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**NORTHERN IRELAND BRANCH of the BPS
ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021**

15 - 16 APRIL 2021, VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

Poster Abstracts
Alphabetical by presenting author

Physical activity, stress, and mental health in students.

Zara Adair, Ulster University

Objectives: The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between physical activity, stress and mental health in a sample of university students.

Design: An online survey using questionnaire data collection.

Methods: A sample of 110 students (28 males and 72 females) aged between 18-28 completed the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), the Undergraduate Stress Questionnaire (USQ), and the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ).

Results: Levels of exercise were significantly correlated with lower levels of depression, but not with anxiety or stress. Further analysis shows that exercise has a curvilinear relationship with anxiety and stress in that moderate levels of exercise are associated with lower stress and less anxiety. However, both low levels of exercise and high levels relate to elevated stress and anxiety.

Conclusions: Findings suggest that the relationship between exercise levels and mental health is not straightforward. Increasing exercise to moderate levels seems to be generally positive, however too much could be negatively indicated. This data cannot elucidate on the direction of effect.

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The effectiveness of online psychotherapy interventions for perinatal mental health disorders: a systematic review

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Objectives: To assess the effectiveness of online psychotherapy (O-P-T) interventions for the treatment of perinatal mental health (PMH) disorders.

Design: To investigate the effectiveness of online psychotherapy within a perinatal population a systematic review of the literature was conducted.

Methods: Eligibility criteria was developed using the PICOS framework. Five electronic databases were searched: PsycINFO, Medline, CINAHL Complete, Proquest Dissertations and Theses, Scopus along with Google Scholar and The Shapiro Library to identify papers published before July 2020. Interventions were included if participants had a clinician assessed diagnosis of a PMH illness at screening, was an experimental design and had clinician involvement in the intervention. Quality was assessed using the Quality Assessment Criteria for Evaluating Primary Research Papers from a Variety of Fields (QualSyst).

Results: 2567 papers were identified and five met the inclusion criteria. Studies were of good quality and the combined sample of participants was 209. Treatment fidelity was not reported. Pooled effect sizes found small to medium effects favouring the intervention versus control on the reduction of depressive symptoms and in some cases remission ($d = 0.48$, 95% CI -0.07, 1.06). Pooled effect sizes on within-group data resulted in large treatment effects for depression, anxiety and stress outcomes ($d = 1.90$; $d = 0.81$; $d = 1.05$).

Conclusions: This review provides evidence that O-P-T interventions for the treatment of PMH disorders are effective in improving clinical outcomes. There, is a need to further test online EMDR interventions using different modalities such as videoconcencing.

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The Video to Recovery: The Effectiveness of Video Interactive Guidance (VIG) Interventions in Improving Parental Mental Health Outcomes

Emma Louise Bohan & Aoife McLoughlin
Mary Immaculate College

Objectives: A systematic review is presented to answer the review question: how effective are Video Interactive Guidance (VIG) interventions in improving parental mental health outcomes?

Design: Five studies (N = 189 participants) published between 2004 and 2017 were examined. The studies included parents who completed a VIG intervention and whose mental health outcomes were measured. Due to the limited research available, both qualitative and quantitative studies were evaluated.

Methods: Gough's Weight of Evidence framework was used to critically appraise the studies on their relevance and quality, in answering the review question.

Results: In summary, the studies add to the novel evidence-base, for the effectiveness of VIG interventions in improving parental mental health outcomes. However, these results ought to be interpreted with caution, as only two study designs (randomised controlled trials), were deemed to be the most appropriate in answering the review question.

Conclusions: Overall, these findings have worthy implications for future practice and research, particularly the area of educational and child psychology. Educational and child psychologists (ECPs) are expected to understand, recommend and deliver evidence-based psychological interventions. Thus, VIG training may be helpful for ECPs working with vulnerable parents. Future research should review the evidence based on studies of one methodology, so true comparative judgements can be made.

