



Diana Teixeira
**Impact of Covid-19 lockdown on online infidelity
and relationship quality**

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Universidade do Minho
Escola de Psicologia

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Trabalho efetuado sob a orientação do(a)
Professora Doutora Joana Arantes

Despacho RT - 31 /2019 - Anexo 3

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Braga, 4 de junho de 2021

Diana Raquel Henriques Teixeira

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“Dificuldades preparam pessoas comuns para destinos extraordinários” Clive Staples Lewis

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I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration.

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Braga, 04 de junho de 2021

Diana Raquel Henriques Teixeira

(Diana Raquel Henriques Teixeira)

O impacto do confinamento da Covid-19 na infidelidade *online* e na qualidade do relacionamento

Resumo

A pandemia causada pela Covid-19 levou ao isolamento social que acarretou consequências económicas, sociais e individuais. Por exemplo, o isolamento constituiu um desafio aos relacionamentos íntimos devido ao seu afastamento físico ou à convivência forçada 24 horas por dia, como resultado das medidas impostas pelo governo. Desta forma, o objetivo do presente estudo foi analisar se o confinamento nacional, que decorreu de 18 de março a 2 de maio de 2020 afetou a infidelidade *online* e a qualidade dos relacionamentos íntimos. O estudo incluiu 1704 participantes (1418 do sexo feminino e 274 do sexo masculino), com idades compreendidas entre os 17 e os 70 anos. Estes preencheram um questionário que esteve *online* desde o primeiro até ao último dia do confinamento nacional. O questionário incluía questões sociodemográficas, questões relacionadas com o confinamento, a Escala de Infidelidade *Online*, o Inventário de Componentes da Qualidade de Relacionamento Percebida, a Escala de Felicidade Subjetiva e o Questionário de Forças Familiares. Os resultados mostraram que os homens tendiam a um maior envolvimento em comportamentos extradiádicos *online* em função do tempo de confinamento e que a qualidade do relacionamento tendia a diminuir para ambos os géneros, à medida que os dias de confinamento aumentavam.

Palavras-chave: confinamento, covid-19, infidelidade *online*, qualidade do relacionamento íntimo

Impact of Covid-19 lockdown on online infidelity and relationship quality

Abstract

The pandemic caused by Covid-19 led to social isolation that had economic, social, and individual consequences. For example, isolation constituted a challenge to intimate relationships due to their physical distance or forced coexistence 24 hours a day, as a result of the measures imposed by the government. Thus, the aim of the present study was to analyze whether the national lockdown which ran from March 18 to May 2, 2020, affected online infidelity and the quality of intimate relationships. The study included 1704 participants (1418 females and 274 males), aged between 17 and 70 years. They completed a questionnaire that was online from the first to the last day of the national lockdown. The questionnaire included sociodemographic questions, questions related to the lockdown, the Online Infidelity Scale, the Perceived Relationship Quality Component Inventory, the Subjective Happiness Scale, and the Family Strengths Questionnaire. Results showed that men tended to engage more in online extradyadic behaviors as a function of lockdown time and that relationship quality tended to decrease for both genders as lockdown days increased.

Keywords: covid-19, intimate relationship quality, lockdown, online infidelity

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Impact of Covid-19 lockdown on online infidelity and relationship quality

During the year 2020, the emergence of the pandemic caused by the new Coronavirus led to isolation and social distancing around the world to reduce the spread of the virus (Luetke et al., 2020; Morais & Lunet, 2020; Pires, 2020), which brought consequences at the economic, social, and individual level (Arslan et al., 2020; Asare & Barfi, 2021). For example, once the lockdowns were declared in different countries (Faro et al., 2020; Maia & Dias, 2020; Relvas et al., 2020), social distancing physically separated many couples that lived in different places (Dewitte et al., 2020; Luetke et al., 2020) and, on the other hand, led to many couples being together 24/7 (Lebow, 2020; Luetke et al., 2020). Therefore, for a significant number of couples, the stress experienced by the new contingencies may have led to an increase of conflicts (Balzarini et al., 2020; Luetke et al., 2020), more negative perception of the partner (Gordon & Mitchell, 2020), lower relationship quality (Balzarini et al., 2020; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020; Relvas et al., 2020), and increase of extradyadic behaviors (Bonotti & Zech, 2021; Gordon & Mitchell, 2020).

Infidelity and pandemic

Infidelity is the sexual (e.g., kissing, touching, fondling in intimate areas) and/or emotional (e.g., romantic involvement, spending time and attention) involvement of an individual who is in an intimate relationship with another person outside of the primary relationship (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2012; Moller & Vossler, 2015; Scheeren et al., 2018; Shackelford et al., 2000; Whitty, 2003; Whitty & Quigley, 2008, Wilson et al., 2011). This extradyadic behavior contribute to a loss of trust or a failure to follow the rules agreed upon by both members of the couple in a relationship of expected emotional and sexual exclusivity (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2012; Moller & Vossler, 2015; Scheeren et al., 2018). According to several authors, there are many reasons associated with the occurrence of infidelity, such as: dissatisfaction in the relationship, anger, desire to punish the partner, neglect by the partner, lack of commitment, attraction to another person and interest and curiosity in greater sexual variety and frequency (Barta & Kiene, 2005, Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2011). Beyond these reasons, according to Elmslie and Tebaldi (2014) people who are less happy in their lives tended to be more involved in acts of infidelity. In addition, family influence can also lead to infidelity (Fish et al., 2012; Nelas et al., 2016; Weiser et al., 2015). Resilient families are defined as families that possess skills or develop effective processes to cope with emerging obstacles or negative experiences (Black & Lobo, 2008; Orthner et al., 2004; Patterson, 2002). Resilient families are also defined as families that had explicit expectations for their children, had routines and celebrations but also shared core values (Orthner et al., 2004; Seccombe, 2002). Literature supports the idea of an intergenerational pattern of infidelity in families,

because research have shown that children exposed to their parents' infidelity are more likely to engage in extradyadic behaviors in their relationships (Fish et al., 2012; Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Nelas et al., 2016; Sori, 2007). Infidelity is a reality that can occur face-to-face or on the internet (Henline et al., 2007, Martins et al., 2016, Whitty, 2005). In fact, with the advances of technology and the creation of social chats and the significant amount of time individuals tend to spend on the internet, it is increasingly easier to communicate and relate to others through social networks (Camargo et al., 2010) and to have online infidelity behaviors (Henline et al., 2007). Online infidelity, also called cyberaffairs, corresponds to romantic and/or sexual relationships that occur online and that are maintained in a virtual way or that can be transferred later into face-to-face relationships (Haack & Falcke, 2013; Millner, 2008; Young et al., 2000). Research has shown that online infidelity tends to affect both members of the primary couple as face-to-face infidelity, leading to serious consequences, such as low self-esteem and sexual confidence, loss of trust, rage, guilt, conflicts, depression, anxiety, breaking up and divorce (Abbasi & Dibble, 2019; Cano & O'Leary, 2000; Cavaglion & Rashty, 2010; Cravens et al., 2013; Fisher et al., 2008; Henline et al., 2007; Hertlein & Piercy, 2006; Octaviana & Abraham, 2018; Russell et al., 2013; Shackelford, 2001). In respect of the prevalence of online infidelity, even though exact statistics do not exist yet, studies have been showing that it is an increasingly common reality (Henline et al., 2007; Hertlein & Piercy, 2008; Vossler & Moller, 2019).

