

PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON LOVE, SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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Abstract. *The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on physical and mental health of people and their daily functioning in all areas of life. The aim of the current study was to examine the perceived effects of pandemic on love, social and professional life. In March 2021, an anonymous survey was conducted online among Bulgarian adults including 450 participants. Especially for this study three scales were developed reflecting deterioration of love and social relations and the quality of work life. Their relationships with fear of COVID-19 and perceived stress were investigated as well as the role of some demographic factors. Results indicated that social relations are deteriorating the most, followed by love relations and quality of professional life. Fear of COVID-19 was most strongly associated with negative experiences in social life ($r=0.28$ $p=0.000$). Perceived stress was associated moderately and positively with decline of the three life areas ($r=0.30$, $p=0.000$). Gender differences were not found in the level of stress and fear, but these variables correlated in a different way with social, love and professional areas in the groups of men and women. Men reported for more negative effects of pandemic on their love relations than women ($t=2.14$, $p=0.03$). Love relations also became more problematic for people who are single compared to those who are married or have partners and as well as for respondents who do not have children. Age, education, tenure and place of living did not relate to decline of quality of love, social and professional life.*

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; perceived stress; love life; social life; professional life.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past two years, people have been living in a COVID-19 pandemic environment characterized by uncertainty and insecurity, periodic modifications of the virus, successive waves of increased morbidity and mortality, accompanied by various measures imposed by governments to limit the spread of the virus. Periodic lockdowns and enforced social distancing have becoming part of everyday life. In many societies, including in Bulgaria, there are conflicting understandings about the virus and its nature, and many people share conspiratorial beliefs. As a result, contradictory attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccination and the low percentage of the vaccinated population have been emerging as an additional problem. This whole context provokes fear and stress and threatens not only people's physical and economic survival, but also their mental health.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has changed the way people live, learn, communicate and work. It has influenced all areas of life, including social contacts and activities, love relations and work life. These three life domains contribute to subjective well-being and perceived quality of life.

Well-being includes emotional, psychological and social components (Keyes, 2002; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). Individuals have high levels of emotional well-being if they experience high levels of pleasant emotions and moods, low levels of negative emotions, and high life satisfaction (Burns et al., 2011). Psychological well-being includes six different aspects – positive attitude toward oneself or self-acceptance, satisfying relationships with others, independence and self-determination (autonomy), sense of mastery and competence (environmental mastery), sense of goal directedness in life (purpose in life) and feeling of personal growth (Ryff, 1989; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). People are considered to have high levels of psychological well-being if they like themselves, have close and warm relationships with others, purpose and meaning in life, and manage to satisfy their needs (Keyes, 2002). Social well-being

focuses on individuals' evaluations of their public and social lives and their functioning in society in relation to others (Keyes, 2002; Petrillo, Capone, Caso & Keyes, 2015). Thus, well-being is associated with a variety of positive personality, social and work-related outcomes.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Social life refers to all forms of interaction with other people that go beyond strictly professional and romantic relationships, although, in practice, these two spheres are also a manifestation of social life. Social life includes contacts with friends and more distant acquaintances, attending various events that aim to attract people and encourage contacts between them (from parties and going out for coffee with friends to going to the opera or political rallies). During the pandemic, these contacts, largely optional in nature, were the most limited. The association between social relationships and health (both mental and physical health) has long been established by classic and new research.

The pioneers of empirical sociology have found evidence that people who are less socially integrated are also more likely to commit suicide than people who are most socially integrated (Durkheim, 1951). Investigating more thoroughly the connection between social relationship and health, Casse (1976) and Cobb (1976) reviewed more than 30 studies focusing on this relationship in both humans and animals. They came to the conclusion that social relationships not only might help promote health, but they also mitigate the effect of psychosocial stress and other health hazards. According to this theory, social relationships are the moderator of the relationship between stress and health. The idea of "social support" as something that sustains the organism by promoting adaptive behavior in the face of stress and adversity provided a general theory on how social relationships affect health (House, Landis & Umberson, 1988).

