

Predicting Acute Stress with Life Satisfaction and Psychological Resilience Scales during COVID-19 Pandemic in Greece

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ABSTRACT

Background theories in positive psychology and mental health support that 'Psychological Resilience' (PR) and 'Satisfaction with Life' (SwL) are protective factors of psychological distress. On the other hand, 'Acute Stress Disorder' (ASD) is a condition related to the adaptation of sympathetic adaptation after a stressful stimulus in a period of less than a month. Regarding the stressful event of COVID-19, little evidence is provided on the question of whether PR and SwL can predict ASD. To investigate, the present study received answers to three self-reported scales regarding ASD (Acute-Stress Disorder Scales [ASDS]; $M= 38.67$, $SD= 15.51$), PR (Nicholson-McBride Resilience Questionnaire [NMRQ]; $M= 41.83$, $SD= 7.63$) and SwL (Satisfaction-with-Life Scale [SWLS]; $M= 23.3$, $SD= 6.31$) from a sample of 1,158 Greeks from the general population during the spread of COVID-19 in the country. The results show that ASD is significantly negatively correlated to both PR [$r= -.420$, $p < .001$] and SwL [$r= -.311$, $p < .001$], while the predictive model (NMRQ and SWLS) predicted significantly ASDS [$F(2, 1157) = 1155.06$, $p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .21$]. The results of the study are overall confirmatory to previous studies although relevant

literature may be limited as emphasis has been put on PTSD. Future studies may test the same research question in non-COVID conditions to the Greek or other populations.

Keywords: Acute Stress Disorder; Psychological Resilience; Satisfaction with Life; COVID-19; Greece

INTRODUCTION

The present study is part of a larger research protocol that was conducted during the first spread of Corona-Virus-2019 (COVID-19) in Greece. The study presents if self-reported scores of 'Acute Stress Disorder' (ASD) can be predicted by self-reported levels in 'Satisfaction with Life' (SwL) and psychological resilience in a sample of 1,158 participants from the general Greek population.

Considering the background of the study and COVID-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) first classified COVID-19 as an "international public health emergency" on January 30, 2020, while on March 11, 2020, the same organization classified COVID-19 as a "global pandemic." (Strongylaki et al., 2021). On February 26, 2020, the first infected patient was diagnosed in Greece. The Greek government began implementing efforts to stop the spread throughout the

nation on that day (Pilafas, Strongylaki, et al., 2021). The Greek government applied progressively mandatory measures in response to the rapidly rising number of COVID-19 infections across the state and the alarming numbers of deaths in China, Italy, and other Western European nations (Pilafas, Strongylaki, et al., 2021). At the end, from March 23 to May 4, 2020, all regions in Greece were subject to a full-scale lockdown in which school and workplaces closed, as well as all residents could not leave their houses (Strongylaki et al., 2021).

At that juncture our research team hypothesized that the Greek population was exhibiting acute stress. To elaborate, ASD is a mental disorder described in the last series of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM) as a condition related to the sympathetic adaptation (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013; Bryant et al., 2011, 2014; Butler, 2000). It differentiates to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) since the later disorders occurs after a month has passed from exposure to stressful stimuli and as long as the individual continues to have stress-related symptoms (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013; Bryant et al., 2011, 2014; Butler, 2000).

On the other hand, SwL and psychological resilience are opposite phenomena, and as a result it may be easily hypothesized that the higher their level the lower the stress-related conditions can be found. According to theory, self-reported SwL shows the perception of individuals upon their judgment on personal satisfaction with their life from a general point of view at that particular moment (Hoseini-Esfidarjani et al., 2022; Osmanli et al., 2021; Schütz et al., 2013). The literature supports that during the spread of COVID-19 SwL was found to be negatively related to psychological distress (Karataş et al., 2021; Rogowska et al., 2021; Satici et al., 2021; Tamarit et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2022). As in the case of SwL, psychological resilience may be considered again a protective factor in

psychological health. Psychological resilience is the ability of people to bounce back to normal after a stressful event -or various stimuli from the environment-, as well as to accept the situation as being part of their reality and try to deal with that situation as much as possible from their perspective (Pilafas et al., 2020). As far as evidence from COVID-19 is concerned, psychological resilience was found to be indeed a protective factor against psychological distress (Ye et al., 2020). However, most studies (e.g. Alshehri et al., 2020; Cockerham et al., 2022; Cui & Chi, 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Vinkers et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022) emphasized on the relationship between psychological resilience and PTSD. A possible explanation may be that there is a one-month time limit for ASD, and after the month passes instead of ASD the condition meets the criteria for PTSD (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013; Bryant et al., 2011, 2014; Butler, 2000). Therefore, researchers that started data collection close to the end of this one month after COVID was spread, probably considered that PTSD-related measures are more suitable to their research investigations.