During the lockdown, internet has become the most used platform for all kinds of situations (e.g., teleworking, distance learning, communication through social networks) (Gioia et al., 2021; Morais & Lunet, 2020; Silva, 2020) making online infidelity more likely to occur (Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Hertlein & Piercy, 2006; Kua et al., 2021). For example, a website targeting extradyadic behaviors of married people saw an increase in access with 17000 new members per day, which compared to 2019 saw an increase of 1500 new members per day (Gordon & Mitchell, 2020). The higher number of entries in dating sites have several justifications, such as: the desire to talk to someone other than the partner, the lack of emotional approval, or the desire to search for a secret sexual relationship (Gordon & Mitchell, 2020). In addition, during the months of February and March 2020, one of the most popular applications - Tinder - recorded an increase of 25% in the average duration of a conversation (Kirana & Tripodi, 2020). In this way, and due to the limitation of physical movement, the online environment made it possible for more flirting, intimate relationships, and sexual revelation (Kirana & Tripodi, 2020). Some articles addressed the issue of infidelity during the pandemic (e.g., Bonotti & Zech, 2021, Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Hardy et al., 2021; Kirana & Tripodi, 2020; Kua et al., 2021; Le et al., 2021; Treter et al., 2021)

but it is necessary to conduct quantitative studies that can fill the gaps that still exist in the literature on this topic and thus understand the possible effects that the relationships suffered during this period.

Intimate relationship quality and pandemic

Quality in an intimate relationship refers to an overall subjective assessment that individuals make of their relationship (Andrade & Garcia, 2012; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Schlösser, 2014; Wachelke et al., 2004). Relationship quality has been shown to be a predictor of stability and longevity in a relationship (Rohmann et al., 2016) and is associated with general happiness (Gustavson et al., 2016; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Ruvolo, 1998). In addition, research has shown that individuals that have a good development of communication and problem-solving skills during adolescence have a tendency to have high-quality relationships (Conger & Conger, 2002; Herzog & Cooney, 2002). Moreover, relationship quality is associated with stress (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009), conflicts (Conger & Conger, 2002), financial problems (Conger et al., 1999; Story & Bradbury, 2004), and family resilience and support (Conger & Conger, 2002; Orthner et al., 2004).

Many authors have focused on studying the effect that the pandemic and the consequent lockdown had on the quality of intimate relationships (e.g., Balzarini et al., 2020; Dewitte et al., 2020; Kirana & Tripodi, 2020; Lehmillier et al., 2020; Li, Li et al., 2020; Li, Tang et al., 2020; Luetke et al., 2020; Panzeri et al., 2020; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020; Relvas et al., 2020). This period, marked especially by increased stress levels, may have proved challenging for all intimate relationships and may have caused an increase in the couple's existing difficulties (Dewitte et al., 2020; Relvas et al., 2020). Balzarini and collaborators (2020) confirmed this idea, showing in their study, which covered couples from 57 countries, that the report of a greater number of stressors associated with the pandemic such as social isolation, financial problems, and stress, was related to lower quality in intimate relationships and a greater emergence of conflicts. In another study by Li, Li, and collaborators (2020), results showed that 32% of men and 39% of women confessed to a decrease in sexual satisfaction during this period, and further, Luetke and collaborators (2020) revealed in their research that, a higher frequency of conflicts in a relationship during the pandemic was associated with a decrease in intimate contacts with their partners (e.g., hugging, kissing, cuddling). Thus, and due to the existence of the various stressors associated with the pandemic as mentioned by Balzarini and collaborators (2020), engaging in beneficial behaviors with partner (e.g., support, problem-solving skills) will become more difficult (Balzarini et al., 2020; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020). Such involvement is necessary as it is associated with well-functioning intimate relationships and help individuals manage situations with high levels of stress (Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020).

Our study

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, there are still no studies on its effect on intimate relationships in terms of online infidelity and relationship quality as a function of lockdown time. Thus, the main aim of this study is to understand the influence of the pandemic caused by Covid-19 on intimate relationships during the first lockdown declared by the Portuguese Government. More specifically, we aim to investigate the effect of lockdown time on online infidelity and relationship quality during the first lockdown, which occurred from March 18 to May 2, 2020. We also examine the relationship between the relationship quality and online infidelity, the relationship of happiness with online infidelity and happiness with relationship quality. Studying happiness proves to be important given that its levels were affected by lockdown (Arslan et al., 2020; Baron et al., 2020) and the change in these values can modify individuals' behavior towards intimate relationships, namely affecting online infidelity and relationship quality (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2014; Gustavson et al., 2016; Ruvolo, 1998). We also aim to examine the relationship between family resilience and online infidelity and between family resilience and relationship quality. Family is an important source not only of transmission values, beliefs, and attitudes, but also an important source of support among family members (de Souza & Batista, 2008; Nelas et al., 2016). Thus, it is important to analyze, in the present study (and considering the changes that the various families have experienced in their daily lives due to the pandemic), whether family resilience will influence the attitudes and behaviors that couples and their children will have in their intimate relationships, namely, whether it will influence online infidelity and the quality of intimate relationships.

Therefore, given the gaps presented and the purposes of the study, the following hypotheses emerge:

H1: Individuals will have more online extradyadic behaviors as the number of days in lockdown increased.

H2: Individuals will have lower perceived relationship quality as the number of days in lockdown increased.

H3: Individuals with lower perceived relationship quality will have more online extradyadic behaviors.

H4: Less happy individuals will have more online extradyadic behaviors.

H5: Less happy individuals will have lower perceived relationship quality.

H6: Individuals with lower levels of family resilience will have more online extradyadic behaviors.

H7: Individuals with lower levels of family resilience will have lower perceived relationship quality.

Method

Participants

Our initial sample included 2060 participants. After excluding those that did not complete at least 20 questions ($n = 356$; 18.74%), our final sample consisted of 1704 participants (see table 1). Of those, 1418 (83.2%) were females, 274 (16.1%) were males and 2 (0.1%) other (e.g., not binary), and their ages ranged between 17 and 70 years ($M = 27.74$, $SD = 9.72$). The majority ($n = 1622$; 95.2%) were Portuguese, heterosexuals ($n = 1557$; 91.4%), did not have children ($n = 1241$; 72.8%) and were in an intimate relationship ($n = 1427$ participants; 83.7%). Of those participants involved in a relationship, most were involved in a dating relationship ($n = 857$; 50.3%) and had been in that relationship for more than two years ($n = 969$; 56.9%). In addition, many of the participants were from a medium socioeconomic status ($n = 983$ participants; 57.7%) and were full-time employees ($n = 671$; 39.4%). Regarding the lockdown questions, the majority of the participants lived with parents and/or other family members during the lockdown ($n = 910$; 53.4%). The most of them considered that their life changed because of lockdown ($n = 1520$; 89.2%). For individuals who were in a relationship, most of them spent less time with their partner during the lockdown compared to the time they spent before the lockdown ($n = 663$; 39.0%).

