

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

Athanasia Chalari

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Abstract

This article conceptualises 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 deriving 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. 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 of 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 opportunity rather than fear enabled participants to concentrate on means employed to cope with this pandemic.

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 Covid-19 pandemic this article will explore the concept of crisis as has been experienced, in real time, by 46 participants residing in 13 different 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 does this crisis mean to them. To do so, the concept of crisis will be discussed against latest literature on Covid-19 pandemic, in an attempt to conceptualise the significance of the unique substance of Covid-19 crisis as well as the coping strategies employed in order to be confronted. 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. Although the idea of crisis has been primarily connected with danger that was supposed to coexist with fear and uncertainty (Koselleck and Richter, 2006), Fuchs (2020) uses the term 'corona crisis' to emphasise the significantly interrupted and altered social reality during the pandemic. Hall (2019) 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" (Hall, 2019: 479). 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.

Ward (2020) argues that Covid-19 is primarily related to the concepts of risk, fear, panic and trust (of lack of) 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 (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 (s) (Monaghan, 2020; Žižek, 2020), elimination of human freedom (Caduff, 2020) and the exaggerated public health measures, including catholic lockdowns (Brown, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic portrays a globalised crisis as it does not only threaten each and everyone's health but has indeed caused an enormous economic catastrophe leading to altered ways of living (Nicola, et al, 2020). Such altered ways of living related to distrust towards governments, statistics, science, media, technology (Calnan, 2020), political institutions (Risi, Pronzato and Fraia, 2020) and even other people (Ward, 2020), whereas Monaghan (2020: 1989) adds the reactions of 'frustration, anger, disbelief, resignation, boredom, disappointment and disdain towards authorities acting in a draconian and inconsistent manner".

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. 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 (Silbereisen, 2005). 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 (Möhrling et al., 2020; Best et al. 2020). Risi, Pronzato and Fraia (2020) 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 are predominantly suffering coronavirus' physical consequences whereas youth are suffering the social impacts of lockdowns (Matthewman, and Huppertz, 2020) whereas concerns about mental health implications for all age groups have been repeatedly raised (Monaghan, 2020). 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; Möhrling et al., 2020; Risi, Pronzato and Fraia, 2020). Tangjia (2014) emphasises that 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 with racism, inequalities, violent attacks (WHO, 2021b), as well as stigma and xenophobia (Ward, 2020).

Crisis through Coping strategies

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). Lived experiences of crises ultimately become manifestations of life crisis shaping life course, biographies and imaginaries of the future. In that sense, economic, political or social crises convert to personal crises (Hall, 2019). People are able to realize that we are part of the same situation, community and destiny (Tangjia, 2014). Regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, Monbiot (2020) notes the rise of volunteering among young people, offering support in various contexts whereas Lourens (2020) praises the lessons people have learned about 'being in this together' during the crisis. Tangjia, maintains that as crisis can determine the ways people live their lives, it can reveal each persons' 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, crisis does not only cause worry and fear but also anticipation and hope (Tangjia, 2014) as it can offer possibilities for change and continuity. Home, (2020) and Neal (1998) 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 Huppertz 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, 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 (Matthewman, and Huppertz, 2020:5-6). Elder, (1999/1974) 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 1930's or World War II. Indeed, different people experience traumatic events in distinct ways (Papadopoulos, 2007), whereas collective trauma may not be the result of collective pain (Alexander, 2012). The fact that traumatic experiences may be shared, is an important factor in mitigating distress and anxiety that these events create 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 peoples' capacity for adaption, reflection and social organization has been manifested (Bacevic and McGoey, 2021).

Nevertheless, some people are more vulnerable in all forms of change caused by crisis, in case they have to face unprecedented transformations in their prior life and thus being unprepared to confront them. However, if change is closer to the previous lives and they have already developed coping mechanisms, then exposure to stress is manageable (Rutter, 1994). 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 (Bohlken, et al, 2020; Du et al, 2020). Reduced exposure to negative media content during the pandemic has also been noted as a helpful coping strategy (Guo et al, 2020).

