COVID-19 Psychological Factors and Lingering Pandemic Trauma

David Meyer, DM
Associate Professor, Voice/Voice Pedagogy
Director, Janette Ogg Voice Research Center
Shenandoah Conservatory

1. How many of us were affected by COVID-19?
2. Psychological costs of the pandemic
3. Singers and stress
   a) Anxiety
   b) Depression
   c) Grief
4. How to support singers post-pandemic
1. How many of us were affected by COVID-19?

USA population: 331,449,281
COVID-19 cases reported in the USA: 33,558,862 (10.12% of the population)
COVID-19 deaths reported in the USA: 602,275

Sources:

April 1, 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau. “Table A. Apportionment Population, Resident Population, and Overseas Population: 2020 Census and 2010 Census”

COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)
https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html
accessed 6/22/21
1. How many of us were affected by COVID-19?

One in ten persons in the USA contracted COVID-19 of these one person per 56 cases died of COVID-19)

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2. Psychological costs of the pandemic

Qiu J, Shen B, Zhao M, et al

A nationwide survey of psychological distress among Chinese people in the COVID-19 epidemic: implications and policy recommendations

General Psychiatry 2020;33:e100213.
doi: 10.1136/gpsych-2020-100213

Developed the COVID-19 Peritraumatic Distress Index (CPDI) to assess negative mood, cognition and behavior change, somatization, and hyper arousal and irritability.

Almost 35% experienced psychological distress

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Individuals between 18 and 30 years of age or above 60, participants identifying as female, and those highly educated presented the highest CPDI scores

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Young people obtain more information from social media - can easily trigger stress.


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Female respondents may have increased reactions to stress or be more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder

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Olga Megalakaki, *et al*

Does peritraumatic distress predict PTSD, depression and anxiety symptoms during and after COVID-19 lockdown in France? A prospective longitudinal study


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2021.02.035

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Prevalence of COVID-19 peritraumatic distress

Close to the 33–35% established among Chinese (Qiu et al., 2020) and Italian (Costantini and Mazzotti, 2020) populations.

Acute peritraumatic distress = strong predictor of poor mental health conditions 3–4 months later.

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35.5% of the French respondents reported significant clinical Covid-19 peritraumatic distress in the early stage of the pandemic.

17.2% developed clinical cases of COVID-19 peritraumatic distress after the national lockdown was lifted

2. Psychological costs of the pandemic

Cindy H. Liu, *et al*

Factors associated with depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptomatology during the COVID-19 pandemic: Clinical implications for U.S. young adult mental health,


Respondents reported high levels of depression (43.3%), high anxiety scores (45.4%), and high levels of PTSD symptoms (31.8%).

Young adults showed high rates of loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Psychological costs of the pandemic

Horesh, D., & Brown, A. D.

Traumatic stress in the age of COVID-19: A call to close critical gaps and adapt to new realities.

*Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 12*(4), 331-335. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0000592](http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0000592) [https://doi.apa.org/fulltext/2020-25108-001.html](https://doi.apa.org/fulltext/2020-25108-001.html)

COVID-19 = a new type of mass trauma

Traumas such as war, assault, and natural disaster have been studied extensively

COVID-19 calls for a novel perspective about “what is trauma,” and what are its implications.

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This pandemic will exacerbate existing mental health disorders and contribute to the onset of new stress-related disorders for many

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"COVID-19 is like an ongoing “cardiac stress test” on the world’s infrastructures and systems, magnifying our every functional and structural vulnerability, including that of the field of traumatic stress.”
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“Performers in may experience a special intensification of psychologic distress in association with lapse in vocal health”

(or with the loss of performing due to the pandemic)


3. Singers and stress

Stress is recognized as a factor in many types of illness and disease.

50% to 70% of all physician visits involve complaints of stress-related illness


https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-looking-at-sea-while-sitting-on-beach-247314/
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Endocrinologist Hans Selye – seminal stress studies (1930s) in animals

3 phases to the observed response:
1) Alarm – fight or flight
2) Adaptation – responses less extreme
3) Exhaustion (and often death)


Fun fact: Selye coined/popularized the term “stress”

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Long-term stress -> negative physiological responses

   Muscle tension (particularly in the head and neck)
   Decreased ability to concentrate
   Insomnia, chronic fatigue
   Asthma
   Immunosuppression
   Increased gastric acid secretion (ulcers+ reflux laryngitis)
   Myocardial infarction (aka heart attack)


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Anxiety and voice physiology:

Changed respiratory patterns
Increased prevalence of lesions (nodules, cysts, polyps, etc.)

