

The Significance of Psychoanalysis on Remitting the Effect of COVID-19 on People's Mental Health

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on mental health, highlighting the need for effective approaches to address the psychological distress experienced by individuals. This article explored the potential role of psychoanalysis in supporting individuals' mental well-being during the pandemic. Drawing on insights from previous studies investigating the challenges and future prospects of psychoanalysis, as well as an examination of dream experiences during the pandemic, this article emphasized the importance of integrating experiential and conceptual research to strengthen the scientific foundation of psychoanalysis. It also highlights the need for interdisciplinary collaboration, dialogue among analysts of different orientations, and inclusive publishing practices to enhance the field. The study further underscores the significance of adequate funding for empirical research and the promotion of inclusivity within the field. The article concluded with emphasizing the potential of psychoanalysis in providing a safe space for individuals to explore and process their emotions, understand their experiences, and promote healing and adaptation in the face of challenges after the pandemic. Overall, this article highlights the relevance of psychoanalysis in addressing the mental health repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and offers valuable insights for mental health professionals and researchers in the field. It also can provide some guidance to the design of family and community intervention programs.

Keywords: inner experiences, symbolism, emotional dynamics, psychoanalysis

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant psychosocial impact on individuals and communities worldwide. The disease itself, coupled with events such as quarantine and lockdowns, has led to various psychological issues, including acute panic, anxiety, obsessive behaviors, hoarding, paranoia, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [1]. The spread of an "infodemic" through social media has further fueled these mental health issues. Moreover, the pandemic has given rise to racism, stigmatization, and xenophobia against specific communities. Frontline healthcare workers, at higher risk of contracting the disease, have experienced adverse psychological outcomes, such as burnout, anxiety, fear of transmission, feelings of incompatibility, depression, increased substance dependence, and PTSD. Children's mental health has also been affected due to disruptions caused by community-based mitigation programs [1]. Special attention is needed for the psychosocial aspects of older people, caregivers, psychiatric patients, and marginalized communities, as they are impacted

differently. To address these issues, it is crucial to develop crisis prevention and intervention models involving governments, healthcare personnel, and other stakeholders. Effective use of internet services, technology, and social media can combat the pandemic and the spread of misinformation. Establishing mental health organizations specifically focused on psychosocial preparedness for future pandemics is necessary. Understanding and addressing the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 are essential for promoting mental well-being and resilience in individuals and communities [1].

Psychoanalysis, as a comprehensive approach to understanding the human psyche, possesses significant importance and distinctive characteristics [2]. Firstly, it is devoted to delving deeply into the individual's psychological state and seeking to uncover the intricate workings of their mind. Through the analysis of dreams, free association, and defense mechanisms, psychoanalytic practitioners have the capacity to reveal the subtleties of the individual's subconscious and unconscious processes, enabling a profound comprehension of the inner world. Secondly, psychoanalysis places great emphasis on the formative impact of childhood experiences and early relationships on the development of one's personality. Recognizing that personality traits and psychological challenges often originate from childhood, particularly in relation to parental and significant interpersonal dynamics, psychoanalysis offers a framework for exploring and comprehending the latent conflicts and unconscious motivations that shape an individual's psychological landscape. Moreover, the therapeutic approach prioritizes the establishment of a secure and nurturing relationship between the individual and the therapist. By providing a safe, supportive, and non-judgmental environment, psychoanalysis allows individuals to freely express and explore their internal conflicts and dilemmas. This therapeutic alliance serves as a powerful tool for personal growth and healing, facilitating the establishment of healthier interpersonal relationships and the resolution of psychological distress. Through these core tenets, psychoanalysis offers a unique and multifaceted perspective, illuminating the complexities of the human mind and providing a framework for transformative psychological treatment.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, psychoanalysis provides valuable insights into the profound psychological impact of the crisis on individuals and society [2]. The pandemic has disrupted daily life, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and fear. The uncertainty surrounding the virus, coupled with the isolation caused by social distancing measures, has taken a toll on people's mental well-being. It has resulted in heightened levels of depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Moreover, the pandemic has magnified existing mental health issues and created new challenges for individuals already struggling with psychological conditions [2]. Understanding and addressing the mental health implications of COVID-19 are crucial for promoting resilience and providing effective support during this challenging time. The ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic has brought about extensive and profound impacts on human lives worldwide. Beyond the direct implications for physical health, the virus has also significantly affected people's mental and psychological well-being. In this context, psychoanalysis has emerged as a promising approach, to explore the psychological ramifications of COVID-19. The current research focuses on the side effects of COVID-19, delving into the psychological challenges faced by individuals during this crisis and their coping mechanisms.

