



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Marital satisfaction and impact of confinement by COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico

Satisfacción marital e impacto del confinamiento por COVID-19 en México

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ABSTRACT

Background: The aim of the study was to evaluate the relationship between marital satisfaction, measured by the Relationship Assessment Scale and the perceived impact of confinement due to COVID-19 in different areas of people's lives, in a Mexican sample.

Method: 101 people living as a couple, with an average age of 41.2 years (SD = 10.7), 54.5% women and 45.5% men were evaluated.

Results: The main result was a negative and significant correlation that indicates that the greater the satisfaction in the relationship, the less impact of confinement in the areas of tranquility, happiness, health, physical condition and emotional well-being.

Conclusion: The people with higher marital satisfaction will perceive less impact during the contingency by COVID-19 in the different areas of the person's life.

Keywords: coronavirus, couple, pandemic, quarantine, isolation, mental health.

RESUMEN

Introducción: El propósito del estudio fue evaluar la relación entre la satisfacción marital, medida por la Escala de Valoración de la Relación y el impacto percibido por el confinamiento debido al COVID-19 en diferentes ámbitos de la vida de las personas en una muestra mexicana. **Método:** Se evaluó a 101 personas que viven en pareja, con edad promedio de 41.2 años ($DE = 10.7$), 54.5% mujeres y 45.5% hombres. **Resultados:** El principal resultado fue la correlación negativa y significativa que indica que, a mayor satisfacción en la relación, menor impacto del confinamiento en los ámbitos de tranquilidad, felicidad, salud, condición física y bienestar emocional. **Conclusión:** Las personas que evalúan su relación de pareja como satisfactoria perciben menor impacto durante la contingencia por COVID-19 en los diferentes ámbitos de su vida.

Palabras clave: coronavirus, pareja, pandemia, cuarentena, aislamiento, salud mental

BACKGROUND

The main health issue during 2020 has been the COVID-19 pandemic. In Mexico, non-essential school and work activities for the population were suspended, implementing a quarantine or voluntary confinement as of March 23 (Ministry of the Interior, 2020). Confinement has been an international strategy to stop the spread of COVID-19, which consists of social isolation and voluntary protection of people in their homes, which has an impact on daily life and restrictions on the practice of activities outside the home (Sandín, Valiente, García-Escalera, & Chorot, 2020).

The change in routine due to confinement has allowed people to choose to do rewarding activities, which help them live their life as well as possible (Polizzi et al., 2020). According to Dekel, Hankin, Pratt, Hackler, and Lanman (2015), finding ways to interact and appreciate life during massive traumas, is a robust predictor of increased psychological well-being and reduction of post-traumatic symptoms.

Although it has been indicated that this crisis affects intimate relationships (Stanley & Markman, 2020), the focus of research on the impact of the pandemic on mental health has been mainly at the individual level. Evidence of this is the work of Zambrano, Serrato and Galindo (in press), who carried out a bibliometric analysis in the SCOPUS database in the psychology collection, identifying 223 articles published in the first semester of 2020, finding that the majority of the studies were conducted in China and are focused on anxiety and depression, thus suggesting that research be conducted focused on the effects of the pandemic on academic performance, job stress, job performance, marital satisfaction, sexual behavior, among other phenomena. Thus, few investigations have focused on couples in confinement, which have focused on the risk of violence (Aponte et al., 2020), the division of domestic work (Carlson, Petts, & Pepin 2020; Chung et al., 2020), in marital conflicts (Chung, Chan, Lanier, & Wong, 2020), or in the effects on sexual behavior (Arafat, Mohamed, Kar, Sharma, & Kabir, 2020); Furthermore, recommendations have been published for therapeutic strategies that contribute to preserving and protecting relationships during contingency (Stanley & Markman, 2020). However, to the best of our knowledge, no research has been published focused on positive well-being variables such as marital satisfaction and its relationship with the impact of confinement due to COVID-19.

Boland and Follingstad (1987) consider marital satisfaction as a general description of attitudes, feelings and evaluations of the relationship, in terms such as happy / unhappy, satisfactory / unsatisfactory. Moral (2015) suggests that satisfaction with the couple relationship is favored by the support and open communication in the couple, while emotional states such as depression and financial difficulties, impair marital satisfaction. Thus, satisfaction with the partner refers to a multidimensional entity that includes aspects of adjustment, happiness, consensus and cohesion.

