

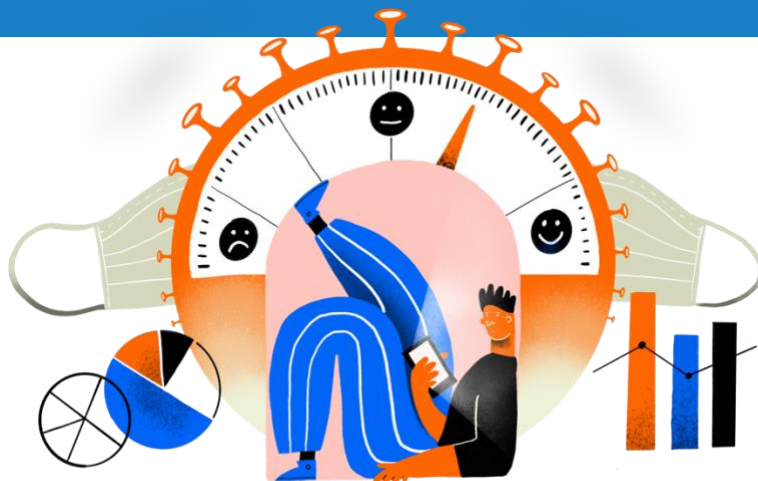
REPORT 3

Psychological vitamins in times of corona fatigue

The Motivation Barometer

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Reference: Motivation Barometer (April 14, 2020). Psychological vitamins in times of corona fatigue. Ghent, Belgium.



The corona measures are beginning to feel psychologically demanding. Some people begin to yearn their old, normal lives, which is referred to as 'corona fatigue'. While we are urged by the government and scientists to hold on, perseverance seems to take more and more energy. Occasionally, some individuals seem to lose their self-control or act more careless with regard to the measures. The question, then, is how to refuel our own energy reservoirs. Based on the ongoing Motivation Barometer study, it appears that investing in your own psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence increases our resilience and arms us against corona fatigue.

Basic physical and psychological needs

In the beginning of the lockdown, some people feared we would run out of food supplies. Sufficient food and water are basic physical needs. The threat of these basic physical needs, which are essential to survival, created hoarding behavior. Importantly, alongside basic physical needs, psychologists claim that we also have a limited number of basic *psychological* needs: the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Their satisfaction makes us feel energized and resilient to face obstacles. If these needs are frustrated, we become insecure, depressed or anxious and our sleep quality deteriorates. Due to their crucial contribution to our mental health, these needs are referred to as psychological *vitamins*: essential nutrients for our mental health.

Three psychological vitamins are important. First, the need for autonomy. If this need is fulfilled, we truly feel like ourselves. We experience a sense of choice in our actions, thoughts and feelings. Conversely, if this need is frustrated, we feel curtailed and pressured. Second, the need for relatedness. If this need is satisfied, we have warm and close relationship with others. We are taken care of and we can care for others. When frustrated, we feel lonely and isolated. The third one is competence, the need to feel qualified. We are able to develop skills and to achieve our aimed goals. In case of frustration, we experience failure. You can easily remember these three needs with the acronym ABC: A stands for Autonomy, the B stands for Belongingness/Relatedness, and the C stands for Competence.

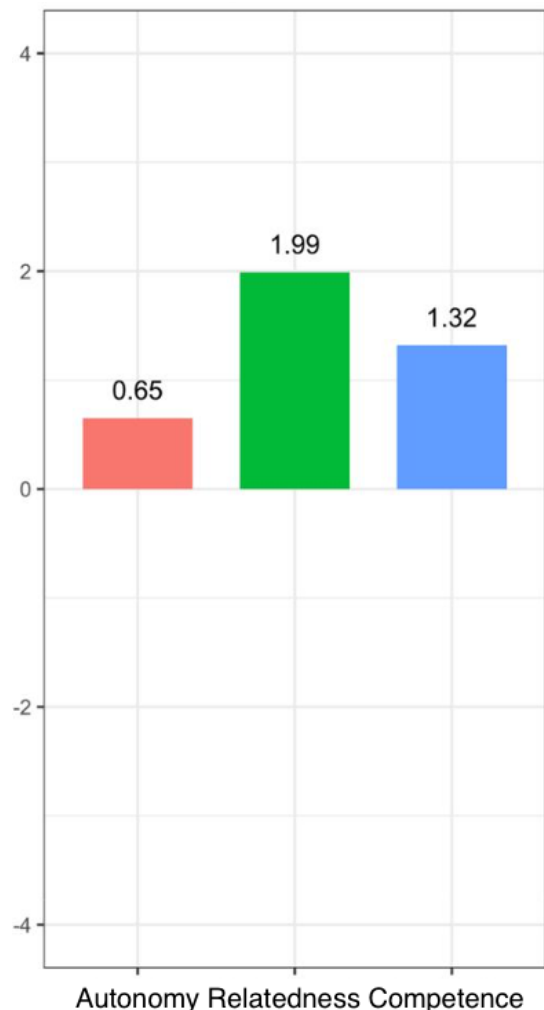
Our ABC in corona times

In these COVID-19 times, the satisfaction of our ABC seems to be under pressure. The measures restrict our freedom of movement and prevent us from making our preferred choices. Psychological distancing forces us to look at digital alternatives to satisfy the need for relatedness. However, a 'digital hug' is not the same as a physical one. Some individuals are prevented from using their skills due to economic unemployment. Accumulating tension with children makes some parents feel insecure in their parenting skills.