Keywords: systematic review, Video Interactive Guidance (VIG), parents, mental health

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An Exploration of the Experiences of Adolescents and Young Adults with ADHD using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Lisa Burke & Dr David McCormack
Queen's University Belfast

Objective: Research in the area of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has largely focused on younger children, in educational settings and on the aetiology of the disorder. Therefore little is known about the experience of ADHD in the adolescent age range.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six young people aged between 16 and 21 years old with a diagnosis of ADHD.

Design: Data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to gain insight into their lived experience.

Results: Two master themes emerged from the data: 'making sense of this part of me' and 'the influence of the systems around me'. Subthemes include: Am I to blame, the 'me' with and without medication, feeling misunderstood and being a passenger in the diagnostic process.

Conclusions: Participants describe a struggle with their sense of self and a desire to take control of their medication use. However many seemed detached from the diagnostic process and influenced by the systems around them. It should be noted that all of the participants were from the same steering group. Five of the six participants were male. However, this is representative of the diagnostic rates in the general population. Future research which evaluates the effectiveness of partnership working, involving health, education and the young people themselves in the diagnostic process, and which aims to promote an understanding of their ADHD at an early stage, would be valuable. Finally, it is clear that there is a paucity of research around the ability to 'Hyper-focus' in ADHD.

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School Staff Wellbeing during the 2020 Covid-19 Related School Closures

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Objectives: This study sought to gain insight into (i) the wellbeing of teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) during the Covid-19 related school closures, and (ii) teachers' and SNAs' perspectives on how the wellbeing of school staff could be further supported at this time

Design: Semi-structured interviews were completed with three teachers and two SNAs. The definition of wellbeing which was used to inform this research was taken from the 'Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018- 2023' (Government of Ireland, 2019, p 10). As this framework provides guidance on how wellbeing may be promoted within schools, it was reasoned to be appropriate for informing this study.

Methods: Data collection took place between May 13th and June 9th 2020. As the research was undertaken by a trainee educational and child psychologist on placement with the National Educational Psychological Service in the republic of Ireland, service users in this region were invited to participate. Participants completed a 20-30 minute semi-structured telephone interview. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.

Results: Three main themes (each with two-three subthemes) were identified:
1. Time (workload, family and personal relationships, physical wellbeing)
2. Pandemic related stressors (concern for pupils, uncertainty and anxiety, caring for others)
3. Promoting wellbeing (guidance for school staff, sudden onset of school closures).

Conclusions: Findings are pertinent to informing current practice in light of the ongoing pandemic. Concurrently, findings should be considered in line with the sample size and timeframe during which the research was undertaken.

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Influence of National Identity on Intergroup Contact Intentions

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Queen's University Belfast

Objectives: This study explores the impact of national identities on children's preferences for integration in Northern Ireland (NI), a context of historic intergroup conflict. Specifically, we explore children's strength of a national ingroup identity (Irish/British) on future contact intentions in a Shared Education context.

Design: In NI, children living in segregated neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland demonstrate a preference for sharing resources with ingroup members, especially when they had a stronger ingroup identity (O'Driscoll et al., 2018). Here, we further explored the effects of strength of identity on children's intentions to act prosocially in a relevant scenario, engaging with others through Shared Education.

Methods: Data collection, delayed due to Covid19, is now ongoing. Participants will include 7-11-year-old children in NI. In a researcher-led remote survey via Qualtrics, children will report their strength of ingroup identity (O'Driscoll et al., 2018), quality and quantity of outgroup contact (Tausch et al., 2007), and how many times, out of 10 opportunities, they wish to engage in shared education with an outgroup child

Results: A linear regression will explore the influence of children's ingroup identity on contact intentions, controlling for previous intergroup contact. We predict children who demonstrate a stronger ingroup identity will choose to engage in fewer opportunities for shared education.

