

Abstract

This research is an autoethnographically grounded study that examined eleven illness narratives on COVID-19 from a white middle to upper class sample within South Africa. The study examined how individuals within this group conceptualised, reacted to and were affected by COVID-19. This is done through the examination of various aspects of the illness narratives presented, namely, diagnosis, help-seeking behaviour, treatment, service utilisation and modes of reasoning for COVID-19. The study makes several interlinked arguments for understanding COVID-19 illness, such as the distinction between disease (as a biomedical construct) and illness (as a subjective experience), the influence of social networks, resources and class on individual suffering, that inequalities in healthcare shape the capacity of people to suffer, and the failure of statistical representations in acknowledging individual suffering. Although participants within the study had access to medical aid and adequate funding for healthcare provisions it is illustrated that social relationships were critical resources for coping with the various uncertainties surrounding COVID-19. Finally, the report indicates that the uncertain nature of COVID-19 is a prominent feature within the illness narratives examined which suggests a greater temporality for the adverse effects of COVID-19 than would be expected within its biomedical categories.