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Special Feature:

COVID-19 & Mental Health: Nourishing your mental health amidst this global crisis

As the number of affected people, death tolls and lockdown across various countries increases due to the COVID-19, it is increasingly important for us to take care of our mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO), Centre for Disease Control (CDC), Mental Health Europe (MHE), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (Government of India) and several other organizations and mental health professionals have crafted and enlisted several strategies for

coping with the stress of this pandemic. We bring to you some of those strategies: Your feelings are valid: While Positive Psychology focuses on addressing human strengths over weaknesses, turning a blind eve to the negatives or denying the absence of the negatives is not among its agenda. In the present situation if we focus only on directing people to look at the brighter side of things without acknowledging their fears and anxieties, we are in essence saying that the negative emotions that so many people out there are experiencing are simply not valid. In its latest article "Minding our minds during the COVID-19 pandemic"¹, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (Govt. of India) also acknowledges and reassures the reader that it is normal to experience fear, sadness, and loneliness in the current situation.

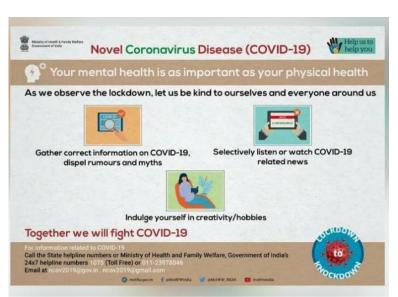
Speaking of the dangers of focusing only on the positives in the current situation, Indra Aimee Rai writes in her blog² "We don't create the space for people to feel both free and safe to speak their struggles. It has the potential to silence and shame those who are

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suffering alone inside their homes, making them feel that there is something wrong with but that does not make you a failure. Recognize that these are difficult times and

them or their inability to emotionally cope." Let us not forget that this pandemic and the subsequent measures taken to curtail its spread, i.e., the lockdown are unprecedented. Know that it is normal for you to



your feelings of fear, entrapment, sadness and loneliness are valid.

Please seek help if you feel a loss of control over your emotions, because now is the time you might need it more than ever before. You may **reach out for**

experience negative emotions amidst this uncertainty and global crises. Anxiety, anger, agitation, restlessness, boredom, sadness, loneliness is but natural under these circumstances. It does not mean that you are failing. It is not realistic of anyone to expect that you will come up with your next masterpiece being locked in your own home while people out there are dying. Let's remember that this is not a summer vacation. Your productivity might reach an all-time low, help @ 08046110007. This is a toll-free helpline number of NIMHANS,

Bangalore. This is an initiative for helping individuals who are feeling overwhelmed with negative emotions, and facing any kind of mental health issues in the present circumstances.

The news and social media: Stop overexposing yourself to news updates on COVID-19.

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If you keep a constant tab on the latest statistics of the pandemic it might escalate your negative emotions such as fear and restlessness. Constant notifications from news-related apps will have a similar outcome. Hence, try muting notifications from such apps. Also seek information from trusted sources only once or twice a day. Further, as the WHO3 recommends "Find opportunities to amplify positive and hopeful stories and positive images of local people who have experienced COVID-19. For example, stories of people who have recovered or who have supported a loved one and are willing to share their experience." Moving onto social media - while it has currently become a source of distress for many, several others are finding solace from memes, blogs articles on COVID-19 and mental health, and from watching the Instagram live videos of their favourite movie stars, musicians, and stand-up comics. If any of these appeal to you, you may try engaging in such activities as well. You may also try joining Facebook groups such as Project Silver <u>Lining</u>⁴ to make your lockdown days a little more positive and cheerful.

Here's what you can do 👇

PROJECT SILVER LINING

Step 1. SHARE **1 good thing that you are** experiencing each day . It could be a picture / video / word post - whatever you like ! (Something that made you happy / you're grateful for)

Step 2. discrete SPREAD the cheer . Tag 1 friend you think would like to be a part of this community.

Love 💞 & virtual hugs 👷 to tide past these trying times

Image source: <u>https://www.facebook.com/101061608217560/photos/a</u> .101094818214239/101736124816775/?type=3&theater

Hand washing and OCD: Hand washing is one of the precautionary measures against COVID-19, and this message is being repeatedly conveyed to us through the news and radio channels, advertisements, social media, Government advisories and guidelines, and numerous other means. However, we must recognize that this is triggering for people who have Obsessive Compulsive

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Disorder (OCD), especially for those with fears revolving around contamination. In this context, Charity OCD Action remarks⁵ that "the issue to look out for is the function - for example, is the washing being carried out for the recommended amount of time to reduce the risk of spreading of the virus - or is it being done ritualistically in a specific order to feel 'just right'?"



