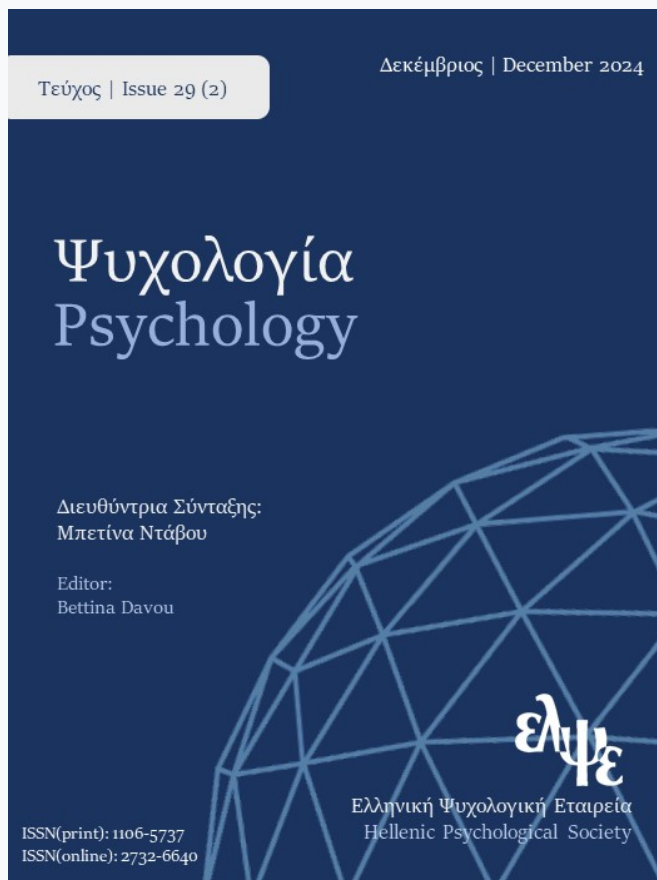


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Preface to the health-psychology article collection

Fotios Anagnostopoulos

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ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ | INTRODUCTION

Preface to the health-psychology article collectionFotios ANAGNOSTOPOULOS¹¹ Department of Psychology, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences

KEYWORDS

Health Psychology
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CORRESPONDENCE

Fotios Anagnostopoulos
Department of Psychology,
Panteion University of Social
and Political Sciences
136 Syngrou Av.
17671, Athens
fganang@panteion.gr

ABSTRACT

Health psychology is a relatively new subfield of psychology that emphasizes the biopsychosocial model, where physical well-being and disease reflect a complex set of interrelated processes, involving psychological, social, and biological factors. Health psychologists use psychological science to promote health, prevent illness, and improve health care systems. Despite significant advancements in research and practice, the field faces numerous challenges, such as the application of technology and telehealth to monitoring health behaviors, the integration of mental health care with physical health services, the reduction in health disparities, the shift towards primary and secondary prevention, the adoption of an interdisciplinary collaboration approach, and the development and implementation of policy and advocacy strategies. In this special issue, six health psychology-related papers are included that address the role of coping and stress mindset in the intensity of stress responses, the importance of emotional states and expert influence in vaccination decisions against human papillomavirus, the posttraumatic growth of community residents and healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of COVID-19 fear on healthcare professionals' quality of life, the relationship between COVID-related stress and COVID-related immunity and self-regulation factors, as well as the associations between optimism and health orientation during the COVID-19 pandemic. By examining psychosocial factors related to health problems and health-related issues, the authors have contributed to advancing our understanding of how such factors can help individuals better manage and cope with health challenges. The findings from these studies may help inform targeted interventions and strategies to improve overall well-being and address the psychological aspects of health and illness, particularly in the context of global health problems.

According to the Division of Health Psychology of the British Psychological Society (BPS), the goal of health psychology is “to study the psychological processes underlying health, illness and health care, and to apply these findings to the promotion and maintenance of health, the analysis and improvement of the health care system and health policy formation, the prevention of illness and disability, and the enhancement of outcomes for those who are ill or disabled” (BPS, 2024). In a similar vein, Division 38 of the American Psychological Association (APA) states that its Society for Health Psychology “seeks to improve the lives of individuals and society by promoting health, preventing illness, and improving health care through research, practice, education, training, and advocacy (APA, 2024). Health psychologists focus on the following areas: (a) health promotion and maintenance (e.g., they study psychological factors and develop and implement interventions to promote regular exercise, get children to develop good oral hygiene habits, or encourage people to quit smoking or improve their diets), (b) illness prevention (e.g., they study pertinent factors and develop interventions to detect disease early, during the asymptomatic phase), (c) the etiology and correlates of illness and dysfunction (e.g., they study ways of effectively coping with stress, or address the role of personality and social support in physical illness), (d) the psychosocial aspects of the experience and treatment of chronic illness (such as multiple sclerosis, cancer, kidney

diseases, diabetes, arthritis, cardiovascular diseases, pulmonary diseases), (e) health care system improvement and the formulation and modification of health policies (e.g., they study how health professionals can influence people's behavior to develop recommendations for improving doctor- patient communication, enhancing adherence to treatment regimen, and optimizing quality of life).