To proceed with the current study, based on the findings from the background review, it was reflected that evidence is needed on the question of whether ASD can be predicted by SwL and psychological resilience for the general Greek population during the first lockdown in the country. Furthermore, it was expected that the outcome of this study would be that both SwL and psychological resilience are negatively correlated with ASD, and that ASD can be predicted by a predictive model that would consist of SwL and psychological resilience in return. Consequently, this study is to provide evidence for the general Greek population upon ASD, and to become one of the limited titles in the field that investigated ASD during the COVID-19 pandemic as most studies investigated PTSD instead.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Participants

The study consists of a convenient sample, and the recruitment was achieved through the snowball strategy. 1,158 participants eventually participated to this research. All

of them were Greek adults with no severe mental and/or neurological conditions. The average age of the sample was found at 40.51 (SD= 12.83) with a range between 18 and 78. More details on the sample are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic details of the participants of the study.

Main Variable	Variable's Subcategories	Total (%) N = 1,158 ^a	Males (%) n = 280, (24.2%)	Females (%) n = 876, (75.6%)	Missing
Education					-
	School Level, (%)	399, (34.5%)	110, (39.3%)	289, (33%)	
	Undergraduate Degree, (%)	402, (34.7%)	85, (30.35%)	316, (36.1%)	
	Postgraduate Degree, (%)	357, (30.9%)	85, (30.35%)	271, (30.9%)	
Marital Status					-
	Single, (%)	299, (25.8%)	111, (39.6%)	188, (21.5%)	
	In relationship, <5 years, (%)	123, (10.6%)	21, (7.5%)	101, (11.5%)	
	In relationship, >5 years, (%)	74, (6.4%)	17, (6.1%)	56, (6.4%)	
	Married, (%)	508, (43.9%)	101, (36.1%)	407, (46.5%)	
	Separated, (%)	25, (2.2%)	2, (0.7%)	23, (2.6%)	
	Divorced, (%)	113, (9.8%)	27, (9.6%)	86, (9.8%)	
	Widowed, (%)	16, (1.4%)	1, (0.4%)	15, (1.7%)	
Children					-
	None, (%)	527, (45.5%)	157, (56.1%)	368, (42%)	
	1, (%)	201, (17.4%)	44, (15.7%)	157, (17.9%)	
	2, (%)	348, (30.1%)	67, (23.9%)	281, (32.1%)	
	3, (%)	69, (6%)	9, (3.2%)	60, (6.8%)	
	≥ 4, (%)	13, (1.1%)	3, (1.1%)	10, (1.1%)	
Occupation					-
	Unemployed, (%)	84 (7.3%)	13, (4.6%)	71, (8.1%)	
	School & University Student, (%)	163 (14.1%)	48, (17.6%)	114, (13%)	
	Self-Employed/Freelancer, (%)	142 (12.3%)	35 (12.5%)	107, (12.2%)	
	Public Servant, (%)	214 (18.5%)	57, (20.4%)	157, (17.9%)	
	Employee at the private sector, (%)	315 (27.2%)	73, (26.1%)	242, (27.6%)	
	Health Professional, (%)	133 (11.5%)	29, (10.4%)	103, (11.8%)	
	Security & Armed Forces, (%)	9 (0.8%)	5, (1.8%)	4, (0.5%)	
	Rentier/Landlord, (%)	13 (1.1%)	1, (0.4%)	12, (1.4%)	
	Retired, (%)	76 (6.6%)	16, (5.7%)	60, (6.8%)	
	Disability Pension, (%)	9 (0.8%)	3, (1.1%)	6, (0.7%)	
Income^b					1 ^c
	≤ 10,000 €, (%)	379, (32.8%)	67, (24%)	310, (35.4%)	
	10,001 – 20,000 €, (%)	401, (34.7%)	118, (42.1%)	283, (32.3%)	
	20,001 – 30,000 €, (%)	174, (15%)	44, (15.7%)	130, (14.8%)	
	≥ 30,001 €, (%)	203, (17.5%)	50, (17.9%)	153, (17.5%)	
Residence					-
	Athens, (%)	934, (80.7%)	237, (84.6%)	695, (79.3%)	
	Thessaloniki, (%)	24, (2.1%)	3, (1.1%)	21, (2.4%)	
	Rest Mainland Greece, (%)	118, (10.2%)	27, (9.6%)	91, (10.4%)	
	Greek Islands, (%)	66, (5.7%)	11, (3.9%)	55, (6.3%)	
	Other, non specified, (%)	16, (1.4%)	2, (0.8%)	14, (1.6%)	
Notes:					
^a Out of the 1,158 participants 2 of them (0.2%) did not declare their gender					
^b This variable shows the amount of the total annual income in the household after the contribution of all members					
^c The single missing case was located in the men's group					

