

Is Nonjudging of Internal Experience a Key to Resilience in LGBTQIA+ Populations in Hard Times?

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INTRODUCTION

LGBTQIA+ people are largely invisible in existing research and disaster response in the United States [4], and research regarding this population during the COVID-19 pandemic is imperative. Existing work suggests Resilience is a protective factor during crises such as the current pandemic [5], and there appears to be a relationship between low Resilience, high Perceived Stress, and depression in LGBTQIA+ individuals [3]. Positive versus Negative Affect has been associated with successful adaptation to stress and resilience [1]. Research on mindfulness in minority populations is sparse [2] and no known work has studied mindfulness or Flourishing in LGBTQIA+ populations during the pandemic. The current study examined Resilience, Perceived Stress, Flourishing, and mindfulness in LGBTQIA+ individuals during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

Participants: Our sample included 93 adults who were primarily female (77.4%), and most participants identified as White (88.2%). Many of our participants were young adults (50.5%) between the ages of 25-34 years who identify as heterosexual (78.5%).

Measures and procedure: Study participants completed demographic items and measures of Resilience, Perceived Stress, Flourishing Positivity Ratio, and Mindfulness as part of a larger survey study conducted shortly after COVID-19 was categorized as a pandemic and “stay-at-home” orders were in place.

Measures used for this study included:

- Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 [CD-RISC-10] (Connor & Davidson, 2018)
 - Brief measure of “bounce back” and adaptability
- Perceived Stress Scale [PSS] (Cohen et al., 1983)
 - The most widely used instrument for measuring the perception of stress that assesses the degree to which situations are appraised as stressful
- Positive and Negative Affect Schedule [PANAS] (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)
 - A widely-used, self-report measure of positive and negative affect
- Five Facet Mindfulness Short Form (FFMQ-SF) (Baer et al., 2008)
 - Measure of various aspects of mindfulness (i.e., observation, description, aware actions, non-judgement of internal experience, and non-reactivity) with higher total scores indicating higher dispositional mindfulness

Table. Summary of T-Statistics



RESULTS

Compared to heterosexuals, LGBTQIA+ (n=17, 18.3%) participants scored appreciably lower on Resilience ($M = 24.94, SD = 5.54$) [$t(87) = 2.78, p = .007$] and the Flourishing Positivity Ratio ($M = 1.12, SD = .66$) [$t(86) = 3.07, p = .003$] and higher on Perceived Stress scores ($M = 21.19, SD = 5.62$) [$t(84) = -2.49, p = .015$]. LGBTQIA+ participants also scored significantly lower on Positive Affect ($M = 28.17, SD = 8.15$) [$t(87) = 2.17, p = .033$] and significantly higher on Negative Affect ($M = 28.47, SD = 7.71$) [$t(86) = -3.91, p < .001$]. LGBTQIA+ participants did not differ on any of the facets of mindfulness except scoring much lower on Nonjudging of Internal Experience ($M = 13.63, SD = 4.03$) [$t(86) = 2.99, p = .004$].

DISCUSSION

In addition to more negative scores on symptom-based measures, including higher Perceived Stress and Negative Affect and lower Resilience, Positive Affect, and Flourishing, LGBTQIA+ participants, compared to heterosexual participants, were appreciably lower on a facet of mindfulness fundamental to present moment awareness - Nonjudging of Internal Experience. Resilience has been shown to be a protective factor during the current pandemic [6], and greater negative affect, may be associated with less successful adaptation to stress. Further, Perceived Stress was higher in the LGBTQIA+ sample compared to the heterosexual sample, which was consistent with previous literature and may place them at higher risk for mental health conditions such as depressive disorders considering, too, their lower rates of Resilience compared to their heterosexual counterparts [4]. In our sample, LGBTQIA+ individuals' responses suggest that they had a subjectively more unpleasant experience during this time period, and they may have also judged their internal experience more harshly than their heterosexual counterparts. This finding alone offers a necessity to foster acceptance-based skills among those LGBTQIA+ persons who may be experiencing distress, and increasing Resilience and Positive Affect, while reducing Perceived Stress in a therapeutic context may help LGBTQIA+ people better cope with crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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