



DIVISION OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021

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Welcome Dr Liza Morton

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‘I feel like I'm in prison for a crime I didn't commit’ Supporting mental health and well-being for people with congenital heart disease during the global Covid-19 pandemic

Objectives: The growing population of adults with congenital heart disease (CHD) often have lifelong experience of dealing with potentially traumatic health crises and medical uncertainty. Further, they can face increased vulnerability to anxiety, depression and PTSD. The COVID-19 pandemic may present additional challenges for this population including an increased risk of serious health complications, the

psychological impact of shielding and strict social distancing, changes to medical care provision and social stigma. Adults with CHD may also experience positive post-traumatic growth (PTG) in the face of such challenges, yet little is known as to what helps cultivate positive adaptation and PTG.

Design: The additional challenges are considered drawing from one of the researcher's lived experience and findings from a cross-sectional, anonymous, online study exploring the impact of the pandemic on mental health for adults (n=236) with CHD. Closed and open-ended questions and a series of standardised psychosocial measures of traumatic experiences, coping mechanisms, emotional regulation and PTG were measured.

Results/Analysis: Findings suggest the CHD population are at increased risk of PTSD which may be exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, positive adaptation may promote post traumatic growth. In particular, health adversity is associated with greater appreciation whilst emotional regulation is associated with post-traumatic growth.

Conclusions: We recommend a growth-focused, psychologically and trauma-informed approach to medicine and public health, recognising the importance of supporting mental health and promoting living well with CHD during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. These findings are likely generalizable to other lifelong health conditions and shielding populations.

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