

Free research contributions during pandemic period: research is still alive

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Dear Colleagues,

we hope that this Editorial finds you all well, with a spirit aware of the difficulties of the moment but also able to find ‘meaning and purpose’ in yourselves and in your work, just to quote a function of the M-axis of the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual-2! Many things that we believed were transitory will probably stay longer and transform our lives, but we are confident in an economic and psychological recovery, thanks also to the launch of the vaccination campaign.

Confident that you are not too afflicted by the pandemic fatigue, we hope that, despite the many restrictions of the case (*e.g.*, in offline samples recruitment!), you are writing or planning new and thought-provoking research papers. From the inevitable spread of online therapies to the specific coping styles induced by the major life changes imposed by the pandemic, we are experiencing very challenging transformations, both inside and outside the therapeutic setting.

A scientific mind never rests, and we are proud to invite you to read this issue of *Research in Psychotherapy: Psychopathology, Process and Outcome* (RIPPO), consisting of several free contributions, some of them related to the practice of psychotherapy during the pandemic. In more detail:

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Focusing on intensive short-term dynamic psychotherapy provided by psychology trainees, Rocco *et al.* (2021) tried to clarify the controversial relationship between treatment effectiveness and therapist experience, by analyzing the effects on symptomatology and psychological functioning in patients with anxiety disorders. Using the global assessment of functioning, the symptom checklist, the inventory of interpersonal problems, and the Shedler Westen assessment procedure at the end of the treatment and 6 and 12-month follow-up, the authors state that this kind of therapy provided by trainees is effective in bringing broad and in-depth change to pathology that can perpetuate anxiety disorders and other psychiatric conditions.

Demma, Suitner, Ferruzza, Nicolini, and Donini (2021) presented an important contribution to the Psychodynamic Focus Group technique in chronic disease. The results highlighted how the caregivers of psoriatic patients involved in the psychodynamic focus groups reported increasing levels of family dermatology life quality index, showing an improvement in their quality of respect to their relatives' pathology; in contrast, caregivers of patients who did not participate in the psychodynamic focus group, maintained stable levels of family dermatology life quality index. The results provide preliminary evidence that the group setting of the Psychodynamic Focus Group can alleviate the negative impact of psychosomatic disease not only on patients but also indirectly on their caregivers.

The well-known construct of separation anxiety was measured and compared with personality dimensions in a community sample of Italian emerging adults by Bassi, Mancinelli, Di Riso, Lis, and Salcuni (2021). Through a mediation model, the authors showed how separation anxiety influenced the identity problem and borderline personality dimension, assessed with the personality assessment inventory borderline scale, through trait anxiety. The clinical implications of the study for research in psychotherapy are discussed, emphasizing the importance of the dimensions involved during this delicate period of ‘transition to adulthood’.

Finally, Tanzilli *et al.* (2021) investigated the connections between mentalization, attachment, and implicit emotion regulation, operationalized as defense mechanisms, in a clinical population of depressed patients. Their findings underlined that patients with secure attachment and good reflective functioning, showed significantly

higher scores in overall level of defenses and, in particular, presented higher frequencies in mature defenses.

Looking at the pandemic context, two articles offer interesting perspectives on psychotherapists' perception of in-the-presence *versus* remote therapy, and app-based group psychological intervention, respectively.

Messina and Löffler-Stastka (2021) explored psychotherapists' perceptions of their clinical skills and in-session feelings in live therapy *versus* online therapy. Compared to live therapy, therapists reported significantly fewer clinical skills in online therapy, while difficulties in practice did not differ across the conditions considered. Regarding in-sessions feelings, therapists reported significantly lower scores of 'boring' and higher scores of 'flow' in live therapy compared to online therapy, whereas anxiety did not differ in the two conditions.

