


BOOK REVIEW

Pandemic Providers: Psychologists Respond to Covid

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On March 11, 2020, a pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization; this declaration came after 118,000 cases of the virus were diagnosed in 114 countries, resulting in 4,291 deaths. As of March 23, 2024, 774,834,237 cases had been confirmed worldwide in 229 countries and territories, resulting in more than seven million confirmed deaths (approximately 1.2 million in the US) (Worldometer, n.d.). These numbers increase daily. Although Joe Biden declared on May 11, 2023 that the national state of emergency for COVID was over, the disease continues to be a global threat that bedevils public health officials around the world.

None of us were ready for the COVID pandemic, and few of us were able to anticipate the profound changes that would result from an infection with a virus that was previously unknown to almost everyone, including psychologists. However, we soon confronted new challenges: Our patients were reluctant to come to our offices, fearing infection; when they did come, they wore masks, making it difficult to hear them clearly or assess affect; comfortable and seemingly innocuous acts like simply shaking hands became threatening and uncomfortable; cancelled appointments were commonplace as the virus spread; and conferencing with patients with Zoom became the new norm – and eventually a widely accepted professional interaction that received federal funding (Watson et al., 2023).

While many of us reacted by withdrawing from professional practice, a group of psychologists, experts in treating trauma and members of the American Psychological Association’s Division of Trauma Psychology (Division 56), began meeting weekly online to share insights and experiences with the challenges

presented by the pandemic. These weekly meetings eventually resulted in an edited book, *Pandemic Providers: Psychologists Respond to Covid*, published by Springer. The three editors, Charles Figley, Lenore Walker and Ilene Serlin, are well known psychologists widely recognized for their trauma expertise. They were able to recruit an astonishingly talented range of contributors, many of whom will be well known to *International Psychology Bulletin* readers. These contributors include luminaries such as Judith Alpert, Maureen O'Reilly-Landry, Judy Kuriansky, Patricia O'Gorman, Kirk Schneider, and Arlene Steinberg.

Pandemic Providers is a unique book, just as the COVID pandemic was a unique public health challenge. The APA task force was "bottom up," unlike other association task force groups that typically are implemented by APA Council. Fourteen APA specialty divisions participated in the work, led by psychologist Charles Figley. The group met on a weekly basis, sharing experiences and letting one another know what seemed to work in treating the depression and anxiety that accompanied the pandemic for so many.

Although the work started as an APA Task Force, it soon morphed into something more. In the Preface, the editors note:

We met weekly at noon Fridays. We quickly discovered that our group was among very few behaving collectively as practitioners to help practitioners. We were psychologists, social workers, counselors, lawyers, nurses, and other mental health specialists and experts who quickly became active in healing the nation and the world, in our own way. Although we came together under the APA rubric initially, we were on our own mission as a Task Force. Like the pandemic, the mission was emerging gradually. (p. v)

Members of Division 52 (International Psychology) will be interested in the "International and Multidimensional Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19" chapter that examined COVID programs and policies across dozens of countries ranging from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. In addition, there is a table in the same chapter that lists multinational research projects on the pandemic, and a separate chapter that addresses international student collaborations on COVID-19.

I was especially fascinated by a chapter by Alpert, Steinberg and Laddis comparing the COVID-19 pandemic with the 1918 influenza pandemic, also known as the "forgotten flu." This is the closest parallel to the COVID pandemic; it "infected about one-third of the world population (500 million people) and killed 675,000 Americans and 50 million people worldwide" (p. 21). There are fascinating parallels between the attempts of Presidents Wilson and Trump to minimize the seriousness of each pandemic for political reasons.

Pandemic Providers' extraordinary scholarship and hundreds of references and hyperlinks will be invaluable for serious COVID scholars. The book is expensive (\$180 for the hardcover version; \$139 for the ebook); however, the book belongs in every college and university library in English speaking countries.

In short, *Pandemic Providers: Psychologists Respond to Covid* is a prodigious achievement with elaborate documentation. The citations and references are comprehensive and current, and the writing is clear. The authors include many of the leading figures in contemporary psychology. This project was a Herculean task that took approximately three years to complete. Who could have guessed that a book this important would eventually result from a simple series of Friday afternoon Zoom calls? Perhaps *Pandemic Providers* will help guide us as psychologists and other health care providers prepare to confront the next pandemic.

References

Watson, J. D., Pierce, B. S., Tyler, C. M., Donovan, E. K., Merced, K., Mallon, M., Autler, A., & Perrin, P. B. (2023). Barriers and facilitators to psychologists' telepsychology uptake during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(8), 5467 – 5485. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20085467>

Worldometer (n.d.). Coronavirus cases and deaths. Retrieved March 23, 2024 from <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>.