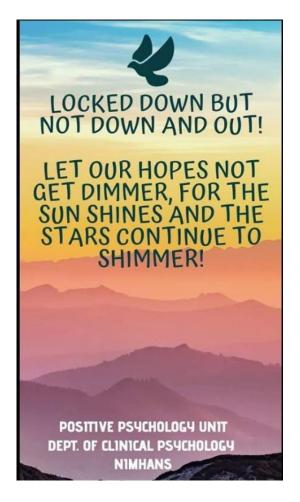
Image Source: <u>https://in.news.yahoo.com/gentle-hand-wash-aesop-resurrection-hand-wash-113420206.html</u>

Distant socializing: Criticizing the use of the term "social distancing", <u>Greenway, Saeri</u> <u>& Cruwys</u> remark in their article⁶ "While we must be physically distant, it's crucial we maintain, or even increase, social contact with others during this unprecedented time... so much of our social closeness depends on physical closeness. Humans are innately social, and often our instinct is to reach out to touch or be close to others when we feel unwell or afraid. This makes it all the more difficult to stay away from others right now." Some of their tips for maintaining social contact in the present situation include:

- Interacting with others virtually, through video and voice calls and text messages. Jamil Zaki, Associate
 Professor of Psychology at Stanford
 University says⁷ "Ironically, the same technologies we often blame for tearing apart our social fabric might be our best chance, now, of keeping it together".
- Talking to one's neighbours across balconies, if feasible.
- Using this lockdown period to spend quality time with one's family and partner by engaging in indoor games, watching tv shows, movies, and meditating or exercising together.

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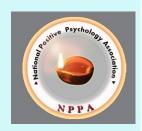
Useful online resources: In addition to social media, and video chat applications such as Skype, there are a number of other ways to keep yourself engaged on cyberspace. For instance, you can learn a new language with the help of online language learning tools such as Duolingo, Busuu, and BBC languages.

Similarly, guided meditation apps such as *Omvana* or free online meditation sessions hosted by the Art of Living (https://www.artofliving.org/in-en/freeonline-meditation) might help those looking for ways to calm their mind. Free online yoga classes (https://anmolmehta.com/classesonline/) as well as follow-along videos on deep breathing exercises (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=395Zlo N4Pr8) might help in maintaining ones

N4Rr8) might help in maintaining ones physical health while at home. Another online resource that might be of special appeal to book lovers is the freely downloadable ebooks of the world-renowned author Paulo Coelho. He has posted a few of his e-books on his official website

(https://paulocoelhoblog.com/booksonline/). Apart from these, Arogya Setu (https://www.mygov.in/aarogya-setu-app/) the coronavirus tracking app (with additional features) launched by the Government of India is another resource that might come in handy during this time.

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important for health care

professionals and those

If you have

children and older people

at home, reassure them

that they are safe while

also emphasizing that

hygiene. If any of your

older family members

have dementia or

younger family

they must maintain good

members have ADHD or

in essential services.

Self-care: "Create a menu of personal selfcare activities that you enjoy, such as spending time with friends and family, exercising, or reading a wardrobe. Also, don't underestimate the benefits of good sleep and good food during these trying times. This is particularly

book," recommends the CDC⁸. Further, the MHE website⁹ says that instead of focusing on the things that are beyond our control (containing the virus), we must shift our focus to things that are under our control

(maintaining personal hygiene).

We could try



Image source: <u>https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-</u> vector/hobbies-leisure-activity-or-pastime-art-and-vector-24556274

distracting ourselves by engaging in activities that make us feel positive and cheerful such as an afternoon siesta, sitting in the balcony, watching re-runs of our favourite web-series, listening to songs and updating our musical playlist, doing yoga or light exercises, cooking and baking (albeit with limited resources) or even cleaning our room, and decluttering our

other psychological/behavioural issues try talking to their

therapist/physician/psychiatrist about teletherapy or video-based sessions. It is also important for you to take care of your own mental health and seek support if you are feeling overwhelmed and out of control.

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Remember this situation is temporary. But once this is over let's not forget to continue being grateful to the medical community, sanitation workers, deliverymen, and all other essential servicemen who are helping us through this crisis.

