

## Positive Education and School Psychology During COVID-19 Pandemic

Jolanta Burke<sup>1</sup> and Gökmen Arslan<sup>2</sup> 

As coronavirus rages around the globe, its impact extends to 1.6 billion students (94% of the learner population) across almost 200 countries (UN, 2020), many of whom do not have adequate resources to fully engage in remote learning (Hall et al., 2020). Coronavirus pandemic has quickly changed the context in which people live, increasing exposure to risks. The pandemic's disruptions are far-reaching. Compared to pre-pandemic indicators, many young people are craving the social aspect of their school lives (Burke & Dempsey, 2020), reporting less engagement with play (Moore et al., 2020), and lower levels of wellbeing (Quinn et al., 2020). Teachers and school leaders find remote instruction challenging (Devitt et al., 2020), and the prospect operating schools side-by-side with the pandemic fills many with apprehension (Burke, 2020). In these unsettled times, more than ever, positive school psychology research is required.

Academic databases indicate that less than 1% of the current COVID-19-related research considers a positive psychological perspective, and there are even fewer studies in the field of positive education during the pandemic. A growing number of academic publications demonstrate the potential ways positive psychology can help educators manage distance learning during the pandemic successfully. Following past positive education research findings, we recognize the significant role that meaning-making, psychological flexibility, resilience, belonging, or positive affect can play during a global crisis (e.g., Arslan, 2020; Arslan et al., 2020; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Frydenberg et al., 2012; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Wong, 2011; Yıldırım, & Güler, 2020; Yıldırım, & Solmaz, 2020). Nonetheless, expanded positive school psychology

research that bridges the science-to-practice gap is needed to counteract the impact of COVID-19 on the school communities worldwide.

Theories suggest that close family and school relations foster young people's mental health and promote their psychological resilience during the pandemic (Arslan, 2020; Prime et al., 2020). Some authors acknowledge the potential of COVID-19 to initiate post-traumatic growth in both individuals and communities (Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2020). In a rapid survey carried out merely one week after the pandemic-related school closure, with almost 3,000 school leaders, half of them reported that the school closure would positively affect their staff and students (Burke & Dempsey, 2020). Similar findings were reported post-SARS pandemic. In the SARS study, the majority (86%) of people directly affected by the SARS virus acknowledged the benefits of experiencing it (Cheng et al., 2006). As traumatic as COVID-19 is to many now, it could also become a springboard for positive change, especially in schools that draw on positive education research to support staff wellbeing and sustain programs and services that foster students' social-emotional health.

Growing evidence demonstrates that positive changes are indeed emerging among the pandemic-affected school communities. For example, in a survey of almost 1,000 school principals during the early pandemic-related lockdown, many leaders reported they began new hobbies, created healthier personal routines, and started to exercise more regularly. They also enjoyed a less hectic pace of life than they had before the pandemic lockdown (Dempsey & Burke, 2020). Parents reported similar experiences. Many

<sup>1</sup>Department of Education, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare, Ireland.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling, Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Burdur, Turkey

found that caring for their children during the lockdown resulted in high positive affect levels and increased exercising (going for walks, gardening, pursuing a hobby; Lades et al., 2020). More such studies are needed that highlight the conditions and incidents of positive changes during the pandemic.

### Conclusion

Although we hope for this public health crisis to end soon, the pandemic signifies to be more extended than initially expected. Positive school psychology literacy is thus necessary for developing science that informed evidence helping students to cope with the challenges. In this regard, we encourage researchers, counsellors, mental health providers, and school authorities to develop effective interventions in school context, online or face-to-face where applicable, to support students' mental health and academic development. For example, given that in most countries' education has been done online during pandemic which has potential to affect students' sense of belonging to the school and mental health, implementation of such interventions would be particularly important to promote positive mental health. Therefore, we believe that application of the principles of positive psychology that emphasizes human strengths into school context can play a key role for the promotion of positive education and school psychology. The *Journal of Positive School Psychology* thus supports these efforts and invites manuscripts informing educators and mental health providers of best practices that sustain staff, parents, students' coping, resilience, and wellbeing during this most challenging worldwide emergency.

### Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Michael J. Furlong, Professor, (University of California), Murat Yildirim, PhD, (University of Leicester) and Kelly-Ann Allen, PhD, (Monash University) for their time and consultation when writing this editorial.