2. Psychoanalysis and Impact of COVID-19 on Unconscious Mind

2.1. Unconscious Processes and Dreams During COVID-19

A previous study interviewed highly experienced psychoanalysts to provide valuable insights into the current state and future prospects of psychoanalysis [3]. The findings highlighted the challenges faced by contemporary psychoanalysis, including the ambiguity of its scientific status and the controversy regarding its effectiveness in modern times. The survey participants acknowledged the criticisms

directed at psychoanalysis, particularly regarding the lack of empirical evidence [3]. However, the study also emphasized that integrating experiential and conceptual research can still offer valuable insights in modern mental health practice. Therefore, the study called for greater efforts to integrate research in psychoanalysis, enhancing its practical value in contemporary mental health fields. Furthermore, the research revealed a gap between psychoanalytic education and research, as well as limited scientific discussions among analysts of different orientations and dialogue with other mental health professionals. To foster the development of psychoanalysis, the study recommended enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration and promoting open dialogue to enrich the field and encourage more inclusive and diverse perspectives [3]. The study emphasized the crucial importance of ensuring adequate funding support for empirical research to strengthen the evidence base of psychoanalysis and promote its wider acceptance. Additionally, it underscored the significance of creating an inclusive publishing culture that encourages diverse voices and viewpoints, facilitating the advancement of the field of psychoanalysis.

Transformation and adaptation have emerged as common themes in the dreams of several individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. In one dream, a dreamer depicted climbing a steep mountain, symbolizing the challenges and obstacles faced in their personal and professional life [4]. This dream reflected a sense of stagnation and a longing for meaningful activities and goals. They were encouraged to seek new stimuli and challenges, engage in previously neglected projects, and connect with like-minded individuals. In another dream, a dog was given to an adoption agency, symbolizing the disconnect between the dreamer's inner self and the external world, as well as a sense of survival mode and desolation. The dreamer experienced feelings of helplessness and isolation during the pandemic and had to let go of some emotional attachments. The necessity of this separation for survival was acknowledged, but it also caused inner conflict. Exploring how to maintain emotional connections while ensuring self-protection became a crucial task [4]. Another dream involved the witnessing of receding seawater and the discovery of a sign pointing towards a church. This dream symbolized the emptiness of cultural life, lack of leadership, and conflicting information. The dreamer described a shift in societal values during the pandemic and a longing for more meaningful social connections and guidance. This dream inspired the dreamer to engage in community activities and seek out groups with shared values for connection. In a different dream, the dreamers found themselves in a shopping mall, where they unexpectedly encountered a dead body. This dream represented memories of traumatic events experienced during the COVID-19 outbreak, leading to an ongoing anticipation of further trauma. Exploring ways to process past traumas and engage in dialogue and healing became essential for the dreamer. Lastly, a dreamer dreamt of diving in a massive indoor lake, symbolizing their longing for interpersonal relationships and a harmonious existence. The dreamer felt isolated and disconnected during the pandemic, and the lake in their dream provided a renewed sense of connection with others [4]. They started actively participating in online social activities and made efforts to stay connected with friends and family.

These dreams offer valuable insights into the inner experiences of individuals and inspire them to seek positive solutions and inner balance amidst their challenges. Analyzing and understanding these dreams can assist them in coping with difficulties, finding meaning, and adapting to the new reality [4]. The mental health of individuals has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in increased levels of anxiety, stress, and depression. Numerous factors, such as the constant fear of contracting the virus, the enforcement of social distancing measures and lockdowns leading to social isolation, economic hardships and job losses, disruptions in daily routines, and the grief associated with losing loved ones, have collectively contributed to heightened psychological distress.

