



# THE USE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF COPING STRATEGIES AMONG PHYSICAL THERAPISTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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## Introduction

The response of physical therapists (PT) to the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) have been studied in New York City for the purpose of assessing how PT are adapting to the pandemic (1). Other studies from outside the United States focused on strategies for decreasing the risk of disease transmission and optimizing treatment services (2,3), The purpose of this study was to examine the use and effectiveness of coping strategies of PT in the United States during COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methods

- 76 PT (Age = 54.9 ± 4.3 years) participated. Subjects included 65 women and 11 men.
- Subjects provided written informed consent prior to participating and the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board.
- The survey instrument was sent via conventional mail to 250 PT in the USA whose information was obtained from the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). A qualitative, cross-sectional conventional mail survey instrument was used to examine the use and effectiveness of coping strategies of PT in the United States during COVID-19 pandemic.
- This study used a validated hard-copy mailed survey instrument which contained open-ended and fixed choice questions.
- Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationship between coping strategy frequency of use, and strategy effectiveness.

## Results

- Descriptive data were analyzed, using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 27.0).
- Answers to open-ended questions were content-analyzed using inductive and deductive methods (Tables 1-4).
- Results revealed that the frequency of use of specific coping strategies was highly correlated with the strategies’ effectiveness ( $r = 0.90, p \leq 0.001$ ).
- The five most commonly used coping strategies and their mean effectiveness (five point scale in which the higher number = more effective) include physical activity/exercise ( $n = 71, 4.55/5.00$ ), family support ( $n = 66, 4.42/5.00$ ), social support ( $n = 60, 4.32/5.00$ ), spirituality ( $n = 57, 4.12/5.00$ ), and distraction ( $n = 45, 3.78/5.00$ ).
- Based on seven-point Likert scale questions, in which a higher number indicates a higher ability to cope, participants reported their beliefs about how well they are able to cope with COVID-19 at work (6.07/7.00) and in their life (6.10/7.00).
- Subjects also identified their ability to manage their physical (6.13/7.00), mental (5.85/7.00), and relational (5.90/7.00) health during COVID-19.
- Participants Likert scale average score (higher number indicates more stress) for seven different stressors was 4.51/7.00.

## Results-continued

Table 1: Top Stressors At Work (N = 65)

Higher Order Theme	Number
Decreased Patients	10
Patient Safety	9
Staffing Issues	8
Increased Workload per PT	7
Fear of Infection	6
Loss of Pay	6
Disregard for CDC guidelines	6

Table 2: Top Stressors Outside of Work (N = 61)

Higher Order Theme	Number
Family Safety	19
Lack of Social Life	12
Fear of Transmission	12
No Stressors Outside of Work	10
Finances	7
Politicization of Health	6
Disregard for CDC guidelines	5

Table 3: Top Coping Strategies At Work (N = 66)

Higher Order Theme	Number
Talking with Coworkers	12
No Coping Strategies	15
Following CDC guidelines	10
Positivity/Compassion	8
Distraction Techniques	8
Prayer	6
Taking Breaks	6

Table 4: Top Coping Strategies Outside of Work (N = 65)

Higher Order Theme	Number
Exercise	26
Keeping in Touch with Friends/Family (safely)	15
Relaxation Techniques	12
Prayer	7
Spending Time Outside	5

## Discussion

Despite relatively high stress across a number of variables, on average PT used a variety of effective coping strategies and reported high levels of belief that they are able to cope well and manage their physical, mental, and relational health. Previous research on PT response to COVID-19 focused on recommendations for how to adapt (1), decrease the risk of disease transmission (2), and to provide operational suggestions (3). This is the first study to demonstrate that the most commonly used coping strategies are also likely to be the most effective.

## Conclusion

Physical therapists can use these data as a guide for effective coping strategies. Despite significant COVID-19 related stress, on average, most PT cope well.

## References

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