### ORCID

Gökmen Arslan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9427-1554>

Published Online: October 4, 2020

### References

- Arslan, G. (2020). Subjective vitality and college belongingness explain how loneliness reduces psychological well-being during coronavirus pandemic: Preliminary validation of the College Belongingness Questionnaire. *Psyarxiv.com/j7tf2*. <http://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/j7tf2>
- Arslan, G., Yıldırım, M., Tanhan, A., Buluş, M., & Allen, K. A. (2020). Coronavirus stress, optimism-pessimism, psychological inflexibility, and psychological health: Psychometric properties of the Coronavirus Stress Measure. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00337-6>
- Burke, J. (2020). *Primary School leaders' concerns about reopening schools after the COVID-19 closure*. Maynooth University, Maynooth
- Burke, J & Dempsey, M (2020). *COVID-19 practice in primary schools in Ireland*. Maynooth University, Dublin. <http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/12796/>
- Cheng, C., Wai-Man, W., & Tsang, K. W. (2006). Perception of benefits and costs during SARS outbreak: An 18-month prospective study. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 74*(5), 870-879. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.74.5.870>
- Dempsey, M & Burke, J. (2020). *COVID-19 Practice in primary schools: A two-month follow-up*. Maynooth University, Maynooth. [http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/13001/1/Wellbeing%20and%20Leadership%20Report\\_Final.pdf](http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/13001/1/Wellbeing%20and%20Leadership%20Report_Final.pdf)
- Devitt, A., Bray, A., Banks, J., & Ni Chorcara, E. (2020). *Teaching and learning during school closures: Lessons Learned. Irish second-level teacher perspective*. Trinity, Dublin. <https://www.tcd.ie/Education/research/covid-19/teaching-and-learning-resources/>
- Fredrickson, B. L., Tugade, M. M., & Waugh, C. E. (2003). What good are positive emotions in crises? A Prospective study of resilience and emotions following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11th, 2001. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 84*(2), 365-376. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.365>
- Hall, T., Connolly, C., O'Gradaigh, S., Burden, K., Kearney, M., Schuck, S.,... Kosmas, P. (2020). Education in precarious times: a comparative study across six countries to identify design priorities for mobile learning in a pandemic. *International Learning Sciences*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/ILS-04-2020-0089>
- Frydenberg, E., Deans, J., & O'Brien, K. A. (2012). *Developing children's coping in the early years: Strategies for dealing with stress, change and anxiety*. London, UK: Bloomsbury

Arslan, G. (2020). Subjective vitality and college belongingness explain how loneliness reduces

- Lades, L. K., Laffan, K., Daly, M., & Delaney, L. (2020). Daily emotional well-being during the covid-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Health Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/bjhp.12450>
- Moore, S. A., Faulkner, G., Rhodes, R. E., Brussoni, M., Chulak-Bozzer, T., Ferguson, L. J., . . . Tremblay, M. S. (2020). Impact of the COVID-19 virus outbreak on movement and play behaviours of Canadian children and youth: A national survey. *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, *17*(1), 1-11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12966-020-00987-8>
- Prime, H., Wade, M., & Browne, D. T. (2020). Risk and resilience in family well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *American Psychologist*, *75*(5), 631-643. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000660>
- Quinn, P., McGilloway, S., & Burke, J. (2020). *The Class of 2020: The experience of Leaving Certificate students during COVID-19 in Ireland*. Maynooth University, Maynooth
- Shakespeare-Finch, J., Bowen-Salter, H., Cashin, M., Badawi, A., Wells, R., Rosenbaum, S., & Steel, Z. (2020). COVID-19: An Australian perspective. *Journal of Loss & Trauma*, *25*(8), 662-672. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2020.1780748>
- Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence. *Psychological Inquiry*, *15*(1), 1-18. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1501\\_01](http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1501_01)
- Tugade, M. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). Resilient Individuals Use Positive Emotions to Bounce Back From Negative Emotional Experiences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *86*(2), 320-333. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.86.2.320>
- UN. (2020). *Education during COVID-19 and beyond*. [https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg\\_policy\\_brief\\_covid-19\\_and\\_education\\_august\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf)
- Wong, P. T. P. (2011). Positive psychology 20: Towards a balanced interactive model of the good life. *Canadian Psychology*, *52*(2), 69-81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0022511>
- Yıldırım, M., & Güler, A. (2020). Positivity mechanism explains how COVID-19 perceived risk increases death distress and reduces happiness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *168*(2021) 110347.
- Yıldırım, M., & Solmaz, F. (2020). COVID-19 burnout, COVID-19 stress and resilience: Initial psychometric properties of COVID-19 Burnout Scale. *Death Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1818885>