Research on the perceived quality of life confirms that the caliber of people's personal

relationships is more powerful predictor of their happiness and life satisfaction than the caliber of their lives in most other domains (Rook, 1998). People with high life satisfaction are more likely to engage more in various forms of social activities like spending more time talking to other people, they also report having more friends and feeling closer to their friends (Kansky, 2018). Research also shows that people who have fewer social ties are at higher risk of morbidity and mortality – an increased risk that cannot be explained by other factors such as socio-economic status or previous health status (Burman & Margolin 1992; House, Umberson & Landis, 1988).

All this data comes from research done in Western societies (namely the USA), but we have strong reasons to believe the importance of social relationships would also be evident in Bulgaria. Anthropologist Donald Brown (1991), who identifies several hundred universal behavior and language patterns, noted that in every culture humans prefer living with others (in families and communal groups) to living alone.

The COVID-19 pandemic represents uniquely difficult situation for humanity, because in the face of such a powerful stressor people were advised to stay away from their social circles – a process called “*social isolation*” and “*social distancing*”. Thus, during the pandemic protecting one’s friends and relatives often meant meeting with them on fewer occasions and in smaller groups.

This is why we would expect that the deterioration of social relations would be most felt and would correlate with higher levels of perceived stress.

LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

While social relationships in general have been linked to physical and mental health and well-being, romantic relationships in particular represent a unique form of social relation that has its own connection with health and subjective well-being. Love relationships differ from general social relationships in various ways, yet researchers have acknowledged the difficulty in defining a romantic relationship

(Kansky, 2018). One important distinction between a friendship and a love relationship is the difference in the levels of intimacy – friends may share intimate details of their lives, but in romantic relationships the role of intimacy is typically deeper (Moss & Schwebel, 1993). Combined with intimacy, passion and commitment are two additional features central to romantic relationships (Sternberg, 1986).

Love, romance, and intimacy are all positively associated with well-being (Love & Holder, 2015). It is interesting to note that the link is stronger for females than males. In both married and unmarried couples, love emerges as strongly linked to satisfaction (Hendrick, Hendrick & Adler, 1988).

Using what we already stated about social relationship in general, we may conclude that love relationships could also be an important source of positive affect that helps mitigate the negative effect of stress and adversity. In a study by Yankov (2017) Bulgarian respondents aged 19 to 30 were asked several questions about their understanding and experience in love relationships. When asked about the positive and negative sides of being in a romantic relationship, over 40% of the respondents stated that they experienced personal growth during the course of their romantic relationship, 21% stated that being in a relationship gave them the feeling of being loved and appreciated and additional 24% stated that they can’t name any negative sides of being in a love relationship. These finding help us better understand the specific positive effects that come from romantic relationships.

It is interesting to investigate the effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on respondents’ love relationships. We would expect the deterioration of love relationships would be lower than the deterioration of general social relationship, especially among the respondents who are married or live with their partner, because even during pandemic people are able to spend time with others living in the same household. However too much time together could possibly have a negative effect. It is also interesting to examine any possible gender differences, since the relationship be-

tween love and well-being have been found to be stronger for females in previous studies (Love & Holder, 2015).

WORK LIFE

People spend a large part of their lives at work, performing work tasks. Work structures their daily life and time. It is a source not only of income and financial stability, but also of emotions, self-esteem, social status and satisfaction. Work gives people meaning and opportunities to express themselves, develop and achieve goals. In the workplace, people try to satisfy various needs such as physiological, social, emotional, recognition and self-actualization. For employees of Generation Y and Z, the professional role is even more important because they take work as a cause. It is important for them to identify with the values of the organization and to contribute to society. They expect work to be meaningful, fun, varied and socially responsible.

