Research Article

# The Two Sides of Experienced Crisis: Enabling and Preventing Coping Strategies During COVID-19 Pandemic

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This article conceptualises the Covid-19 pandemic through the notion of crisis in an attempt to explain how the two different sides of this crisis can prevent or enable coping strategies to emerge and be employed. For this endeavour to be accomplished, this study utilised selected fragments derived from a larger sample of 46 in-depth interviews with Greek participants (born and raised in Greece) during the April 2020 first lockdown, residing in 23 cities worldwide[1]. This article argues that shared experiences among participants entail meaning-making of the pandemic in terms of a) a fearful crisis through vulnerability and failure, as well as b) a hopeful opportunity for improvement through coping strategies. Despite the fatal aftermath of this global crisis, most people have managed to survive it, and some of them have even managed to excel through it. Ultimately, portraying crisis as an opportunity rather than fear enabled participants to concentrate on the means employed to cope with this pandemic.

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## Introduction

What does it mean to experience the greatest global crisis of our time? How do we make sense of it? What does it mean, and what does it feel like? How are we affected? Are we all affected in the same way, to the same extent? And perhaps most importantly, how do we cope with it? Within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, this article will explore the concept of crisis as it has been experienced, in real time, by 46 participants residing in 13 district countries and 23 cities around the world during the April 2020 lockdowns. This article aims to describe, understand, and explain how different people residing in different parts of the globe have managed to cope with this global crisis and ultimately what this crisis means to

them. To do so, the concept of crisis will be discussed against the latest literature on the Covid-19 pandemic, in an attempt to conceptualise the significance of the unique substance of the Covid-19 crisis as well as the coping strategies employed in order to confront it. 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 to identify coping strategies employed among the participants in order to cope with it.

## Crisis through altered ways of living

The French, German, and English words la crise ("the crisis"), die Krise ("the crisis"), and "crisis" have the common Greek root originating from the verb 'krino', which means choose, decide, and judge, and this implies that events of a certain magnitude force such

choosing, deciding, and judging upon us. Thus, the root of this word relates to our ability to 'evaluate' rather than to 'danger' coexisting with fear and uncertainty[1] which ended up becoming a common understanding of what the meaning of 'crisis' entails. The context of the Covid-19 pandemic certainly aligned with the current understanding of 'crisis' rather than the root of its meaning.

Fuchs[2] uses the term 'corona crisis' to emphasise the significantly interrupted and altered social reality during the pandemic. Hall[3] provides perhaps the most concrete and topical depiction of the concept of crisis and clearly associates the concept with that of change and unsettlement: "Crises are characterised by a jarring or disruption of time, momentum, and change"[3]. Such a 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.

Ward[4] argues that Covid-19 is primarily related to the concepts of risk, fear, panic, and trust (or lack thereof), as well as individualisation, isolation, stigma, globalization, and uncertainty. Fear and panic have certainly been fundamental components of the pandemic, which has been reported as 'Covid-19 phobia'[5] and 'Coronaphobia'[6]; fear has also been generated by the media, especially in relation to economic global disaster(s)[7][8], the elimination of human freedom[9] and the exaggerated public health measures, including catholic lockdowns[10].

The Covid-19 pandemic has been portrayed as a globalised crisis as it does not only threaten everyone's health but has indeed caused an enormous economic catastrophe leading to altered ways of living[11]. Such altered ways of living are related to distrust towards governments, statistics, science, media, technology[12], political institutions[13] and even other people[4], whereas Monaghan[7] adds the reactions of 'frustration, anger, disbelief, resignation, boredom, disappointment, and disdain towards authorities acting in a draconian and inconsistent manner". This particular approach to the Covid-19 crisis may actually have some sort of connection with the root of the word 'crisis' as it does entail some kind of judgement.