Conclusions: Findings will inform how ingroup identity may affect prosocial behaviour intentions in real-world peacebuilding interventions.

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The psychological impact of Covid-19 on Allied Health and Healthcare Science Students

Jean Daly-lynn, Ulster University

Objectives: To explore the psychological impact of Covid-19 on the educational experience of allied health and healthcare science students.

Design: A participatory research design including focus groups with student researchers was adopted. Student researchers were final year students trained to facilitate online focus groups with their peers and thematically analysed the results with support from the academic team.

Methods: Six peer researchers undertook both synchronous and asynchronous training and worked in pairs to facilitate the online focus groups. This ongoing study has completed three focus groups (FG) (first years FG N=4; second year FG N=4; Final year FG N=4) using an online platform called Blackboard Collaborate. Participants have been recruited via email through the School of Health Sciences.

Results: The themes emerging to date are social isolation, the impact of informal communication on friendships and learning, uncertainty around practice placement, anxiety and increased workload, financial stress and stigma experienced as a result of the media attention on students breaking governmental guidance.

Conclusions: The findings highlight the psychological impact on our future allied health and healthcare science workforce. The health care workforce of Northern Ireland needs nurtured to ensure the provision of health services in the future. This research aims to identify gaps and future needs the students might have so they can be supported to mitigate any impact this might have on their future career. The strong student voice in this research seeks to amplify the student experience and foster research skills within an undergraduate cohort.

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Exploring the Association Between Exposure to Political Violence, SES and Early Family Conflict on Poor Mental Health, amongst Catholics and Protestants

Nicole Devlin, Queen's University Belfast

Northern Ireland is experiencing a mental health crisis, whereby, a number of influences have been identified that can impact mental health from socioeconomic conditions through to family dysfunction, and whilst these have been explored in isolation, the current study seeks to explore further. The aims of the study were to explore the effects of exposure to political violence (EPV), socioeconomic status (SES), early family conflict (EFC) on poor mental health (PMH) of individuals in Northern Ireland. A total of 513 participants (overall demographics: 62% females, 38% males; with a mean age of 32, range of 18-81) who identified as Catholic and Protestant participated. They completed the General Health Questionnaire; the MacArthur Subjective SES Ladder; the Brief Family Relationship Scale; and the measure of exposure to political violence.

It was reported that the Catholic group reported higher levels of PMH, than the Protestant participants. For both Catholics and Protestants, it was found that EFC and SES were found to be significant predictors of PMH, whilst EPV was found not to be significantly associated with PMH. These findings suggest that mental health in NI may be influenced by societal-level issues (i.e., SES) and familial level issues (i.e., EFC). These are appropriate targets for policy and intervention, however, there are a number of methodological issues that need to be considered when interpreting the findings, which can be used in future research. Concluding, there are important inequalities to address which influence mental health outcomes.

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Bilingualism and Executive Function: A Comparison Study of Response Inhibition, Working Memory Updating and Emotion Regulation ability between Monolinguals and Bilinguals.

Ronan Fleury, Dublin City University

Objectives: The presence of an apparent Bilingual cognitive enhancement has met increasing controversy and criticism over the past decade. Research on both sides of the argument offer compelling/valid arguments, underpinned by cognitive frameworks, including the role of the executive function system in learning an additional language either early or late in life. The aim of this study is to investigate if language status such as Early or Late Bilingualism positively affects executive functions performance in Inhibition Control, Working Memory Updating and Emotion Regulation, compared to Monolinguals.

Method: A cohort of 72 participated (22 Monolinguals, 26 Early Bilinguals and 24 Late Bilinguals), completed a Colour-Word Stroop Task (Inhibition Control), an N-Back Task (Working Memory Updating) and an Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Emotion Regulation). The Stroop Task ranged in difficulty, from 50/50 to 75/25 incongruent/congruent trials. The 3-Back task, consisted of 30 trials, examining Working Memory Updating. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire consisted of 10 questions.