Table 1

Sample sociodemographic characteristics

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	1418	83.2%
Male	274	16.1%
Others (e.g., not binary)	2	0.1%
Nationality		
Portuguese	1622	95.2%
Brazilian	48	2.8%
Others (Angolan, Belgian, Canadian, Chinese, Colombian, Danish, Dutch-Portuguese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese-Brazilian, Portuguese-Cape Verdean, Romanian, Swiss, Venezuelan).	15	0.9%
Portuguese-French	2	0.1%
Russian	2	0.1%
Spanish	2	0.1%
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	1557	91.4%
Bisexual	86	5.0%
Homosexual	34	2.0%
Others (pansexual, demisexual-panromantic, asexual)	7	0.4%
Children		

IMPACT OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ON ONLINE INFIDELITY AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

No	1241	72.8%
Yes	463	27.2%
Intimate relationship		
Yes	1427	83.7%
No	277	16.3%
Relationship type		
Dating	857	50.3%
Marriage	316	18.5%
De facto union	208	12.2%
Casual	42	2.5%
Other	1	0.1%
Relationship duration		
Between 2 and 5 years	415	24.4%
More than 10 years	298	17.5%
Between 5 and 10 years	256	15.0%
Between 1 and 2 years	205	12.0%
Between 6 months and 1 year	133	7.8%
Less than 6 months	117	6.9%
Socioeconomic status		
Medium	983	57.7%
Medium-low	448	26.3%
Medium-high	117	10.4%
Low	83	4.9%
High	7	0.4%
Professional situation		
Full-time employee	671	39.4%
Others	425	24.9%
Unemployed	290	17.0%
Part-time employee	139	8.2%
Retired	11	0.6%
Cohabitation during the lockdown		
Live with parents and/or other family members	910	53.4%
Lived with partner and children	323	19.0%
Lived only with partner	230	13.5%
Lived with partner and other family members (e.g., mother, uncle)	112	6.6%
Lived alone	61	3.6%
Lived only with children	38	2.2%
Lived with partner and friends	18	1.1%
Other situations	8	0.5%
Change in daily life		
Yes	1520	89.2%
No	19	1.1%
Time spent with partner during the lockdown		
Less time than before the lockdown	663	39.0%
More time than before the lockdown	442	26.0%
Same time as before the lockdown	215	12.6%

Measures

Sociodemographic Questionnaire

The sociodemographic questionnaire contained questions about gender, age, nationality, and sexual orientation. In addition, they were also asked whether they had children, if they were currently

involved in an intimate relationship and who responded affirmatively specified the type (e.g., casual, dating, marriage) and the duration of the relationship (e.g., less than 6 months, between 2 and 5 years, more than 10 years). Finally, they were asked about their socioeconomic status, occupation, and professional situation.

Questions about the Lockdown

Participants answered several questions regarding the lockdown, including cohabitation and were asked to indicate if their lives have changed due to the Covid-19, and to specify the number of days they have been staying-at-home because of the Covid-19, and the general lockdown imposed by the Portuguese Government. Participants that were involved in an intimate relationship were also asked about the time spent with their partner during the lockdown compared to the time spent before lockdown.

Online Infidelity Scale (OIS) (Teixeira & Arantes, Sub)

The OIS was developed specifically for this study and aims to assess a set of online infidelity behaviors, both sexual and emotional. It is a self-report instrument composed of 10 items, such as “I am attracted to someone other than my partner, with whom I communicate via Internet (e.g., social networks) or cell phone” or “I share deep emotional or intimate information with someone other than my partner through the internet or cell phone.” Each item was evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“It never happens”) to 7 (“It happens frequently”). Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire based on what happened during their “last week”. The arithmetic mean was computed for each participant, with higher scores indicating higher levels of extradyadic behaviors. Teixeira and Arantes (sub) conducted exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and found evidence in favor of a simpler, unifactorial model that explained 64.49% of the variance. This model produced an acceptable fit to the original data (CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = .910, NFI (Normed Fit Index) = .907; RFI (Relative Fit Index) = .854; IFI (Incremental Fit Index) = .911; TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) = .859 and χ^2 (Chi-squared) = 822.115). It also demonstrated good internal reliability ($\alpha = .93$).*

Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) Inventory (Fletcher et al., 2000; Portuguese version by Silva et al., 2017)

The PRQC assesses relationship quality and consists of 18 items, divided into 6 components: Relationship Satisfaction (e.g., “How satisfied are you with your relationship?”), Commitment (e.g., “How committed are you to your relationship?”), Intimacy (e.g., “How intimate is your relationship?”), Trust (e.g., “How much do you trust your partner?”), Passion (“How passionate is your relationship?”) and Love (e.g., “How much do you love your partner?”). Each component is assessed by three items, each scoring

on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“Not at all”) to 7 (“Extremely”). This inventory has demonstrated good internal reliability ($\alpha = .85 - .88$, Fletcher et al., 2000; $\alpha = .97$, Silva et al., 2017)

Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Portuguese version by Spagnoli et al., 2012)

The SHS was developed to assess happiness, and it consists of four items. In half of the items, participants are asked to compare themselves with others in absolute and relative terms (e.g., “Compared to other people like me, I consider myself:”), scoring on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“Less happy”) to 7 (“Happier”). The remaining items are based on descriptions of happiness and unhappiness: (e.g., “In general, I consider myself:”), and participants answer using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“A person who is not very happy”) to 7 (“A very happy person”). This scale has an acceptable internal reliability (.79-.94, Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; .73-.80, Spagnoli et al., 2012).

Family Strengths Questionnaire (FSQ) (Melo & Alarcão, 2011)

This questionnaire was developed to evaluate family resilience. It is a self-report instrument composed of 29 items, each evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (“Nothing similar”) to 5 (“Extremely similar”). The FSQ is divided into 4 factors: Positive Family Organization (10 items; e.g., “In my family, everyone has the right to give their opinion”), Positive Family Beliefs (7 items; “In my family we are able to discuss different points of view without being angry with each other”), Positive Management and Family Support (7 items; “In my family we are able to cope well with unforeseen circumstances and difficulties”), and Positive Emotions (5 items; “In my family we were able to resolve a disagreement without conflict”). This scale has shown good internal reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .95.