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¹<u>https://www.mohfw.gov.in/</u>

²https://www.elephantjournal.com/2020/03 /stop-romanticising-lockdown-its-a-mentalhealth-crisis-in-themaking/?fbclid=IwAR1BW2M7MRQRgMi9F nNGADDJLCxRzv91ATMjSeQmKEJRY6btE0 fTfgLDMDg

³<u>https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf</u>

4<u>https://www.facebook.com/pg/Project-</u> <u>Silver-Lining-</u> <u>101061608217560/community/?ref=page_int</u> ernal

<u>https://www.bbc.com/news/health-51873799</u>

⁶https://theconversation.com/why-are-wecalling-it-social-distancing-right-now-weneed-social-connections-more-than-ever-134249

<u>mm twitter Stanford 202003190917 sf119</u> <u>430894&sf119430894=1</u>

<u>8https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html</u>

9<u>https://www.mhe-sme.org/covid-19/</u>

The Scholarly Nook

The Scholarly Nook brings to you articles written by scholars either on some of their own research or regarding the latest ongoing research in the field of Positive Psychology. In this edition we present an article on positive risk-taking behavior among youth. Read ahead to know more!

Positive Risk-taking

"The biggest risk in life is not taking any risk" Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder of Facebook

The standpoint of Mark Zuckerberg reflected in this previously mentioned catchphrase drove him to create Facebook at



the age of 19 which according to the World Health Organization is classified as a period of adolescence (World Health Organization, 2017). Scholars such as Reyna and Fraley (2006) and Steinberg (2004) contend that this period is marked by an immense desire to experiment, explore and take risks.

While, the idea of risk-taking, in general, is often looked at negatively, empirical research suggests that taking risks in life is completely normal, and is in fact, considered to be important for healthy youth development. It helps young people to grow and thrive (Bottomley, 2013). Adolescent's propensity to take risks has become an important area of investigation for psychologists, and an area of concern for policymakers. This has led researchers to explore various aspects of risk-taking; one of which is positive risk-taking. According to researchers, risk-taking behavior falls on a spectrum. Negative risk-taking behaviors lies on one part of the spectrum. This includes behaviors such as drunk driving, unprotected sex, and substance abuse to name a few. On NEWSLETTER ISSUE #07



the other end of the spectrum lies positive risk-taking behaviors that are legally (e.g., fighting for your rights), and socially acceptable (e.g., inventing something new) have low chances of negative life outcome (e.g., if not able to invent something it won't cost life like in drunk driving) (Hansen & Breivik, 2001; Fischer & Smith, 2004) and are beneficial for adolescents well-being (Duell & Steinberg, 2019).

Young people are predisposed to take all kinds of risks in life. Newspaper articles and our vicinities are full of examples



describing adolescents who take positive risks in life. Consider teen *Soring Lepcha*, innovator of cost-effective water filters (National child award winner at age 12), Olympic air pistol shooter *Manu Bhaker* (gold medalist at age 16), *Malala Yousafzai* (age 16) won Nobel prize for fighting for girls education against Islamist activists, *Greta Thunberg* (age 16) Climate change activist

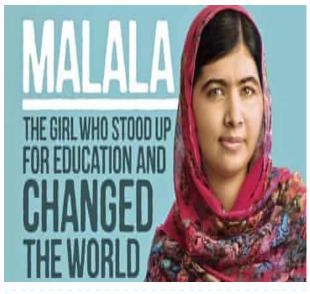


Image source: <u>https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2014/aug/25/malala-yousafzai-interview-</u>identity-amnesty-teen-takeover-2014

(nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize), and
National Bravery Award winner Nazia (aged
16) took rampant action against illegal
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gambling in Agra by reporting the crime to the police.

Despite, the real-world examples of positive risk-taking, the empirical work in this area of positive risk-taking is still at a nascent phase. In their recent work, Duell and Steinberg (2019) elaborated on the nature of positive risks by highlighting three elements that characterize this construct. The first element focuses on how positive risks help in enhancing well-being and self-growth (e.g., enrolling in a new and challenging course would help an individual gain extra skill and knowledge if he/she takes that risk). Second, the costs carried by positive risks are less severe than negative risk (e.g., the amount of harm to adolescent's safety, health and wellbeing are less in comparison to negative risk). Lastly, these risks are accepted and approved by societal and legal authorities. Researchers working on positive risk-taking are still exploring this area and its benefits for human development.



"The key to limiting dangerous risk-taking behavior is to supplement it with more appropriate risks" - Lisa Bottomley (2013)

Positive risk-taking appears to be beneficial in creating and maintaining a healthy and important connection between the community and school engagement (Wood et al., 2013). As reported by Duell and Stenberg (2019), adolescents who took greater negative risk (e.g., stealing from a store, speeding on roads, using drugs and substances) reported lesser school engagement as compared to those who took more positive risks (e.g., standing for ones right and trying a new activity which they have never tried). As Duell (2019) remarks "Youth who take more positive risks may be more engaged in their academics, and being engaged in one's academics is likely to increase opportunities for positive risk-taking".

