



SOCIAL RELATIONS AND OPTIMISM IN THE PERIOD OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

During the Covid-19 pandemic, attempts to limit the spread of the virus through interventions such as physical distancing rules, restrictions, and quarantine influenced social relationships. Personal constructs, such as optimism, have had an effect on future conceptions and life experiences. The present research aimed to capture associations between the way we relate to others, the perception of the quality of social interactions and optimism. Following the analyzes on a representative sample from Romania, adults aged between 18 and 75, we found statistically significant associations between the way of relating (more isolated, more online, more with physical presence) and the disposition towards optimism. We found negative associations between the perception of deteriorating social relationships and optimism. Regarding the level of optimism shown during the pandemic according to gender and age, we did not find any significant differences.

Keywords: *COVID-19, social relations, optimism, pessimism*

1. INTRODUCTION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, governments tried to limit the spread of the virus through non-medical interventions: rules of physical distance, restrictions and quarantine. Social relations have deteriorated or suffered as a result of obstacles imposed. Research has shown that people with high optimism are less involved in behavioral change (Fragkaki & all., 2021). The study of the relationship between optimism and resilience found that there is a positive relationship between constructs (0.507), not only in the usual way, but also in difficult times (Maheshwari, Jutta, 2020). *Optimism* has had a beneficial impact on the pandemic, reducing anxiety and fear, but optimism must lead to positive behavior (Eva & all., 2020) *Optimism-pessimism* and psychological inflexibility mediated the effect of coronavirus on stress and psychological problems in adults (Arslan & all., 2020).

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Optimism and hope mitigate the negative effects of stress on well-being during the pandemic (Genç, Arslan, 2021). While *unrealistic optimism* may provide some psychological benefits in the short term, it could be dangerous due to inadequate assessment of dangerous situations such as those caused by a pandemic (Gassen & all., 2021). The disposition towards optimism can be defined as the tendency to have a positive conception, in general, on the future and the experiences of life (Sirbu, 2016; Stomff, 2019; Rizeanu, Haica, 2020). The concept derives from the *Theory of Self-Regulation* (Vohs & Baumeister, 2017).

The amplitude of personality factors, in this case optimism, determines a certain type of coping. The accumulation of unwanted experiences, failures or the perception of helplessness can generate confusion and high anxiety (Rizeanu, 2013) which correlates negatively with optimism (Bratu, Rizeanu, 2018, Vasiliu, 2017a). The person can adopt, depending on the meanings and consequences of the events (Kreitler, Kreitler, 1993), passive or active coping strategies (Paulhan, Bourgeois, 1995). Defense mechanisms can be triggered such as: regression, isolation, return to one's own person, apathetic retreat, rejection of reality or projection (Ionescu et al., 2007).

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The research aimed to describe a picture of the type of relationship during the COVID pandemic in Romania, the perception of deteriorating social interactions and optimism.

2.2. HYPOTHESES

H1: There are statistically significant differences between the way people socialize during the COVID 19 pandemic and optimism.

H2: There are statistically significant relationships between the perception of deteriorating social relations during the pandemic and optimism.

H3: There are statistically significant differences between the level of optimism shown during the pandemic related to gender and age.

3. METHOD

Optimism was assessed on a LOT-R scale (Scheier, Carver, Bridges, 1994), with 10 themes.

The perception of the quality of social relationships, the answer to the question: "Have your social interactions deteriorated lately?", Was measured on a seven-step Likert scale where "1" = significant and "7" = almost none.

The way of social realization was operationalized in three categories:

- REL = 1 "For the last two years I have spent most of my time in solitary confinement",

- REL = 2 "In the last two years I have interacted with other people more online",

- REL = 3 "In the last two years I have been in contact with other people more with physical presence".

The questionnaire was filled in online. Participants were informed about the objectives pursued, the content of the evidence used and the fact that participation is voluntary, while respecting the confidentiality of personal data and the results of the evaluation. The provisions of the deontological code of the profession of psychologist with the right of free practice (2019) were respected. Following the collection of data from the participants, resulted the distributions of the social relations modalities adopted in the COVID pandemic 19 (Fig. 1).

