

# Positivity through adversity in the race to the BSc finish line – Reflections on the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on final year studies

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In January 2020, the UK watched from afar as the City of Wuhan in the Hubei Province, China, became an area that was to be the epicentre of the original outbreak of COVID-19. At that time, I was a third year BSc Psychology (Health psychology) mature student at University of Northumbria, with three school aged children and dealing with a lengthy mystery illness. My dissertation, a lab study titled: "An investigation of the effect of Resveratrol on 'Remembering to Remember' in healthy adults" was something I was very passionate about as my husband has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and I have personal awareness of the impact it has on family life. The objective of this double-blind study was to examine whether Resveratrol could increase Prospective Memory (PM) in healthy adults who show increased symptoms of ADHD.

Enduring two lab visits, healthy participants all completed the ADHD diagnosis tool ASRS-v1.1 solely on visit one to obtain ADHD symptom severity. Thereafter, 500mg trans-Resveratrol and placebo were administered at least 7 days apart. A non-stimulating TV program (Grand Designs) was shown for 45 minutes to allow for absorption and participants then took part in a Prospective Remembering Video Procedure (PRVP) task to test prospective memory. The study began under a thin veil of awareness that COVID-19 was gathering pace and I was becoming more depleted of energy. The study ran for several weeks but could not continue. Due to the requirement of administering

Resveratrol, moving the study online was also not an option and the five participants data was enough to write my dissertation but not enough to provide clarity on effect and I was left feeling defeated and deflated.

By March 2020, I was home-schooling my three children, university teaching had moved online, and the world was becoming a very different place. My health was rapidly deteriorating due to the pressure I was under and having my children at home full time left me with little time or energy to do anything else. I had already been rushed to hospital twice, with May 2020 thankfully being the final time and I was facing total UK lockdown and an ambulance ride alone. With a heart rate of over 220BPM at rest and atrial fibrillation (AF), I had loss of taste that was embodied in a strong metallic sensation, my cognition was in decline, rapid weight loss due to a non-existent appetite and my anxiety and insomnia were increasing. Not only myself, but most of my family were struggling with health issues that included loss of smell and taste, continuous coughs, high intermittent temperatures, joint issues, post viral facial rash, migraine, pneumonia, and nausea. Although it would be pertinent not to give this mystery illness a label due to lack of early testing, in reference to a study by Watson et al (2020) titled 'Altered Smell and Taste: anosmia, parosmia and the impact of long Covid-19', a participant quoted "Four months into recovery the rancid/metallic taste and smell hit me." And "It's really quite debilitating – physically, mentally and professionally. I'm 6 months in and losing hope." As a family, we have had the struggle of what could be classed as long

COVID-19 symptoms and I am thankful to report in January 2021, that after a lengthy battle with ensuring the right nutrition, rest, supplementation and exercise aplenty, myself and most of my family are almost back to full health.

The lengthy interruption took a toll on my BSc, and at times I was ready to quit, my cognition, emotional and mental wellbeing were just not capable at taking on such an enormous task. I had submitted my dissertation with success in June 2020, but I had other modules to complete to get my final degree classification. I decided to compartmentalise my module work and utilise small sections of the assignments rather than feel the pressure of the whole requirement. I was very slow and pragmatic but finally in September 2020 I was able to submit all the required modules and I gained my BSc Psychology (Health Psychology) on 2nd October 2020. Emerging from this trying time has made me look to post-traumatic growth (PTG) and what I could do to empower myself to grasp a positive outcome. Although past research on PTG has left questions on limitations of methodology, it remains to be an intriguing topic that I felt could enable me to find self-improvement through adversity (Jayawickreme et al, 2021). I decided to start by making one small change in my routine and that was to alter the very first thing I do on waking. Historically, like many, I would reach over to my mobile phone, turn off the alarm and begin scrolling through my emails, social media and world news. I applied some self-analysis to this and realised that the content was at times very stressful and before I had even started my day, I was elevating my stress levels. This led me to doing one thing differently and although I still reach for my mobile phone, I now go into my notes and write down three things that I am grateful for in my life. Personally, this helps me to start my day with a positive mindset and due to this I tend to have dominant positive thoughts diurnally rather than negative.

As I write this on the evening of 4th January

2021 although I am pleased to report that I am now thriving on the MSc Health Psychology course and thoroughly enjoying the content matter. England has again been put into lockdown and I feel a sense of déjà vu as I am again assigned the role of home school Mum. Covid-19 has affected so many students and their quest for knowledge and success in subject matter they are passionate about. As for me, I will strive and struggle to pave a career path that will enable me to potentially be able to help others live a happier and healthier life because I can hold my hand up and say, I have walked some of my journey in your shoes.

## References

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