Procedure

Participants’ responses were recorded anonymously on an Internet webpage using Qualtrics software, Version 2018 of the Qualtrics Research Suite (www.qualtrics.com). The questionnaire was available on various social networks (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) and was sent through personal and institutional e-mails throughout the general mandatory lockdown that occurred during the State of National Emergency declared by the Portuguese Government – from March 18 to May 2, 2020. For all participants, the sociodemographic questionnaire and the questions about the lockdown were present first. Then they answered to the SHS and FSQ in a counterbalanced order. Those participants that were currently involved in a relationship completed also the PRQC Inventory and OIS, also in a counterbalanced order. Participants did not receive any monetary compensation for completing it and they took approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data were exported to an Excel spreadsheet. Analyses were conducted with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS® 27.0), and included: i) Descriptive analyses for the full sample, males and females; ii) Pearson’s correlations in order to explore associations between the variables presented in the study; iii) *t* tests of independent samples to investigate possible differences between genders, participants with or without children, those involved or not involved in an intimate relationship, participants who lived or did not live with their partners during the lockdown, and health professionals or non-health professionals; and iv) univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) to compare individuals with different professional situations.

Results

Descriptive analyses

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for the sample on the following variables: lockdown days, time spent with partner during lockdown (compared to the time spent before lockdown), online infidelity, relationship quality, happiness, family resilience, and age. Results are shown for both the full sample and separately for males and females. Results indicate that there were significant gender differences in our sample regarding online extradyadic behaviors. More specifically, compared to females, men reported more extradyadic behaviors, $t(181.701) = 4.395, p < .001$.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics (M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation) for the full sample, males and females

	Full sample			Males			Females			<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
LD	23.43	16.47	1464	20.47	13.42	238	24.04	16.97	1222	-3.584***
TPL	3.45	2.44	1320	3.25	2.37	177	3.48	2.46	1133	-1.161
OI	1.33	.80	1096	1.68	1.17	162	1.27	.70	927	4.395***
RQ	6.15	1.02	1118	6.01	1.11	169	6.17	1.00	942	-1.804
HAP	5.18	1.22	1395	5.21	1.24	243	5.18	1.22	1143	.345
FR	3.74	.70	1332	3.74	.69	232	3.74	.70	1090	-.069
Age	27.74	9.72	1689	27.64	9.86	274	27.75	9.70	1413	-.164

Note 1. LD = Lockdown Days; TPL = Time spent with Partner during Lockdown; OI = Online Infidelity; RQ = Relationship Quality; HAP = Happiness; FR = Family Resilience.

Note 2. To compare males and females, *t* tests are also shown.

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

Correlational analyses

We examined correlations among the lockdown days, time spent with partner during lockdown (compared to the time spent before lockdown), online infidelity, relationship quality, happiness, family resilience, and age. Results are shown in Table 3. Lockdown days was positively correlated with time spent with partner during lockdown, $r = .065$, $p < .05$, and with age, $r = .153$, $p < .001$, and negatively correlated with relationship quality, $r = -.126$, $p < .001$. That is, individuals that were in lockdown for longer tended to spend more time with partner during lockdown (compared to the time spent before lockdown), to be older, and to score lower on relationship quality.

Time spent with partner during lockdown (compared to the time spent before lockdown) was positively correlated with happiness, $r = .143$, $p < .001$, family resilience, $r = .187$, $p < .001$, and age, $r = .435$, $p < .001$, whereas it was negatively correlated with relationship quality, $r = -.073$, $p < .05$. This means that participants that spent more time with partner during lockdown (compared to the time spent before lockdown), had a tendency to report more happiness, more family resilience, to be older and less relationship quality.

In addition, online infidelity was positively correlated with age, $r = .109$, $p < .001$, and negatively correlated with relationship quality, $r = -.457$, $p < .001$, happiness, $r = -.204$, $p < .001$ and family resilience, $r = -.147$, $p < .001$. That is, individuals that reported more online extradyadic behaviors tended to be older, and to score lower on relationship quality, happiness, and family resilience.

Results also showed that relationship quality was positively correlated with happiness, $r = .369$, $p < .001$, and family resilience $r = .254$, $p < .001$ and negatively correlated with age, $r = -.352$, $p < .001$. This indicated that individuals that reported more relationship quality tended to be happier, to have more resilient families and to be younger.

Happiness was positively correlated with family resilience, $r = .503$, $p < .001$, and age, $r = .101$, $p < .001$, showing that happier individuals reported higher levels of family resilience and were older.

Finally, family resilience was positively correlated with age, $r = .192$, $p < .001$, indicating that older participants tended to have more resilient families.

Table 3

Correlations between lockdown days, time spent with partner during lockdown (compared to the time spent before lockdown), online infidelity, relationship quality, happiness, family resilience, and age.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ON ONLINE INFIDELITY AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1.LD	-	.065*	.040	-.126***	-.050	.043	.153***
2.TPL		-	-.024	-.073*	.143***	.187***	.435***
3.OI			-	-.457***	-.204***	-.147***	.109***
4.RQ				-	.369***	.254***	-.352***
5.HAP					-	.503***	.101***
6.FR						-	.192***
7.Age							-

Note. LD = Lockdown Days; TPL = Time spent with Partner during Lockdown; OI = Online Infidelity; RQ = Relationship Quality; HAP = Happiness; FR = Family Resilience.

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

Next, we investigated whether males and females had significantly different correlations for the variables in Table 3. Results showed that, for men, lockdown days was positively significantly correlated with online infidelity, $r = .209$, $p < .05$, showing that men that were in lockdown for longer tended to show more online extradyadic behaviors. However, for women, lockdown days was not significantly correlated with online infidelity, $r = .006$, $p = .86$. In addition, it was found in the case of women, that lockdown days were positively correlated with family resilience, $r = .070$, $p < .05$, meaning that the greater the number of days in lockdown, the greater the family resilience.

Differences between individuals with and without children

A t test for independent samples showed a statistically significant difference between these groups. More specifically, individuals with children were happier, ($M_{HAP} = 5.33$, $SD_{HAP} = 1.26$) and showed higher levels of family resilience ($M_{FR} = 3.98$, $SD_{FR} = .58$) compared with individuals without children ($M_{HAP} = 5.12$, $SD_{HAP} = 1.21$; $M_{FR} = 3.64$, $SD_{FR} = .71$), $t(1393) = 2.859$, $p < .01$, and $t(834.651) = 8.977$, $p < .001$, respectively. However, individuals with children reported lower levels of relationship quality ($M_{RQ} = 5.75$, $SD_{RQ} = 1.22$) than those without children ($M_{RQ} = 6.33$, $SD_{RQ} = .84$), $t(520.857) = -8.145$, $p < .001$.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ON ONLINE INFIDELITY AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

