Fear of COVID-19 and Adherence to Lockdown Deteriorated Police Cadets’ Handgrip Strength Relative to BMI

COURTNIE MOODIE1, FILIP KUKIC2, NENAD KOROPANOVSKI3, ANA VESKOVIĆ4, NICOLA PETROVIĆ4, ANDREAS STAMATIS5, & ZACHARIAS PAPADAKIS1

1Human Performance Laboratory, Department of Exercise Science, Barry University, Miami Shores, FL; 2Police Sports Education Center, Abu Dhabi, UAE; 3University of Criminal Investigations and Police Studies, Belgrade, Serbia; 4University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia; and 5SUNY Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh, NY.

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Advisor / Mentor: Papadakis, Zacharias (zpapadakis@barry.edu)

ABSTRACT

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, police academies enforced lockdowns to protect cadets’ well-being. Fear of health issues (e.g., perceived severity) influences ones‘ adherence (e.g., readiness to act) to changes in exercise behavior. According to WHO, modifications in exercise behavior during the pandemic influence health status. A well-established clinical health marker is the handgrip strength relative to body mass index (HSR). The relationship between fear and physical well-being during COVID-19 is still under investigation. The mediating effect of adherence to COVID-19 restrictions on the fear-health status relationship in police cadets is unknown. PURPOSE: To explore a) the fear-HSR relationship and b) the mediating effect of adherence to COVID-19 restrictions on the fear-HSR relationship. METHODS: Cadets of both sexes, 98 males and 77 females, performed a bilateral HSR test and answered a) to what degree (i.e., no, partial, yes) they apply the recommended anti-COVID-19 measures; b) a five-item Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Fear of COVID-19 (FCV-19S) survey. HSR, adherence to COVID-19 restrictions, and composite sum mean FCV-19S score (higher score indicates higher fear) were used as outcome, predictor, and mediating variables respectively. PROCESS© v.3 by Hayes mediation analysis model 4 performed using SPSS© with significance set at p<0.05. RESULTS: Fear was a significant predictor of HSR (the c pathway) (b=-.34, t[173]=-2.6, p=.01): more fear, less HSR. FCV-19S was positively related to adherence (the a pathway) (b=.23, t[173]=2.6, p=.009): more FCV-19S, more adherence. Adherence was negatively related to HSR (the b pathway) (b=-.27, t[172]=-2.4, p=.02): more adherence, less HSR, with fear as an adjustor. The relationship between FCV-19S and HSR was lessened with adherence as an adjustor (the c’ pathway) (b=-.27, t[172]=-2.1, p=.04). The indirect effect indicated that mediation occurred: indirect=-.07, 95% CI[-.13,.01]. CONCLUSION: In this case, nor the lockdown nor fear were related to higher scores in the HSR index, although adherence to restrictions lessened the effect of fear alone. Administrators may need to find ways to not only decrease fear of COVID-19, but also avoid blanket measures as those may end up not protecting their cadets’ wellbeing.