in relation to cognitive, affective, automatic and self-problematics in mentalization. Psychodynamic interventions and different therapists' CTs were associated with changes in mentalization throughout therap.

Conclusions: The present study confirms the presence of changes in patients' mentalization throughout the process of SB-APP. Our results also indicated that these changes were related to therapists' technique and countertransference. Clinical implications of the present study will be discussed.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of treatment based on mentalization for borderline personality disorder: longitudinal study at the Public Mental Health Service of Camposampiero

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Abstract

Introduction: In line with the Diagnostic Therapeutic Assistance Pathways for the treatment of Serious Personality Disorders promulgated by the Veneto region, the CSM of Camposampiero has structured a Mentalization-Based Treatment (MBT) project for patients with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). The research aims to evaluate, through outcome and process variables, a clinical improvement and a possible functional recovery for patients, considering different moments: at the beginning (T0), after 9 months (T1), at the end of treatment (T2), and Follow-Up at 1 (FU1) and 2 years (FU2).

Method: The sample was divided into two groups. The first group (N1 = 16) was assessed through various tools to check the symptomatic trend: HoNOS, SCID-5, GAF, SCL-90-R, and Patient Evaluation Card (concerning therapies pharmacological, emergency access, and hospitalizations) were administered at T0, T1, T2, FU1, and FU2. In the second group (N2 = 9) a process analysis was carried out, every 3-month until the end of the treatment, to evaluate the changes in mentalization capacity, through different scales (MIS, MMS, RFQ). In addition, Borderline symptomatology (BPD-CL) and associated clinical manifestations (BDI-II, STAI-Y1Y2) were investigated.

Results: Non-parametric statistical analyzes highlighted how the implementation of the MBT path in an Italian Public Service can lead. In the first group (N1 = 16), MBT leads to a clinically significant symptomatic improvement, with a consequential decrease in emergency access and medication use. Furthermore, a reduction in the Service workload was found. In the second group (N2 = 9) an increase in mentalizing capacity and recovery of personal and social functioning was observed.

Clustering personality disorders in relation to mentalization failures: a latent profile analysis

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Abstract

Introduction: The aim of this work is to investigate the relationship between the dimensions of mentalization and personality disorders (PDs).

Method: Measures were applied on a sample of 404 patients with PDs and included the Mentalization Imbalances Scale (MIS), Modes of Mentalization Scale (MMS), Reflective Functioning Questionnaire (RFQ), Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) and Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI).

Results: A latent profile analysis enlightened the presence of four different clusters with different problematics in the dimensions of mentalization as rated with the MIS: (1) affective–self-automatic profile (ASA-P); (2) external profile (E-P); (3) others–automatic-affective profile (OAA-P); (4) cognitive–self-automatic profile (CSA-P). Moreover, in relation to the quality of mentalization as assessed with the MMS, three different profiles emerged: high; mid and low functioning. The prevalence of the profiles within PDs varies, with higher percentage of ASA-P in Paranoid, Schizotypal, Antisocial, Narcissistic and Dependent disorders, higher percentage of CSA-P in Schizoid and Obsessive, and higher percentage of OOA-P in Avoidant and Obsessive disorders. One-way MANOVA was conducted on part of the sample ($n = 217$) and showed that the MIS profiles differed in relation to RFQ, DERS and IRI scores, with ASA-P patients reporting higher levels of uncertainty about mental states and CSA-P patients reporting higher

levels of certainty about mental states. The profiles also differed on DERS non-acceptance, strategies and impulse scales.

Conclusion: Our results seem to confirm that PDs are characterized by specific patterns of failures in mentalization. Clinical implications will be discussed.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF COVID-19: FINDINGS FROM RELEVANT POPULATIONS

Proposer

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Abstract

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. Since the announcement and the rapid spread of the pandemic, all healthcare systems around the world faced critical and unprecedented challenges. Several countries used restrictive measures such as lockdown and social distancing to contain the virus's spread.

Although the emergency was initially medical, we now have to deal with its psychological consequences and implications. This critical situation is affecting the global economy and has profoundly changed people's habits and lives, affecting their work, social interactions, and spare time. Everybody is dealing with the fear of infection, as well as possible economic difficulties and social isolation. These circumstances can increase psychological distress levels (e.g., anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress symptoms) in the general population. Among the population, some categories may be more at risk than others. In particular, healthcare workers represent a group at high risk for psychological distress, as they had to work under extreme pressure to face an unpredictable situation with many patients with critical conditions, high morbidity, and mortality rates. Moreover, the mental health of people who have been hospitalized due to COVID-19 should be carefully monitored, as they experienced severe physical symptoms, isolation, and fear of death. Finally, during the main peak of the emergency, families of COVID-19 patients who died in the hospital did not receive adequate attention. Due to the recommended preventive measures, they did not have the opportunity to say their final farewell to their loved one or even attend a funeral, with important consequences on their mourning process.

Thus, the present symposium aims to analyze the psychological impact of COVID-19 in representative samples, including the general population, healthcare workers, COVID-19 patients, and bereaved families.

