Mindfulness and Health Anxiety – not Social Support – Associated with Resilience During COVID-19

Lauren Peterson, MA[1], Jennifer K Altman, PhD[1], Christian French, MA[1], Aaron Carter, MA[1], Amy Schaefer, MA[1], Abbie O Beacham, PhD[2]

[1]Spalding University, Louisville, KY; [2]University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic placed new and unforeseen stress on individuals, resulting in increased feelings of overwhelm, social isolation, and worry about the health of ourselves and/or others. Some degree of health anxiety, or worries about health, heightened sensitivity to bodily sensations, and feared consequences of having an illness, may be expected during a pandemic, though over time may have a negative impact on quality of life. Coping with the effects of this ongoing stressful situation has the potential to cause diminished ability to bounce back or be resilient in the face of adversity[1]. Resilience has been suggested to be a protective factor against adverse mental health outcomes after a disaster[2] and has been shown to be influenced by behavioral, environmental, and cognitive processes. Given the context of COVID-19, our study examined factors associated with resilience.

METHOD

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

Measures and procedure: Study participants completed demographic items and measures of Resilience, Health Anxiety, Mindfulness, and Perceived Social Support 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][3]
  - Brief measure of "bounce back" and adaptability; mean total score in standardization sample was 32.1 [SD 5.8]
- Short Health Anxiety Inventory; [HAI-18][4]
  - Brief screening measure of health anxiety; mean total score in standardization sample was 12.2 [SD 6.2]
- Five Facets Mindfulness Short Form [FFMQ-SF][5]
  - Measure of different aspects of mindfulness (i.e., observation, description, aware actions, non-judgment inner experience, and non-reactivity) with higher total scores indicating higher dispositional mindfulness
- Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support [MSPSS][6]
  - Brief tool designed to measure perceptions of support from family, friends, and a significant other

Table 1. *Means and Standard Deviations for Measures used in Analyses*

	Mean	SD
CD-RISC Total	28.7609	6.50168
HAI Total	14.2	8.50227
FFMQ Total	81.5632	13.96482
MSPSS Total	5.5092	1.15192

Table 2. *Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Resilience*

Variable	Dependent Variable CD-RISC Constant Age	
	Standardized Beta	***t***
Age	-0.045	-0.524
HAI Total	-0.407	-4.249*
FFMQ Total	0.392	3.854*
MSPSS Total	0.164	1.952
Adjusted R[2]	0.536	
Std.Error of the Estimate	4.43069	
F	22.336*	

NOTE: Utilizes Standardized Coefficients; *p<.01

RESULTS

- Linear regression was conducted to ascertain salient predictors of resilience, as measured by the CD-RISC Total Score with age as a constant.
  - This model accounts for 53% of variance (p<.001); $F_{(4,70)}$ = 22.336
  - Two significant IVs, when controlling for Age:
    - Health Anxiety (β=-.407, p<.001)
      - There was a negative relationship between health anxiety and resilience; that is, we found lower health anxiety to have a relationship with resilience.
    - Mindfulness (β=.392, p<.001)
      - Our sample showed a positive relationship between mindfulness and resilience.
  - Social support was not a significant predictor at the p < .05 level (β=.164, p=.055)

DISCUSSION

Although support from others is well documented, the ability to "bounce back" (i.e., be resilient) may be more related to an individual's private internal experiences. In our sample, those with lower levels of health anxiety reported higher levels of resilience. Notably, our sample reported higher levels of health anxiety than the standardization sample. During a global pandemic, it would be reasonable to expect higher levels of health anxiety. Mindfulness was also a significant predictor of resilience, suggesting that these practices may positively impact resilience. When our study was conducted, the public health measures for reducing the spread of the pandemic included social distancing measures. Surprisingly, we did not find perceived social support to be a significant predictor of resilience. Our findings suggest that boosting individuals' ability to work flexibly with internal experiences, such as health anxiety and mindfulness, may increase resilience regardless of their social support level. Better understanding the factors that are associated with resilience may lead to novel interventions that can positively impact overall wellbeing.

REFERENCES

[1] CDC. (2021). Coping with Stress. COVID-19. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html
[2] Joohee, L., Blackmon, B., Cochran, D., Kar, B., Rehner, T., & Gunnell, M. (2017). Community Resilience, Psychological Resilience, and Depressive Symptoms: An Examination of the Mississippi Gulf Coast 10 Years After Hurricane Katrina and 5 Years After the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness, 12*, 1–8.
[3] Campbell-Sills, L., & Stein, M. B. (2007). Psychometric analysis and refinement of the Connor–Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC): Validation of a 10-item measure of resilience. *Journal of Traumatic Stress: Official Publication of The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, 20*(6), 1019-1028.
[4] Salkovskis, P. M., Rimes, K. A., Warwick, H. M., & Clark, D. M. (2002). The Health Anxiety Inventory: development and validation of scales for the measurement of health anxiety and hypochondriasis. *Psychological medicine, 32*(5), 843–853.
[5] Baer, R. A., Smith, G. T., Hopkins, J., Krietemeyer, J., & Toney, L. (2006). Using self-report assessment methods to explore facets of mindfulness. *Assessment, 13*(1), 27–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191105283504
[6] Zimet, G. D., Powell, S. S., Farley, G. K., Werkman, S., & Berkoff, K. A. (1990). Psychometric characteristics of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. *Journal of personality assessment, 55*(3-4), 610–617. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.1990.9674095