Prime, Wade and Browne (2020) indicate that the couple, being the leaders of the family, have the responsibility to generate hope and emotional security; in addition to negotiating family rules, rituals, and routines, while facing extraordinary levels of uncertainty, family disruption, and fear due to the ongoing pan-

demic. The authors add that it is important to note that families will be affected differently by the health, social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering the above, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between marital satisfaction through the Relationship Assessment Scale and the perceived impact of confinement due to COVID-19 in different areas of the lives of couples, in a Mexican sample.

METHOD

Participants

This work corresponds to a partial report of a broader investigation. The data were collected from May 18 to 25, 2020. The inclusion criteria to meet the objective of this study were that people were in isolation, that they reported leaving their home only to work or not going out at all, being residents in Mexico and living with their partner, regardless of the legal status of their union (common law or married). Information on the city or state of origin was not requested, so there is no further information on its geographic and sociocultural context.

The participation of 101 people who met the inclusion criteria was achieved. The average age was 41.2 years (SD = 10.7); 84.2% married and 15.8% in common law union. 55 women (54.5%) and 46 men (45.5%) participated; 59.4% indicated having one or two children (n = 60), 8.9% said they had 3 or 4 children, 29.7% reported not having children (n = 30) and two people mentioned that none of their children lived in the same house that they. 37.6% indicated having postgraduate studies, 47.5% undergraduate and the rest technical career, high school or secondary education.

Instruments

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) by Hendrick (1988) was used in its validation for Mexico by Moral (2008). It consists of a unifactorial Likert-type scale that globally measures the satisfaction of the couple's relationship through seven items with a range of 1 to 5, presenting a range of 7 to 35 points; a higher score reflects a higher assessment / satisfaction with the couple's relationship. Moral (2008) reported an internal consistency of .81 in a Mexican sample. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was .92.

To assess the perceived impact of confinement, the question was asked: How much do you consider that staying at home has affected you in the following areas: tranquility, work, happiness, finances, health, physical condition, emotional well-being? The response options ranged from 0 = almost nothing to 4 = I can't stand it anymore. Cronbach's alpha was estimated, finding a coefficient of .82, the inter-item correlations were positive and were in the range of .20 to .75, so it is considered that these questions can be added as indicators of the perception of impact confinement.

Additionally, they were asked about the number of exits from home in the last week and the reason, how many hours a day were invested in watching news, press conferences or statements related to COVID-19, what activities had helped them cope with confinement and what they considered the most difficult about being in confinement.

Process

The questionnaires were disseminated via the internet with the survey management application Google Forms. The survey was online May 18-25, 2020.

IBM® SPSS® Statistics 24 was used. A descriptive analysis of the variables was performed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the RAS scores did not fit a normal distribution ($Z = 0.179, p = .001$). The Mann Whitney U test was used to identify the differences between groups, and the Spearman coefficient was used to evaluate the correlations, with a significance level of $p < .05$.

Ethical aspects

This research was evaluated and approved in its ethical and methodological aspects by researchers from the Research Team in Social and Health Psychology of the Autonomous University of Nuevo León.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, the purpose of the research was explained, and the participant was asked to continue answering if he agreed. The anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided was guaranteed at all times.

RESULTS

Average marital satisfaction was 29.6 (SD = 5.8) with a median of 31 points and equivalence in the scores between men and women ($Z = 0.045, p = .964$). The participants indicated that

during the last week the average number of outings from home was 2.2 (SD = 0.37); the main reason for leaving was to buy food or medicine. The hours invested in viewing news and communications related to COVID-19 was 1.4 (SD = 1.3), varying from less than an hour to 7 hours a day.

Among the activities reported to cope with confinement, those focused on maintaining a routine such as: setting schedules (25.7%), and performing pleasant activities, such as: watching movies or series (21.8%) and exercising (14.9%) had a higher frequency); the rest reported other pleasant activities, such as spending time with their pet, listening to music, and spending time with the family, among others.

The participants indicated that the most difficult thing about being in confinement was not being able to go out to have fun (40.6%), a small percentage indicated that the most difficult thing was having to be at home (8.9%) and the rest was distributed between not being able to have contact physical with other people, not being able to go to work, having to work online and not being able to go on a trip.

In Table 1 it can be seen that health is the area considered least affected by staying at home, followed by happiness. The areas most affected were work, fitness and finances.

Table 2 shows the correlations between the study variables. It can be observed that, the higher marital satisfaction, the lower the impact of confinement in tranquility, happiness, health, physical condition and emotional well-being. Additionally, the higher the satisfaction, the less time spent watching news re-

Table 1. Perceived impact of confinement.