To gain insights into the dream experiences of individuals during the pandemic, a study was conducted in Italy. Researchers meticulously analyzed a database comprising over 1,000 dream reports from 598 participants, aiming to explore the correlation between their psychological and

socio-occupational dimensions and the content of their dreams. The study revealed that young adults exhibited higher levels of anxiety, depression, and rumination compared to middle-aged and older participants, which can be attributed to the lack of social interaction and the pervasive uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Interestingly, individuals who were actively receiving psychotherapy or counseling reported a greater frequency of COVID-19-related dreams, suggesting that therapeutic dialogue may facilitate the integration of conscious concerns into unconscious dream productions. A significant correlation was found between the frequency of these dreams and participants' anxiety levels and fear of contagion. The dream reports were further categorized into distinct themes. The prevailing themes included depictions of lockdown experiences, COVID-19-related scenarios, instances of violence, and bodily sensations [5]. Lockdown dreams often conveyed feelings of confinement and restriction, while COVID-19 dreams encapsulated the pervasive fear of contagion and various perilous situations. Some dreams featured violent acts or scenes of torture, while others centered around bodily experiences such as illnesses or unfamiliar sensations.

In a dream, an individual found themselves situated within a dilapidated classroom, suddenly realizing they were participating in an entrance test for a master's degree. A wave of panic washed over them as they discovered that they had yet to answer any of the test questions [5]. However, upon closer inspection, they noticed that the test papers were already filled out and scribbled upon, indicating they belonged to someone else. Eager to rectify the situation, the person promptly reported the issue to the authority overseeing the test. As a result, they received a mere compensation of 20 euros, rendering their own test invalid. Frustration and a sense of injustice welled up inside them, leading them to question the necessity of taking the test altogether, considering their already attained first-year status in the master's program [5]. Gradually, a newfound calm settled in as they gathered their belongings, preparing to depart from the classroom. However, just before exiting, their seatmate leaned in and uttered an enigmatic statement: "Hey, I'm sorry you haven't developed immunity." Bewildered by the remark, they pondered its meaning. Their attention was then drawn to a sign positioned above the door, indicating a "COVID-19 Test." These exemplification dreams offer insights into the narrative qualities and emotional dynamics present within each dream. The first dream paints a picture of fear and perplexity through the depiction of tension, confined spaces, and the impending threat of rising water. The second dream evokes a mixture of fear and exhaustion as the dreamer experiences a relentless pursuit, panic, and the presence of a malevolent figure. In contrast, the third dream reveals a narrative arc of confusion, injustice, and eventual realization, leading to a shift in perspective. Each dream encapsulates a distinct emotional experience and presents unique thematic elements.

The predominant emotions experienced in these dreams were negative in nature, with fear, anxiety, and worry being the most prevalent [5]. Although dreams with positive emotions such as joy, pleasure, and themes related to sex or maternity were less frequent, dreams encompassing emotions of displacement, helplessness, anger, and sadness or grief were also reported, albeit in smaller numbers. In essence, this study provides significant insights into the dream experiences of individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy. It underscores the prevalence of negative emotions in these dreams and their association with psychological distress and the fear of contagion. Understanding these dream experiences serves to deepen people's comprehension of the profound psychological impact of the pandemic on individuals' mental well-being.

In a thought-provoking study, an in-depth exploration was undertaken to assess the far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals' mental health, with a specific focus on patient narratives shared during therapy sessions. Drawing upon the extensive use of social media as a platform for sharing experiences, the previous study sheds light on the profound influence of community-building in times of crisis [6]. Through an analysis of three distinct patient stories, the paper uncovers a spectrum of effects experienced by individuals during the pandemic, ranging from

positive to negative. Each narrative offers a unique glimpse into the challenges faced and the coping mechanisms employed by patients navigating the uncertain terrain of a global health crisis. Moreover, the author engages in a reflective analysis of their personal experiences and observations as a therapist. They delve into the paradigm shift brought about by the transition to virtual consultations, examining the opportunities and limitations that arose from this new mode of therapeutic engagement. This introspective exploration allows for a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics between therapists and patients in the context of remote therapy sessions [6].

One particularly striking case study revolves around a patient named Aaron, who found solace in the midst of isolation. Aaron's journey is traced through the lens of therapy sessions, highlighting their transformation as they channel their energy into creative endeavors and explore new avenues for personal growth. This narrative prompts the author to contemplate the significance of self-care practices and the potential for personal development that can emerge even in the face of adversity. By intertwining the patient narratives, the author's reflections, and the broader context of virtual therapy, this paper paints a comprehensive picture of the multidimensional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health. It underscores the importance of community support and adaptive strategies in promoting resilience during challenging times [7].