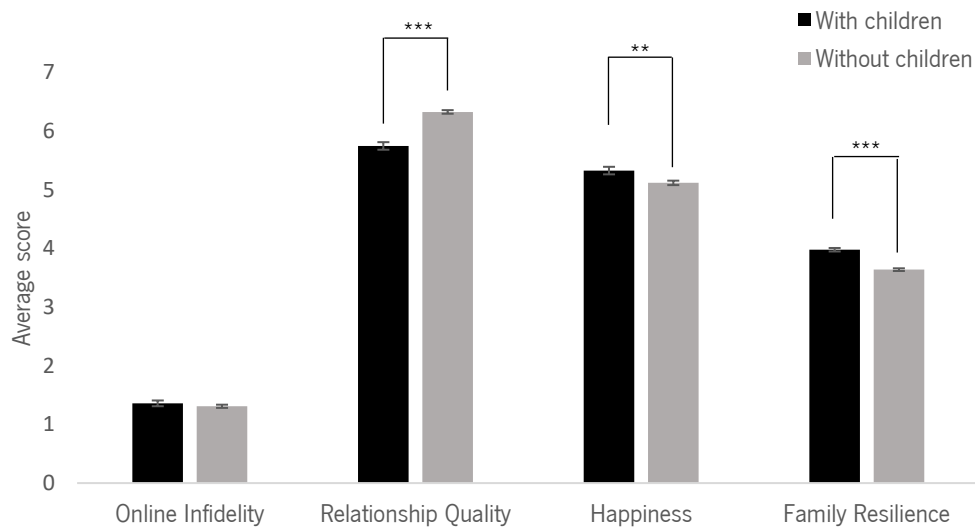


Figure 1. Average scores for differences between individuals with and without children. Errors bars represent standard error. *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$.

Differences between individuals who were in a relationship and those who were not

A t test for independent samples showed a statistically significant difference between individuals who were currently in an intimate relationship and those who were not, $t(1393) = 3.388$, $p < .01$, indicating that individuals who were in an intimate relationship were happier ($M_{HAP} = 5.24$, $SD_{HAP} = 1.22$) than those who were not ($M_{HAP} = 4.96$, $SD_{HAP} = 1.23$).

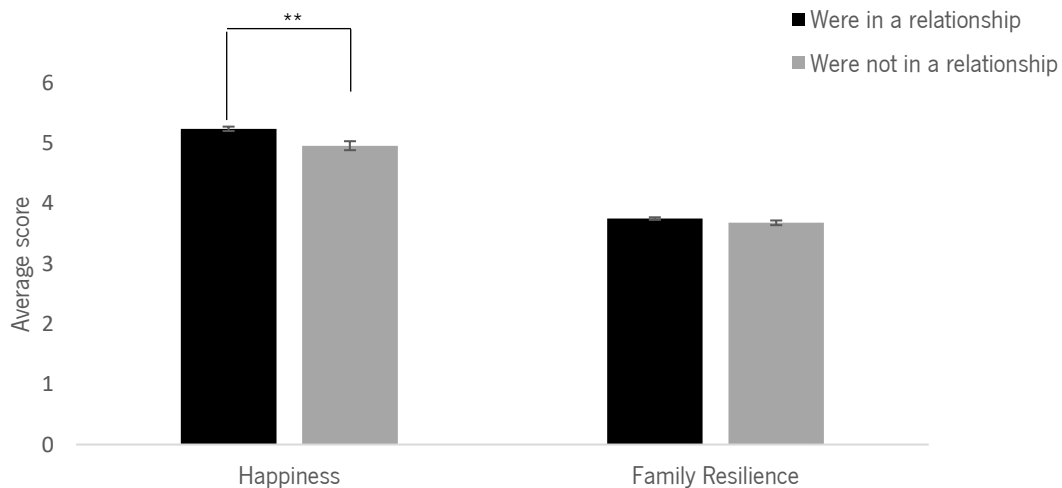


Figure 2. Average scores for differences between individuals who were in a relationship and those who were not. Errors bars represent standard error. ** $p < .01$.

Differences between individuals who lived with partner and those who did not during the lockdown

IMPACT OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ON ONLINE INFIDELITY AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

A *t* test for independent samples showed a statistically significant difference between these groups. Thus, individuals who lived with partner during lockdown were happier ($M_{HAP} = 5.35$, $SD_{HAP} = 1.20$) and showed higher levels of family resilience ($M_{FR} = 3.90$, $SD_{FR} = .64$) compared with individuals who did not live with partner ($M_{HAP} = 5.13$, $SD_{HAP} = 1.22$; $M_{FR} = 3.62$, $SD_{FR} = .74$), $t(1116) = -3.039$, $p < .01$ and $t(1061.117) = -6.472$, $p < .001$, respectively. However, individuals who lived with partner reported lower levels of relationship quality ($M_{RQ} = 5.97$, $SD_{RQ} = 1.12$), than those who did not ($M_{RQ} = 6.31$, $SD_{RQ} = 0.88$), $t(1021.224) = 5.624$, $p < .001$.

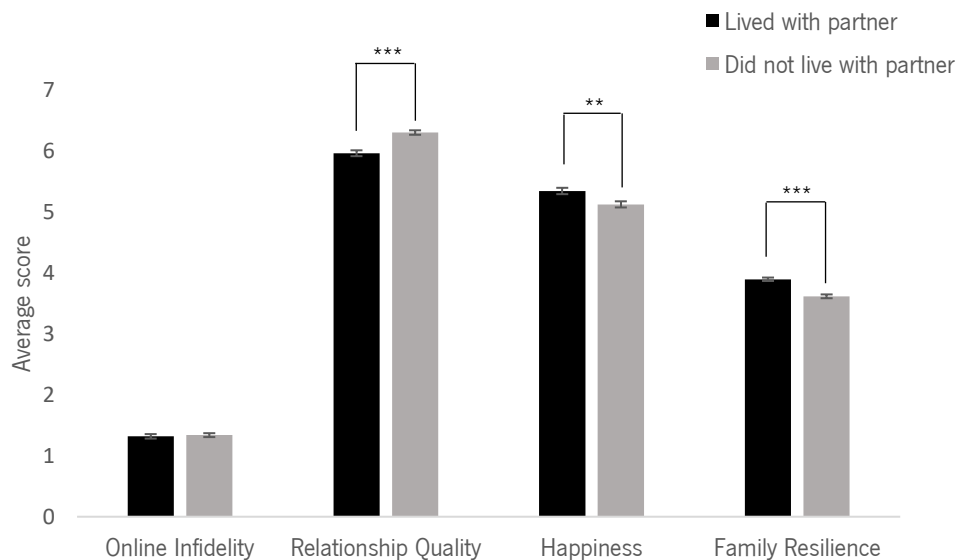


Figure 1. Average scores for differences between who lived with partner and those who did not during the lockdown. Errors bars represent standard error. *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$.

