

Art therapeutic practices for coping with stress in the conditions of COVID 19

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Abstract

The connection between people and art for centuries has provided an opportunity to stabilize the psychological state, their personal development and well-being. Today, in the conditions of "new normal" art therapy is desirable and offers us opportunities to deal with the crisis, reveals internal horizons for self-development. Positive thoughts and feelings fill a person when is engaged in creative activity. The present study marks the beginning of a study related to the impact of art therapy practices on a people emotional state in conditions of social isolation.

Keywords: art therapy, coping with stress, COVID 19

Introduction

The Bulgarian Ministry of Health (MoH) published the first guidelines related to Kovid 19 in January 2020, and on March 13, 2020, a state of emergency was declared for the country. A section specifically for KOVID 19 was created on the website of the Ministry of Health, through which citizens receive information about the situation⁴³ The MoH delivers information via its website in a daily manner. Information on outbreak trends, responses and prevention of COVID-19 is available at a new web portal that serves as an entry to all relevant public authorities. The portal has been launched as a part of the national informational COVID system and includes data and map dashboard, showing confirmed cases, number of quarantined persons by districts and municipalities and other relevant data⁴⁴.

A number of measures have been taken, some of them relevant today, related to limiting the distance between people, switching to online work and training, restricting travel, stopping the work of entire sectors of the economy - restaurants, tourism.

The situation caused by COVID 19 was new for everyone - governments, doctors and citizens. The information offered, on the one hand, creates a sense of awareness among citizens, but on the other hand, increases their anxiety.

Researchers publish data related to stress worldwide. Rehman, U., Shahnawaz, M.G., Khan, N.H. et al.: „Covid-19 has caused significant distress around the globe. Apart from the evident physical symptoms in infected cases, it has caused serious damage to public mental health. India, like other countries, implemented a nationwide lockdown to contain and curb the transmission of the virus. The current research is an attempt to explore psychological distress among people residing in India during the lockdown. Four hundred and three participants were asked to complete a questionnaire with questions around symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, and family affluence. The results indicated that people who do not have enough supplies to sustain

⁴³ <https://www.mh.government.bg/bg/informaciya-za-grazhdani/informaciya-otnosno-noviyakoronavirus-2019-ncov>

⁴⁴ <https://www.covid19healthsystem.org/countries/bulgaria/livinghit.aspx?Section=1.1%20Health%20communication&Type=Section>

the lockdown were most affected, and family affluence was found to be negatively correlated with stress, anxiety, and depression. Among different professions, students and healthcare professionals were found to experience stress, anxiety, and depression more than others. Despite the current situation, stress, anxiety, and depression were found to be in normal ranges for mental health professionals highlighting their capabilities to remain normal in times of distress. Policymakers and other authorities may take the assistance of mental health professionals to help overcome psychological issues related to Covid-19.” [1]

Salari, N., Hosseinian-Far, A., Jalali, R. et al.: „The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on public mental health. Therefore, monitoring and oversight of the population mental health during crises such as a pandemic is an immediate priority. COVID-19 not only causes physical health concerns but also results in several psychological disorders. The spread of the new coronavirus can impact the mental health of people in different communities. Thus, it is essential to preserve the mental health of individuals and to develop psychological interventions that can improve the mental health of vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic.” [2]

Rosario Sinta Gamonal Limcaoco, Enrique Montero Mateos, Juan Matias Fernandez, Carlos Roncero: „With these results the researchers describe an increase of affective symptoms due to the COVID-19. This pandemic is raising the anxiety levels. The findings of the study show the affective and cognitive alterations people are going through. This survey is the first attempt to measure the psychological consequences this pandemic is having, in order to be able to provide the support to confront this global issue, addressing the mental health care that will be needed.” [3]