EFFECTS OF COVID-19

Today, for most people social, love and professional life are equally important priorities that they try to balance. The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, however has led to substantial changes in the all three areas. The most dramatic change concerned the continued lockdowns instituted by many governments, the restriction of visits and forced social distance. As a result many workplaces have already adopted longterm work-from-home policies and children's learning moved online periodically.

Investigating the effects of COVID-19 on the quality of life, researchers established some positive, but also some important negative consequences.

In terms of the social life, positive effects of being forced to stay at home are the opportunity to spend more time with your family, to devote more time to yourself and your hobbies or slow down and get rest. On the other hand, however, the forced social distance has created social isolation and experienced lack of social support due to the limited social con-

tacts. The lack of social activities and outdoor cultural, sport and entertainment events has caused a feeling of monotony, loneliness and even depression. Maintaining good social relations requires recognizing the other person's values and emotions, getting to know their personality profile and motives, following their verbal and non-verbal cues, which is difficult in online communication. For this reason, during the COVID-19 pandemic social contacts have been reduced or remained superficial and many people have suffered from deprivation of social needs. Some people have tried to replace these contacts with some kind of online version of them, but this is only a partial solution, sometimes even more emphasizing the inferiority of the contact when it is not live face-to-face.

In terms of the love relations positive effects of the pandemic, if the couple lives together, include having more time to spend with the partner, more time for real communication with him/her and enjoying him/her presence. Working from home for both partners may improve the balance between work and personal life at the beginning. But the continued lockdowns and the becoming the work-from-home into a new norm for many organizations may have negative effects on love and family relationship. Working from home has given rise to "additional family demands resulting from greater proximity and accessibility" (Golden et al., 2006, p. 1340). That is, if both partners are at home the whole day for a long period of time, their beloved ones will make more demands on their time, attention and affection. Spending too much time with the partner in the context of reduced social activities and isolation may lead to monotonous coexistence, more stress and conflicts and feeling of a lack of personal space and opportunity for privacy. If partners do not live together, forced social isolation and restrictions can cause not only physical distance, but also emotional and psychological alienation.

Work life has also been strongly affected by the COVID-19. With the outbreak of the pandemic, some industries were forced to temporarily suspend their business activi-

ties, resulting in some employees losing their jobs. Other organizations have used alternative flexible approaches to the implementation of the work process such as rotational, hybrid method, remote working or working from home. Working remotely or from home is not a new format, but the COVID-19 pandemic has turned it from a possibility and a kind of “luxury” into a mandatory form for many people. A work-from-home policy has benefits and risks described in the psychological literature. On the one hand, this practice provides employees with more flexibility in completing work tasks, because the employees are not limited within the standard working hours, but can work more flexibly in the most productive time for them. It allows employees to build their own work rhythm and organize their workplace as they like removing distractions from the office. Working from home also allows employees not to waste money and time in travel and traffic jams (Contreras et al. 2020; Irawanto, Novianti & Roz, 2021; Nakrošienė et al., 2019). Other positive consequences for employees are increased control over work demands and reduced stress due to not having an immediate supervisor to control and monitor them. Very important advantage of the work-from-home policy is flexibility in juggling between work and personal/family life and the lower work-family conflict (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Golden et al., 2006; Rau & Hyland, 2002).

However, telecommuting and working from home during lockdowns can be particularly harmful. In the long term, forced standing and working from home might lead to social isolation, reduced physical activity, boredom and lack of dynamism, and lower motivation and performance (Liu & Lo, 2018). It could be especially harmful for working parents due to the overlap and interference between the work setting and home setting that blur the boundary between work and family life. Thus COVID-19 lockdowns created for working parents additional housework and childcare during home office hours that often caused parental burnout (Grose, 2020; Feng & Savani, 2020). From this point