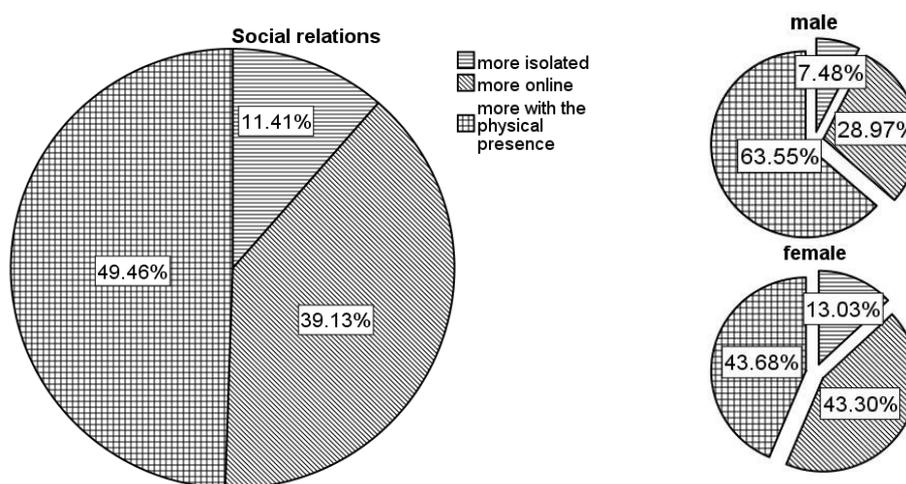


Figure 1. Distributions of social relations modalities adopted in the COVID 19 pandemic

Statistical analyzes were performed with the PSPP program and the 95% confidence interval was calculated with the Practical Meta-Analysis Effect Size Calculator.

An ex-post-facto non-experimental plan of an ascertaining type was chosen (Vasiliu, 2018, p.21):

N: O₁ O₂

where O1 represents the application of the social relationship mode and O2 represents the evaluation of optimism.

4. RESULTS

Participants answered all the items and the data ranged between the minimum and maximum values assumed by each questionnaire. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test showed that the distribution of the variable optimism ($m = 16.07$, $me = 16$) is nonparametric ($p < 0.05$) and the others are categorical. Non-parametric statistical tests were chosen. The Box-Plot analysis did not reveal any aberrant values that would significantly influence the research result.

The Kendall's tau b statistical test was applied to verify the first null hypothesis (Tab. 1). We found statistically significant, positive associations between REL - the way of social relationship and optimism ($K\tau = 0.230$, $p = 0.001$, 95% CI = 0.1308: 0.3246). We rejected the null hypothesis.

Table 1. The association between the way of socialization during the pandemic and optimism

	1.	2.
1. Social relations	1.000	.
2. Optimism	.230**	1.000
	.000	.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Following the application of the Mann-Whitney U test, we found significant differences between the averages of the ranks for optimism depending on the mode of relationship (REL) as follows: between REL = 1 and REL = 2 ($U = 1843,500$, $N1 = 42$, $N2 = 114$, $p = 0.001$); between REL = 1 and REL = 3 ($U = 1814,500$, $N1 = 42$, $N2 = 182$, $p = 0.001$); between REL = 2 and REL = 3 ($U = 10518,000$, $N1 = 144$, $N2 = 182$, $p = 0.002$). The calculated effect size (Pallant, 2007, p. 225) was average in all situations, so the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and seems to be quite important from a practical point of view (Vasiliu, 2018, p. 103). Figure 2 shows the results.