European Vaccination information portal⁴⁵ inform: „A percentage of those affected by COVID-19 will require hospitalization, some even requiring intensive care, sometimes for extended periods. People developing severe respiratory symptoms may require mechanical ventilation support, which may make them more susceptible to secondary bacterial infections. In addition, COVID-19 patients can experience complications, such as strokes or heart attacks, due to increased coagulation. Some patients experience neurological symptoms, such as personality changes or changes in alertness”

As the number of COVID-19 cases increases, so does people's anxiety. For the general public, the mental health effects of COVID-19 are as important as the physical health effects. For the past few weeks, Mental Health America (MHA) has been using its unique database to monitor this increase in anxiety on a daily basis. According to these screening data, we experienced a 19% increase in clinical anxiety screening in the first weeks of February and a 12% increase in the first two weeks of March. This suggests that our screenwriters are not just "worried". They represent thousands of people whose lives and well-being are severely affected by worries about the virus.

Methods

In April 2020, the authors developed a questionnaire to examine the creative attitudes and human behavior in the conditions of social isolation and stress caused by COVID 19.

⁴⁵ <https://vaccination-info.eu/en>

The developed questionnaire contains 8 questions, the first two are related to the age and gender of the respondents, and the remaining 6 questions are related to the feelings and emotions of the respondents before, during and after performing creative activities. There was also an open question related to what creative activity is preferred by the respondents.

The questionnaire was sent to over 150 people on the Internet through the social network Facebook and was completed in 4 hours by 86 respondents. The research was basic and aimed to examine attitudes, and now at a later stage we can move on to a deeper phase of research. A study is planned for March 2021 including people with special needs.

Results

The obtained results will help to study the orientation towards therapeutic practices based on creativity and their key role as anti-stress therapy.

We are guided by the understanding that at such a moment we cannot change the world quickly, but we can pay attention to the microworld within us and understand how to preserve our spirit and body in the name of our wholeness.

Demographic questions show that women were more active to participate in the survey: 79.1% of respondents were women and 20.9% were men (Figure1).

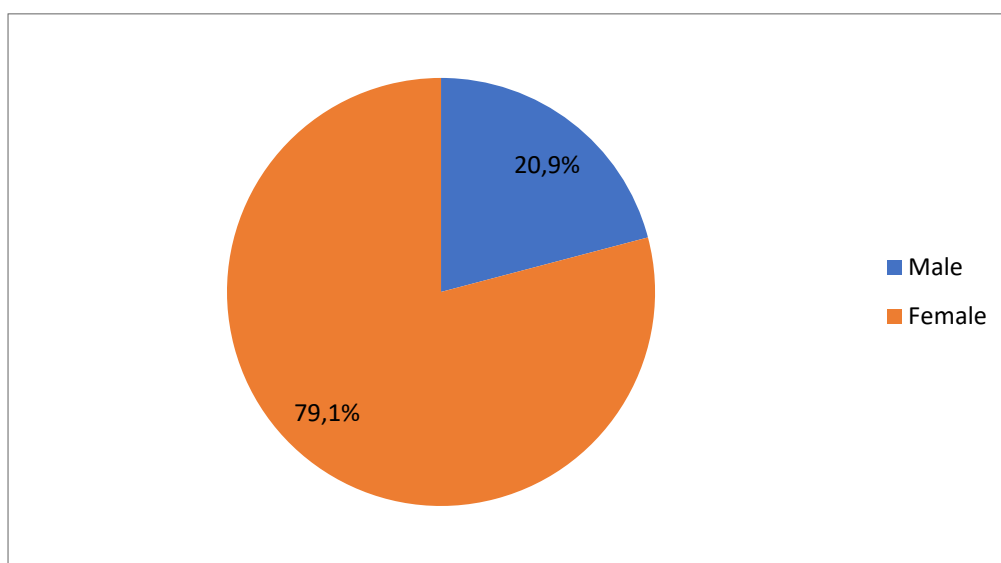


Figure 1. Sex

The questionnaire reached respondents of different ages from 18 to over 65 (Figure 2). The largest group are people between 18 and 30 years, which is an indicator that the problem of stress is common, regardless of age.