of view, these long-term changes in the workplace provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic might have long-term negative effects on perceived work productivity, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Feng & Savani (2020) in their research found that there were gender differences in the perceived effects of COVID-19. Their results showed that during the lockdown, women reported lower work productivity and job satisfaction than men. They explained these differences with gender role theory (Bem, 1993; Gutek et al., 1991), which posits that society defines the family role as central to women’s but not men’s social identity. The COVID-19 pandemic increased women’s housework and childcare beyond a threshold, thereby creating a gender gap in work productivity and job satisfaction. In the context of COVID-19 lockdowns there have been higher expectations and demands on women to manage the logistics and time commitments to housework, childcare, home schooling and distance learning, job tasks and cares for the elderly (Grose, 2020). The problem is even more serious for single mothers, who usually rely on the school and various social structures to support them so that they have time for daily activities and professional tasks. Therefore, women may experience more stress and burnout that have negative effects on work-related outcomes.

In summary, it could be said that the COVID -19 pandemic has had a mixed effect on people’s lives. The new “normality” in the form of work-from-home removes some stressors but adds others. On the one hand, it improves the work-personal/family life balance, but at the same time in the long term, it blurs the boundaries between the two spheres and increases mental tension (Kim et al. 2019). Psychological aspects of experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic that have affected all areas of life are fear of the virus and perceived stress.

FEAR OF COVID-19

Fear of COVID-19 was provoked by the traumatic situation of unexpected threat, uncertainty and unpredictability in which

the society was placed. Fear of COVID-19 has been related to various motives, such as fear of infection or even death, of suffering from the disease and long-term negative side effects, forced social isolation, lack of social support, loss of predictability of daily and professional life. Fear of COVID-19 includes physiological (palpitations and trouble sleeping due to the fear of getting COVID-19), emotional (nervousness and anxiety due to fear of losing your own life), cognitive (avoiding thinking about the virus or denying it) and behavioral (willingness to comply with preventive measures) aspects (Ahorsu, et al., 2020).

Perceived stress

Life changes related to COVID-19 are stressful because they require significant adaptation efforts. According to the psychological stress theory of Lazarus (1966), the evaluation of the relationship between the individual and the environment as stressful or not is determined by a cognitive evaluation process. People constantly evaluate what happens to them in terms of its significance for their psychological well-being, whether and how they cope with the demands of the environment, and the qualities and intensity of the emotions they experience. The individual's perception of the situation and the person's ability to cope with it determine the degree of stress experienced. From this perspective, there are two things to consider about COVID-19 situation: 1) most people in society do not have past experience with pandemics and have not had to deal with such situations in the past; 2) the lack of knowledge about the virus itself and its consequences, as well as the initial lack of vaccines, and subsequently the contradictory attitudes towards them. This leads to the perception of the situation as unfavorable, because it threatens the life and health of people and their usual way of life, limiting their freedom and right to choose. Therefore, evaluating the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of novelty, controllability, significance, duration, causality, and predictability, it can be assumed that most people experience high levels of perceived stress.

The aim of the current study was to examine the perceived effects of pandemic on love life, social life and professional life and to investigate how fear of COVID-19, perceived stress and gender were related to deterioration of these three areas of life.

Hypotheses

H1: It is assumed that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, people experience the greatest deterioration of social relations as social life is most severely restricted, simultaneously and roughly equally for all people.

H2: It is assumed that women score higher on perceived stress and experience more negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on love life, social life and professional life. This hypothesis is based on the gender role theory and gender role stereotypes, positing that women are more likely than men to perceive the role of a family member as central to their identity (Bem, 1993; Gutek et al., 1991) and are also more emotional, sensitive and sociable, having higher need of close relations and express themselves through communication and relationships (Williams & Best, 1982).

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 450 participants (74.7% female, 23.7% male, 1.3% unspecified), aged 17 to 69 years ($M = 37.32$; $SD = 9.72$). 13.5% of them had a high-school degree, 32.4% - bachelor's degree, 49.2% - Master's degree and 4.7% - PhD degree. Of those 450 participants 22.4% stated they were single, 10.9% are in a relationship but don't live with their partner, 29.8% are in a relationship and live with their partner, 35.3% are married and 1.6% are widowed. Nearly half of the respondents – 51.3% – have no children, 26.7% have one child, 18.7% have two children and 3.3% have three or more children. When asked about their employment status, 89.1% of the respondents stated that are currently employed and 10.9% indicated being unemployed.

