

Impact of COVID-19 in Spain: Associations on adjustment and parent-child relations from two cohorts of emerging adults

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BACKGROUND

- The global COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented psychological effect on young people and their family relationships. The lockdown imposed as a result of the pandemic triggered important changes in parent-emerging adult offspring processes and relationships, as well as to affecting the adjustment of young people.
- Emerging adulthood (EA) is a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, instability and open possibilities and has singular implications for adjustment with high rates of health symptomatology and mental disorders that become more prevalent during these years.
- The pandemic has greatly limited to emerging adults the opportunities for financial self-sufficiency, leaving home, personal and professional stability and their abilities to reach these achievements and preparing for adult lives. Recent research found that the pandemic and related restrictions to it are associated with poorer adjustment during emerging adulthood.

AIMS

Main aim:

The current study aims to examine the associations between parent-child relationships (parental involvement and parental warmth) and adjustment (flourishing and depression, anxiety, stress) during emerging adulthood in Spain before (2015) and during (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specific aims:



- To explore differences in parenting dimensions (parental involvement and parental warmth) and adjustment (flourishing, depression, anxiety, and stress) between two cohorts before and during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- To determine how the pandemic affected the relationship between these same parenting dimensions and emerging adults' adjustment.

METHOD

Participants

The research compares 1732 emerging adults aged between 18 and 29 years from two different cohorts who participated in the Transition to Adulthood in Spain (TAE) Project. The participants were collected at Universidad de Sevilla and at Escuela Universitaria de Osuna. Regarding the participants from Osuna in Cohort 2 was recruited in spring 2020, before the lockdown and was called pre-pandemic sample, and the participants from Sevilla in Cohorts 2 were collected on autumn 2020 during Covid crisis, and therefore was called COVID-19 sample. In the Cohort 1 participants were 755 emerging adults (66.7% women, 33.3% men; $M = 20.20$, $SD = 2.10$) and Cohort 2 participants were 977 emerging adults (69.7% women, 29.8% men and 0.5% others; $M = 21.15$, $SD = 2.67$).

Figure 1: Sample design

	EU Osuna	Universidad Sevilla	N
2015 (Cohort 1)	 Sample 1 (n= 201)	 Sample 1 (n= 554)	755
2020 (Cohort 2)	Sample 2 (n= 198)	Sample 2 (n= 779)	977
	Recruited before the state of emergency (Pre-pandemic)	Recruited in the autumn 2020 (Covid-19)	1732

MEASURES

- Sociodemographic variables
- Parental involvement and warmth: Parental Perceptions of Parents Scales (POPS), College Student Version (Grolnick et al., 1991; Robbins, 1994).
- Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) Spanish adaptation (Bados et al., 2005).
- Flourishing: Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010) Spanish version (De la Fuente et al., 2017).

RESULTS

Result showed stability in family relationships variables between 2015 and 2020 pre-pandemic sample (both samples 1, Sevilla and Osuna) but a decrease in parental involvement and parental warmth between 2015 and 2020 covid-19 sample (samples 2, Sevilla and Osuna).

Parental involvement and parental warmth showed negative and significantly associations with depression, anxiety and stress, and positive one with flourishing for both cohorts.

Results also revealed that intercorrelations between parental warmth, and emerging adults' flourishing in C2 were stronger than in C1 for both samples (*Fisher's Z* = -3.84, $p < .001$ for pre-pandemic (EU Osuna); *Fisher's Z* = -1.74, $p = .04$ for Covid-19 U. Sevilla). Besides, the intercorrelation between parental warmth and emerging adults' depression and anxiety in C2 was stronger than in C1 only for pre-pandemic (EU Osuna) (*Fisher's Z* = 2.23; $p = .013$ for depression, *Fisher's Z* = 1.72; $p = .042$ for anxiety). In sample 2, parental warmth negatively correlates with stress more strongly in cohort 2 compared to cohort 1 (*Fisher's Z* = -1.645; $p = .05$).

Regarding parental involvement, intercorrelations between this family variable and emerging adults' flourishing were stronger in C2 than in C1 only for sample 2 (*Fisher's Z* = -1.84; $p = .033$).

