Review of: "The two sides of Experienced Crisis: Enabling and preventing Coping strategies during Covid-19 Pandemic"

Stephan Price[1]

1 University of Exeter

Overview summary and evaluation

I was very pleased to see a qualitative and interpretative study submitted/published on Qeios, and want to acknowledge first of all the courage involved in doing this, as there are no guarantees it will be reviewed sympathetically, given the academic backgrounds of the majority of those that have engaged with it so far. So thanks to the author(s?) for submitting and I hope these comments help you improve the paper.

That said, I felt this paper was really a work in progress. The discussion and conclusion (which is absent) in particular, do not provide arguments for the significance and implications of the main finding. There is a challenge, which is how the paper avoids reproducing a cliché, which means that perhaps some deeper thinking needs to be done about the literature that sets up the analysis, and of which perhaps it is too easy to say the results are 'in line' with.

There is a question around authorship (which might be a mere detail, but might not), and improvements to make in terms of clarifying and being more transparent about the methodology.

The paper has the potential to make a local contribution to a wider effort through similar small studies to piecing together an understanding of how people responded to the Covid-19 crisis and how people respond to crises more widely. It's a messy and not-straightforward process, and some work to improve the critical rigour and methodological transparency of the paper would support the contribution that it could make.

In the course of reading, I came across numerous sentences that could have been expressed more clearly, could be improved by a different syntax, or needed plain correction for grammar etc. I made a note of many, simply to get them out of my head and sometimes to work out what they ought to be saying and include them here, but I can't promise that it is an exhaustive list, and the author(s?) should look for patterns in those comments and apply them to any future versions. In general, though I like and prefer longer sentences, here it might be worth considering shortening sentences to keep the grammatical and syntactical challenges down.

Ethics

The paper states the research follows BSA ethical standards. It would be good to give the reference number of the ethics committee decision.

The paper is presented as single authored, but also states:

"Data has been collected and transcribed by the two authors who have continually checked and reviewed the themes emerging from the data throughout the process."

If someone else has made a significant contribution to the research they ought to be appropriately acknowledged, and this suggests that this has not been done here.

In the Analysis section, we read of both a Mary and a Maria in quick succession. In addition to checking the names used in the paper it would be good to make it clear in the text that all the names used are pseudonyms.

Quality

Conceptual discussion

Crisis or disaster?: "For Matthewman and Huppatz disasters"…

We've just shifted on to disasters, which are different from crises, without signalling. So far you've characterized crisis without defining it, which is fine, but by introducing 'disaster' you raise the question of definitions much more strongly. You could either avoid the term 'disaster', or you might need to say what you view the difference is, and why reference to disaster is still relevant. Unfortunately, there is much in the literature on crisis and disaster that I have come across (mainly work in tourism) that is unhelpful. My own view was that a disaster describes an event, whereas a crisis is an evaluation of a situation.

Methodology

'Fragments': "To explore experienced covid-19 crisis, fragments were selected by a large pool of 46 semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Maxwell, 2013) conducted during lockdowns of April 2020, in real time have been utilised. The data had been collected for the purposes of a larger study on social change, crisis and trauma; this article used only the parts of interviews associated to experienced crisis."

It would help to be more clear about these 'fragments'. I'm not sure fragments is the right word. It might be 'extracts'. I think I would say that the extracts were taken from the transcripts, rather than the interviews. It would be helpful to be open about how much of the overall data were included in your extracted dataset. What proportion of the transcripts did you analyse? How many words was that? Were the sections extracted about the same amount from each respondent, or did it vary? Were the relevant sections associated with particular questions?

Also, it's not clear in the above quote what 'in real time' means.

The tables: is it possible to make the tables into actual tables showing a breakdown of all the respondents so we can see how the characteristics combined?

Sampling: the risk with snowballing here is that you end up recruiting people who are like each other in some way that biases the results.

Perhaps one of the advantages of the Qeios model is that as there is no editorial or journal 'ego' involved in the decision to publish, it allows us to be more transparent about the ways in which social science research is a compromise with reality, and show that knowledge can be built up even with samples that are flawed (if a 'flaw' such 'bias' can be deemed to be). I'll acknowledge a risk here, in that Qeios' current author and reviewer community would seem to have a strong skew towards naturalistic sciences that might value crystalline research designs over ones more conditioned by messy reality – this is where the courage in your submission lies, but it will help to broaden the interdisciplinary base of the journal and the assessment of this particular paper should even out over time (and if naturalistic scientific principles are applied by reviewers, it will be there for all to see), and could be part of the contribution of the paper, in the sense that it better allows others to build on it.

So, I think it would help if you dealt with this here, by saying what steps you took to ensure that your sample was socially heterogenous, despite the snowballing method, or maybe… I've not seen this before but, as it seems to be a mixed approach – part through gatekeepers, part through snowballing – showing us through something like a tree diagram who got snowballed through whom, and showing that there were a lot of different branches, or social difference along those branches.