Papadopoulos claims that there are people who not only survive challenging circumstances but they become strengthened by

the particular exposure to adversity (Papadopoulos, 2004, 2006). It is possible that people may find meaning in their suffering and can transform their negative experience in a positive way (Frankl, 1959). Such approaches are related to resilience which may explain how people living in a difficult world, can prioritise positivity and hope (Bartley, 2006; Ungar, 2004) and it is associated with “phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001: 228). In fact Lindinger-Sternart et al (2021) suggest that resilience can be a protective factor against mental health problems that are related to adverse experiences of 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 (Silbereisen and Chen, 2010; Elder and Caspi, 1990). 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 advantages of emerging new opportunities (Pinquart and Silbereisen’s, 2004). 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 (Anwar, et al, 2020). 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 (Cauberghe et al, 2021).

The more uncertain and undefined new challenges are, the more likely it is that old, albeit, successful behavioural strategies will be used (Elder & Caspi, 1990). 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 (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004). For example, studies on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on students emphasise the significance of utilisation of social networks, the effectiveness of empathetic communication system and the helpfulness of adaptive expression and emotional management (Morales- Rodríguez, 2021) that educational institutions could have set in place as supportive mechanisms in times of crisis or radical change.

Tangjia (2014) maintains that although 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 crisis ahead of time by putting positive and useful elements into full use to eliminate crisis. In this vein, the United Nations emphasise the necessity of the immediate establishment of a universal healthcare and social protection systems along with improving governance even by developing countries (UN, 2021). 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 in caused in each case.

Methods

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. All interviews took place through the digital platforms of: skype, messenger and whatsapp, due to distancing measures (Jowett, 2021). The sample consisted of Greek men and women (born and raised in Greece), 24 of them residing in 6 different Greek cities and 22 of them residing 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, Bahrein. Participants who aged between 21-84 years old were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study, as it is commonly deemed suitable with exploratory and non-probabilistic research designs (Ritchie et al. 2013). The sample was opportunistic; the recruitment strategy used 'gatekeepers' and 'snowballing' techniques (Becker, 1963).

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

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

Table 2. Greeks living Abroad (total:22)

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

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 (Polit & Beck, 2012). Lived experiences are deemed incomplete while remaining descriptive; interpretation of significance for the person and contextualisation of the social circumstance is pivotal (Gadamer, 1976; 2004). 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.

The study followed the ethical standards stipulated by the British Sociological Association guidelines on ethical research (BSA, 2022) 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 (Light, Singer and Willett, 1990; Kvale, 1996), concerned solely with personal experiences of everyday living (Baker, 1997; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2005). 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 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 (Maxwell, 2013).

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. This approach was deemed effective to explore novel phenomena within a continuous interaction between theory generation and empirical observation (Charmaz and Belgrave 2015). 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 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 of the larger project was collected during the first major lockdown, and since this occasion 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 had been limited.

Analysis

The participants of this study used the term of 'crisis' in various contexts in order to depict what the pandemic means for them. Matthewman and Huppatz (2020) 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 covid-19 crisis. Their views entail a plurality of components aligned with relevant literature and initially related with a) danger and fear (Koselleck and Richter, 2006) followed by the aspects of b) opportunity and hope (French and Leyshon, 2010). Based on the ways participants have experienced and made meaning of this pandemic, coping strategies have (or 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 the danger which is supposed to coexist with fear and uncertainty (Tangjia, 2014). In this vein, Ward (2020) 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 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 uncertainly is my main concern" (Mary, 66, Crete, retired, 2 kids, married).

