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ARAŞTIRMA

Açık Erişim

COVID-19 Stress in Married Individuals in Terms of Dyadic Coping and Problem-Solving in Marriage

Evlü Bireylerde Covid 19 Stresinin Evlilikte Problem Çözme ve Stresle Çift Olarak Baş Etme Açısından İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between the levels of married individuals being affected by the new life form that has emerged due to COVID-19 and the variables of dyadic coping with stress and problem-solving in marriage. The study group consists of 487 married individuals (77% women, 23% men) living in Turkey. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used in data analysis. It is found that regression model was significant and 46% of the COVID-19 pandemic effect was explained by problem-solving in marriage and dyadic coping with stress. The effect of both predictor variables on the COVID-19 Impact Index was moderate. This finding reveals that the couple can show greater resilience in the face of challenging life events if the ability to jointly cope with stress and problem solving is acquired. Explaining the impact of stressful life events such as Covid 19 on dyadic or triadic relationships with internal variables such as personality provides less information about the nature of relationships. In a couple relationship, the way one of the partners copes with stress and solves problems can be a source of stress for the other. For this reason, there is a need for studies that reflect the social context in studies examining the couple relationship.

Article Information

Keywords

Covid 19 pandemic, dyadic coping, problem solving, married individuals

Anahtar Kelimeler

Covid 19 pandemisi, stresle çift olarak baş etme, problem çözme, evli bireyler

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, evli bireylerin COVID-19 nedeniyle ortaya çıkan yeni yaşam biçiminden etkilenme düzeyleri ile evlilikte stresle çift olarak baş etme ve problem çözme değişkenleri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma grubunu Türkiye'de yaşayan 487 evli birey (%77 kadın, %23 erkek) oluşturmaktadır. Verilerin analizinde hiyerarşik çoklu regresyon analizi kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına bakıldığında regresyon modelinin anlamlı olduğu ve COVID-19 pandemi etkisinin %46'sının evlilikte problem çözme ve stresle çift olarak baş etme ile açıklandığı bulunmuştur. Her iki yordayıcı değişkenin COVID-19 Etki Endeksi üzerindeki etkisi orta düzeydedir. Bu bulgu, çifte stresle ortak başa çıkma ve problem çözme becerisinin kazandırılması halinde çiftin zorlayıcı yaşam olayları karşısında daha fazla dayanıklılık gösterebileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Covid 19 gibi stresli yaşam olaylarının ikili veya üçlü ilişkiler üzerindeki etkisini kişilik gibi içsel değişkenlerle açıklamak, ilişkilerin doğası hakkında daha az bilgi sağlar. Çift ilişkisinde partnerlerden birinin stresle başa çıkma ve problem çözme tarzı, karşısındaki açısından bir stres kaynağı olabilir. Bu nedenle çift ilişkisini inceleyen çalışmalarda sosyal bağlamı yansıtan çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır.

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INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic has affected and continues to affect lives in many aspects. The global COVID-19 pandemic, for which the whole world and the WHO were caught largely unprepared, has primarily forced the health systems owing to the nature of the phenomenon. Moreover, it has influenced social life at both macro and micro levels. The pandemic and the vital changes resulting from the pandemic have affected the individual and interpersonal dynamics as well as the married individuals' in different ways. Thus, Bradbury (2020) described the pandemic in an interview as "a stressful experience that can damage even the best relationships, no matter how well the couple gets along or their communication at home is" (personal communication). However, in a study shedding light on the relationship between stress and a couple's satisfaction with the relationship, it is revealed how significant the partners' support for each other under stressful conditions is (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Based on this information, it can be said that the extent to which married individuals are affected by the new living conditions caused by the pandemic depends on their ability to solve social problems together and cope with stress.

