

NAMING THE COMPLEX: REFLECTIONS ON THE PANDEMIC AND PANDEMONIUM

NOMBRANDO LO COMPLEJO: REFLEXIONANDO
SOBRE LA PANDEMIA Y EL PANDEMONIO

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The *Puerto Rican Journal of Psychology*, with this volume produced by the new editorial board, begins a stage in which it has a commitment to foster discussions that account for the complexity in which our societies are immersed due to the multiplicity of realities that are experiencing in the social, economic, and political spheres; affecting physical, emotional and mental health. A holistic vision of the human being and contextualized in its social reality will allow a better understanding of our subject of study in order to elaborate possibilities that come closer and account for its complexity. This first number, volume 32, has a variety of articles that highlight the complex reality that exists in different dimensions of our society. The first section has four regular articles that address issues of education in children, the reintegration of veterans in our society and the transformations of bodies and sexuality in advanced adulthood.

Some questions that arise from these articles are; what are the challenges that teachers in Puerto Rico face considering the new reality of lack of resources, poverty, natural disasters, among others? On the other hand, how to establish learning expectations if we are not sensitive and responsive to the social, economic and emotional needs of students and teachers? These questions require a comprehensive vision to be able to draft alternatives that are in accordance with the complex reality that exists in the educative process. This complexity unfolds in a case study of a comprehensive evaluation that, by considering multiple factors, it was able to elaborate a closer approach to the reality of the subject under consideration and therefore provide recommendations that allowed a further development of his capacity and going beyond of the diagnostic label. Likewise, it is important to have instruments that are culturally appropriate for the population we want to serve, as indicated by the study that explored the validity and reliability of an emotional intelligence inventory for Mexican children and

youth. Finally, the qualitative article on sexuality in a sample of people in advanced adulthood gives us an account of the evolution of the needs of our bodies, beyond our stages of life.

This issue also features the first part of the special section “**Emotional Health and COVID-19.**” This special section is goaled to document and reflect on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the different aspects of our society. We present refereed articles; as well, we invited diverse professionals to write comments in order to begin an introspective process and discussion on how we have faced the COVID-19 pandemic, what we have learned, what responses have been correct and which ones have promoted discrimination and inequalities. This pandemic has had an impact on multiple levels (i.e., national, global and individual) and in various contexts (i.e., economy, physical and mental health, demographics, inequalities in access to health related to the intersectionality of race, gender, class, functional diversity, among others). Considering that complexity, we invited professionals from diverse fields including epidemiology, psychiatry, psychology in private practice, and demography to share some of their reflections. As Dr. Cruz María Nazario, an epidemiologist in Puerto Rico, mentions, “a pandemic is not a merely biological event.”

Pandemics have been and will be part of our history, however, how government agencies and people in their personal character and as a community decide to respond to a crisis of such magnitude, can make the difference between life and death for many people. Although there is a chaotic element in natural disasters and pandemics, the lack of organization, restructuring and a depoliticized plan can lead to a pandemonium, a crisis superimposed on a crisis, with the most vulnerable communities being the most affected. The lack of preparation has been one of the greatest challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the demographer, Mr. Raúl Figueroa Rodríguez:

One of the greatest challenges for the management of COVID-19 both in Puerto Rico and in the rest of the world was the lack of preparation. In the case of Puerto Rico, it was mixed with an overconfidence of the government that the pandemic would not reach our territory. There were no trained personnel on the subject, in many places the necessary infrastructure to work with the pandemic and care for sick people was not established, which caused many deaths, especially in Europe where the health system collapsed and in several countries as well. On the other hand, the lack of preparedness led to a shortage of personal protective equipment for the health personnel that put the lives of many first responders at risk. In the case of Puerto Rico, there was no active surveillance system to work with the pandemic and technological limitations within the Department of Health affected the management of it [communication with the Editor-in-Chief].

From the mental health perspective, the pandemic has represented a greater challenge, particularly because it initially required a rapid and complex adaptation process. Dr. Karen Martínez-González, psychiatrist and Director of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Puerto Rico mentions:

The biggest challenge both in Puerto Rico and globally is that the COVID-19 pandemic led us to adapt to too many new things in a short period. The stress adaptation system in humans is not made to continually have to respond to new threats and situations. As a society, we had to move from the fear of contagion, to the loneliness of distancing, the uncertainty of returning to socialization and the doubts of vaccination. In Puerto Rico, specifically, it has been a challenge knowing that this situation joins a chain of prior stressful and traumatic events. It has been difficult to meet the demand for psychiatric services necessary to manage

the consequences that we are seeing in the mental health of Puerto Ricans. In addition, it has been a challenge to bring the correct information to the communities. Our current world with access to immediate information was not ready to self-regulate and evaluate the role they have in society [communication with Editor-in-Chief].

The beginnings of a pandemic bring confusion and disorganization due to the element of surprise. We have no doubts about it. As Dr. Ana Colón Cruz, a clinical psychologist in private practice, mentions, "There was no preparation or planning time to explore and propose alternatives for clinical follow-up with patients." However, as the crisis progresses, it is essential to make the adjustments with the immediacy that the emergency requires, to correct and move towards measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic as much as possible. "For these patients, interrupting the [therapy] process and not having access to the safe space that they knew was not an acceptable option," says Dr. Colón Cruz. Among the learning experiences that have emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for collaborations has been essential. Mr. Figueroa-Rodríguez points out:

One of the lessons of this pandemic has been the importance of integrating more collaborators outside of the government during the preparation, response and management of pandemics. The integration of people outside the government has been essential to deal with the limitations that the government has of trained personnel and technology to deal with pandemic. Aspects such as handling and presentation of the data improved once people outside the government were integrated. In turns, we have seen the importance of technology to address pandemics. Advances were made in science and technology to make vaccines,

tests, among other. In addition, we began to see advances in remote work, telemedicine and the technologies associated with these [communication with Editor-in-Chief].

From the mental health side, the importance of contextualizing health conditions within social determinants is another learning lesson. Dr. Martinez Gonzalez tells us:

In order to manage a pandemic, the social determinants of health cannot be set aside. We need as a society to understand that not all people have the same opportunities to protect ourselves from these unforeseen and stressful events. The pandemic has made us admit that we all live on the same planet and if one group is not well, that can have an effect on the others. The recommendations for the future is that we must provide health services with an equity approach. For this, we are going to need to transform many of the current structures of how we provide health services [communication with Editor-in-Chief].

Equity, as mentioned by Dr. Martínez González and Dr. Nazario in their reflections, is not negotiable in the face of a national and global emergency. Developing responses that equitably protect our communities regardless of their socioeconomic background, race, gender, among other diversities, is our ethical and moral responsibility. Elaborating other answers is not an option. The articles and reflections included in this special section highlight that, particularly in Puerto Rico, the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the many crises that the country has been facing for more than a decade. The imposition of the Fiscal Control Board with economic cuts that have affected basic services, government corruption, catastrophic hurricane, and an increase in seismic activity in the southern part of the country are some of the multiple crises Puerto Rico has faces. Uncertainty has been the reality for the Puerto Rican population for many

years. It will be important discerning and not mistake learned hopelessness for resilience. We hope that this is the beginning of many reflections with a multiplicity of views. We hope that the articles included in this issue can contribute to raising awareness of a better possibility for all the people who make up our society. A pandemic is not necessarily preventable but a pandemonium is; if we do what we are called to do responsibly as subjects, as a community, as government in the interconnection of the communities we are traversing.

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