Nevertheless, the meaning of the Covid-19 crisis remains aligned with danger, fear, and unsettlement. Altered ways of living due to the pandemic are related to

Meszaros'[14] view on crisis, arguing that its meaning relates to 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. Evidently, in cases of radical social change and transformations not allowing individuals to maintain effectively habitual behaviours, a sense of loss of control over one's life may occur[15]. For example, the extended periods people had to remain in their homes during the pandemic in Germany and elsewhere resulted in a general, pronounced decrease in family satisfaction, economic hardship, job loss, increased health risks and uncertainties, a reduction of social contacts outside of the household, increased screen time, and fewer opportunities for physical activity[16]. Risi, Pronzato, and Fraia[13] explained that during the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy, stress overload had been caused by the emergent lack of personal spaces, the complex management of different social roles, and the collapse of the traditional boundaries between professional and private life.

The consequences of the Covid-19 crisis have been experienced on a micro-level (everyday living) as well as on a macro-level (social, cultural, political). It has been widely acknowledged that during this pandemic, the elderly have predominantly suffered the coronavirus' physical consequences, whereas youth have suffered the social impacts of lockdowns[17] and concerns about mental health implications for all age groups have been repeatedly raised[7]. People of colour have been particularly affected due to socio-economic volatility, whereas women, specifically, have been globally affected more as they form the larger part of health and social-care professions[18], they still offer the largest part of unpaid work[19] and they have been the main ones to combine housework, childcare, and work-from-home activities[16][13][20]. Tangjia[21] emphasises that a crisis exposes the symptoms of society, particularly serious but hidden social problems continuing in the name of prosperity. In the case of Covid-19, such symptoms were primarily related to racism, inequalities, violent attacks[22], as well as stigma and xenophobia[4].

## Crisis through Coping Strategies

Coping strategies may entail different meanings for different people, although based on the American Psychological Association[23], coping strategies typically involve a conscious and direct approach to problem(s) and can refer to action(s), ways people adopt

to confront stressful or unpleasant situation(s), as well as the modification of one's reaction to such a situation. In this context, this section is looking into various coping strategies (adopted individually or collectively) identified during the Covid-19 pandemic through relevant literature.

For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise of volunteering among young people, who have offered support in various contexts, has raised[24] whereas Lourens[25] praises the lessons people have learned about 'being in this together' during the crisis. Tangjia maintains that as a crisis can determine the ways people live their lives, it can reveal each person's capacity, courage, and wisdom and helps us adjust ourselves to new situations and to understand ourselves in new ways despite causing dramatic change to living conditions and human relationships. Therefore, a crisis does not only cause worry and fear but also anticipation and hope[21] as it can offer possibilities for change and continuity. Muldoon[26] and Neal[27] add that in cases where disruptive events occur, new opportunities for innovation and change may also emerge. French and Leyshon (2010: 2549) add that "crises are about change … [and] opportunities to impose new ideas and practices".

For Matthewman and Huppatz, disasters like the Covid-19 pandemic should be seen as social phenomena entailing public and shared fears and experiences, collective adversity as well as social solidarity, and physical and emotional support; humans can be (come) remarkably altruistic, caring, resilient, and generous, desiring connection and purpose. This pandemic revealed the belief that alternative ways of living are possible[17]. Elder[28] was one of the first to focus on the individual experience of collective threats, such as economic crises or wars, explaining that people experience in different ways major historical traumas, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s or World War II. Indeed, different people experience traumatic events in distinct ways[29], whereas collective trauma may not be the result of collective pain[30]. The fact that traumatic experiences may be shared is an important factor in mitigating the distress and anxiety that these events create, while a sense of shared experience can contribute to feelings of collective efficacy and psychological resilience[31]. Evidently, during the Covid-19 pandemic, peoples' capacity for adaptation, reflection, and social organization has been manifested[32].