Interventions of clinical psychology for healthcare professionals, patients and families during COVID-19 pandemic at the hospital: modelling trajectories of care from the clinical practice

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Abstract

The contribution aims at describing, along with data, the 3 lines of psychological interventions delivered in a large University healthcare organization for subjects differently involved in the COVID-19 pandemic: hospital staff, COVID-19 hospitalized patients, bereaved families.

A psychological screening program was implemented 6 months after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak to assess the prevalence of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among employees and to identify personal and professional predictive factors. Among the 308 respondents, 53% reported moderate/severe depression, 40% moderate/severe PTSD and 23% moderate/severe anxiety. The experiences of clinical psychologists who performed psychological consultations for over 330 COVID-19 patients were collected from weekly reiterative group discussions about difficulties, issues psychological actions during such interventions. Each encounter was audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. Patients' concerns and needs are related to the themes of isolation, fear of death and mourning, while the actions are mainly focused to the 'hic et nunc' or to a narrative reconstruction of the patient's lived experience. Preliminary data on patients recovered from COVID-19 at 1-3 months after the hospital discharge showed that 28% reported anxiety, 17% depression symptoms, and 36.4% post-traumatic stress.

A phone-based primary preventive psychological intervention has been delivered for families of COVID-19 patients who died at the hospital. Preliminary data on 246 families called over the first 3 months were collected with multiple qualitative methods and thematically analyzed, showing that families' reactions were seen as close to a traumatic grief and families' needs ranged from find alternative rituals to express emotions or give meaning.

The unique features and related challenges of each intervention, along with the implications for clinical practice, are discussed.

Clinical psychology services for patients hospitalized due to COVID-19 during the rehabilitation phase

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Abstract

The IRCCS Policlinico San Donato hospital in Milan was converted into a COVID-19 center in March 2020, and a COVID-19 rehabilitation unit was later opened in April 2020 to assist patients who were not autonomous after hospitalization due to COVID-19. All patients (n=35) of the Covid Rehabilitation Unit (18 female), with an average age of 75 years were regularly supported by the Clinical Psychology Service Team in this period. The average length of hospitalization was of 20 days. Following the pertinent ministerial decrees, guidelines, and relevant literature, the patients were followed up through telehealth (via phone, smartphone, or tablet with audio or audio-visual calls). The following validated tests were administered at the time of admission and discharge from Covid-19 Rehabilitation: the Fagerström test, the Morisky, Green, and Levine Adherence Scale (MGL), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), the Patient Health Questionnaire - 9 (PHQ-9), the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7), the EuroQoL-Visual Analog Scale (VAS), the QoL-VAS, the Impact of Event Scale (IES-R) and the Insomnia Severity Index (ISI). At the time of admission into Covid-19 Rehabilitation 41,7% of patients reported borderline levels of depression whereas 8,3% indicated moderate levels. When it comes to anxiety 45,8% of the patients reported a low level and 4,2% a severe level. The findings of the psychometric and psychological assessments contributed to increase the efficiency and expediency of the provision of clinical psychology services in the midst of pandemic conditions.

The "Emotional Thermometer [Termometro Emotivo]" project: mental health and daily emotional states in Italian adults during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

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Abstract

In this contribution, we will present some findings from the “Emotional Thermometer [Termometro Emotivo]” project. The project aims at investigating the impact of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on mental health in Italian adults. In this contribution, we present findings on short-term psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak (Study 1) and real-time emotional and psychological

responses (Study 2) to this exceptional situation. The first study includes a large sample of participants taken from the general population (N = 1548), who completed measures of psychological distress, emotion regulation strategies, perceived social support, and subjective perceptions of the situation. The second study includes a subsample of 823 participants who completed daily measures of emotional and psychological states for 21 days.

Results from Study 1 suggest increased levels of psychological distress and post-traumatic responses to COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in participants. They also demonstrate the protective role of social support and coping strategies on individuals' mental health. Furthermore, results from Study 2 show that participants experienced higher levels of daily negative psychological states during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, and inflexibility of negative emotional states.

Overall, our findings stress the psychological cost of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in community people. As a consequence, our contribution aims at suggesting the need of paying clinical attention to potential pathological or maladaptive conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic in community people.

The psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Italian healthcare workers: preliminary findings

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Abstract

The rapid spread of COVID-19 pandemic put a heavy burden on Italian healthcare facilities, forcing healthcare professionals to work under increasing pressure and urgency. The constant exposure to the risk of infection, daily contact with emergency situations and mortality, and grueling work shifts are just some of the many sources of distress that healthcare workers face.

During the first wave of COVID-19, we conducted a web-based longitudinal survey to examine levels of psychological distress in a sample of 1055 Italian healthcare workers. Participants completed the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21, the Insomnia Severity Index, the Impact of Event Scale-Revised, the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Descriptive statistics and Kruskal-Wallis test were performed in order to compare scores obtained by different working categories in the psychometric scales.

Our results show that healthcare professionals working in COVID wards reported higher levels of psychological distress, compared to healthcare professionals working in non-COVID wards. These findings highlight the importance of carrying out psychological interventions for healthcare workers operating in COVID wards.



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