Despite advancements in research and the practice of health psychology over the past four decades, the field faces several challenges for the future (Friedman, 2011; Sarafino et al., 2015; Taylor & Stanton, 2021). These challenges include: (1) technology and telehealth (e.g., ensuring effective communication and maintaining therapeutic relationships through digital platforms, mobile health applications, wearable devices, and social media platforms to monitor and track health behaviors), (2) mental health integration (e.g., linking and integrating mental health care with physical health services and primary health care settings, and promoting a holistic approach that addresses both physical and mental health; Thornicroft et al., 2019), (3) health disparities (e.g., addressing social determinants of health, reducing disparities in providing health care to different patient populations, and tailoring interventions to diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds; Kreuter et al., 2021; Williams & Mohammed, 2009), (4) chronic disease management (e.g., developing and implementing effective interventions that promote sustainable behavior change, facilitate psychological adjustment and resilience, and improve patient adherence to treatment), (5) behavioral interventions (e.g., designing and implementing behavioral interventions that are theory-driven, model-guided, evidence-based, and capable of being easily adaptable to meet future or greater needs in real-world settings, especially in the face of societal influences and environmental factors; Michie et al., 2018), (6) emphasizing primary and secondary prevention (e.g., shifting the focus from tertiary care towards preventive psychology, featuring the importance of detecting early warning signs of a health problem and preventing exposure to hazards and altering unhealthy or unsafe behaviors that can cause disease or injury), (7) research methods and methodology (e.g., applying advanced statistical techniques and innovative research methods such as intersectional multilevel methods, community-based participatory research, or innovations in qualitative methods, such as nesting qualitative approaches within clinical trials and using qualitative methods to work with non-verbal populations and young children; ensuring that research is inclusive and take ethical considerations into account), (8) aging population (e.g., addressing the psychological, cognitive, behavioral and emotional, aspects of aging, and helping older people achieve and maintain healthy and productive lifestyles and adjust to the problems of chronic illness), (9) education and training (e.g., promoting interdisciplinary approaches, fostering multidisciplinary collaboration and teamwork among health workers from fields such as psychology, medicine, epidemiology, public and community health, nursing, social work, physiotherapy, nutrition/ dietetics, dentistry, genetics, and ensuring that health professionals are adequately trained in health psychology principles to provide and support biopsychosocial care), (10) integration with clinical health care (e.g., bridging the gap between psychological research and clinical practice, by collaborating more efficiently with healthcare providers to ensure that psychological insights inform treatment strategies for chronic diseases, and that psychological factors are linked to biological ones, such as immunologic, hormonal, and neurochemical), (11) policy and advocacy (e.g., engaging in health policy and advocating for changes that promote psychological well-being in public health initiatives, influencing legislation and funding for holistic services), (12) global health issues (e.g., modifying psychological approaches and developing interventions to address global health challenges such as climate change and contemporary pandemics -like COVID-19, which impact physical and mental health; Freedland et al., 2020; Swim et al., 2011; Taylor, 2022a, 2022b).

The above-mentioned challenging areas do not always serve as a guide for recently released studies. For example, last year's articles published in the health psychology journals of two well-known psychological organizations (namely, the BPS and the APA), covered a wide range of topics, including (i) dyadic coping, resilience, and posttraumatic growth in spinal cord injury patients and their spouses, (ii) longitudinal

associations in dementia family caregivers of ambivalent feelings and disruptive behaviors with C-reactive protein, interleukin-6, and D-dimer, (iii) adverse childhood experiences and adult disease, and (iv) effectiveness of an online multicomponent program for chronic fatigue syndrome. Moreover, some published articles in these journals address and discuss (v) low early life socioeconomic status and susceptibility to the common cold in adulthood, (vi) how mindfulness improves psychological health and supports health behavior cognitions, (vii) climate anxiety and its association with health behaviors and generalized anxiety, and (viii) the presence of attentional and interpretation biases in patients with severe multiple sclerosis-related fatigue. It is clear that the authors of these publications touch on only a small portion of the 12 challenging areas of research that were previously mentioned.