How much do you consider that staying at home has affected you in the following areas?	Almost nothing	A little	Regular	A lot	I can not stand
Tranquility	33.7%	32.6%	19.8%	13.9%	0.0%
Job	28.7%	21.8%	18.8%	27.7%	3.0%
Happiness	44.6%	30.6%	19.8%	4.0%	1.0%
Finance	30.7%	20.8%	26.7%	19.8%	2.0%
Health	54.5%	22.7%	19.8%	3.0%	0.0%
Physical condition	30.7%	28.7%	15.8%	22.8%	2.0%
Emotional well-being	35.6%	29.7%	19.8%	10.9%	4.0%

Table 2. Correlations between the study variables.

Impact of confinement on:	(two)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Marital satisfaction	-.265 **	-.104	-.386 **	-.127	-.210 *	-.233 *	-.436 **	-.245 *
(2) Tranquility		.457 **	.625 **	.265 **	.507 **	.377 **	.712 **	.056
(3) Work			.176	.351 **	.285 **	0.165	.255 **	-.045
(4) Happiness				.266 **	.518 **	.451 **	.796 **	.173
(5) Finance					.288 **	.233 *	.257 **	.074
(6) Health						.465 **	.569 **	.169
(7) Physical condition							.559 **	.088

lated to COVID-19.

Considering the impact of confinement as a score that adds up the 7 areas evaluated, the average score was 8.2 (SD = 5.3), showing a negative and significant correlation with marital satisfaction ($r_s = -.365$, $p = .001$). Likewise, dividing the sample according to the quartiles of the impact scores of the confinement, a comparison of the two extreme groups was made (quartile 25, impact between 0 and 4; quartile 75, impact greater than 12), finding a significant difference in marital satisfaction ($Z = -3.185$, $p = .001$).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between marital satisfaction and the perceived impact of confinement in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The relationship found indicates that those people with greater satisfaction in their relationship perceive less impact from confinement. Considering that satisfaction with the couple relationship is favored by the support and communication in the couple (Moral, 2015), it is deduced that dialogue, conversation and mutual support contribute to reducing the perceived impact of confinement.

Likewise, it was identified that people carry out various activities that help to cope with the confinement situation. In relation to this, Polizzi, Polizzi, Lynn, and Perry, (2020) indicate that engaging in rewarding activities, such as hobbies, solving puzzles, reading, listening to music, singing, playing an instrument, watching television, learning a language, playing games, and even preparing for a better life change after the pandemic, it can help people live their life to the best of their ability; While those focused on negative aspects such as exposing themselves to watching news related to COVID-19 for many hours, present worse satisfaction with their relationship. Confinement has been described as an event that produces discomfort (Hawryluck et al., 2004; Rubin & Wessely, 2020), however, according to the results of this study, people who value their relationship as satisfactory seem to face better that situation and perceive less impact.

The results of this research are directly applicable in the care of people affected by confinement, Pietromonaco and Overall (2020) indicate that many couples will be susceptible to stress related to the pandemic and suggest that these couples may benefit from working with professionals to strengthen the adaptive relationship processes, communication strategies and mutual support. These interventions would improve marital satisfaction, which is related to the perceived impact of confinement, according to the present findings.

It is suggested for future research to return to the evaluation of positive variables that allow to identify, within this specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the aspects to emphasize in the prevention and psychological treatment interventions during the contingency.

The study has limitations that make it difficult to generalize the results. Among them, the sample size and its own characteristics, among which the high score on the RAS scale and the level of studies of the participants stand out. However, the results of this study represent an important contribution to the line of research on mental health in times of the coronavirus; since,

as far as we know, it is the first to consider marital satisfaction in the Spanish-speaking population, in the context of COVID-19 contingency and assess its relationship to the impact on different areas of Mexican couples' lives in confinement.

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AUTHORS 'CONTRIBUTION

Lucía Quezada Berumen: validation, research, writing, project administration.

René Landero Hernández: methodology, resources, writing, supervision.

Mónica Teresa González Ramírez: conceptualization, formal analysis, writing, visualization.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Does not apply.

REVIEW PROCESS

This study has been peer-reviewed in a double-blind manner.

DECLARATION OF DATA AVAILABILITY

The data of the present study will be available to the scientific community that requests them from the corresponding author.

DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY

The authors are responsible for all statements made in this article. Neither Interactions nor the Peruvian Institute of Psychological Orientation are responsible for the statements made in this document.

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