Maria associates Covid-19 with a crisis which has expanded rapidly, spreading panic, sadness and uncertainty; Maria seems surprised, if not shocked, while trying to prevent these feelings overwhelm her. Both Argiro and Mary seem 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 Covid-19 pandemic which has been reported as 'Covid-19 phobia' (Lindinger-Sternart et al, 2021) and 'coronaphobia' (Asmundson and Taylor, 2020; Brooks, et al, 2020) denoting the vulnerability and insecurity associated to the fear of potential infection. But as the above fragment denote, 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 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 (Calnan, 2020) and political institutions (Risi, Pronzato and Fraia, 2020). Such reactions are more related to distrust as this crisis has been ineffectively managed. Distrust has also been depicted towards other people (Ward, 2020), as very characteristically portrayed by Theo from Northampton (UK):

“This crisis has let lots of our ugliness to be seen. People caring for themselves, emptying supermarkets, behaving on a survival mode” (Theo, 40, Northampton, student, in 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 to 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 crisis without revealing a way to confront it.

In line with the primary depiction of crisis through fear and danger (Koselleck and Richter, 2006), 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 crisis shaping life course, biographies and imaginaries of the future. In that sense, economic, political or social crises convert to personal crises (Hall, 2019). Indeed, participants depicted Covid-19 as a crisis entailing vulnerability primarily related to public health; it has been described as a crisis which 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 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 description of the ways they have experienced 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 conceptualise and experience it.

Notably, there are two sides in each crisis as it can be experienced as both danger and an opportunity (Tangjia, 2014) because crises entail change as well as opportunities to impose new ideas and practices (French and Leyshon, 2010). 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 (2019) maintain that crises can offer possibilities for change and continuity and as will be argued, such approach on how 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 Bahrein 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 given” (Koralia, 40, Bahrein, housewife, 3 kids, married).

“We can re-evaluate circumstances both in 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 as well as opportunity while Koralia (Bahrein) 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 (2014) 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 it go. It’s a great opportunity to prove 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 narrate the crisis as a gift of additional time (in contradiction to 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 proved helpful and self-supportive. According to Home, (2020) and Neal (1998) disruptive events may also offer new opportunities for innovation and change; crises and radical social change does not only cause worry and fear but also anticipation and hope (Tangjia, 2014) as it can offer possibilities for change and continuity while forming lived, intimate, and very personal experiences (Hall, 2019). 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 will come 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 (2021) maintain that during the Covid-19 pandemic people’s capacity for adaption, 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 to all of us, it won’t last for ever 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 realisation that all humans go through the same experience and that this will pass too. For Tangjia, (2014) 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 have been identified by relevant literature include seeking social support and positive thinking (Anwar, et al, 2020). Such attitudes can be seen through the examples of Bill from 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 pass 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 they become strengthened by the particular exposure to adversity; according to Papadopoulos (2004, 2006) 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 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 is 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 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, 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 of caring and schooling and employ creative combinations of demanding roles within the context of isolation. Crisis has indeed two sides and the analysed fragments of this section revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic is no exception. Although 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 crisis ahead of time by putting positive and useful elements into full use to eliminate crisis (Tangjia, 2014). The data has shown that different people experience shared adversity in distinctive ways but coping strategies are primarily employed by those who have given a meaning to crisis more related to opportunity and hope rather than fear and vulnerability.

Participants of 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 act 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 of what they have and willingness to become and remain self-supportive. Ultimately, portraying crisis as opportunity rather than fear enabled participants to concentrate on 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 of 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 Covid-19 pandemic, despite its primary depiction as a crisis entailing inevitably fearful and vulnerable shared experiences as well as a sense of failure. 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.

In relation to the concept of crisis, participants depicted Covid-19 as a crisis which 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. 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 our selves from this pandemic. Portraying crisis through fear, vulnerability and failure, prohibited participants of forming coping strategies.

At the same time Covid-19 pandemic has being portrayed as a crisis offering an opportunity of improvement by evaluating what is important and act 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 of what we have and willingness to become and remain self-supportive. Ultimately, portraying crisis as opportunity rather than fear enabled participants to concentrate on means employed to cope with this pandemic.

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