

WELL-BEING & SUPPORT

UW SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Coping with Uncertainty and the Effects of Chronic and Acute Stress on our Well-Being

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Session Four

- **Objectives:** Look at the impacts of uncertainty on our well-being, especially in a COVID era. Examine the shift in impacts of stress on our well-being through exploring both acute and chronic stressors in our environment. Explore the concept of radical acceptance as developed in dialectical behavioral therapy.
- **Content:** Look at models of post disaster recovery and emotional well-being. Normalize the challenges we have experienced over the last several years and will experience in the coming years through validating emotional responses and considering the impacts of anniversary reactions and on-going disruptions. Discuss research on the differences between acute and chronic stress. Explore one's agency or control in times of chronic and acute stress to leverage radical acceptance of the challenging situations we find ourselves in during our careers and lives.
- **Take Away:** Chronic and acute stress impacts our well-being in terms of our mental, physical, and social health. Focusing on the agency and control we have in difficult situations allows us to accept reality, take action where we can, and to stay hopeful for the future.



Welcome to our 4-part series

- 1) Resilience and Emotional Intelligence
- 2) Compassion, Empathy, and Pursuing Kindness to Ourselves
- 3) Exploring Gratitude: Positive Emotions and Expansive Thinking
- 4) Coping with Uncertainty and the Effects of Chronic and Acute Stress on our Well-Being



Anticipatory Joy

It has been a hard several years...

As you look ahead, what is one thing you are really looking forward to doing or experiencing?

We are going to practice with Slido to leverage some technology for interaction...

slido



What is one thing you are looking forward to doing or experiencing this winter or spring?

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Themes for today

- Uncertainty in Covid-19
- Chronic and Acute Stress
- Radical Acceptance
- Agency & Anticipatory Joy