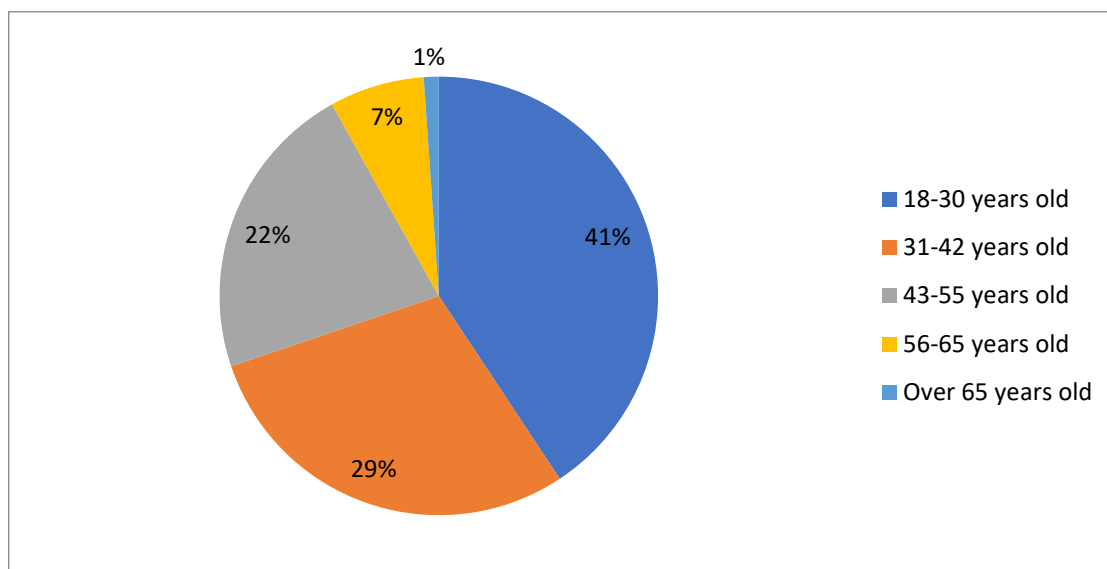


Figure 2. Age

The situation of social isolation caused by the global crisis brings to the fore the desire and demand for creative activities in people. Moreover, the feeling of creating a "own" creative product gives a feeling of calm and increases self-esteem. To the question "Do you have home creativity (creative process) that makes you feel good during social isolation?" 99% of respondents answered "yes". They identify themselves and their creative impulses with different activities, summarized and presented in Figure 3.

To the question "Do you have a homework (creative process) that makes you feel good during social isolation?" respondents during social isolation find satisfaction mostly in literature, cooking, fine arts, listening and making music, research.