Certainly, some people are more vulnerable to all forms of change caused by a crisis, especially if they have to face unprecedented transformations in their prior life and are thus unprepared to confront them. However, if the change is closer to their previous lives and they have already developed coping mechanisms, then exposure to stress is manageable[33]. For example, during the pandemic, social support, positive lifestyle behaviours, social media used for the purpose of maintaining social contact, and even mindfulness have been some of the main coping strategies utilised in particularly stressful settings like those experienced by medical professionals[34]. Reduced exposure to negative media content during the pandemic has also been noted as a helpful coping strategy[35].

Papadopoulos claims that there are people who not only survive challenging circumstances but become strengthened by the particular exposure to adversity[36][37]. It is possible that people may find meaning in their suffering and can transform their negative experience in a positive way[38]. Such approaches are related to resilience, which may explain how people living in a difficult world can prioritise positivity and hope[39][40] and it is associated with "phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development"[41]. In fact, Lindinger-Sternart et al[5] suggest that resilience can be a protective factor against mental health problems that are related to adverse experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings of this study suggest that the higher the age of participants, the higher the level of resilience towards Covid-19 phobia, which suggests that experience of prior adversity may be adaptive.

Resilience may also be perceived in terms of 'coping mechanisms' or adaptation to a new social, economic, and political situation. In challenging times, people may re-adjust claims and resources or may develop new ways of behaving in order to meet the new challenges; eventually, a new equilibrium is achieved when claims match resources[42][43]. Notably, resource-rich individuals are expected to show active, problem-focused coping and adaptive abilities resulting from radical social alterations, be prepared to overcome adverse circumstances, and be able to take advantage of emerging new opportunities[44]. Coping strategies that have proven helpful during the pandemic have been identified by researchers and include seeking social support, positive thinking, and problem-solving, along with the positive role of the media[45]. At the same time, younger people, and particularly children, have

developed distinct ways of coping with the pandemic, including seeking social support via social media and searching for distractions; interestingly, it was helpful for older children to search for Covid-19-related information, whereas for younger children, avoiding news media has helped them to better regulate their emotions[46].

The more uncertain and undefined new challenges are, the more likely it is that old, albeit successful, behavioural strategies will be used[43]. Self-efficacy, planning competence, and educational attainment have been identified as important resources in mastering rapid change of social and political systems by empowering people through strengthening individual and social resources prior to the emergence of the transitional period[44]. For example, studies on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on students emphasise the significance of the utilisation of social networks, the effectiveness of an empathetic communication system, and the helpfulness of adaptive expression and emotional management[47] that educational institutions could have set in place as supportive mechanisms in times of crisis or radical change.

Tangjia[21] maintains that although a crisis often appears suddenly and people do not have enough time to react and take action, we can nevertheless work out some plans to cope with a crisis ahead of time by putting positive and useful elements into full use to eliminate the crisis. In this vein, the United Nations emphasise the necessity of the immediate establishment of universal healthcare and social protection systems, along with improving governance, even by developing countries[48]. Such proactive protective measures may prevent future re-occurrences of the current disastrous effects of the pandemic or may better control and minimise the damage caused in each case.

## Methods

To explore the experienced COVID-19 crisis, fragments were selected from a large pool of 46 semi-structured, in-depth interviews[49] conducted during the lockdowns of April 2020, in real time. The data had been collected for the purposes of a larger study on social change, crisis, and trauma[50]; this article used only the parts of the interviews associated with the experienced crisis. All interviews took place through the digital platforms of Skype, Messenger, and WhatsApp, due to distancing measures[51]. The sample consisted of Greek men and women (born and raised in Greece), 24 of whom resided in 6 different Greek cities and 22 of whom resided in 17 cities abroad (first-generation immigrants), including the following 12 countries abroad: Iceland, UK, Belgium, Austria, Denmark, Germany, France, Netherlands, USA, Japan, Hong Kong, and Bahrain. Participants aged between 21 and 84 years old were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study, as it is commonly deemed suitable for exploratory and non-probabilistic research designs[52]. The sample was opportunistic; the recruitment strategy used 'gatekeepers' and 'snowballing' techniques.