2.2. Collective Unconsciousness and COVID-19

The sharing of dreams in group settings fosters affiliation, interdependence, and cohesion among members, creating a common space for collective exploration. Tribal cultures and ancient civilizations recognized the significance of collective dream interpretation, using it as a means to understand the individual and the community. Even in modern times, group discussions of dreams and symbolic images continue to illuminate their meanings and reveal connections within the group [8]. Dreams serve as shared cultural objects, bringing individuals together and highlighting their similarities. Through the process of storytelling and interpretation, dreams contribute to the acquisition of awareness and the creation of a common narrative in the experiential group. In this context, dreams act as intermediaries, linking experiences, emotions, fantasies, and thought processes, thereby promoting the development of a shared group space. The dream, as a psychic phenomenon, interconnects the various psychic areas of dreamers, forming a cohesive and interconnected matrix within the group. By engaging in social dreaming, the group taps into the collective experience of the unconscious, providing a platform for the emergence of social thinking and promoting the evolution of the group as a unit [9]. The dream narrative within the group matrix captures the essence of resonance, polyphony, and a balanced mix of symmetrical and asymmetrical logic. It reflects the primordial matrix of humanity and enables the formation of a common psychic space where individual elements harmonize and intertwine, contributing to the cohesion of the group. Through the process of free associations and the creation of a cohesion field, the group collectively engages in the construction of psychic reality and the interpretation of the unconsciousness. The mental state shared by the group members influences their emotional expression and affects the cohesion of the group. Dream sharing sessions in the group can provide a platform for free associations, creating unconscious alliances and reinforcing the common psychic space. The social dreaming matrix, evoked in the here and now, facilitates the emergence of social thinking and promotes a sense of participation in the psychic phenomena and processes of multiple individuals. By analyzing dream narratives within the group, people can gain insights into the broader societal thinking and its intrapsychic and interpersonal implications.

A previous study discussed the specific nature of trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and explores the defenses used on both social and individual levels. It also examined the potential for psychoanalysts to discover new societal commitments and make modifications to their programs and interventions. The observations are based on the experiences of 400 Italian analysts who provided

support to individuals during the initial phase of the pandemic [8]. The paper highlights the collective trauma caused by the sudden disruption of normal habits, the anxiety generated by an invisible threat, and the questioning of established parameters. It also discussed the activation of various defense mechanisms such as externalization, projection, denial, emotional withdrawal, and avoidance. The paper further described a psychoanalytic listening service established by Italian psychoanalysts and the range of requests they received, highlighting the need for mental health intervention during the pandemic [8]. The concept of time and its relationship to trauma repetition is explored, as well as the modifications in psychoanalytic techniques necessitated by the pandemic.

3. Therapeutic Relationship and Adaptation

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in winter 2020 brought about profound changes in the lives of individuals, including nurses who found themselves at the forefront of the crisis [10]. Their professional practice underwent significant transformations as they confronted unprecedented challenges and grappled with difficult decisions, often leading to moral ambiguity. One striking example is the shortage of beds, which compelled medical-surgical unit nurses to provide care for deteriorating COVID-19 patients typically reserved for intensive care units (ICUs). In such circumstances, nurses had to make do with whatever equipment was available, even resorting to outdated or faulty resources as ICU supplies dwindled. Furthermore, nurses from various specialty units, with limited training, were tasked with operating life support equipment like ventilators repurposed from other hospital areas. The absence of comprehensive guidance from experienced ICU nurses posed a potential risk, as errors in ventilator settings could cause severe lung damage and loss of life. Nevertheless, these frontline nurses became the primary caregivers for these patients, facing the challenges head-on.

Nurses on the rapid response teams, responsible for attending to code blue emergencies, continued to prioritize safety—both their own and that of their patients—by donning appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) before entering patient rooms and engaging in resuscitation efforts [10]. This PPE included full head hoods, double N95 and surgical masks, double gloves, shoe protectors, and disposable gowns. However, the time required to suit up in this protective gear may affect the timeliness of resuscitation procedures. Nonetheless, nurses remained steadfast in ensuring optimal protection for themselves and their patients, even if it meant potential delays in response time. The toll of witnessing patients' suffering and loss, resulting from circumstances beyond their control, placed a significant psychological burden on nurses. The emotional strain often conflicted with the ethical principles ingrained during their nursing education, which emphasized preserving life, alleviating suffering, and promoting health for patients and communities. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that nurses also bear a moral obligation to prioritize their own well-being, as highlighted in the Code of Ethics of the American Nurses Association.