Since March 19, the satisfaction of our basic needs was surveyed daily. A total of 15 281 persons with an average age of 49 years indicated to what extent they feel autonomous, connected and competent. Figure 1 shows the degree to which these three needs are satisfied (a higher, positive score) or frustrated (a lower, negative score). For example, despite the imposed physical distance, relatedness appears to be the most fulfilled need of the trio. Apparently, we manage to maintain satisfying contact with family and friends in different (digital) ways. On average, single people do experience less warmth and relatedness. Our need for competence is also relatively well off. We feel competent, perhaps because we develop new (e.g., technological) skills or reuse old skills (e.g., gardening after the winter season). The least fulfilled ABC need is autonomy. Especially young adults (18 to 35 years old) feel that the drastic measures threaten their freedom. In an attempt to regain this frustrated autonomy, a part of the population seems to protest and starts to neglect some of the measures. The voluntary motivation to adhere to the measures slightly decreases (see Report 2). Willingness is beginning to fade, especially among young adults.

Yet, there are large differences between individuals, which act as predictors of their mental health. Individuals who experience more ABC vitamins during this lockdown clearly seem to benefit. They are more motivated to adhere to the measures, they report more vitality and life satisfaction, better sleep quality, and fewer depressive symptoms. These beneficial effects are seen in men and women, young and older people, singles and cohabiting couples. These

Figure 1. Average basic psychological needs.



results hold up, even when controlling for other predictors of well-being, such as uncertainty about the situation, physical health, satisfaction with the family income and the amount of living space, and the degree to which we say we are physically active. In sum, satisfaction of the ABC is a blessing for our mental health.

Taking matters into your own hands

The satisfaction of the ABC partly depends on your environment, yet, you can become more in charge yourself. You can consciously choose to do activities which satisfy your ABC. During this crisis, the extent to which people do so, largely differs between individuals. The results of this ongoing study indicate that fulfillment of one's basic psychological needs acts as an *anti-dote* to insecurity and sadness. By actively seeking out and engaging in activities which address our ABC, people refuel their own energy reservoirs. Participants who could be followed over time ($N = 827$) indicated in one week the extent to which they actively and consciously

- ... look for activities they really want to do (autonomy)
- ... seek out activities that they are good at or that they can learn something from (competence)...
- ... seek out contact with others close to them (relatedness)

Additionally, they noted concrete examples of ABC-enhancing activities they planned to perform in the following week. A selection of these vitamin-rich activities is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of listed ABC-rich activities.

Autonomy	Connection	Competency
Read book	Video calling with (grand)parents or (grand)children	Digital communication-explore opportunities
Meditating, yoga	More time conscious with the children share	Learning a new language
Create photo album	Being active on whatsapp	Practicing music
Gardening	Keeping E-aperitive with friends	Painting and drawing
Sewing	Letter writing	Baking, new recipes try out

One week later, it was found that those who managed to carry out the intended ABC-rich activities also experienced more satisfaction of the ABC. This refuelled their energy reservoir and allowed them to better cope with the challenges of the corona crisis.

From words to actions

But for several individuals, there seems to be a gap between their intentions and their actions. They envisage certain activities, yet, they fail to put them into action. Their intentions therefore do not contribute to the maintenance of well-being. Therefore, in order for your intention to become reality, it is good to pursue achievable and authentic ABC-rich activities. Here are a few concrete tips:

- Don't set the bar too high for yourself. You may have the intention to contact your parents, (grand)children or friends, but it may not be realistic to do so on a daily basis.
- Work with intermediate steps. Putting together a photo album of the past four summer vacations can become daunting because it is too much work. With such larger ambitions, it is desirable to provide smaller, more achievable intermediate steps.
- Provide a Plan B. Not everything will work out as planned. Perhaps it turns out that the intention to spend more time with the kids is unachievable when you have a lot of (tele)work to do. At that moment, how can you still consciously spend time with your children?
- Ask yourself why you are doing the activity. Is it really an authentic choice or is the gardening influenced by the wishes of your partner? Do you suddenly start exercising because you see many neighbors walking by in sporty outfits nowadays? It is especially important to choose activities that connect to what you personally find interesting. Resurrecting old hobbies or pursuing existing ones more intensively are always a must in this respect.

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