1.                                          **Age** (21-84)
2.                      **Family status** (married=7, Single=11, in relationship=2, widow=1, divorced=3, parents=6, expecting=3)
3.                                       **Gender** (females=15, males=9)
4.      **Employment status** (employed/subsidised=10, part-time=0, suspended=4, unemployed=2, housewives=1, students=2, retired=5)
5.       **Educational status** (secondary education=9, College/Technical Education=3, University=6, Postgraduate=3, PhD=3)

**Table 1.** Greeks living in Greece (total: 24)

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. | **Age** (24-78) |
| 2. | **Family status** (married=9, Single=11, in relationship=2, widow=0, divorced=0, parents=5, expecting=0) |
| 3. | **Gender** (females=12, males=10) |
| 4. | **Employment status** (employed/subsidised=10, part-time=1, suspended=3, unemployed=1, housewives=2, students=4, retired=1) |
| 5. | **Educational status** (secondary education=1, College/Technical Education=2, University=8, Postgraduate=10, PhD=1) |
| 6. | **Locations Abroad:** Japan/Tokyo=2, Japan/Yokohama=1, UK/London=2, UK/Northampton=2, Denmark/Copenhagen=2, Iceland/Reykjavik=2, Belgium/Brussels=3, Netherlands/Eindhoven=1, Bahrain=1, USA/LA=1, USA/Maryland=1, Hong Kong=1, Austria/Graz=1, Germany/Munich=1, France/Paris=1 |

**Table 2.** Greeks living Abroad (total: 22)

Interpretive phenomenology presents a unique methodology for studying lived experience as it brings to light what is often taken for granted while allowing the emergence of phenomena from the perspective of how people interpret and attribute meaning to their existence; phenomenology, and more specifically hermeneutics, focuses on the interpretation of meaning through lived experience[53]. Lived experiences are deemed incomplete while remaining descriptive; interpretation of significance for the person and contextualisation of the social circumstance is pivotal[54][55]. This study consists of an exploratory investigation[56] exploring possible tendencies in the ways meaning-making of the 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 the April 2020 lockdowns in different parts of the world.

The study followed the ethical standards stipulated by the British Sociological Association guidelines on ethical research[57] concerning consent, anonymity, respect for participants, integrity, and safe data storage. The research questions of the larger project addressed during interviews were informed by the research literature and were asked in an open-ended format[58] [59], concerned solely with personal experiences of everyday living[60][61]. The questions were phrased in neutral ways, asking participants to describe their everyday routines during the lockdown, deliberately avoiding any reference to the core concept of crisis (thus limiting bias). Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes, was conducted in Greek and/or English, and was coded to identify themes related to the aims of the study through open coding techniques; contiguity-based relations between themes were identified, revealing relations among parts of transcribed texts[49].

Data have been collected and transcribed by the two authors, who have continually checked and reviewed the themes emerging from the data throughout the process. This approach was deemed effective to explore novel phenomena within a continuous interaction between theory generation and empirical observation[62]. Additionally, both researchers were themselves experiencing a strict lockdown in the city of Athens, Greece, during data collection. Conscious efforts were made to remain as open and accepting as possible to the different experiences participants shared, while respecting and empathising with the difficulties and challenges they have been sharing, as many of the experiences were also identified in the lives of the researchers.

Limitations: The data for the larger project were collected during the first major lockdown, and since that time, several developments have taken place (additional lockdowns, vaccination, new variants). Thus, a different timing might have offered different findings, and in that respect, a repeated data collection might have proven fruitful; similarly, a comparative approach including data collected within different cultural settings might have offered more generalisable outcomes; however, the capacity of this study was limited.