Results: An ANOVA was run for the Stroop task and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. A Kruskal-Wallis H test was run for the N-Back task. Results suggested no significant difference for Inhibition Control and Working Memory Updating depending on language status. However, a just beyond significant advantage in Emotion Regulation (appraisal) was observed for Late Bilinguals compared to Monolinguals.

Discussion: Cognitive advantage for Bilinguals was not observed in executive processing but noted in emotion regulation. Reasons for this finding, as well as research limitations and future directions were discussed, such as further exploration of neurocognitive Bilingual advantages.

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Building capacity for high-quality research on the role of music therapy in supporting informal carers of people at end of life.

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Objectives: Informal carers of people at end of life are at increased risk for mental health problems across the bereavement trajectory. The role of music therapy in supporting informal carers of people at end of life is an increasingly important clinical focus. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research to inform evidence-based practice. The aim of this ongoing research programme is to further develop UK capacity for high-quality music therapy research in end of life care with a focus on informal carers.

Design: The programme of research contains several capacity-building components to identify the existing evidence base and to co-design a music therapy intervention for informal carers of patients at end of life.

Methods: A JBI segregated mixed-methods systematic review will be undertaken of the existing research evidence on the effectiveness and experience of music therapy interventions. This will be followed by a Word Café style workshop to identify priority questions for music therapy research with informal carers in addition to methodological challenges/potential solutions for conducting high-quality research. Finally, a series of workshops will take place to co-design a music therapy intervention for evaluation.

Results: This findings from this research programme will help to inform evidence-based practice for music therapy provision for informal carers of people at end of life.

Conclusions: Developing an evidence-based health care system which responds to the holistic needs of the growing numbers of informal carers is of utmost importance. Music therapy has the potential to contribute value by improving outcomes for both carers and patients.

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The unofficial transfer tests in Northern Ireland: a scoping review of the literature

Clare Kidston, Queen's University, Belfast

Objectives: This scoping review seeks to map the literature relating to unofficial transfer tests in Northern Ireland (NI), which have facilitated grammar schools' practice of academic selection since the 11-plus was discontinued in 2008. The review question is: 'what is the nature and extent of research pertaining to unofficial transfer tests in NI since 2008 and their impacts for children and families?'

Design: Although frequently constructed as fair and objective, the current unregulated testing system is not subject to public scrutiny. Amidst rising demand, there is a need to establish what is known in relation to the quality and impacts of these privately-organised tests.

Methods: This scoping review was conducted in accordance with PRISMA-ScR guidance. Data sources included PsychINFO, Web of Science, ERIC and relevant grey literature. Eligibility criteria stipulated English-language documents focused on NI transfer tests post-2008, their impacts and/or stakeholder views. Data were organised by methodological characteristics and thematically analysed.

Results: The final sample included 14 documents, most of which presented secondary research (n=12) originating in NI (n=10). Topics covered included social and educational inequalities, educational outcomes, stakeholder views, historical context and children's rights. Three themes characterised the tests as: lacking empirical support, having unknown, multi-levelled impacts and non children's rights-compliant.

Conclusions: These findings indicate a need for research investigating the tests' technical robustness and stakeholder impacts and experience, to encourage wider awareness of this important debate. Such work may be particularly useful considering the COVID-related disruption to transfer testing experienced by schools, children and families in 2020-21.