Measures and Procedure

The respondents were asked to fill five questionnaires and give some demographic data (age, gender, education, marital status, children).

1) Fear of COVID-19 Scale (FCV-19S, Ahorsu, et al. 2020) consists of 7 items, which are rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1–Strongly disagree to 7–Strongly agree. Although the original scale is unidimensional, in Bulgarian conditions 3 subscales are identified: physiological and emotional symptoms of fear, and avoidance (Dragova-Koleva, 2021). In this study, however we used only the overall level of fear of COVID-19. Sample items: *“I am most afraid of coronavirus-19”*; *“It makes me uncomfortable to think about coronavirus-19.”*

2) Short version of Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983; Bulgarian adaptation: Karastoyanov, Rusinova, 2000), including 4 items. Respondents answer on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 – never to 5 – very often. Sample items: *“In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?”*; *“In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?”*

Three scales were developed specially for this study measuring the perceived effects of COVID-19 on social, love and professional life and the degree of deterioration in these areas:

3) Deterioration of social relations scale consists of 7 items. Sample items:

Because of the COVID-19 crisis:

“...my circle of friends narrowed.”

“....I lost contact with many of the people important to me.”

4) Deterioration of love relations scale consists of 9 items. Sample items:

Because of the COVID-19 crisis:

“....my relationship with my intimate partner has deteriorated.”

“....staying at home and the inability to go out are harmful to love relationships.”

5) Deterioration of the quality of work life scale, including 5 items. Sample items:

Because of the COVID-19 crisis:

“.....I have to work mostly from home.”

“.....I feel less and less connected with my colleagues and the organization.”

For these three questionnaires respondents answered on a 7-point scale. The higher scores indicate higher level of negative effects and deterioration in social, love and professional areas in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

The study was done entirely online. The research obtained approval from the Ethics Committee in the Department of Cognitive science and Psychology in New Bulgarian University. The participation in the study was anonymous and took around 20 to 30 minutes. The survey was conducted between 23.02.2021 and 30.03.2021. Participants did not receive any compensation for their participation.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and internal consistencies of all scales included in the present study.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and internal consistencies

Scale	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Fear of COVID-19	2.83	1.12	1.00	6.43	0.75	0.82	7
Perceived stress	2.53	0.88	1.00	5.00	0.43	0.81	4
Social relations	4.38	1.19	1.00	7.00	-.175	0.70	7
Love relations	3.57	1.17	1.00	7.00	.211	0.79	9
Work life	3.32	1.66	1.00	7.00	0.37	0.87	5

All measures have good reliability and could be used for scientific purposes. The skewness for all variables was acceptable (< 1 for skewness) allowing the use of parametric tests. The overall level of fear of COVID-19 was low. The established mean value of the perceived stress was near to the theoretical mean score, that is, participants experienced moderate stress.

Social relations have been deteriorated the most, followed by love relations and quality of professional life. Participants in the study evaluated their social relations as moderately deteriorated. To confirm the first hypothesis Paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the three different life domains and the extent of aggravation in them. There were statistically significant differences among all of them which means that

experiences in these areas are really separate. This was also confirmed by the weak correlation between perceived COVID-19 effects on social, love and work relations (table 2).

Obviously fear of COVID-19 correlated positively with perceived stress, but the relation was moderate ($r=.31$, $p < .01$). The results of correlational analysis revealed that there were low correlations between fear of Covid-19 and the aggravation of social, love and professional life, but the relation of fear with the negative experiences in social area was a little bit stronger ($r=0.28$, $p=0.000$). Perceived stress correlated moderately with social and love relations and the quality of work life (table 2).

Independent t-test was used to check for gender differences (table 3).