# Findings

The participants of this study used the term 'crisis' in various contexts to depict what the pandemic means for them. Matthewman and Huppatz[17] explain that disasters, like Covid-19, are essentially social phenomena, and consequent threats and experiences are public and shared. However, depending on how different people experience and give meaning to shared adversity forms the way that this adversity will be confronted by each one of them. The responses of participants have been categorised in two main ways, depending on how they have experienced and gave meaning to the Covid-19 crisis. Their views entail a plurality of components aligned with relevant literature and initially related to a) danger and fear[1] followed by the aspects of b) opportunity and hope[63]. Based on the ways participants have experienced and made meaning of this pandemic, coping strategies have (or have not) emerged within their narratives. This analysis reveals the two sides of crisis through the lived experiences of the participants.

## A. Vulnerability, Fear, and Failure

Commonly, the meaning of crisis has been connected with danger, which is supposed to coexist with fear and uncertainty[21]. In this vein, Ward[4] explains that Covid-19 is primarily related to concepts of risk, fear, panic, and lack of trust, as well as individualisation, isolation, and uncertainty. Those concepts have been dominant in participants' narratives; for example, some participants perceived the pandemic as a global crisis entailing the element of vulnerability. Argiro from Reykjavik explains that:

> "It's a crisis that showed us how vulnerable humans are. We give all of our time thinking about the pettiness of our daily routines, and we forget how fragile life is" (Argiro, 40, Reykjavik, subsidised, married).

The pandemic is depicted as a crisis by Argiro, which is signified as vulnerability through the risk of losing one's life because of Covid-19; this vulnerability overshadows the trivial insignificance of daily routines and becomes a priority. For Mary from Crete (Greece), this crisis is about panic and uncertainty:

> "Panic from one day to the next. This crisis started very far away, and now it's everywhere. I am trying not to let myself feel sadness and panic, but uncertainty is my main concern" (Mary, 66, Crete, retired, 2 kids, married).

Mary associates Covid-19 with a crisis that has expanded rapidly, spreading panic, sadness, and uncertainty; Mary seems surprised, if not shocked, while trying to prevent these feelings from overwhelming her. Both Argiro and Mary seem to be observers of the crisis without expressing some kind of (re)action. To the contrary, Thanos from Kastoria (Greece) explains that:

> "This crisis is all about being able to control our fear. Nothing else can help. Whatever is meant to happen will happen" (Thanos, 36, Kastoria, employed, single).

Like Mary, for Thanos, the Covid-19 crisis is conceptualised through fear, but unlike Mary, he proposed a course of action: humans need to control fear. Thus, although fear prevails, this fragment implies a way to empowerment through controlling our fears. Thus, through the conceptualisation of crisis as fear (instead of danger and disaster), humans can actually do something by controlling their own fears and consequently controlling the crisis. Fear and panic have certainly been fundamental components of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been reported as 'Covid-19 phobia'[5] and 'coronaphobia'[6] denoting the vulnerability and insecurity associated with the fear of potential infection. But as the above fragment denotes, some people are immobilised through fear, whereas others realise that they should not be controlled by fear. An additional way that the crisis of Covid-19 has been depicted is as a human crisis, as noted by Iason from Copenhagen:

> "It is a human crisis apart from the health crisis. We could have been more prepared; we had seen evidence that something like that may happen" (Iason, 28, Copenhagen, unemployed, single).

The human crisis for Iason means that humanity was unprepared to confront Covid-19, although it should have been able to do so. Therefore, Iason implies that something must have gone wrong, as humans are not able to collectively protect themselves from the danger of the pandemic. Thus, crisis is more related to the failure of being collectively protected in this context. A similar context of crisis can be seen through the form of distrust towards governments, statistics, science, media, technology[12] and political institutions[13]. Such reactions are more related to distrust, as this crisis has

been ineffectively managed. Distrust has also been depicted towards other people[4], as very characteristically portrayed by Theo from Northampton (UK):

> "This crisis has let lots of our ugliness be seen. People caring for themselves, emptying supermarkets, behaving in a survival mode" (Theo, 40, Northampton, student, in a relationship).

Theo associates the Covid-19 crisis with ugliness deriving from individualistic rather than collective reactions. Thus, crisis here is related to Iason's view of a pre-pandemic human crisis, again associated with failure, but in this case, it was the failure of acting collectively in a more humanitarian way, whereas Iason was referring to the failure of being collectively prepared to protect ourselves from this pandemic. In both cases, participants remain observers of this side of the crisis without revealing a way to confront it.