These findings revealed that high-quality parent-child relations continued to be a protective factor against mental illness among emerging adults even under adverse conditions as those experienced during COVID-19 pandemic when family relationships is deteriorated. It is necessary to develop psychological interventions aimed at fostering the protecting role of family to promote the emerging adults' psychosocial wellbeing.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and t-tests for Independent Samples, for Parenting Variables and Adjustment

Measure	C1 Sample 1 (U. Osuna)		C2 Pre-pandemic sample (U. Osuna)		t(df)	p	Cohen's d	95% CI
	M	SD	M	SD				
Parental involvement	5.78	1.14	5.77	1.15	.133(395)	.895	.01	[-0.21, -0.24]
Parental warmth	6.22	.97	6.22	1.05	-.054(395)	.957	.00	[-0.20, 0.19]
Flourishing	48.74	4.82	47.90	5.55	1.615(387.604)	.107	.16	[-0.18, 1.86]
Depression	7.96	7.19	12.12	10.71	-4.540(344.111)	.000	.46	[-5.95, -2.36]
Anxiety	8.07	7.97	10.00	9.89	-2.137(377.422)	.033	.21	[-3.69, -0.15]
Stress	13.15	8.88	15.69	10.96	-2.547(378.212)	.011	.25	[-4.51, -0.58]

	C1 Sample 2 (U. Sevilla)		C2 S2 COVID-19 Sample (U. Sevilla)		t(df)	p	Cohen's d	95% CI
	M	SD	M	SD				
Parental involvement	5.52	1.17	5.30	1.29	3.113(1252.140)	.002	.40	[0.78, 0.34]
Parental warmth	6.03	1.03	5.77	1.19	4.280(1279.002)	>.001	.23	[0.14, 0.38]
Flourishing	46.16	6.01	44.55	6.92	4.510(1277.942)	>.001	.40	[0.91, 2.30]
Depression	10.28	8.63	15.52	10.87	-9.777(1307.384)	.000	.53	[-6.30, -4.19]
Anxiety	8.39	8.00	11.50	10.22	-6.199(1311.567)	.000	.34	[-4.09, -2.12]
Stress	14.58	9.18	17.74	10.44	-5.825(1264.681)	.000	.32	[-4.22, -2.09]

Note. C1 = Cohort 1 (2015); C2 = Cohort 2 (2020); U = Universidad

Table 2: Sample 1 Intercorrelations for Study Variables Disaggregated by Cohorts

Parenting Variables	Sample 1 Cohort 1 (Osuna)				Sample 1 Cohort 2 (Osuna)			
	Flourishing	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Flourishing	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
Parental involvement	.22***	-.37***	-.23**	-.28***	.36***	-.38**	-.29***	-.22***
Parental warmth	.18***	-.38***	-.28***	-.29***	.52***	-.55***	-.43***	-.42***

p < .05; *p < .001

Table 3: Sample 2 Intercorrelations for Study Variables Disaggregated by Cohorts

Parenting Variables	Sample 2 Cohort 1 (Sevilla)				Sample 2 Cohort 2 (Sevilla)			
	Flourishing	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Flourishing	Depression	Anxiety	Stress
Parental involvement	.26***	-.25***	-.20***	-.18***	.35***	-.32***	-.26***	-.25***
Parental warmth	.35***	-.30***	-.22***	-.19***	.43***	-.37***	-.29***	-.27***

p < .05; *p < .001

CONCLUSION

Findings from this research indicate that the COVID-19 deteriorated family relationships: comparing emerging adults from 2015 with emerging adults from 2020, during Covid crisis, emerging adults reported less involvement and warmth from parents during the pandemic. In relation to emerging adults' adjustment, study findings verify that emerging adults already have high levels of psychological distress before the pandemic. These results agree with previous studies that warn of a deterioration in emerging adults' mental health for some years now (e.g., Krokstad et al., 2022; Wiens, 2020). In relation to emerging adults' mental health, study findings verify that emerging adults already have high levels of psychological distress before the pandemic. These findings revealed that high-quality parent-child relations continued to be a protective factor against mental illness among emerging adults even under adverse conditions as those experienced during COVID-19 pandemic when family relationships is deteriorated. It is necessary to develop psychological interventions aimed at fostering the protecting role of family to promote the emerging adults' psychosocial wellbeing.