Positive risk-taking helps the youth to build a sense of positive identity, a sense of purpose in their life (as they are experimenting with new ideas) (Malin et. al., 2017), develops a sense of personal and social **NEWSLETTER ISSUE #07** responsibility (e.g., by inculcating behaviors which do not harm the society like drunk driving). These characteristics, therefore,



Image source: https://indiastemfoundation.org/

create an opportunity for goal setting (e.g., by enrolling in new and challenging coursework) and learning (Crone & Dahl, 2012) which promotes healthy psychological functioning.

An easy way to promote positive risktaking behavior in youth is to develop schoolbased academic and extracurricular exercises that prioritize those activities which promote positive risk-taking. Schools and colleges, as a system, can promote positive risk-taking by helping students to take academic (see Duell



et. al., 2019 for details) and innovative risk (e.g., participating in Olympiads, competitions at national and international platforms), pro-social risk (e.g., helping someone in need by risking your life), adventurous (e.g., going for sports and other activities) and social risks (e.g., standing for your beliefs).

It is important to focus on risk-taking positive behaviors for two reasons (a) risktaking is developmentally constructive for youth (an individual needs to take a risk in life for healthy functioning), (b) since adolescents have a high propensity and tolerance for risk (Steinberg, 2004; Reyna et. al., 2006), society needs to provide them with enough opportunities to take risks that are constructive and help them to develop in adaptive ways without risking their life and health.

In conclusion, the domain of positive risk-taking behavior can help youth become aware of other alternatives for fulfilling their risk-taking propensity. This will help them to redirect their risk-taking tendencies towards goal-directed behaviors that promote learning and well-being. Schools and colleges are ideal places where we can help them to start exploring the benefits of positive risk-taking.

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The Oracle: Interview Series with Esteemed Professors

In this issue, we feel privileged to introduce all our members to Prof. Nov Rattan Sharma, one of our Advisory Committee Members. Prof. Sharma has been associated with the field of Psychology for over 36 years, and is currently serving as a Professor of Psychology at Maharshi Dayanand University (MDU), Rohtak. He is widely known for having established the Center of Positive Health at the Department of Psychology of MDU for both the students and the general public. He has published 12 books and over 190 papers in several national and international journals. Let us learn more

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his journey in the field of Psychology, from Prof. Sharma himself.



Prof. Sharma being felicitated at an international conference held in Gandhinagar (November, 2019)

1. What had stimulated your interest in Psychology?

When I was studying in a rural school for matriculation in the year 1977, I was frequently put on duty as monitor to ensure the quietness in the vacant periods. I found the job interesting as well as challenging

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because of the varied reaction and behavior of classmates. While one was sitting quietly and following the instructions of one of his own bystanders, a few others objected and behaved in rebellious manner. Such a discrepancy in the behavioral pattern of my classmates was bothering me a lot. I used to ask my teachers and parents to make me to understand and explain this mysteriously diversified behavior. My class teacher asked me to meet one of our villagers (Prof. C. R. Darolia) who was at that time pursuing a Master's Program in Psychology at Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra (KUK). My inquisitive mind discussed with him about individual differences and he advised me to take Psychology as a course in the Pre-University Program. His able guidance brought me to KUK for M. A. Psychology in 1981. Personal consultation and mindful deliberation on the part Prof. Darolia stimulated my interest in Psychology.



2. How did your association with Psychology begin?

After completing my Master's degree in Psychology with First class First, I joined as lecturer in 1983 and completed my Ph. D. with specialization in Comparative Psychology with Albino rats

as subjects. My earlier teaching and research were primarily in Experimental and Comparative Psychology. My training under Prof. I. S. Muhar made me conduct and design the experiments at my work place i.e. M. D. University Rohtak. During

that time my wife Dr. Sushma Sharma was perusing Ph. D. in Psychology at H. P. University Shimla under Prof. A. S. Sethi. I

used to meet Prof. Sethi frequently who used to talk/ teach me spiritual aspects of life. He was a strong devotee of Shri Satya Sai Baba. I was highly impressed by his

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discourses on spirituality. Around 1995, my research domain observed a paradigm shift from Pure Psychology to Applied Psychology. Human values, preservation of natural resources, service to mankind became my life goal posts. My interests in Indian Psychology through the study of



Prof. Sharma at a workshop on Positive Health Promotion which he had conducted at UMD, Malaysia during ACHP-2019

different religions and spiritual books were further strengthened during a refresher course at Allahabad university in 1996 where discourses from

Prof. L. B. Tiripathi, Prof. Janak Pandey, Prof. Girishwar Mishra, Prof. Ajit K. Dalal and many others shaped my



understanding about Applied Indian Psychology.