In line with the primary depiction of crisis through fear and danger[11], participants have used such characteristics to portray their own unique understanding and experience of the pandemic, which seems to be unrelated to the geographical areas in which participants reside. Lived experiences of crises ultimately become manifestations of life crises shaping life courses, biographies, and imaginaries of the future. In that sense, economic, political, or social crises convert to personal crises[3]. Indeed, participants depicted Covid-19 as a crisis entailing vulnerability primarily related to public health; it has been described as a crisis that has expanded rapidly, entailing panic, sadness, and uncertainty, while at the same time it has been conceptualised through fear (rather than danger or destruction) albeit aiming at empowerment through controlling the crisis while controlling our fears. The Covid-19 crisis has also been depicted through the failure to collectively act in a humanitarian way, as well as the failure of being prepared and able to protect ourselves from this pandemic. With the exception of the perspective on the need to control our fears, the rest of the fragments offered observations and descriptions of the ways they have experienced the Covid-19 crisis without expanding on ways they have employed to confront it. Thus, this side of the Covid-19 crisis has been perceived primarily through vulnerability, fear, and failure, depending on how people have conceptualised and experienced it.

Notably, there are two sides to each crisis as it can be experienced as both danger and an opportunity[21] because crises entail change as well as opportunities to impose new ideas and practices[63]. This side of the crisis has been revealed by several participants offering an additional perspective on coping strategies employed to confront this crisis.

## B. Opportunity, Hope, and Coping Strategies

Hall[3] maintains that crises can offer possibilities for change and continuity, and as will be argued, such an approach to how the Covid-19 crisis has been experienced has enabled participants to employ coping strategies in order to confront the Covid-19 crisis. For example, Giannis from Tokyo, Koralia from Bahrain, and Lia from Brussels have depicted the aspect of positive opportunity within the Covid-19 context:

> "This pandemic for me means half challenge and half opportunity" (Giannis, 59, Tokyo, Employed, 1 kid, married).

> "It's like a restart, an opportunity to re-evaluate whatever we thought was given" (Koralia, 40, Bahrain, housewife, 3 kids, married).

> "We can re-evaluate circumstances both at governmental and individual levels. We realise what is important to us and what is not. We can also make good use of it and become better as individuals and states" (Lia, 28, Brussels, employed, single).

Giannis (Tokyo) depicts the pandemic both as a challenge and as an opportunity, while Koralia (Bahrain) perceives it as an opportunity to re-evaluate whatever we have been relying on. In similar ways, Lia (Brussels) views the opportunity to evaluate what is important on a personal and national level and act accordingly. Thus, the crisis can be perceived as an opportunity to improve. Indeed, Tangjia[21] explains that people who can recognise opportunity in crisis are those with a clear awareness of what is happening and can successfully find a safe way through it, like Natalia from the UK and Aggelos from the USA, who display self-awareness and self-support:

> "It's a good lesson that we need to learn. To become stronger and move on although no one was prepared for a crisis like that" (Natalia, 29, Northampton, suspended, in relationship).

> "For me it's a gift of time, a 'pause' that each one of us can use constructively or simply let go. It's a great opportunity to prove to

*ourselves that we can handle this crisis"*
*(Aggelos, 23, Los Angeles, part-time employed, single)*

Natalia's fragment depicts this crisis as a lesson teaching us how to be stronger and move on, although people have not been prepared to confront this crisis; similarly, Aggelos narrates the crisis as a gift of additional time (in contradiction to the previous depiction of lockdowns as 'dead time') offering the opportunity to make good use of it by overcoming the crisis. Although neither Natalia nor Aggelos explain how they plan to utilise the opportunity to overcome this crisis, they both display a rather positive and optimistic attitude which can be proven helpful and self-supportive. According to Home, (2020) and Neal[27] disruptive events may also offer new opportunities for innovation and change; crises and radical social change do not only cause worry and fear but also anticipation and hope[21] as they can offer possibilities for change and continuity while forming lived, intimate, and very personal experiences[3]. Aggeliki and Aris from Athens reveal their own lived experiences through appreciating what they have, being aware of themselves and the situation they experience, while becoming self-supportive.