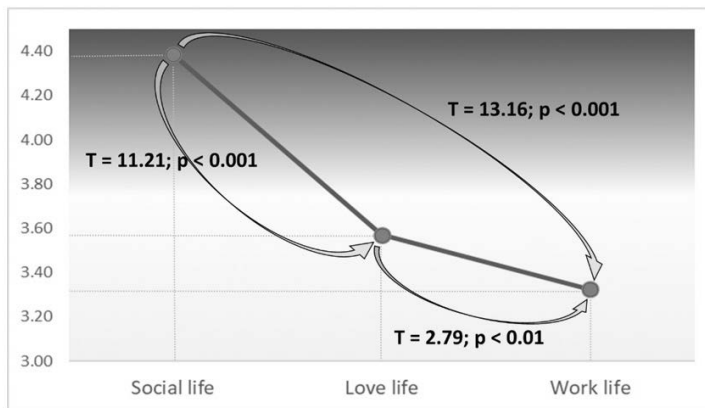


Figure 1. Differences between social life, love life and work life measured by Paired-samples T-test

Table 2
Correlations among study variables (n=450)

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Fear of COVID-19	-				
2. Perceived stress	.31**	-			
3. Social relations	.28**	.31**	-		
4. Love relations	.16**	.31**	.15**	-	
5. Work life	.16**	.28**	.31**	.15**	-

Table 3
Sex differences in study variables

Scales	Male (n=107)		Female (n=337)		T-value	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Fear of COVID-19	2.71	1.09	2.87	1.13	-1.310	.192
Perceived stress	2.48	.91	2.52	.87	-.490	.624
Social relations	4.36	1.25	4.40	1.16	-.326	.745
Love relations	3.78	1.18	3.51	1.17	2.142	.033
Work life	3.37	1.64	3.30	1.66	.410	.682

Table 4
Correlations in male and female subsamples

	Fear of COVID-19		Perceived stress	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Social relations	.08	.35**	.24*	.35**
Love relations	.23*	.15**	.41**	.29**
Work life	.02	.21**	.09	.34**

*p < .05 **p < .01

A statistically significant gender difference was found only in terms of perceived deterioration of love relations. Men reported for more negative effects of pandemic on their love relations than women. Thus, the second hypothesis was not confirmed.

Love relations also became more problematic for people who are single compared to those who are married or have partners ($F=19.205$, $p=.000$) and as well as for respondents who do not have children ($F=2.689$, $p=.031$).

Age, education, tenure and place of living did not relate to decline of quality of love, social and professional life.

To study the role of gender more thoroughly, the groups of male and female participants were examined separately and significant differences were found.

Fear of COVID-19 and perceived stress correlated in a different way with social, love and professional areas in the groups of men and women. In the male subsample fear of

COVID-19 was weakly and positively associated only with negative effects in the love area, whereas for women fear correlated statistically significant with aggravation of the three life domains and the correlation was strongest to social relations. A similar tendency was found in relation to perceived stress. Men who had higher stress perceived COVID-19 pandemic as more harmful for their love relations. There was also a low correlation between stress and social relation and no association with work life. In the female group perceived stress correlated moderately and positively with negative experiences in the three life areas.

So, on the base of the received results in this study we couldn't conclude that women are more afraid of COVID-19 and more stressed than men in the pandemic situation, but for them these two negative emotional states are related to negative effects in social relations, love relations and professional life. For men, love relationships are the most vulnerable to stress and fear of COVID-19.

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic had most negative effects on the social life, followed by love relations and quality of professional life. Therefore, the first hypothesis was supported. Social restrictions including restrictions of movement and lockdown affected this area more directly. In social life people experienced more losses that cannot be compensated by new technology and online communication. The sharp and prolonged restriction of human contacts cannot be easily replaced. Love relationships didn't suffer such strong deterioration as social relationships, probably because the pandemic measures in many cases required people to 1) meet less often and 2) meet in smaller groups. People who share a household with their romantic partner didn't suffer from the first requirement, and for couples who don't live together romantic meetings are by nature more personal and don't involve gatherings of a big number of people, so the second requirement wasn't applicable. Regarding professional life, one year after the start of the pandemic, employees and employers have more or less managed to adapt to the situation, and governments, including the Bulgarian one, have managed to introduce measures to support businesses and preserve jobs. The experiences in the three spheres were relatively separate.