Design & Statistical Analysis

The design of this study follows the guidelines of a multiple linear regression (Field, 2017; Maydeu-Olivares & Millsap, 2009), as all assumptions are met. The statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software (IBM Corp., 2021).

PROCEDURE

After ethical approval was obtained, the survey was built in Google forms. Prospective participants were recruited from social media. After data were collected, answers were downloaded from Google Forms and transferred to SPSS software.

Answers were coded accordingly, and statistical analysis took place. The results of the analysis were reflected and submitted for publication.

Materials

Acute stress was measured through the Greek version of Acute Stress Disorder Scale (ASDS; Pilafas, Prouzou, et al., 2021). The scale is self-reported and consists of 19 items that measure only one factor: acute stress. Answers to the items are given in a Likert scale from 0= 'not at all' to 4= 'very much'. The questionnaire is considered reliable and valid in the Greek population with a Cronbach's alpha score of .925 (Pilafas, Prouzou, et al., 2021).

Psychological resilience was measured via the Greek version of Nicholson-McBride Resilience Questionnaire (NMRQ; Pilafas et al., 2020). The questionnaire has 12 items related to psychological resilience and measures them in a self-reported fashion through a Likert scale of between 1= 'strongly disagree' and 5= 'strongly agree'. The scale was reported valid and reliable to the Greek population with a Cronbach's alpha score of .800 (Pilafas et al., 2020).

SwL was measured through the Greek version of 'Satisfaction with Life Scale' (SWLS; Lyrakos et al., 2013). The questionnaire contains 5 items which are measured through a self-reported Likert scale, as 1= 'strongly disagree' to 7 'strongly agree'. The Greek version of SWLS has been reported valid and reliable to the Greek population with SWLS having a Cronbach's alpha score of .831 in Lyrakos and colleagues' study (2013).

RESULT

The multiple linear regression analysis took place using SWLS (M= 23.3, SD= 6.31) and NMRQ (M= 41.83, SD= 7.63) as predictors of ASDS (M= 38.67, SD= 15.51). In the regression analysis all 1,158 participants' answers were included.

The results of the Pearson's r correlation analysis shows that the criterion (ASDS) is negatively correlated to NMRQ [$r = -.420$,

$p < .001$] and again, negatively correlated to SWLS [$r = -.311$, $p < .001$]. Between the variables that created the predictive model, NMRQ and SWLS were found positively correlated, as $r = .316$, $p < .001$.

Furthermore, the ANOVA analysis shows that the predictive model indeed predicts the criterion, as $F(2, 1157) = 1155.06$, $p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .21$. The regression analysis shows that the predictive model predicts 21% of the variance in the levels of ASDS in this study. The later amount of prediction is considered good, since in psychology a desirable ratio starts from 20 to 26% of prediction, while a percentage above 70% indicates that the predictive model is likely to measure the same condition with the criterion (Miles, 2014).