In 2001, I became Chairman of the Department from which I had earned my Ph.D. degree in 1987. My interest in Positive Psychology was further sharpened through the accomplishments of certain focused academic and professional activities from 2001 to 2004. In my opinion today's Positive Psychology is the by-product of Indian Philosophy and Psychology. An International conference of IAAP at MDU in 2004 was conducted and I proposed- "POSITIVE HEALTH



At the ASPA Conference at Colombo in February, 2020.

AND WELL BEING" as a focal theme with the objective being to consolidate the knowledge generated internationally to enable us to learn and practice macro and micro level implications of Positive Psychology in its regular form. A center for POSITIVE HEALTH was also established in the same year to impart psychological services to the university fraternity.

3. What do you feel about the way Positive Psychology has been developing in India, and where do you see Positive Psychology in India, in the next 5 years?

I am satisfied with the pace and strengths of the ways in which Positive Psychology is developing in India. I feel proud when I come across the remarkable contributions of young scientists in the various fields of Positive Psychology by assimilating the eastern and western perspectives. I sincerely appreciate the efforts of Dr. Kamlesh Singh who is reorienting Positive Psychology constructs by conducting

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series of programs including real field researches. In one of her largely attended programs, well reputed Clinical Psychologist, Prof. S. S. Nathawat declared himself to be a Positive Psychologist to foster promotional/ growth model of behaviour technology by inculcating the SQ and GQ.

I strongly feel that in next five years, Indian Psychologists will lead the international community of Positive Psychologists because we not only have rich theoretical backgrounds of resources but also the scope for empirical and scientific testing with external validity. It can be visualised with the fact that world level scientists are actively engaged in checking the efficacy of positive psychological concepts and theories.

4. What would you say, is the value of Positive Psychology to the general population?

There are timeless and boundless values of Positive Psychology to the general

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population. Actually, need and applications of Positive Psychology are not only across the life span but are also beyond generations. Indian Positive Psychology with current research evidences have made the common man to believe that Happy and Healthy life can be lived only and only if you transform yourself from vicious thought cycle to virtuous thought cycle towards small or large life events.

5. As someone who has been teaching, training and guiding scholars in Psychology several years, what kind of training would you suggest for students of Positive Psychology?

The students/ youth of present day have the scientific temperament with logical arguments and they are fact seekers. They can be tuned, trained or transformed only through evidence-based technology. Therefore, there is a need to gather, generate and share scientific knowledge to



create genuine effective model of training use minimum words/ time to indicate weakness and use words / time maximally to express the strength of an individual. In our researches it has been successfully demonstrated that training for life skills and positive capacities across three-time horizons (Past, Present and Future) should be the focus of training instead of identifying and dealing with problem behavior.

6. How can the community of Positive Psychologists contribute in a better way to research in the Indian setting?

Community of Indian Positive Psychologists across the globe should join their hands to take up the psycho - social constructs from ancient Indian heritage for the scientific verification which in turn has implications for the grass roots and benefits the masses. The transfer of knowledge should be directly translated into training modules for a better, fuller and more meaningful positive life.



Prof. Sharma with his wife, Dr. Sushma Sharma at the 9th World Congress of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies held in Berlin (2019)

Latest Updates

While conferences and seminars have been called off due to travel restrictions, you may refer to these resources to learn something new during this time:



 Positive Psychology Leader Series (IPPA): Optimizing social connection in a period of physical separation with Dr. Sara Algoe, 23rd April, 7.30 pm – 8.30 pm EST

(https://www.ippanetwork.org/ppls/)

 Free CE Course: Making sense of the pandemic – Psychological Impact on clients and communities by Dr. Baruch Fischhoff

(https://clearlyclinical.com/podcast/2020/3/1 6/free-ce-course-making-sense-of-thepandemic-psychological-impact-on-clientsand-communities-ep-83)

- Positive Psychology: Resilience Skills by Dr. Karen Reivich (Coursera) (<u>https://www.coursera.org/learn/positive-psychology-resilience</u>)
- Positive Psychology: Applications and Interventions by Dr. James Pawelski (Coursera) (<u>https://www.coursera.org/learn/positive-psychology-applications</u>)

Edítor: Dr. Kamlesh Síngh Co-edítor: Shílpa Bandyopadhyay Scholarly Nook: Kírtí Tyagí