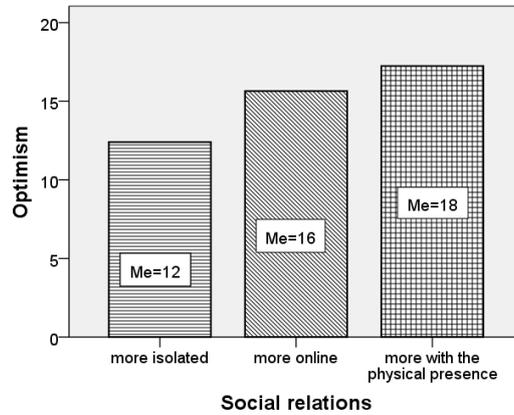


Figure 2. Optimism according to the ways of social relations adopted in the pandemic

The Kendall's tau_b statistical test was applied to verify the second null hypothesis (Tab. 2). We found statistically significant, negative associations between the perception of the deterioration of social relations during the pandemic and optimism ($K\tau = -0.322$, $p = 0.001$, 95% CI = -0.2272: -0.4107). I rejected the null hypothesis. The size is average ($r = 0.322$) so the effect obtained is unlikely to have occurred by chance and seems to be quite important from a practical point of view. (Vasiliu, 2018, p. 103).

Table 2. The association between the perception of the deterioration of social relations in the pandemic and optimism

	1.	2.
1. Optimism	1.000	-.322**
	.	.000
2. deterioration of social interactions	-.322*	1.000
	.000	.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Kendall's tau_b statistical test was applied to verify the third null hypothesis (Tab. 3). We did not find statistically significant associations between the ranks of the analyzed variables. In the case of the variable Age, the confidence interval contains the value "0" (95% CI = -0.0284: 0.1749). Moreover, the critical value of the association coefficient for a number of degrees of freedom $df > 300$ and a statistical significance $p = 0.05$ is critical = 0.095. In this situation $r = 0.074 < r_{critic}$. I accepted the null hypothesis.

Table 3. Associations between age, gender and optimism

	1.	2.	3.
1. Optimism	1.000	.074*	-.032
	.	.041	.461
2. Age	.074*	1.000	-.201**
	.041	.	.000
3. Gender	-.032	-.201**	1.000
	.461	.000	.

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The ascertaining research allows us to formulate the following conclusions:

1. The way different people related during the pandemic (more isolated, more online or more with physical presence) is positively associated with optimism. Concern for exercising control over the environment generates a tendency to assert control even in conditions of uncertainty, chaos or stress (Vohs & Baumeister, 2017). The pandemic favored such conditions and the uncertainty led to confusion about the meanings and consequences of events (Kreitler, Kreitler, 1993). Pessimistic people have adopted a pragmatic position in the face of danger, they have complied more with the restrictions, leading to the triggering of at least two defense mechanisms: turning to oneself and apathetic withdrawal (Ionescu et al., 2007). Optimistic people were more likely to be active coping (Paulhan, Bourgeois, 1995). In some non-transformable situations, exaggerated optimism has led to persistence in trying to transform them, which has led to negative effects (Gassen & all., 2021). Following a study conducted in the period before the pandemic, on a sample of 357 adults in Romania, the descriptive characteristics of optimism were determined ($m = 16.10$. $Me = 16$) (Vasiliu, 2017). Comparing with the results of the present study, for optimism ($m = 16.07$, $me = 16$), we can observe that, in general, no significant changes took place.

2. The perception regarding the deterioration of social relations during the pandemic was positively associated with optimism. Positive or negative conceptions of the future depending on the tendency towards optimism or pessimism (Sîrbu, 2016; Țânculescu-Popa, 2021) have affected the way of approaching social relations. High optimism has led to less involvement in behavioral change (Fragkaki & all., 2021), including in maintaining relationships and continuing them in the same way as under normal conditions.

3. The results showed that there are no significant differences in optimism based on gender or age. The world is perceived as a result of subjective information processing that structures personal constructs. Assignment of

meanings, rational and voluntary cognitive process, as a result of which beliefs and motivation guide and trigger behavior (Kreitler, Kreitler, 1993) do not differ depending on the two independent variables.

Further research should follow to what extent this picture is relatively stable.

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Practical Meta-Analysis Effect Size Calculator:

<http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/escalc/html/EffectSizeCalculator-R-main.php> [accesat în 11 ianuarie 2022].

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