This special issue on ‘Contemporary challenges in Clinical and Health Psychology’ contains a collection of six papers that highlight different themes of psychological research, conducted during the various waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as themes covering intentions to get vaccinated against HPV, in addition to the role of coping and stress mindset in the intensity of stress responses.

In the first study of the collection, Belevogka and Smyth employed a mixed-methods design to examine how coping mechanisms are related to stress mindset and stress responses. They found that those who had a stress-is-enhancing mindset (which is characterized by the extent to which an individual views stress as beneficial for health, performance, and well-being) experienced increased energy levels, higher concentration, better memory abilities and motivation, and less intense responses to stress than those who had a stress-is-debilitating mindset (who experienced the negative consequences of stress). Avoidant coping techniques were found to mediate the relationship between stress mindset and intensity of responses to stress. Results suggested that adopting a less negative, balanced, mindset about stress might be associated with more beneficial coping mechanisms, which, in turn, could enhance the regulation of stress responses. These findings should be taken into account when designing stress reduction interventions.

The article by Efkarpidis, Koulierakis, and Papastilianou is concerned with parental intentions to vaccinate their daughters for human papillomavirus (HPV). In order to create relevant questionnaires that were administered to participants, this study used the COM-B model (which suggests that one must have the capability, the opportunity, and the motivation in order to engage in a particular behavior) as well as the Theoretical Domain Framework (which includes 15 domains such as social influences, environmental context and resources, reinforcement, beliefs about consequences, intentions, goals, emotion, knowledge, decision processes, cognitive and interpersonal skills). Knowledge about the vaccine, fear of possible side effects, relief that serious diseases could be avoided, expert influence, and reminders through email were significantly related to parents’ intention to vaccinate their daughters against HPV. Interventions aimed at parents who have not fully vaccinated their daughters with the HPV vaccine should consider changing the parents’ emotional state and emphasize and strengthen the role of experts in providing information about the crucial role of vaccination.

The article by Kalaitzaki, Tamiolaki, and Tsouvelas addresses a critical issue related to posttraumatic growth (PTG) during the COVID-19 pandemic. They compared the PTG levels between community residents and healthcare workers over two time points, specifically during the first (March- May 2020) and the second (Nov 2020-May 2021) COVID-19 lockdowns. These authors set to identifying the coping strategies that promoted different PTG domains (i.e., personal strength, altered priorities and new possibilities in life, spiritual growth, appreciation for life, and improved interpersonal relationships). In both sampling groups, two adaptive coping responses (positive reframing and religious coping) were related to all PTG domains. However, certain coping strategies (e.g., self-distraction) were associated with specific PTG dimensions (e.g., personal strength) in one group (community residents) but not in the other. According to the authors, the findings can guide preventive training initiatives that focus on specific coping strategies that each sampling group needs to improve.

Kaltsouda et al. investigated the association between healthcare professionals' health-related quality of life and their fear of COVID-19. Their cross-sectional study, carried out during the second and third waves of the pandemic (Jan- May 2021), revealed that fear of COVID was significantly related to physical and mental health. In the face of serious public health threats, the authors contend that their findings underscore the necessity of targeted interventions to foster resilience factors against excessive fear.

Paschali and Karademas conducted research on COVID-related distress (as indicated by anxiety-specific symptoms, perceived stress, and perceived changes in emotional quality of life) two years after the onset of the pandemic (Nov 2021- Jan 2022) and examined its relationship with COVID-related immunity (coronavirus infection and vaccination) and self-regulation factors (i.e., COVID-related representations and coping mechanisms). They found that the factors associated with COVID-related perceived stress were emotional representations, positive attitude, seeking social support, and wishful thinking. The last three factors were also related to perceived changes in emotional quality of life. Furthermore, higher levels of emotional representations and wishful thinking were linked to more COVID-related anxiety symptoms, whereas higher levels of positive attitudes were linked to fewer symptoms. The authors concluded that even two years after the outburst of the pandemic, COVID-related distress was more closely linked to people's overall experiences and coping strategies than to their risk of infection or fear of repercussions. These findings may help inform and direct future efforts to properly address and manage pandemic-related distress.

In a cross-sectional study, Orlandou, Togas, and Alexias explored associations between optimism and health orientation during the COVID-19 pandemic (Oct – Dec 2020), as well as differences across gender and exercise status. The study revealed strong associations between optimism and health orientation during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., the tendency to rate one's future health status as being excellent; the motivation to ensure that one is not unhealthy), with notable differences across gender and exercise status. In order to help people better cope with health challenges, such as pandemics, the authors propose that future research should take individuals' health orientation into account.