Differences between health professionals and non-health professionals

Our results showed, through a *t* test for independent samples, that there was a statistically significant difference between health professionals and non-health professionals. More specifically, health professionals reported lower online extradyadic behaviors ($M_{OI} = 1.20$, $SD_{OI} = .39$) and lower levels of relationship quality ($M_{RQ} = 5.79$, $SD_{RQ} = 1.22$) compared with non-health professionals ($M_{OI} = 1.32$, $SD_{OI} = .78$; $M_{RQ} = 6.18$, $SD_{RQ} = .98$), $t(124.442) = -2.266$, $p < .05$ and $t(77.142) = -2.612$, $p < .05$, respectively.

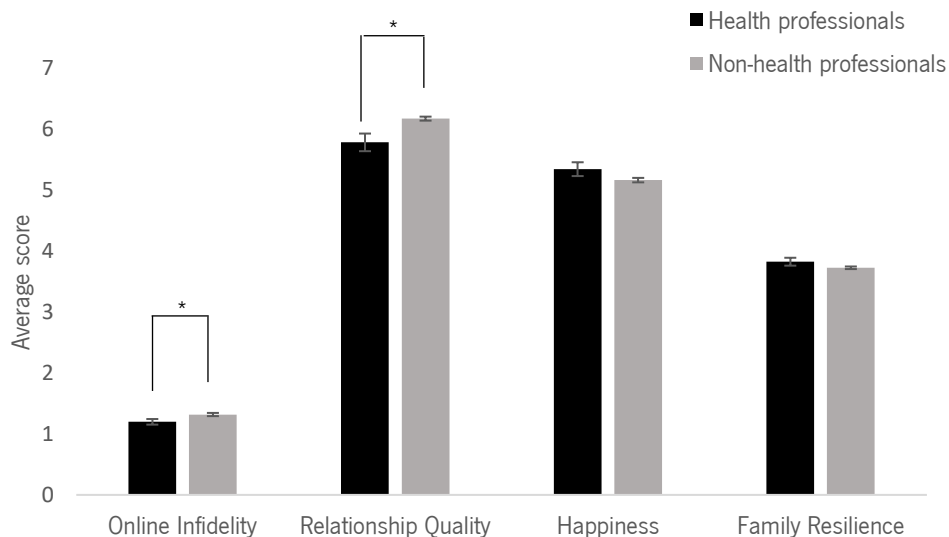


Figure 4. Average scores for differences between health professionals and non-health professionals. Errors bars represent standard error. * $p < .05$.

Differences in professional situations

Unidirectional ANOVAS were performed to examine possible differences in online infidelity, relationship quality, happiness, and family resilience depending on professional situations of the participants. Results showed a significant effect of online infidelity, $F(3,752) = 2.911, p < .05$. Post-hoc Tukey tests showed that there was a significant difference between individuals who were unemployed ($M_{OI} = 1.33, SD_{OI} = .77$) and those that were retired ($M_{OI} = 2.28, SD_{OI} = 1.81$), $p < .05$, between those who were retired and were part-time employees ($M_{OI} = 1.33, SD_{OI} = .78$), $p < .05$, and between who were retired and were full-time employees ($M_{OI} = 1.34, SD_{OI} = .86$), $p < .05$, so those who showed higher values of extradyadic behaviors were those who were retired.

Results also showed a significant effect of relationship quality $F(3,771) = 4.877, p < .01$. Post-Hoc Tukey tests indicated that there was a significant difference between individuals who were unemployed ($M_{RQ} = 6.25, SD_{RQ} = .97$) and who were retired ($M_{RQ} = 5.06, SD_{RQ} = 1.88$), $p < .05$, in which relationship quality was higher for who were unemployed. Differences were also found between individuals who were unemployed and were full-time employees ($M_{RQ} = 6.01, SD_{RQ} = 1.06$), $p < .05$, in which unemployed individuals showed a higher relationship quality and finally, between who were retired and were part-time employees ($M_{RQ} = 6.19, SD_{RQ} = 1.00$), $p < .05$, where those who reported a higher relationship quality were part-time employees.

In addition, results showed a significant effect of happiness, $F(3,906) = 4.722, p < .01$. Post-hoc Tukey tests showed that there was a significant difference between who were unemployed ($M_{HAP} =$

5.06, $SD_{HAP} = 1.37$) and who were full-time employees ($M_{HAP} = 5.35$, $SD_{HAP} = 1.16$), $p < .05$, in which who were full-time employees showed higher levels of happiness.

Finally, results showed a significant effect of family resilience, $F(3,871) = 10.761$, $p < .001$. Thus, Post-hoc Tukey test indicated that there was a significant difference between who were unemployed ($M_{FR} = 3.63$, $SD_{FR} = .73$) and who were retired ($M_{FR} = 4.21$, $SD_{FR} = .45$), $p < .05$, whereby, those who were retired reported greater family resilience. In addition, there was statistically significant differences between individuals who were unemployed and full-time employees ($M_{FR} = 3.88$, $SD_{FR} = .62$), $p < .001$, demonstrating greater family resilience those who were full-time employees. Results also showed differences between who were retired and part-time employees ($M_{FR} = 3.66$, $SD_{FR} = .74$), $p < .05$, in which, individuals who were retired reported greater family resilience. At last, there was a significant difference between who were part-time employees and full-time employees, $p < .01$, in which full-time employees demonstrated greater family resilience.

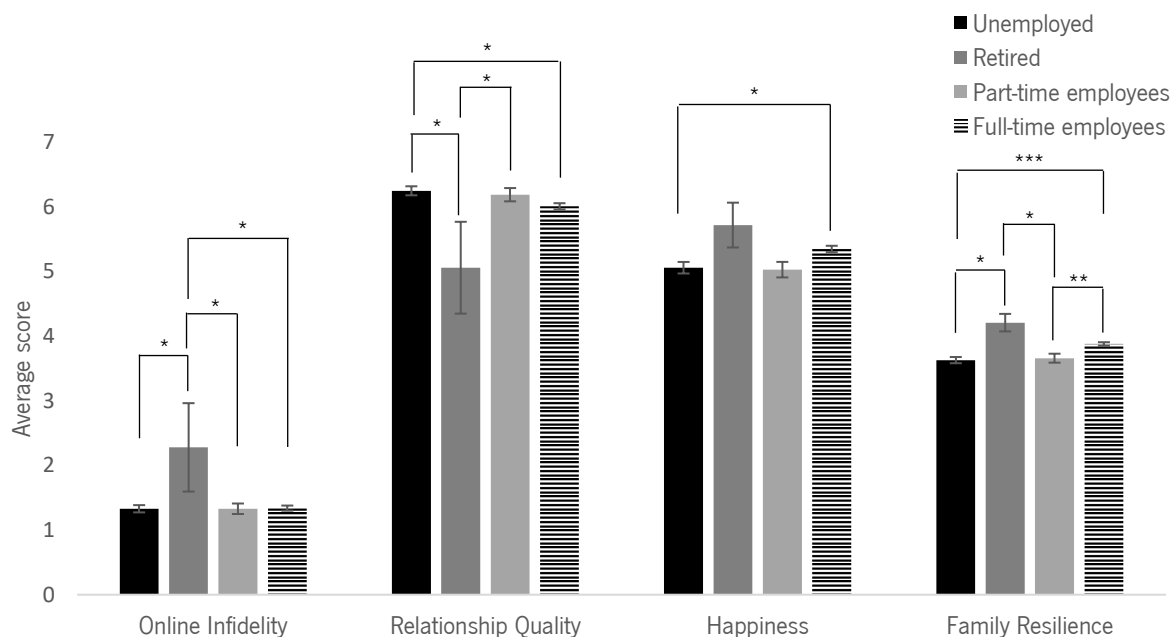


Figure 5. Average scores for differences in professional situations. Errors bars represent standard error.