> *"It's a 'pause' so that we can see what is going on inside us and around us. Once the time comes to press 'play' again, then we can decide if our life is as we want it to be, if the people around us are the ones we want"* (Aggeliki, 46, Athens, employed, expecting, in-relationship).

> *"This pandemic for me means a gift of extra time added to a crazy and demanding everyday life, to reflect upon my life, my family, my work, my friends. I am happy for that"* (Aris, 42, Athens, employed, 1 kid, married).

Aggeliki perceives the pandemic as a 'pause', as a time discontinuity which can be used for introspection and evaluation of ourselves and others. Slowing down time gives the opportunity to consider what works in one's life and what should change; thus, Aggeliki focuses on a constructive utilisation of her time while supporting herself through this opportunity. Similarly, Aris explains that he feels happy for being able to slow down his demanding routine and be able to reflect upon his life. Both fragments reveal ways that Aggeliki and Aris have employed to support themselves constructively. Additionally, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain that

coping strategies include trying to change the problem that is causing the distress, and Bacevic and McGoey[32] maintain that during the Covid-19 pandemic, people's capacity for adaptation, reflection, and social organization has been evident, as seen through the examples of Lia from Belgium and Nora from Athens who have focused on self-improvement and self-help:

> *"I see the chance to reconsider everything really and the opportunity to become better humans instead of falling apart"* (Lia, 28, Belgium, employed, single).

> *"I don't feel helpless, alone, or desperate. I have started adjusting my everyday life to this lockdown. It's something imposed on all of us, it won't last forever, and eventually, we will get out of it. We are all in the exact same situation globally. But I am hopeful, we will make it"* (Nora, 42, Athens, employed, single).

Like Aggeliki and Aris, Lia (Belgium) describes an opportunity to improve ourselves through self-awareness, while Nora (Athens) becomes more specific in describing that what makes her hopeful is the realization that all humans go through the same experience and that this will pass too. For Tangjia[21], there is no better way to overcome a crisis than sympathetic understanding, considerate care, and mutual help. Coping strategies that have been proven helpful during the pandemic and have been identified by relevant literature include seeking social support and positive thinking[45]. Such attitudes can be seen through the examples of Bill from the USA and Kostas from Athens, who reveal kindness, empathy, self-awareness, and self-support as follows:

> *"it's all about taking care of ourselves and the people next to us"* (Bill, 78, Maryland, retired, married)

> *"Although I feel that I am running out of energy I don't feel angry. This pandemic is about testing relationships of all kinds. The stronger ones will survive; the others will fall apart. Especially if you are locked under the same roof! Understanding, respect, lots of love, and a bit of humour is needed to get past this. And I know that we will make it"* (Kostas, 60, Athens, employed, 2 kids, divorced).

Bill acknowledges the significance of empathy and caring towards others as well as oneself, while Kostas

becomes self-aware while evaluating his own feelings. He refers to family cohabitation during quarantine which, although it can prove challenging, can be managed through understanding, respect, love, and humour. Notably, there are people who not only survive challenging circumstances but become strengthened by the particular exposure to adversity; according to Papadopoulos[36][37], positive developments are possible as direct results of being exposed to adversity. Voula's example demonstrates this exact case by appreciating what she has while supporting and rewarding herself. She says:

> "This pandemic for me was like a vacation because I was very lucky. Because I didn't lose my job permanently, I didn't have to work and take care of my children within a small flat all day long, I didn't have a vulnerable member of my family to protect. All I had to do was lock myself indoors, fill up my fridge, and let the time pass. I wouldn't have said the same if I was working long shifts at a supermarket while being a parent" (Voula, 42, Austria, suspended, 1 kid, married).