Moreover, the Durbin-Watson statistic autocorrelation is shown at 1.94. A score between 1.5 and 2.5 support that the scores are likely to be normal, while values closely below and up to 2 may suggest that the observed values may be correlated with future values and thus the values of this study are likely to have an impact and provide a meaning to similar future research designs (Chatterjee & Simonoff, 2013).

In addition, regression coefficients analysis shows that none of the variables in the predictive model can be deleted from the overall model as both were found significant (NMRQ, $\beta = -.357$, $p < .001$; SWLS, $\beta = -.198$, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to show if SwL and psychological resilience can predict ASD in a sample of 1,158 Greeks from the general population during the COVID-19 outbreak in the country. The results of the study illustrate that psychological resilience and SwL were found positively correlated to each other, and both negatively correlated to ASD as expected from the background theories in psychological distress and positive psychology. Furthermore, SwL and psychological resilience predict self-reported measures of ASD in this sample

with a relatively high amount of prediction considering that the study is related to behavioral sciences.

As far as previous studies are concerned, the overall findings of the present are confirmatory to previous related studies. More specifically, in this study ASD was negatively correlated with psychological resilience and predicted by NMRQ. The results are consistent with evidence which derive from other studies. For instance, a large study in China recruited 7,800 college students during the spread of COVID-19 in the country (Ye et al., 2020). The authors reported that the relationship between COVID-19-related stressful experiences and ASD could be mediated by resilience (Ye et al., 2020). Another large study was performed online in the USA. The sample consists of 3,042 participants and the researchers of that study concluded that higher resilience was associated with lower COVID-19 related worries (Barzilay et al., 2020). In this case, although the American study investigated COVID-19 related worries, it is worth mentioning that the term is not clinical, nor standardized in any commonly accepted self-reported measure. In our study the stress-related conditions that was chosen is limited to ASD as a commonly accepted condition on public panic and catastrophes. For example, in a study of 30 burn patients in the Formosa Fun Coast Explosion in Taiwan, it was found that resilience was mainly predicted by perceived stress in a stepwise regression analysis (Chen et al., 2020).

Considering SwL, the results of the current study are likely to be consistent to findings that were provided by other similar designs. To elaborate, a large study in Poland during the spread of COVID-19 in the country recruited 914 university students (Rogowska et al., 2020). One of the outcomes of that study is that there are significant statistical differences between the levels of SwL when perceived stress was the dependent variable (Rogowska et al., 2020). Although perceived stress lays between PTSD and ASD -especially if data are collected close

to the one month from exposure to the stressful event that differentiates ASD from PTSD-, the results may show a clear and strong link between a stress-related condition and SwL. Another European study in Portugal reported that SwL mediated the association between stress and personal burnout, depression and work-related burnout in a sample of 379 nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic in the country (Martins et al., 2022). Although this design and population are not identical to the ones of the present study, it is worth mentioning that SwL again was likely to work as a protective factor against stress-related condition in COVID-19. Apart from Europe, a Brazilian study of 1,224 undergraduate students at the Western Parana State University found that SwL was negatively related to stress-related conditions, and as a result it was suggested the delivery of interventions in favor of increasing SwL with a view to decrease stress-related condition in a future pandemic (Lopes & Nihei, 2021). Moreover, a Filipino study found that increases in COVID-related stress levels decrease SwL and psychological well-being in a sample of 301 student nurses (Labrague, 2021).

Regarding the limitations to the present study, data collection was performed through the spread of COVID-19 in Greece. Therefore, any outcomes are likely to reflect only the case of the pandemic for the Greek general population. As a result, future studies may test the same research question under everyday-life conditions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study investigated whether psychological resilience and SwL can predict ASD in a sample of 1,158 Greeks from the general population during the domestic lockdown which was enforced by the local government in an effort of eliminating the spread of the deadly virus in the country. The results of this study show that SwL and psychological resilience are positively correlated to each other, and that ASD is negatively correlated to both SwL

and psychological resilience respectively. Further, SwL and psychological resilience as a predictive model predict significantly ASD. The prediction ratio was reflected as satisfactory. The study finds itself limited to COVID-19 conditions and thus further research is needed in everyday life conditions in the Greek population. Lastly, it is highlighted that the study may be one of the few titles that provides quantitative evidence on ASD for the general population during the first COVID-19 spread in Greece.

Declaration by Authors

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