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent social isolation has led many couples faced a strong impact on their daily lives (Luetke et al., 2020, Relvas et al., 2020). Due to the existence of gaps in the literature regarding the effect of lockdown time on online infidelity and on the quality of intimate relationships during the first lockdown, it became crucial to conduct the present study. This study addressed these gaps by examining the impact of the first national lockdown on intimate relationships in respect to online infidelity and relationship quality as a function of lockdown time. In addition, we also

analyzed the relationship between relationship quality and online infidelity, as well as the relationship between: happiness and online infidelity, happiness and relationship quality, family resilience and online infidelity and between family resilience and relationship quality.

Our first hypothesis stated that individuals would have more online extradyadic behaviors as the number of days in lockdown increased. Results showed that males, but not females, reported a higher number of online extradyadic behaviors as the number of days in lockdown increased– which was only particularly consistent with our hypothesis. Online infidelity was higher for men than for women as the lockdown days increased that can be explained by the fact that men are more prone to infidelity than women, both online and face-to-face, and both the married and those in a dating relationship, and for this reason, the male gender has been repeatedly associated with infidelity (Abbasi, 2019; Allen & Baucom, 2004; Fincham & May, 2017; Luo et al., 2010; Martins et al., 2016). Some authors claim that this is because men are the ones who most seek relationships through the Internet and the ones who have a greater need to search for new sensations (Lalaz & Weigel, 2011; Scheeren et al., 2018). This search for new sensations making them more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as online infidelity (Lalaz & Weigel, 2011; Scheeren et al., 2018; Schneider, 2000; Underwood & Findlay, 2004). In addition, internet dependence is more common for men than women (Kannan et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2020). During the lockdown, people spent more time at home, and therefore used internet more inevitably, either for telework, distance learning and to communicate with others via social networks (Giola et al., 2021; Morais & Lunet, 2020). So, the increased time spent on the Internet may have developed dependence on technologies and behaviors that may have proved problematic specially for men, which may explain the greater tendency to engage in online infidelity behaviors (Arora et al., 2021; Lalaz & Weigel, 2011; Young et al., 2000). On the other hand, women were during this period busier with traditional household chores, such as: cooking, cleaning, shopping and concerned with caring for their children than men thus having less time and availability for other types of activities compared to men (Erickson, 2005; Pires, 2020; United Nations, 2020).

Results showed that individuals reported lower perceived relationship quality as the number of days in lockdown increased, which confirms the second hypothesis. The Covid-19 has been shown to increase the stress in both males and females (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2021), which is a predictor of low relationship quality (Bodenmann et al., 2010; Relvas et al., 2020). According to Balzarini and collaborators (2020) a greater number of stressors related to covid-19 (e.g., social isolation, financial problems, and stress) were associated with greater relationship conflicts. Furthermore, a study conducted by Luetke and collaborators (2020) concluded that couples who experienced more conflicts

during the pandemic were those who reported a lower frequency of intimate and sexual acts, which may have led to decreased relationship satisfaction and quality (Allen et al., 2005; Gordon & Mitchell, 2020). It is important to note that the increase of conflicts may have happened not only in couples who lived 24 hours together but also in those who were physically separated (Luetke et al., 2020). Thus, the greater the amount of lockdown days, the greater the likelihood of stress, conflicts, reduction in sexual activity, and consequently the greater may be the effect on relationship quality (Brooks et al., 2020; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2021).

The third hypothesis that individuals with lower perceived relationship quality tend to have more online extradyadic behaviors was also confirmed. In fact, according to several authors, the occurrence of infidelity behaviors, both online and face-to-face is predicted by lower relationship quality (Atkins et al., 2001; Li & Zheng, 2017; Martins et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2013). In addition, relationships quality can also be affected by individuals' increased engagement in online interactions with other people rather than their partner, thus verifying a bidirectional process between online interactions that can lead to infidelity and a lower relationship quality (Nelson & Salawu, 2017; Valenzuela et al., 2014). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the decrease of relationship quality due to different predisposing factors (e.g., conflicts, stress, financial problems), increases the likelihood of looking for potential alternative partners, and consequently the occurrence of extradyadic behaviors (Balzarini et al., 2020; Conger et al., 1999; Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2021; Scheeren & Wagner, 2019). These extradyadic behaviors are more likely to occur on the internet due to the social isolation (Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Morais & Lunet, 2020; Silva, 2020).

Our results revealed that less happy individuals reported more online extradyadic behaviors. These findings are consistent with our fourth hypothesis. In the context of the lockdown, social isolation has been shown to have as consequence changes in the psychological well-being of people, such as decreased happiness (Baron et al., 2020; Droit-Volet et al., 2020; Király et al., 2020). According to Elmslie and Tebaldi (2014) when people are more unhappy, they tend to show more infidelity behaviors. Thus, according to the present study and as for first general lockdown, decreased happiness (Baron et al., 2020; Király et al., 2020) showed an association with greater engagement in online infidelity behaviors. This may be explained by the fact that the internet was the most used platform during the lockdown and may have been used as a way to replace the low levels of happiness caused by it (Longstreet & Brooks, 2017; Luetke et al., 2020; Morais & Lunet, 2020; Pires, 2020; Ward et al., 2018). However, this form of replacement may have proved problematic and led to increased engagement in online extradyadic behaviors (Arora et al., 2021; Hertlein & Piercy, 2006).

We hypothesize that less happy individuals would have lower perceived relationship quality. Results were consistent with this hypothesis. Individuals who are unhappy in their lives may see the quality of their interactions with partners affected, but also tend to make more negative attributions towards their relationship, looking at it from a more negative perspective thus contributing to a decrease in the well-being of the relationship (Gustavson et al., 2016; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Ruvolo, 1998). Research has been showing that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a decrease in overall happiness levels (Arslan et al., 2020; Baron et al., 2020), which may have affected the relationships quality due to the development of negative perceptions towards both the partner and the relationship (Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Gustavson et al., 2016; Ruvolo, 1998).