Across the six papers, the authors address and tackle psychological factors involved in topical health problems (COVID-19, HPV) and other health-related issues (regulation of stress responses), using models (e.g., COM-B) or considering and investigating interesting and fascinating concepts, and measuring the corresponding psychological variables (stress mindset, illness representations, health orientation, PTG, fear of COVID). By doing this, they have been able to formulate and test intriguing research hypotheses and advance our knowledge and understanding of the role of psychosocial factors that may help people better manage and cope with pandemic-related distress, regulate their stress responses, get vaccinated against viruses, promote posttraumatic growth, and improve their quality of life. We hope that this special issue will serve as a useful resource for the field and trigger more research on health psychology topics.

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Πρόλογος στη συλλογή των άρθρων ψυχολογίας της υγείας

Φώτιος ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ¹

¹Τμήμα Ψυχολογίας, Πάντειο Πανεπιστήμιο Κοινωνικών και Πολιτικών Επιστημών

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ	ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ
Ψυχολογία της υγείας Ψυχολογικοί παράγοντες Φροντίδα της υγείας Πανδημία της νόσου covid-19	<p>Η ψυχολογία της υγείας αποτελεί έναν σχετικά νέο κλάδο της ψυχολογίας που δίνει έμφαση στο βιοψυχοκοινωνικό μοντέλο, όπου η σωματική ευεξία και η ασθένεια αντανακλούν ένα σύνθετο σύνολο αλληλένδετων διαδικασιών, που περιλαμβάνουν ψυχολογικούς, κοινωνικούς και βιολογικούς παραγόντες. Οι ψυχολόγοι υγείας χρησιμοποιούν την ψυχολογική επιστήμη για την προαγωγή της υγείας, την πρόληψη των ασθενειών και τη βελτίωση των συστημάτων υγειονομικής περίθαλψης. Παρά τις σημαντικές προόδους στην έρευνα και την πρακτική, ο κλάδος αντιμετωπίζει πολυάριθμες προκλήσεις, όπως η εφαρμογή της τεχνολογίας και της τηλε-υγείας για την παρακολούθηση των συμπεριφορών υγείας, η διασύνδεση της φροντίδας ψυχικής υγείας με τις υπηρεσίες σωματικής υγείας, η μείωση των ανισοτήτων στην υγεία, η στροφή προς την πρωτογενή και δευτερογενή πρόληψη, η υιοθέτηση μιας προσέγγισης διεπιστημονικής συνεργασίας και η ανάπτυξη και εφαρμογή στρατηγικών πολιτικής και υπεράσπισης/ συνηγορίας. Σε αυτό το ειδικό τεύχος περιλαμβάνονται έξι εργασίες που σχετίζονται με την ψυχολογία της υγείας και αφορούν τον ρόλο των στρατηγικών αντιμετώπισης και της νοοτροπίας γύρω από το στρες στην ένταση των αντιδράσεων στο στρες, τη σημασία των συναισθηματικών καταστάσεων και της επιρροής των ειδικών επιστημόνων στις αποφάσεις εμβολιασμού κατά του ιού των ανθρώπινων θηλωμάτων, τη μετατραυματική ανάπτυξη κατά τη διάρκεια της πανδημίας COVID-19, τον αντίκτυπο του φόβου για τη νόσο COVID-19 στην ποιότητα ζωής των επαγγελματιών υγείας, τη σχέση μεταξύ του στρες που σχετίζεται με την νόσο COVID και των παραγόντων ανοσίας και αυτορρύθμισης που σχετίζονται με την νόσο COVID, καθώς και τις συσχετίσεις μεταξύ της αισιοδοξίας και του προσανατολισμού στην υγεία κατά τη διάρκεια της πανδημίας COVID-19. Εξετάζοντας τους ψυχοκοινωνικούς παράγοντες που σχετίζονται με την υγεία, οι συγγραφείς συμβάλλουν στην πληρέστερη κατανόηση του τρόπου με τον οποίο αυτοί οι παράγοντες μπορούν να βοηθήσουν τα άτομα να διαχειριστούν και να αντιμετωπίσουν καλύτερα τις προκλήσεις της υγείας. Τα ευρήματα αυτών των μελετών μπορούν να βοηθήσουν στη διαμόρφωση στοχευμένων παρεμβάσεων και στρατηγικών για τη βελτίωση της συνολικής ευημερίας των ατόμων και την αντιμετώπιση των ψυχολογικών πτυχών της υγείας και της ασθένειας, ιδίως στο πλαίσιο των παγκόσμιων προβλημάτων υγείας.</p>
ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΕΠΙΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑΣ	
Φώτιος Αναγνωστόπουλος Τμήμα Ψυχολογίας Πάντειο Πανεπιστήμιο Κοινωνικών και Πολιτικών Επιστημών Λεωφ. Συγγρού 136 17671 Αθήνα fganang@panteion.gr	