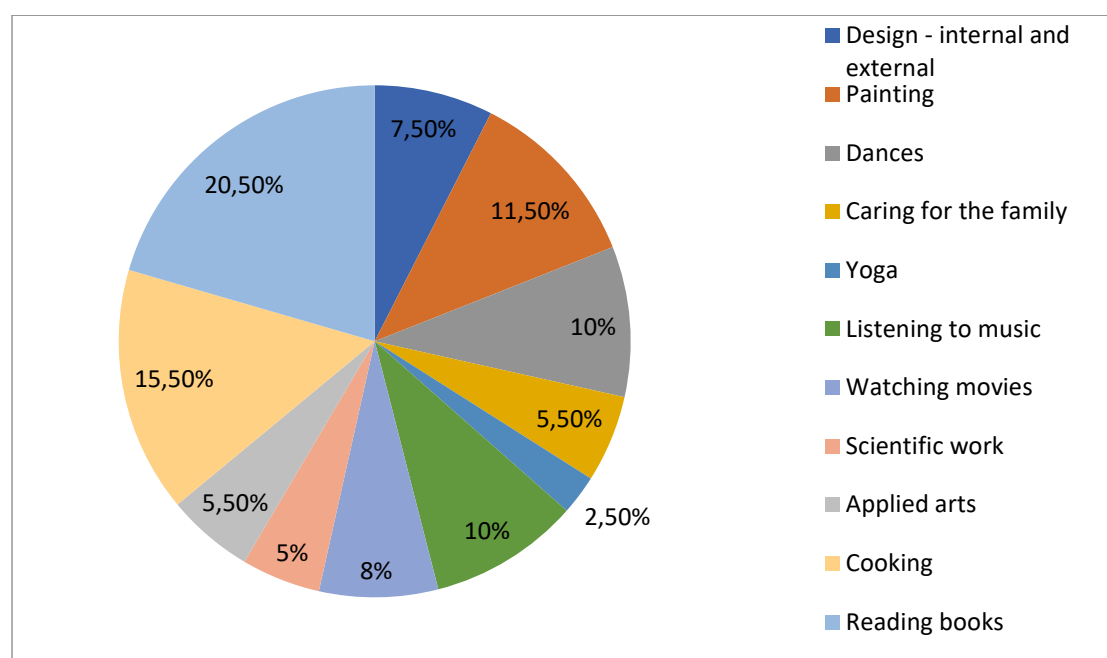


Figure 3. Preferred creative activities

To the questions related to the feelings and emotions that the respondents experience at different times: before the beginning of the creative activity, during the creative process and after its completion, the respondents declare the feeling of positive emotions, thoughts, and feelings

during all three periods. The creative process evokes feelings of gratitude, enthusiasm, inspiration, desire to create.

At the beginning of the creative activity the negative feelings and thoughts that fill the respondents are 43%, and the positive ones - 57%.

In the second phase of "creative making", anxiety subsides to 11% and positive feelings increase to 89%.

In the third phase, when we have a finished product, the respondents who cannot judge whether they feel better or feel just as anxious as in the beginning are already 3%, and satisfied, calm, rested, despite the physical load for some of the creative activities are also inspired by 97% of the respondents.

The number of respondents is not large enough, but it gives reasonable confidence that research should be continued in this direction to achieve proven art therapy as a mean to overcome stress and increase self-esteem, both in people with special needs and in physically healthy people in a situation of fear and social isolation.

The influence of creative activities on the emotional and mental state of man has been proven since ancient times. With the present study we confirmed the thesis that art therapy practices are useful for coping with stress in the conditions of COVID 19. The crisis with social isolation will not be a temporary phenomenon and it is important to note that over 80% of respondents declare their readiness to continue creative activities outside of social isolation.

Discussion

The idea of including literature in education has a tradition in psychology education. This is also shown by the pilot study - reading books is preferred by 20.5% of respondents. The interrelation and enrichment between fiction and psychology is convincingly presented by LS Vygotsky, SL Rubenstein and other scientists. Art (literature, painting, music, design, dance, cinema, theater), with its professional and pedagogical understanding, can enrich the original ideas of students and teachers and create an atmosphere of safety, security, and comfort in the classroom. Researchers prove that the inclusion of works of fiction, painting, music, and theater stimulates students' motivation, makes knowledge emotionally valuable, personally meaningful, increases awareness, the power of learning educational material [5]. Our attention is focused on discussion on the following issues:

- Do we use the potential that art gives us in the process of teaching in a real educational environment?
- Is it possible for art therapy practices to become part of the learning process at school and university?
- How to apply art therapy to people with special needs in the conditions of COVID 19?
- Will art therapy become part of the "new normal" and do we have art therapy specialists?
- How to use art therapy practices remotely, through digital technologies?

From the conducted pilot research, it seems that art therapy is necessary and desirable in the conditions of social isolation and through it the anxiety is reduced. Qualified art therapists and art pedagogues are needed for active work and stress reduction in a real educational environment and in life. It would be useful and possible to work on creating hybrid specialties, including art therapy.

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Resources

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<https://vaccination-info.eu/en>