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Using the Mosaic Approach to Construct Children's Understanding of Safe Space in School

Maria Macdonald, Queen's University Belfast

This participatory research, with seven primary school children and three teachers, aimed to visibly listen to and document their understanding of safe space in their school, using the multi-modal creative methodology known as the Mosaic Approach. Safe Space is a conceptually confused and contested term originating in the identity politics of marginalised communities in the 1960's. Currently a popular, yet unevidenced, intervention for supporting children's emotional wellbeing, designated safe areas in schools were originally proposed by psychotherapists and neuroscientists using psychodynamic, attachment-based paradigms. This study used puppetry, photography, child-led tours, observations, field notes and recorded interviews to prioritise children's construction of safe space in one school. Taking a qualitative, social constructivist and interpretive approach this research used inductive thematic analysis to analyse verbal data and content analysis to analyse visual data. An overarching theme of autonomy and control for children reflected sub-themes of free play, connecting with others, respite through withdrawal, watching out and feeling calm. Teacher interviews identified themes of an essential breathing space, a need for control and emotional containment. Discussion on psychological and emotional safety in school and the importance of child agency and choice according to theoretical frameworks of values and needs and an inclusive ecology of education led to an exploration of whether safe space is an inclusive strategy or does in fact serve to emphasize difference and exclusion. The current under-representation of children's views is problematized and the value of deconstructing the dominant adult discourses through visible listening to children is highlighted.

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Vulnerability, uncertainty, adaptation and resilience: The impact of Covid-19 on delivering psychological services in Cork and Kerry primary care.

Inge Nieuwstraten, Veronica Byrne, Rosarie Crowley, Riana Vermaak
University College Cork

Objectives: This study examines four psychologists' experience of working during Covid-19 in primary care settings in Cork and Kerry. The psychologists met initially through the PSI and the first author joined the quarterly Psychology in Primary Care meetings. A temporary lack of adequate access to supervisors resulted in an initiative in 2017 to meet fortnightly for peer supervision.

Design: All participants wrote a lengthy reflective piece on what they experienced personally and professionally from the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak in March 2020, and how they coped subsequently with uncertainty and with changing work practices.

Methods: The reports were collated and analysed by the first author using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results: Two main strands emerged, in the form of personal and professional impact. Personal impact encompassed themes of: anxiety, coping with uncertainty, being a psychologist/a person living through a pandemic, being redeployed, parenting/homeschooling, no holiday, in and out of lockdown, bereavement and grief. Professional impact included: constraints and directives about service delivery, uncertainty, clients opting out, challenges of working remotely (modality, WIFI coverage), the impact of changed settings, referral changes, cessation of community interventions, redeployment, concern with clients in isolation, reciprocal health inquiries.

Conclusions: Uncertainty impacted practitioner resilience and made for questioning about the importance of our work. Access to peer supervision and work were helpful, and successful adaptation is experienced as a 'green shoot of hope'. Recommendations: greater consultation with staff in primary care in order to make the most efficient use of highly trained personnel.

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Working Title: Perspectives and Experiences of Young People with Autism, their Parents and Community Coaches regarding Inclusion in Community Sport Organisations in Ireland.

Kate O' Brien, Mary Immaculate College

Aims: This study explores the perspectives and experiences of young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), their parents and community coaches on the inclusion of young people with autism in community sport organisations in Ireland, with the aim of identifying facilitators for this inclusion.

Rationale: Sport is credited for shaping psychosocial, cognitive, and physical development and offers children with ASD additional benefits. Although the increase in the prevalence of Irish young people diagnosed with ASD is reflected in an increased focus on inclusive education, little emphasis has been placed on inclusion in community sport. This research coincides with Ireland's move towards a Family Centred Practice, targeting support for young people in their daily environments. Moreover, given reports of insufficient provision of services and lengthy waitlists for intervention from disability services, sporting interventions outside the clinic are a worthwhile intervention to foster psychosocial development and daily living skills as the provision of such interventions in a young person's natural setting appear to be more effective than traditional clinical settings.

Method: The Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) underpins this research, providing a theoretical framework to understand multilevel influences on sport participation. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is the adopted model of exploration. The project is currently in the data collection phase for community coaches (n=6) and recruitment phase for young people with ASD and their parents (n=3 dyads). Semi-structured interviews are being conducted via, Zoom. The SEM will be integrated into Reflexive Thematic Analysis as emerging data/codes will be assigned to different levels of the SEM.

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