Parolin *et al.* (2021) implemented the 'Italia Ti Ascolto' (ITA) APP, an internet-based intervention, used to provide an online solution for psychological support needs during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) lockdown and pandemic, which heavily affected the Lombardy region of Italy. Through the app, users initially completed a baseline assessment on emotion regulation strategies, psychological distress, anxiety, depression, and perceived social support. Then, they could select between several one-hour long clinical groups held free of charge by experienced psychotherapists. After every session, people are asked to complete a quick user satisfaction survey. Preliminary data on psychological variables collected at baseline showed significant associations between emotion regulation strategies and depressive, anxious, and stress level symptoms. Future developments of ITA and implications for clinical practice and treatment were discussed.

Cornelis, Desmet, Reitske, Van Nieuwenhove, and Willemsen (2021), through the analysis of a single case of dissociation, investigated the interactions between hysterical symptoms and interpersonal dynamics during psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The authors followed consensual qualitative research for case studies and investigated repression and dissociation as central mechanisms in the formation of hysterical symptoms, using both quantitative outcomes measures (Inventory of Interpersonal Problems-32, Global Assessment of Functioning, Saliva stress hormone levels, General Health Questionnaire - 12, Semi-structured Change Interview) and process analysis (Core Conflictual Relationships Theme method). A complex psychoanalytic interpretation of dissociative symptoms and analytic techniques is discussed, along with the detailed intervention.

This Issue of RIPPPO ends with three papers on tools validation, engaging in empirical evaluation of outcomes and process in psychotherapy.

Client's beliefs about the treatment and their role in achieving the desired changes, as well as the roles they and their therapists will adopt and engage in during ther-

apy are one of the most important aspects of clinical symptoms reduction. However, validated tools that can assess the dimensions of patient's credibility/expectancy are still scarce. Silva, Barbosa, Salgado, and Cunha (2021) proposed the Portuguese validation of the credibility/expectancy questionnaire. Analyzing the factorial structure (exploratory and confirmatory), internal consistency, test-retest, convergent, discriminant validity, and the predictive validity of the scale in the decrease of symptoms, the authors demonstrate that the bifactorial structure of the instrument showed excellent psychometric properties and encourage the integration of these dimensions in the context of routine practice with several clinical diagnoses.

Remaining in Portugal, Costa, Worthington, Montanha, Couto, and Cunha (2021) validated the construct validity of two measures of self-forgiveness. They find good psychometric properties of the state self-forgiveness scale and the differentiated self-forgiveness process scale in a Portuguese sample. The authors examine the relationships between self-forgiveness, self-criticism, psychological well-being, and global psychopathological symptoms. Self-forgiveness is related to higher indices of positive feelings (*e.g.*, self-compassion, self-esteem) such as positive behaviors and beliefs about the self. Thus, self-criticism (*e.g.*, hated self) tends to decrease while feelings and actions of self-forgiveness, as well as positive feelings about the self (self-compassion; self-love), tends to increase. In clinical practice, these are positive indicators that can lead to self-improvement, as well as positive affect and less symptomatology.

Building on the evidence that client outcomes vary among therapists, van Thiel *et al.* (2021) sought to define what specific characteristics and actions of therapists are responsible for their differential outcomes. The goal of the cross-sectional study was to examine the psychometric characteristics, concerning validity and reliability, of the Dutch-language Facilitative Interpersonal Skills (FIS) on therapy video clips. The FIS consists of video recordings of challenging therapy situations that are recorded with professional actors in the role of clients with various psychological problems. Participants are asked to respond to the client in the video as if they were the client's therapist. The FIS instrument, measuring the therapist's interpersonal skills, has been shown to be predictive of treatment outcomes and empirically tested the discriminability between the non-challenging benign and challenging sets. All clips were translated and directed by practitioners researcher, with first-hand clinical experience. These pilot results may serve as a fruitful basis for future research and practice with the Dutch-language FIS clips.

The next issue of RIPPPO will be dedicated to a 'classic' topic, but rather neglected by current literature. We will address it in a transversal and interdisciplinary way, as well illustrated by the title we have chosen: 'Working on dreams: from psychotherapy to neuroscience'.

Free articles are always welcome in RIPPPO and we invite all of you, academics and practitioners, to share your thoughts and research projects to enrich the common knowledge on process and outcomes research in psychotherapy.

Our best wishes and enjoy the reading!

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