

MINDFULNESS PROCESSES THAT MITIGATE COVID-RELATED STRESS IN PARENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on child development involves understanding the impact of the pandemic on parent well-being and factors that protect against emotional distress associated with the virus itself and the measures used to reduce disease transmission. The purpose of our investigation was to **examine whether level of COVID-related stress exposure was related to parental emotional distress, and whether parents' experience of distress was reduced by their reported level of mindfulness**. We examined whether four specific mindfulness-related constructs: **nonreactivity, nonjudging, acting with awareness, and selfcompassion** – were processes that would buffer the impact of stress exposure on parental emotional distress one-month later.

A total of 414 parents ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.2$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 7.97$; 68.6% female) completed the baseline survey through Mechanical Turk at the end of May 2020. At baseline, parents' nonreactivity, nonjudging, and acting with awareness were assessed using subscales from the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011) and self-compassion during difficult times was measured using the Self-Compassion Scale (Raes et al., 2011). After data quality checks, 80% of the sample was retained ($n=332$) one-month later. COVID-related stress exposure measured the occurrence of pandemic related events and changes. Parents were also asked the extent to which they felt increased stress due to pandemic-related events using 18 items ($\alpha=.91$) from the COVID Family Stress Screener (HuthBocks, 2020 *unpublished measure*).

Moderation analyses indicated that **acting with awareness** ($b=-.15$, $SE_b = 0.04$, $t=-4.14$, $p<.001$), nonjudging ($b=-.09$, $SE_b = 0.04$, $t=-2.25$, $p=.03$), and selfcompassion ($b=-.11$, $SE_b = 0.05$, $t=-2.29$, $p=.02$) moderated the association between COVID-related stress exposure and parental emotional distress. Simple slope analyses suggested that for parents with low-to-average levels of acting with awareness, a strong association between COVID-related stress exposure and emotional distress was observed ($b=.40$, $SE_b = 0.04$, $t=8.80$, $p<.001$; $b=.24$, $SE_b = 0.04$, $t=6.04$, $p<.001$; respectively). For parents reporting **high levels of acting with awareness, COVID-related stress exposure and pandemic-related stress measured one-month later were unrelated** ($b=.09$, $SE_b = 0.06$, $t=1.37$,

$p=.17$). Patterns were similar for self-compassion and non-judging, but weaker compared to acting with awareness such that at high levels of self-compassion and non-judging, the association between COVID-related stress exposure and pandemic-related stress remained significant, but was weaker compared to low-to-average levels of self-compassion and non-judging. Results provide evidence that specific mindfulness processes may act as protective factors for parents against pandemic-related emotional distress.

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