I note that there is a difference in terms of education between the two groups. Looking through the interview extracts offers later this doesn't appear to have an impact on the results, but it would help if the tables were clearer, and possibly showed which category (fear or opportunity) the respondents fall into (is there also overlap?). In some publishing conventions, the tables giving details about the respondents come in the results section, rather than in the methods – this might help you integrate the characteristics your sample with the results of your analysis to some extent.

Please would you also provide median interview time, and please would you state in your summary tables how many and which of the interviews were conducted in Greek, Greek and English, or English only. It would help to clarify which quotes are translated out of Greek and which ones are originally in English because it would help the readers' assessment of the data but also because we need to know whether the English in the quotes is the respondents' or whether it might be corrected.

Maybe keep limitations for the conclusion?

Impact

Because the lockdowns of COVID are, outside China, over, a stronger case needs to be made for the significance of the paper – what is it about the COVID crisis that makes the study of how people understand it significant? – this needs to be developed in the currently underdeveloped discussion (see below).

Novelty

At the current time, the paper does not have an adequate discussion section. At current discussion section functions as a very basic conclusion, reviewing the findings and argument of the paper. The main finding of the paper is stated: "Ultimately, portraying crisis as opportunity rather than fear enabled participants to concentrate on means employed to cope with the pandemic."

I think it would be good to know more about the 'so what' of this main finding: why is this significant, and what are its implications?

My main concern here is about the novelty of the findings, given the way they have been set up. The discussion seems to circle around that well-worn cliché that crisis means both danger and opportunity. This is often backed with reference to the Chinese character for crisis: but although there is a widely held popular culture meme that assumes this is true, it doesn't take long to find out that, in fact, it isn't. But now this idea is deeply embedded in both academic and popular understandings of crisis – so what people say in interviews is 'in line' with what is written in academic texts – but are we really learning anything here?

It might be helpful to discuss this, maybe considering a genealogical approach to the concept of crisis. When, in what political context, and why specifically did the 'opportunity' meaning get introduced to the concept of crisis? Why did it prove so popular? I think maybe your finding does add something – but this really needs to be brought out properly in the discussion – there seems to be a slide from 'opportunity', which is positive and ideological (and therefore possibly an insulation from reality) to 'coping', which seems different, more subtle (certainly the discussion in the literature review is more subtle when talking about coping). There seems to be a shift in this finding from just the meaning of people's interpretation, to the function of those meanings in their lives, which doesn't seem to have the same quality as the meanings themselves.

I also wonder whether the claim/finding that the understandings people have are not influenced by where they are (in Greece or elsewhere), could perhaps be explored more. We could maybe learn more about the different situations people were in internationally (which varied considerably), and more about the implications of this.

Notes on language:

"Fragments deriving from a larger pool of 46 in-depth interviews have been analysed in order to describe and understand what the meaning of this experienced crisis could be, as well as[,DELETE] to identify coping strategies employed among the participants in order to cope with it."

"Such depiction can capture the magnitude, impact and depth of the Covid-19 pandemic as it reflects the [outrageous] global disruption of time and continuity along with collective feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability among humans experienced on a universal level."

- Not sure about the word choice of 'outrageous' here.

"(of lack of)" = (or lack of it)

"Fear and panic have certainly been fundamental components of the pandemic[ADD,] which has been reported as 'Covid-19 phobia (Lindinger-Sternart et al, 2021) and 'Coronaphobia' (Asmundson and Taylor, 2020; Brooks, et al, 2020)"

"fear has also been generated by media especially in relation to economic global disaster[DELETE SPACE](s) (Monaghan, 2020; Žižek, 2020), elimination of human freedom[ADD s] (Caduff, 2020) and the exaggerated public health measures, including [catholic] lockdowns (Brown, 2020)."

- Not sure about word choice: catholic

"The Covid-19 pandemic portrays a globalised crisis as it does not only threaten each and everyone's health" = 'crisis as not only does it threaten…'

- Globalised/globalized? 'z' used elsewhere.

"Altered ways of living are also related with Meszaros' (2014) view on crisis arguing that its meaning relates with the way crisis may be involved in the shaping and reshaping of subjectivity as it is lived and challenged through the emergence of new social practices and social struggles."

- 'related to', 'relates to'
- Could stop sentence at 'view on crisis', and start a new one – seems to run one into the other.