Stress induced voice symptoms can occur without physical pathology

The laryngeal nerve is sensitive to stress
Emotional distress can be like smoke on the throat of a non-smoker, causing muscular twitches in the larynx


3. Singers and stress

Emotional/psychological effects can be confused with “technical issues”

Be aware:

A technical difficulty in the voice might be deeply rooted in emotional issues


3. Singers and stress

Singers around the world have experienced COVID-19 trauma
  Loss of “self”
  Loss of professional opportunities
  Loss of interpersonal connection
  Loss of colleagues/family members/friends

Trauma linked in the literature to:
  Social phobias
  Music Performance Anxiety (MPA)
  Depression
  Grief

Reentry following the COVID-19 pandemic: epidemic levels of MPA, anxiety, depression, and persons experiencing grief

https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-placing-her-finger-between-her-lips-568025/
3. Singers and stress - MPA

Music Performance Anxiety –
3. Singers and stress - MPA


Excellent review of standard Psychotherapies for MPA, alternative therapies, and experimental therapies.
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Simulating the effects of anxiety:

*Don Greene has musicians run or climb stairs to the point of breathlessness then immediately play their instrument or sing to habituate them to performing under the weight of such classic somatic symptoms as elevated heart rate, lack of oxygen, sweaty hands, and tight abdominal muscles.*
3. Singers and stress - depression

Major depression - a common medical condition, with a lifetime prevalence of 17%


Criteria for a major depressive episode:
5 or more of these symptoms 2+ weeks

1. depressed mood,
2. markedly diminished interest or pleasure in activities,
3. significant weight loss or weight gain,
4. insomnia or hypersomnia,
5. marked psychomotor agitation or retardation,
6. fatigue or diminished energy,
7. preoccupation with feelings of worthlessness and guilt,
8. difficulty concentrating or indecisiveness, and
9. recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideation.

3. Singers and stress - grief

1. Accept the reality of the loss

2. Begin to live and cope in a world where the lost object is absent

3. Reinvest life energies in other relationships, interests, talents and goals.

Worden JW. Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy. New York, NY: Springer-Verlag; 1982:7–18. as adapted by Deborah Caputo Rose


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Some singers will be grieving lost loved ones, lost relationships, finances, singing opportunities, or even loss of vocal ability


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4. How to support singers post-pandemic
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PUMP UP your EMPATHY


Excellent review of the study and training of empathy:

Attention, like empathy, is flexible, indeed—and it is also fragile and fallible.

*Music has the power to induce emotion, and emotion is a vital component of human existence, not least of which is emotion’s power to instill empathy.*
4. How to support singers post-pandemic

Build trauma awareness into your pedagogical practice

See “Incorporating Basic Trauma Awareness into the Voice Lesson” by Jess Baldwin
https://singinginpopularmusics.com/2020/04/06/incorporating-basic-trauma-awareness-into-the-voice-lesson/

https://www.pexels.com/photo/dirty-sign-industry-typography-7005410/
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1) Prioritize your own self-regulation
2) Have a plan and communicate it*
3) Establish a connection ritual
4) Choose connection over productivity*
5) Validate their feelings
6) Cut things into smaller bites*
7) Show appreciation for effort (process > product)
8) Focus on positive resources
9) Be aware of the student’s self-regulation
10) Encourage calm, fun, connection


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*For more on journaling, goal setting, and building connection with your student:

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4. How to support singers post-pandemic

Additional resources not cited:


- Discusses the importance of trauma awareness within a voice teaching setting.
- How common vocal techniques could be trauma triggers.
- Discusses why traumatized students may struggle with kinesthetic awareness and sensation
- Considerations for teachers re: student feelings, patience, and sensitivity.


- SLP who focuses on teaching vocabulary as an important part of processing traumatic experiences
- Grounding exercises, followed by verbal processing

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We have all experienced pandemic-induced loss.

Pandemic-induced trauma, anxiety, depression, and grief may be common with reentry.

When in doubt, refer out (to mental health or medical professionals).

Resources exist that can help the voice teacher build trauma awareness into their studios.

2021 D. Meyer
It's not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.

When something happens, the only thing in your power is your attitude toward it.

Discourses, 2.5.4–5 (paraphrase) Epictetus 108 AD
You are **NOT** alone in any of this.
NATS Voice Science Advisory Committee

Jess Baldwin
Kailee Fullmer
Lynn Helding & John Nix

https://www.pexels.com/photo/light-sign-typography-lighting-519/
References


COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html accessed 6/22/21
References


Greene, Don. Fight your fear and win: Seven skills for performing your best under pressure--at work, in sports, on stage. Harmony, 2002.

References


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