The scarcity of adequate PPE not only exposed nurses to increased risks but also jeopardized the safety of their families. A survey conducted among ICU healthcare professionals in the United States revealed that their greatest stress stemmed from concerns about potentially exposing their family members to COVID-19 [10]. These professionals also expressed significant anxiety regarding their personal exposure to the virus. The cumulative impact of these challenging circumstances contributed to moral injury among frontline nurses. Moral injury, characterized by deep psychological distress arising from actions that violate one's moral or ethical code, became prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nurses found themselves in ethically compromising situations and experienced a sense of betrayal by the larger healthcare systems, leading to feelings of guilt, shame, and self-reproach.

Individual susceptibility to moral injury may be influenced by aspects of Freud's structural model of the mind. The integrity of the ego, responsible for differentiating one's own thoughts from the external world, can be compromised under extreme trauma and prolonged periods of making difficult

decisions. Additionally, the superego, representing internalized moral standards, plays a role in susceptibility to moral injury. Perceived failures in meeting these standards can trigger guilt and shame, negatively impacting self-esteem and mental well-being. To support the mental health of frontline nurses, it is crucial for mental health professionals to recognize the emotional challenges they face. Educating nurses about their emotional and psychological responses within the context of their work can help mitigate the detrimental effects of moral injury. Moreover, fostering well-developed ego functions and providing coping strategies can enhance nurses' resilience in navigating moral hazards. Recognizing the significance of their sacrifices and providing comprehensive support systems is crucial to ensure their well-being throughout this ongoing crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on people's mental health worldwide. The prolonged period of uncertainty, fear, social isolation, economic hardships, and loss has contributed to increased levels of anxiety, stress, depression, and other psychological distress [7]. Many individuals have struggled to cope with the challenges brought about by the pandemic and have experienced a range of emotional and psychological difficulties. Psychoanalysis, as a therapeutic approach, can play a significant role in addressing and supporting individuals' mental health in the aftermath of COVID-19. Psychoanalysis focuses on exploring unconscious thoughts, emotions, and experiences that may underlie an individual's psychological struggles. By delving into the deeper layers of the mind, psychoanalysis aims to bring about insight, self-understanding, and healing. One of the key benefits of psychoanalysis is its ability to provide a safe and non-judgmental space for individuals to express and explore their innermost thoughts and feelings [7]. The pandemic has brought about a multitude of complex emotions and experiences that may be difficult to process and understand. Psychoanalysis offers individuals the opportunity to work through these emotions and gain a deeper understanding of themselves.

It is important to note that psychoanalysis is not a one-size-fits-all approach and may not be suitable for everyone. Different individuals may have different therapeutic needs and preferences. However, for those who resonate with psychoanalytic principles and approaches, it can offer a profound and transformative healing experience [7]. In the post-COVID mental health landscape, integrating psychoanalysis with other evidence-based therapeutic modalities can further enhance its effectiveness. Combining psychoanalytic insights with approaches such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based interventions, or trauma-focused therapies can provide a comprehensive and tailored approach to address the diverse needs of individuals. Overall, psychoanalysis holds great potential in supporting individuals' mental health in the aftermath of COVID-19 community-building in times of crisis. [7]. By providing a deep exploration of the unconscious mind, facilitating self-understanding, and fostering healing, psychoanalysis can help individuals navigate the complex emotional landscape and build resilience as they move forward in their lives [7].

4. Conclusion

Psychoanalysis can support individuals' mental health in the aftermath of COVID-19 by providing a safe space to explore and process complex emotions and experiences. It helps individuals make sense of losses, adapt, and regain emotional well-being. Additionally, psychoanalysis offers insights into the impact of the pandemic on relationships and interpersonal dynamics, facilitating healing and growth. Even though there is some empirical support available, there are still several limitations in the current research field. Previous studies investigated the experiences of clients and psychoanalysts mainly in a qualitative approach. Future study should combine quantitative approach with qualitative approach to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the treatment mechanism of psychoanalysis in the context of COVID-19. Previous studies mainly measured the effect of psychoanalysis at one time point. Future study should measure the long-term effect of psychoanalysis

on COVID-19 related mental health issues using a longitudinal approach. This review paper can provide some suggestions to the development of effective interventions for families, schools, and communities to address COVID-19 related psychological distress.

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