"For example, the extended periods people had to remain in their homes during the pandemic in Germany and elsewhere[DELETE,] resulted"

"The consequences of the covid-19 crisis" = 'Covid-19'

"It has been widely acknowledged that during this pandemic the elderly are predominantly suffering coronavirus' physical consequences whereas youth are suffering the social impacts of lockdowns (Matthewman, and Huppatz, 2020)[ADD,] whereas"

"People of color have been particularly effected due to socio-economic volubility whereas women specifically, have been globally affected more as they form the larger part of health and social-care professions (Boniol et al, 2019), they still offer the largest part of unpaid work (Battyany, 2020) and they have been the main ones to combine housework, childcare and work-from-home activities (Collins et al. 2020; Möhring et al., 2020; Risi, Pronzato and Fraia, 2020)."

- I read 'whereas' a bit more like 'but', but here you are following in a similar theme rather than going against what you have just said. For me, this would be easier to follow if you wrote 'People of color have been particularly effected due to socio-economic volubility**, and** women [DELETEspecifically,] have been globally affected more [ADD than men] as they form the larger part of health and social-care professions (Boniol et al, 2019), they still offer the largest part of unpaid work (Battyany, 2020)[ADD,] and they have been the main ones to combine housework, childcare and work-from-home activities (Collins et al. 2020; Möhring et al., 2020; Risi, Pronzato and Fraia, 2020).

"According to Dinerstein, Schwartz and Taylor (2014) the impact of crisis on people can be studied by focusing on the levels of depression and anxiety as well as the feelings of sympathy and empathy towards others (Tangjia, 2014)."

- EITHER 'their levels of' and 'their feelings of'

OR 'focusing on levels of' and 'as well as feelings of'

- "Tangjia, maintains" = 'Tangjia maintains'
- "each persons' capacity" = "each person's capacity"

"Home, (2020)" = "Home (2020),"

"Elder[DELETE,] (1999/1974) was one of the first to focus on the individual experience of collective threats[DELETE,] such as economic crises or wars[ADD,] explaining that people experience [MOVEin different ways] major historical traumas, such as the Great Depression of the 1930[DELETE']s or World War II[ADD,][MOVE HERE]."

"The fact that traumatic experiences may be shared[DELETE,] is an important factor in mitigating [ADD the] distress and anxiety that these events create[ADD,] while a sense of shared experience can contribute to feelings of collective efficacy and psychological resilience (Kearns et al., 2017)."

"Evidently, during the Covid-19 pandemic[ADD,] [CHANGE~~peoples'~~ people's] capacity for adaption, reflection and social organization has been manifested (Bacevic and McGoey, 2021)."

"However, if change is closer to the previous lives" = 'their previous lives'??

"For example, during the pandemic[ADD,]"

"(Pinquart and Silbereisen's, 2004)" = "(Pinquart and Silbereisen, 2004)"

"To explore experienced covid-19 crisis, fragments were selected by a large pool of 46 semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Maxwell, 2013) conducted during lockdowns of April 2020, in real time have been utilised."

- Covid-19

"This study consists an exploratory investigation (Hoaglin, Mosteller and Tukey, 1983) exploring possible tendencies of the ways meaning making of Covid-19 crisis has been shaped through shared experiences; in that sense, interpretive phenomenology offers the ideal epistemological foundation in order to describe, understand and explain the meaning

making of crisis through the ways participants have experienced the adversity of April 2020 lockdowns in different parts of the world."

- 'consists of an'
- DELETE 'exploring', replace with 'of'
- 'within the ways the meaning of the Covid-19 crisis'??
- 'experiences.'
- 'foundation to describe'
- 'the meaning of crisis'
- 'the ways participants experienced the adversity of the FIRST 2020 lockdowns'?

"the city of Athens, Greece[ADD,] during"

."The participants of this study used the term [DELETE of] 'crisis'"

"Matthewman and Huppatz (2020)…" back to disaster again.

"meaning to covid-19 crisis" – Covid

"Those concepts have been dominant in participants' narratives" – 'There concepts were'

"uncertainly is my main concern" uncertainty?

"while trying to prevent these feelings overwhelm her." - 'from overwhelming her'

"But as the above fragment denote" – either 'fragments' or 'denotes'

"participants have used such characteristics" - ' participants used such characteristics'

"associated to failure" – "associated with failure"

"Hall (2019) maintain" - "Hall (2019) maintains"

"such approach on how covid-19" – "such as approach to how"

"Koralia from Bahrein and Lia from Brussels [DELETE have] depicted the aspect of positive opportunity"

"Aggelos narrate the crisis" – "Aggelos narrates the crisis"

"Slowing down time, gives the opportunity" – "Slowing down time gives an opportunity"

"the opportunity to take care of her kid" – "child"

"we can nevertheless, work out some plans to cope" – "we can nevertheless work out some plans to cope"

"This article argues that shared experiences among participants, entail" – "This article argues that shared experiences among participants entail"

"Nevertheless, despite the fatal aftermath of such a traumatic crisis, most people have managed to survive it and some of them have even managed to excel through it."

- the fatalities were during, or indeed, were the reason for the crisis.
- 'Most people managed to survive it'