



Self Care for Anxiety and Depression: Personal and World Crisis

Aims

- 1) Explore the use of self-care activities during regular bouts of anxiety and depression, personal crisis (bereavement, financial issues, etc.) and world crisis (COVID-19)
- 2) Bridge the gap between self-care literature and mental health, since the majority of, if not all, relevant research has focused on self-care for physical ailments
- 3) Explore use and helpfulness of specific joyous/relaxing self-care activities that may reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- 4) Encourage the use of self-care

Method

171 participants were asked to complete an online survey using Qualtrics. Questions centred around their self-care behaviours, as well as diagnosis and symptoms of anxiety and depression (using the Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) questionnaire and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ), respectively). Participants were asked to select which self-care activities they used during regular anxiety/depression, personal crisis, and world crisis. They also rated how often they did each activity and how helpful they found them to reduce distress.

Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests and summary independent t-tests.

Summary

This study highlights the importance and effectiveness of several self-care activities, namely aromatherapy, yoga, and moderate exercise, when compared to traditional methods of therapeutic intervention. This could have implications for NHS referral services as the use of other therapies (cognitive behavioural therapy, etc.) were low and rated as least helpful, suggesting that self-care activities may be more accessible and useful in reducing effects anxiety and depression, especially during personal or world crisis. The results of this study can also provide new insight into crisis theory and research into the avoidant personality types of those with anxiety and depression. Avoidant self-care activities may thus be appropriate to reduce depressive and anxious symptoms on a short-term basis. The study also shows the negative impact of COVID-19 on self-care activities and mental health. Results of this study can provide insight into coping mechanisms used by those with anxiety and depression when faced with unprecedented times like COVID-19, where the effect on mental health will be undeniable.

Self-Care Categories

Counselling

Other Therapies: prescription medication, cognitive behavioural therapy, compassion focused therapy, etc.

Alternative Therapies: mindfulness, aromatherapy, yoga, journaling, music, meditation, praying, gardening, writing poetry/non-fiction, walking, jogging, other exercise, art/crafts

Social Ties: spending time with friends/family

Avoidant: spending time with pets, gaming, reading, cooking/baking, taking a hot bath, watching TV, playing puzzles

Results

No self-care activities were undertaken more during episodes of personal crisis, however, some activities were undertaken more during world crisis. Avoidant activities were not found to be significantly more used during episodes of personal and world crisis, but were found to be rated as most helpful, alongside some alternative therapy activities. Other therapies were rated as least helpful. Those with high PHQ scores were most likely to choose an avoidant self-care activity across all three time periods, whilst those with low PHQ scores were most likely to choose an alternative therapy activity across all three time periods. Across GAD scores, low scorers were also more likely to choose an alternative therapy activity across all periods, whilst high scorers were more likely to choose an alternative therapy activity during regular bouts of depression and personal crisis, but an avoidant activity during world crisis. The most prevalent activities undertaken as a result of COVID-19 were watching TV, gaming, arts/crafts, gardening, and walking or other exercise, as well as learning a new language. Those in part-time employment were found to have been more negatively impacted by COVID-19 than those in any other work status.

