

# Amplifying Well-Being through Self-Care in the Age of COVID-19: An Online PsyD Peer Mentoring Group

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## INTRO

Engaging in self-care is widely recognized as an important practice, and an ethical imperative, maintaining professional competence among practicing psychologists. Engaging in self-care has been shown to promote positive outcomes such as improved professional functioning and increased well-being among psychologists. However, self-care is not often emphasized in clinical psychology training programs despite the fact that clinical psychology trainees are recognized as being vulnerable to myriad stressors which may impact optimal functioning, including financial worries/debt, anxiety, pressures related to academic coursework and research, poor work/school life balance, and professional self-doubt.

## METHODS

Utilizing a strengths-based approach, this mixed-methods pilot study examined the effects of an eight-week self-care peer mentoring program on well-being, resilience, stress, burnout, and engagement in self-care among 7 clinical psychology graduate students during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the social justice marches, the murder of George Floyd, and the end of participants' academic quarter. Participants completed the Perceived Stress Scale, the PERMA Profiler (to measure well-being), the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory and a self-care engagement inventory. They also provided qualitative data concerning their experiences of participating in the group.

Resilience increased significantly, and well-being remained consistent among 7 clinical psychology trainees who engaged in an 8-week self-care peer mentoring group during the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and the end of the academic quarter.

Findings suggests strength-based approaches, peer support, and accountability for engaging in self-care may have increased resilience and countered what participants said was lost during the beginning stages of the pandemic.

## RESULTS

Results demonstrated a significant increase in resilience from pre- to post-study, and that well-being held consistent throughout, despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, social justice marches associated with the murder of George Floyd, and the increased workload associated with the end of the academic quarter. Qualitative results demonstrated the primary perceived benefits of the peer mentoring self-care program were increased connection and peer-support around self-care, increased focus on self-care, and accountability and consistency regarding engagement in self-care. Qualitative results also suggested participants would have appreciated longer meeting times and longer duration of the study. Participants expressed a desire for continuation of self-care peer mentoring groups, and increased focus on self-care engagement within their academic community.

## DISCUSSION

Our data suggests purposeful focus on self-care in a strengths-based community of peers who provided support and accountability for engagement may have increased resilience and countered what participants reported was lost during the onset of the pandemic – sense of connection, structure, and a sense of normalcy.



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## Self-Care Inventory for Students

Results from participants' ratings on the Self-Care Inventory for Students. We asked participants three questions each week referencing the previous week's topic and activity.

1. Please scale your overall sense of well-being 1-10 (10 represents flourishing greatly and 1 represents the opposite).
2. Please rate the extent the self-care activity you engaged in last week affected your overall sense of well-being (10 represents flourishing greatly and 1 represents the opposite).
3. Rate your level of engagement in this domain of self-care over the last week (10 represents high engagement and 1 represents the opposite).

Self-Care Domain	Overall Well-Being	Well-Being Related to Self-Care Activity	Engagement in Self-Care Activity	Mean
Physical	6.90	6.71	6.14	6.58
Relational	6.30	6.57	5.71	6.19
Psychological	6.60	6.86	6.14	6.53
Emotional	5.70	6.00	5.86	5.85
Spiritual	6.30	7.14	6.00	6.48
School/Work Balance	7.10	6.43	6.71	6.74
Individual Self-Care Plan	5.40	6.14	6.43	5.99
Mean	6.33	6.55	6.14	6.34

## ***Qualitative Data for Analysis***

Participant responses to the Post-Meeting online surveys were transformed into psychological meanings lived by the participant which, in some instances, required that the original expressions of the participants be changed. The transformed meaning unit expressions were utilized as the foundation for describing the general psychological structure of the experience. Four themes and 11 sub-themes were identified.

Table 2: Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-themes
More time/Slower Pace	More time for self-care More time for school work More time at home Less time commuting
Lack of Social Connection/Increased Appreciation for Connection	More awareness of need for relationships Less social time, more mindfulness Leaving house less
Lack of Structure	No accountability Losing track of time
Lack of Normalcy	Unable to do normal daily activities/schedule Prevented access to locations

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