

A Psychoanalytic Lens: Unmasked Layers of the Self among Post-Graduate Psychology Students in Surviving the COVID-19 Lockdown

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Abstract : The World Health Organisation (WHO) identified the Sars-Cov-2 (COVID-19) as a pandemic on the 12th of March 2020, with South Africa recording its first case on the 5th of March 2020. The rapidly spreading virus led the South African government to implement one of the strictest nationwide lockdowns globally, resulting in the closing down of all institutions of higher learning effective March 18th 2020. Thus, this qualitative study primarily aimed to explore whether post-graduate psychology students were in a state of a depleted or cohesive self, post the psychological isolation of COVID-19 risk-adjusted level 5 lockdown. Semi-structured interviews from a qualitative interpretive approach comprising N=6 psychology post-graduate students facilitated a rich understanding of their intra-psychic experiences of the self. Thematic analysis of data gathered from the interviews illuminated how students were forced into the self by the emotional isolation of hard lockdown, with the emergence of core psychic conflict often defended against through external self-object experiences. The findings also suggest that lockdown stripped off this sample of psychology post-graduate students' defensive escape from the inner self through external self-object distractions. The external self was stripped to the core of the internal self by the isolation of hard lockdown, thereby uncovering the psychic function of roles and defenses amalgamated throughout modern cultural consciousness that dictates self-functioning. The study suggests modelling reflexivity skills in the integration of internal and external self-experience dynamics as part of a training model for continued personal and professional development for psychology students.

Keywords : COVID-19, fragmentation, self-object experience, true/false self

Conference Title : ICAPP 2024 : International Conference on Applied Psychology and Psychoanalysis

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : August 22-23, 2024