

Study: Online psychological intervention reduced stress during COVID lockdown

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Resilience and well-being in difficult times can be developed via online interventions in the workplace. An international team of researchers from France, the UK and Russia (with the participation of researchers

from the HSE International Laboratory of Positive Psychology of Personality and Motivation) studied the effectiveness of SPARK Resilience, a program for developing resilience, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study were published in *PLOS ONE*.

By creating the SPARK Resilience program, psychologists focused on helping people gain resilience—the ability to successfully adapt to and overcome challenging times. It is based on models of cognitive behavioral therapy and positive psychology. Developing an understanding of the SPARK model involves identifying the situation, perception, affect, reaction, and knowledge in application to real life situations.

The researchers state that in order to increase psychological stability, it is important to consider the situation as a set of neutral facts, to know the features of your perception of troubles (for example, a tendency to catastrophize or ignore problems), to notice and regulate automatic reactions resulting in destructive behavior. Usually, this conscious approach leads to a deeper understanding of the situation and your role in it and makes it possible to effectively manage stress.

SPARK Resilience was originally developed as a universal school program. It is widely used in the UK, France, the Netherlands, Japan, and Singapore. Previously, the program's effectiveness was studied after it was tested on children and adolescents. Recently, a new version of the program—SPARK Resilience in the workplace—has been created.

It involves group coaching designed for employees of enterprises and work teams and is based on a wide range of positive psychology practices. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the study authors worked with this version of the program, which allowed them to understand how SPARK Resilience affects adults.

The data for the study was collected at the beginning of the pandemic (in April 2020) in France. The participants were French-speaking volunteers who took part in group coaching via Zoom video conferences. Eight one-and-a-half-hour sessions were conducted over four weeks.

The SPARK sessions combined training, group interaction, surveys, quizzes, discussions in small virtual groups, mindfulness exercises and optional homework. They were conducted by two coaches with a degree in psychology and extensive experience in [group work](#).

The sample included 101 program participants and 86 people in the control group. Everyone filled out surveys before and after the program. The analysis revealed a statistically significant increase in resilience and psychological well-being, as well as a decrease in perceived stress in the group that underwent intervention.

Most of the participants confirmed that they want to apply what they learned during the program in their life. The participants reported high levels of satisfaction, which can also be explained by the context of the pandemic—the study was conducted during the earliest lockdown period, which was first introduced in France on March 17. It was exactly the time when people needed serious psychological support.

"Following the research of the last 20 years, we know that [positive psychology](#) really helps people not only feel better, but also cope with problems more effectively. A recent meta-analytical study, including fifteen hundred samples, confirms the high effectiveness of programs for [resilience](#) development. Our research shows that it can also be applied in a remote format, which allows coaches to successfully work with large groups comprising hundreds of participants. As a result, we can more effectively share knowledge and practices that can help people live a successful and happy life under stress and uncertainty," says Evgeny Osin, one of the study authors, Deputy Head of the International

Laboratory of Positive Psychology of Personality and Motivation.

The researchers note that SPARK Resilience can be used to work with both individuals and teams. This approach is quite flexible and can be developed according to new research in [psychology](#).

More information: Evgeny Osin et al, SPARK Resilience in the workplace: Effectiveness of a brief online resilience intervention during the COVID-19 lockdown, *PLoS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0271753](#)

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