In the whole sample fear of COVID-19 correlated positively and weakly with the three areas of life, but its relation was stronger with the negative experiences in social life ($r=0.28$, $p=0.000$). Perceived stress was associated moderately and positively with decline of the three life areas.

Men reported for more negative effects of pandemic on their love relations than women.

Sex differences were found in the pattern of correlations of fear and stress with the three life areas. For men the strongest correlations of fear of COVID-19 and stress were only with the deterioration of the love relations. In the group of women fear of COVID-19 was associated positively with the negative experiences in all three areas of life,

but the correlation was stronger with social relations. Perceived stress was also a more important factor for the quality of women's lives. It correlated positively and moderately with the deterioration of social, love and work life. For women, fear and stress were least associated with love relationships, while for men the opposite was true. Therefore, for women, fear and stress permeate all three spheres of life, but for them social life was more vulnerable in a COVID-19 pandemic, while for men love relations were more sensitive to negative effects.

As a possible explanation of the established sex differences in the perceived negative effects of pandemic on love relations could be used the gender role theory which argues that for women a family role is more important and they are expected to take on the bulk of family responsibilities without even talking about it (Hochschild, 1999). Although other social roles are also very important for women nowadays, the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has revived social expectations for women. Therefore, during a crisis, women devote more time to the family and its members, take care of its survival and comfort, sacrificing their leisure time, as a result of which love partner relations remain in the background. In this situation, love for a partner is more likely to be expressed through a focus on physical and economic survival, emotional and instrumental support, rather than through intimacy, tenderness and passion. This can make men feel frustrated in love relationships. Since in a situation of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, outdoor social contacts have been reduced, the woman at home becomes the main source of attention, affection, entertainment, support, not only for her romantic partner, but for all other family members, which is exhausting for her and gives rise to serious role conflicts.

Perhaps for men, living with their romantic partner all day every day for months and years creates more stress because of boredom, routine, lack of variety or oversaturation. The partner becomes the only vent of tension, which can again lead to more conflict.

LIMITATIONS

The study, though, was limited by the lack of sufficient control over the participants, which is a standard limitation of online research. Also, typical of psychological research, the number of female participants was significantly greater than male. Another limitation is that it was not planned and balanced to have a similar number of people on essential characteristics such as working/not working / lost their jobs due to the pandemic, as well as the different options of people in a relationship, living together or not. Unfortunately, we do not have data with the same instruments from international research.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic started two years ago and people expected it to end when a reliable treatment or vaccine was found. Instead, for the time being, it appears that pandemic waves follow one another, and it is not very clear when or if they will ever end, or at least turn into a regular flu. Accordingly, what seemed like a need for momentary adaptation to some adverse factor (waiting for the stressor to disappear) increasingly turns out to be permanent accommodation of new patterns of behavior, habituation and acceptance of the new situation, adaptation for permanent, not temporary. This adaptation to the „new normal“, to the current reality, to some extent makes our research also very temporary, since from the beginning of the pandemic until now we are studying a crisis adaptation, but very soon this will no longer be a crisis response of society, but will become in its normal operation. Therefore, there is a danger the established negative effects of Covid-19 on social, love and work life to become the “new normality”. For example, many employers today report that they are having difficulty bringing employees back to the office, and many students prefer to continue their studies online. Many people have lost their social skills of spontaneous communication, empathy and patience with others, and the divorce rate greatly increased.

In other words, people initially had trouble adjusting to the new situation, and now have difficulty returning to the lost old normality for which they suffered. From this point of view, there is a need for psychological research to show strengths and weaknesses, problem points, ideas for optimizing and supporting mental health of people.

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