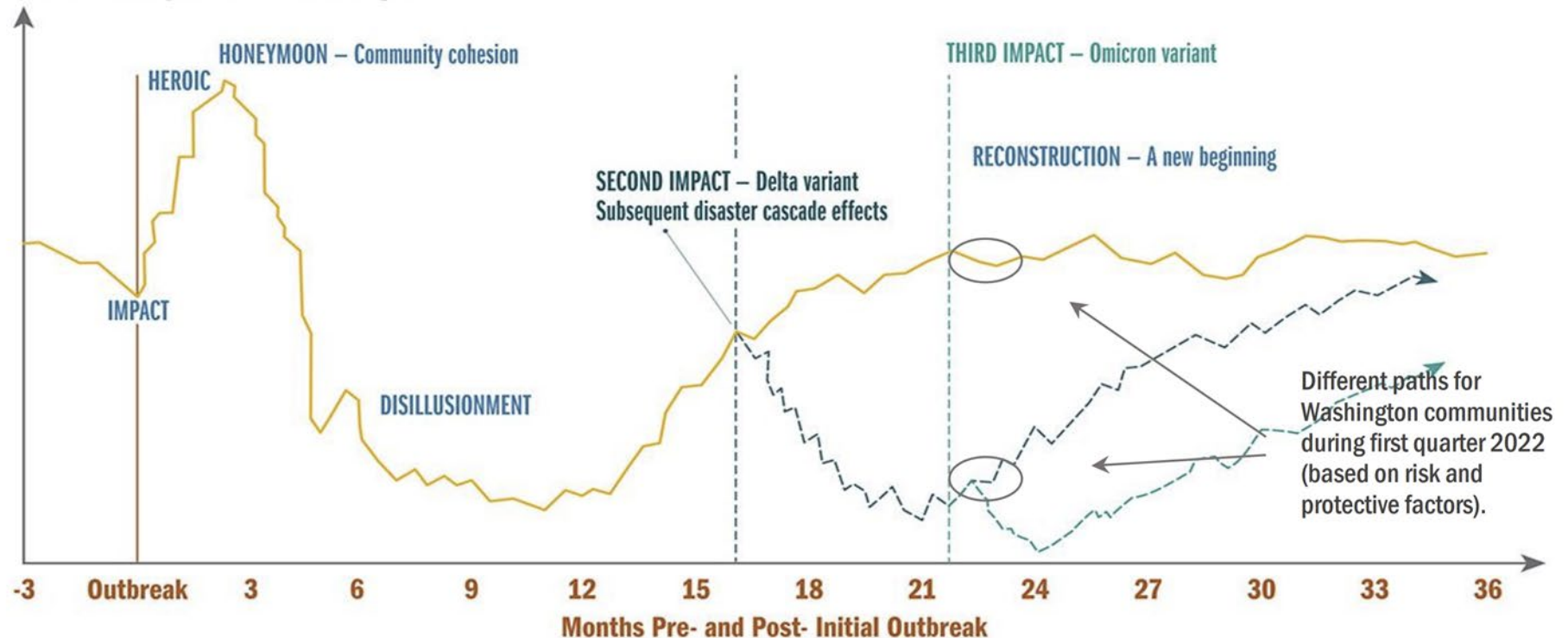
Humans and Uncertainty

- We have different thresholds for tolerating uncertainty
- Our brains perceive ambiguity as a threat and try to protect us by diminishing our ability to focus on anything other than creating certainty
- Uncertainty causes us to experience stress if we do not accept the moment just as it is
 - Waiting to order

Trajectories of Recovery

Reactions and Behavioral Health Symptoms in Disasters – COVID-19

Emotional Response – Lows to Highs



Acute and Chronic Stress

- **Acute Stress:** sudden, short term
 - Stress released after event is over
 - Example – big presentation, competition, argument, stuck in traffic, exam
 - Leads to fear and adrenaline
- **Chronic Stress:** on-going environmental factors, build up over time
 - Example – bad commute, negative work environment, relationship challenges
 - Negative health outcomes – blood pressure, sleep issues, mental fatigue, burnout



What are examples of acute stressors in your life?

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What are examples of chronic stressors in your life?

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Behavioral Practices for Well-Being

R – Relationships

E – Exercise

F – Fun; Recreation & Enjoyable Activities

R – Relaxation & Stress Management

E – Eat Well – Nutrition & Diet

S – Sufficient Sleep

H – Helping others

E – Earth – Time in Nature

R – Reason – Sense of Purpose (Religiosity & Spirituality)



How do we respond to stress?

- Distress Tolerance: the ability to endure emotional discomfort without turning to harmful coping methods
- Radical Acceptance: Accepting what is and letting go of what you want
 - Ongoing acceptance of the present moment, reality, truth
 - Accept what cannot be changed in present or past
 - Marsha Linehan – Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (UW Connections!)

Radical Acceptance

“Whatever we can’t embrace with love imprisons us.” –Tara Brach

- Practicing Radical Acceptance: step back from emotions to see reality and truth
 - Acknowledging what is (not approval, acceptance)
 - Let go of fighting or struggling with reality
 - Move away from the fantasy or stories we create
- Accepting the present moment allows us to make changes for the future

What should we accept?

- The past does not change
- We can only control some things
- We are imperfect
- Things only go our way some of the time
- Our thoughts and feelings
- Impermanence – nothing lasts forever

**Goal: Let go of “I wish things were different”
or “I want to go back to normal”**

Simple Equations

Pain + Non-Acceptance = Suffering

Pain + Acceptance = Pain

Although pain is an inevitable part of life, radical acceptance involves moving away from emotional reactions and helplessness toward calm and logical thought. While you may not be able to change the facts of a situation, you can choose how you view it.



What is something that has been challenging or even painful during the last several years that you are working on accepting?

Agency in Uncertainty

- Accepting what we can and cannot control
- Anxiety drops when we let go of worrying about things outside of our control
- Turning our focus onto what we can control and look forward to

Anticipatory Joy

- Chronic stress can have negative health effects on us
- Pandemic uncertainty: missed trips, graduations, funerals, weddings, etc.
- Limit to how many things our brain can focus on at once
- What do you have agency over that you can look forward to doing?



Thinking big - where do you want to travel next in the world?

Support & Seeking Help

Peer Support Program – Refer yourself or a colleague

- One on one conversation with a trained supporter

Employee Mental Health Program – You or a family member can work with our navigator to set up care

Check out our Office of Faculty Affairs Website for Info!

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EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

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Looking Forward

What do you take away?

- What stands out to you?
- How does this shift how you move through your work?
- What do you hope to share with others?



What do you want to take away from today's session?

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THANK YOU