The reflexive fragment of Voula (from Austria) reveals her willingness and ability to concentrate on the aspects of her life about which she feels grateful, like the fact that she is still employed (although suspended) and that this has given her the opportunity to take care of her kid, the fact that she does not have to protect a vulnerable member of her family, and that she is able to fill up her fridge and just be patient. Voula acknowledges that her life situation would have been very different if she had to work at a supermarket while being a parent. This narrative reflects gratitude and an ability to become self-supportive as a means employed by Voula to cope with this pandemic.

Pratt (2020) maintains that the unfamiliarity of 'lockdown' has been a challenge to our societies and the ways we care for others. Families, individuals, and social groups have had to develop coping strategies for caring and schooling and employ creative combinations of demanding roles within the context of isolation. Crisis indeed has two sides, and the analysed fragments of this section revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic is no exception. Although a crisis often appears suddenly and people do not have enough time to react and take action, we can nevertheless work out some plans to cope with a crisis ahead of time by putting positive and useful elements into full use to eliminate the crisis[21]. The data have shown that different people experience

shared adversity in distinctive ways, but coping strategies are primarily employed by those who have given a meaning to the crisis more related to opportunity and hope rather than fear and vulnerability.

Participants in this section have depicted the Covid-19 pandemic primarily as an opportunity to improve matters mainly on a personal level. They became more specific about the ways that they have employed to achieve that: by evaluating what is important and acting accordingly; remaining positive and optimistic; being aware of themselves and the situation they experience; utilising time constructively; being hopeful through the realisation that all humans go through the same experience and that this will pass too; through empathy and caring towards others as well as oneself; through understanding, respect, love, and humour. Finally, through gratitude for what they have and a willingness to become and remain self-supportive. Ultimately, portraying the crisis as an opportunity rather than fear enabled participants to concentrate on the means employed to cope with the pandemic.

## Discussion

This article argues that shared experiences among participants entail meaning-making of the pandemic in terms of a) fearful *crisis*: entailing panic, sadness, vulnerability, uncertainty, and failure of humanity, as well as b) opportunity for improvement through: self/social awareness and evaluation, optimism, hopefulness, patience, empathy, caring, understanding, respect, love, humour, gratitude, and self-support. Despite its disastrous and lethal aftermath, most people have survived it, and in doing so, coping strategies have been employed. This article focused on the hopeful perception of the Covid-19 pandemic, despite its primary depiction as a crisis entailing inevitably fearful and vulnerable shared experiences as well as a sense of failure.

In relation to the concept of crisis, participants depicted Covid-19 as a crisis that has expanded rapidly, entailing panic, sadness, vulnerability, and uncertainty, while at the same time it has been conceptualised through fear, including empowerment through controlling the crisis while controlling our fears. The Covid-19 crisis has also been depicted through failure to collectively act in a humanitarian way, as well as a failure of being prepared and able to protect ourselves from this pandemic. Portraying the crisis through fear, vulnerability, and failure prohibited participants from forming coping strategies.

At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic has been portrayed as a crisis offering an opportunity for improvement by evaluating what is important and acting accordingly; remaining positive and optimistic; being aware of oneself and the external situation; utilising time constructively; being hopeful through the realisation that all humans go through the same experience and that this will pass too; through empathy and caring towards others as well as oneself; through understanding, respect, love, and humour. Finally, through gratitude for what we have and a willingness to become and remain self-supportive. Ultimately, portraying the crisis as an opportunity rather than fear enabled participants to concentrate on the means employed to cope with this pandemic.

## Footnotes

1 The complete study can be found at: Chalari, A. and Koutantou, E.[50] *Psycho-Social approaches to Covid-19Pandemic: Change, Crisis and Trauma.* London: Palgrave McMillan (ISBN: 978-3-031-07830-9)

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## Declarations