Our results revealed that individuals with lower levels of family resilience will have more online extradyadic behaviors, confirming our sixth hypothesis. On the one hand, it is known that, often, within families, there is a great difficulty in, for example, share household chores, equalizing the time spent between mother and father on childcare, establishing family rituals, and having conversations during meals, whereby all of which are crucial to the effective functioning of the family (Fiese, 2006, Imber-Black, 2002; Wagner et al., 2005). All these difficulties may affect the family's emotional bonding and resilience especially during stressful situations, such as the pandemic, facilitating instability not only in family life but also in marital life (Fiese, 2006; Lavee & Katz, 2002; Seccombe, 2002). This instability may consequently lead to greater marital conflicts (Balzarini et al., 2020; Luetke et al., 2020). Since the emergence of conflicts is associated with lower quality in the marital relationship (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007; Ledermann et al., 2007; Luetke et al., 2020) and since lower relationship quality is one of the triggers of infidelity behaviors (Allen et al., 2005; Li & Zheng, 2017; Shaw et al., 2013), lower family resilience may lead to greater involvement in extradyadic behaviors. On the other hand, family of origin has a high influence on the lives of young people, which is reflected later in their relationships (Nelas et al., 2016). Therefore, the education that young people receive from their parents influences the behavior they will have in future intimate relationships (Nelas et al., 2016; Weiser et al., 2015). Thus, family of origin experiences may influence one's behavior in their relationships leading to a greater likelihood of infidelity (Fish et al., 2012; Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Sori, 2007). This can be exacerbated during the pandemic due to emerging difficulties within families (Gordon & Mitchell, 2020; Weiser et al., 2015).

Finally, the seventh hypothesis that individuals with lower levels of family resilience would have lower perceived relationship quality was also confirmed. Resilience within a family can affect the relationship quality as a couple, because if the family is more resilient it will be able to develop more adaptive responses in the face of adversity and, therefore, the resources existing in an intimate

relationship can decrease the likelihood of conflict and consequently the likelihood of affecting the relationship quality (Conger & Conger, 2002; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007; Orthner et al., 2004; Patterson, 2002). Thus, families who perceive themselves as stronger may be those who can more easily cope with the difficulties that arise and who will therefore be able to maintain the quality of the marital relationship (Huber et al., 2010; Orthner et al., 2004; Patterson, 2002). Research has also shown that children who have grown up in a family environment marked by divorce or low parental relationship quality tend to develop false beliefs or counterproductive attitudes about their intimate relationships when they grow up, which undermines their role as a partner (Gardner et al., 2011; Hee et al., 2020; Hetherington, 2003). Therefore, they are more prone to poor partner choices, higher levels of conflict with their partners, difficulties in communicating, and consequently a greater likelihood of divorce (Amato & Cheadle, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Hee et al., 2020; Hetherington, 2003). Thus, the low levels of family resilience in the family of origin can be reflected in the intimate relationships of their children (Gordon & Mitchell, 2020).

Beyond these results, others proved to be equally important. For example, our results show that health professionals reported less online infidelity behaviors and lower relationship quality than non-health professionals. These findings may be explained by their high workload and consequently low amount of time available during the pandemic (Barroso et al., 2020). Moreover, in our study we considered it important to compare individuals who were in a relationship with those who were not. This proved to be important since it was not only individuals in an intimate relationship who faced several challenges during the pandemic (Relvas et al., 2020). Such was also proven to be the case for single individuals, where higher symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress during the lockdown were found (Shah et al., 2021; Stanton et al., 2020), which may be associated with the feeling of loneliness and social isolation during this period (Matthews et al., 2016). Results of the present study showed that individuals who were in an intimate relationship were happier than those who were not. Dush and Amato (2005) reported in their study that being in an intimate relationship contributes to an individual's well-being regardless of whether or not the individual is happy in their relationship. Having some type of relationship (e.g., marriage, dating), according to some authors, is preferable to not having none since, in a relationship, individuals tend to feel better not only about themselves but also about their lives (Dush & Amato, 2005; House et al., 1998).

In this research it is important to emphasize some limitations. First, because we used self-report measures, participants' responses may have been influenced by social desirability, they may have difficulty understanding the instructions and some specific questions, and they may have experience

deficits in their introspective capacity (Demetriou et al., 2015). Second, the average age is 28 years, and thus it would be interesting to conduct a similar study with an older sample to examine whether the same pattern of results would be obtained. Third, our sample consisted mainly of women. Therefore, future studies could include a sample with the same number of female and male participants. Fourth, participants responded to the questionnaire individually, and it would be interesting to collect data from both members of the couple.

In conclusion, the Covid-19 pandemic has a worldwide effect (Achdut & Refaeli, 2020) and, therefore, it is of major importance to deeply to understand how it has affected intimate relationships, including relationship quality and extradyadic behaviors, since in China and Hong Kong, for example, the number of requests of divorce increased during this period (Ibarra et al., 2020). The present study introduced the novelty of analyzing the influence of lockdown time in online infidelity and relationships quality. Results allowed us to understand that social isolation that occurred during the lockdown has caused (and likely will continue to cause) negative consequences on intimate relationships, especially as lockdown days increased, which shows that the lockdown time had a great influence on the occurrence of online infidelity and on the relationships dyad. In addition, we also found that happiness and family resilience also tended to affect relationships during this period. As the pandemic is such an atypical period, its effects can extend over time and, therefore, it is essential to develop prevention and adaptation plans in view of the effects that may arise in intimate relationships. These interventions and the role of the psychologist could help the development of relationship protective factors, such as better communication, cohesion, commitment, trust, and intimacy.

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Anexo: Parecer Comissão de Ética para a Investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas



Universidade do Minho

Conselho de Ética

Comissão de Ética para a Investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas

Identificação do documento: CEICSH 044/2021

Relatores: Emanuel Pedro Viana Barbas Albuquerque e Marlene Alexandra Veloso Matos

Título do projeto: *Consequências do isolamento social nos relacionamentos amorosos devido à Covid-19*

Equipa de Investigação: Diana Raquel Henriques Teixeira e Leticia Dias da Costa (IRs), Mestrado Integrado em Psicologia, Escola de Psicologia, Universidade do Minho; Joana Arantes (Orientadora), Escola de Psicologia, Universidade do Minho

PARECER

A Comissão de Ética para a Investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas (CEICSH) analisou o processo relativo ao projeto de investigação acima identificado, intitulado *Consequências do isolamento social nos relacionamentos amorosos devido à Covid-19*.

Os documentos apresentados revelam que o projeto obedece aos requisitos exigidos para as boas práticas na investigação com humanos, em conformidade com as normas nacionais e internacionais que regulam a investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas.

Face ao exposto, a Comissão de Ética para a Investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas (CEICSH) nada tem a opor à realização do projeto nos termos apresentados no Formulário de Identificação e Caracterização do Projeto, que se anexa, emitindo o seu parecer favorável, que foi aprovado por unanimidade pelos seus membros.

Braga, 31 de maio de 2021.

O Presidente da CEICSH

(Acílio Estanqueiro Rocha)

Anexo: Formulário de identificação e caracterização do projeto