The fact that coping with stress and problem-solving are rather addressed as an intrapsychic variable in the relevant literature may cause ignoring the social context. However, we consider that addressing these variables in the context of dyadic relationship (interpsychic) will reflect the social reality of the individual more. Consequently, a person's characteristics can be affected by the characteristics of other people who are considered important or with whom he/she is together (Bodenmann, 2005). Thus, the WHO (2003) shows in a study that there is a relationship between weak close social relationships and poor physical and psychological health status. A similar logic emerges in systemic couple therapy. According to this therapy school, one's reality and/or structuring is affected by how other people structure events (Kowalczyk, 2000). Accordingly, we think that investigating the COVID-19 exposure levels of married individuals in terms of intrapersonal variables may provide incomplete information about the extent to which married individuals are affected by this phenomenon. Therefore, it was assumed that married individuals' dyadic coping with stress and problem-solving in marriage would better reflect the nature of the dyadic couple relationship. In line with this, the current study aims to examine the relationship between the levels of married individuals' being affected by the new life form that has emerged due to COVID-19 and the variables of dyadic coping with stress and problem-solving in marriage. The explanations about the theoretical background of this study are presented below.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Among stress-related theories, the transactional theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1985) is one of the most important and has significantly influenced the subsequent studies. Although the approach is individual-centered, it has addressed the individual and his/her social environment as a whole; it has also divided the coping attitudes into two, as problem-solving-oriented and emotion-oriented. Since the 1990s, researchers have started to emphasize the importance of social context and the impact of important people in an individual's life in coping with stressful situations (Ledermann, Bodenmann, Gagliardi, Charvoz, Verardi, Rossier, Bertoni and Lafrate, 2010). This change has enabled the concepts of problem-solving, stress, and coping to be addressed as a dual phenomenon in studies on marriage. Folkman (2009) brought dyadic coping to the fore as an extension of the original transactional theory, saying that "dyadic coping is more than the sum of two people's coping responses." This explanation is the cornerstone of modern dyadic coping approaches.

There are multiple approaches addressing problem-solving in marriage as dyadic (Berg & Upchurch, 2007, Bodenmann, 1991; 2005, Coyne & Smith, 1991, DeLongis & O'Brien 1990, Kayser, Watson, & Andrade, 2007, Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan and Coyne, 1998, Revenson, 1994). Although all of the above-mentioned approaches emphasize the importance of addressing the dual phenomenon in coping processes, the Systemic Transactional Model (STM) is the only framework that clearly defines the importance of that stress and coping are mutual. The strengths of this model are that it combines established coping concepts in a dual perspective and addresses positive and negative coping separately (Regan, Lambert, Kelly, Falconier, Kissane & Levesque, 2015). Therefore, we considered the STM as a theoretical basis in our study.

The STM refers to a perspective in which one of the spouses reflects the stress experienced (verbally or non-verbally) and the other spouse responds with different coping responses, taking into account the stress symptoms. According to this approach, stress can be perceived by both spouses directly, or it can be perceived by one of the spouses and reflected on the other spouse. To maintain homeostasis in the couple relationship, the resources of both spouses to cope with stress are mobilized because it is assumed that the well-being and satisfaction of one spouse significantly depend on the well-being and satisfaction of the other spouse (Bodenmann, 1997; 2005; Bodenmann, Pihet & Kayser, 2006). Therefore, the STM considers each spouse's coping efforts in relation to the other's. A spouse's coping with stress is not independent of the other spouse or the outcome. In line with these views, addressing stress with intrapersonal processes or limiting the analysis unit to the "individual" will lead to ignoring the reciprocity of the relationship emphasized in the STM. Prime, Vade and Browne (2020) emphasize that instead of studies focusing on individual resources (Vagni, 2020), encouraging couples' dyadic coping competencies can be a way to improve their ability to cope with stress and anxieties related to the COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, it was thought that it would be more accurate for the unit of analysis in this study to be a "dyadic relationship." Of course, it can be examined in an individual context how individuals are affected by COVID-19. However, this study aimed to examine how married individuals were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of dyadic coping with stress and joint problem-solving. The literature information about the explanatory variables in this study is given below.

With the pandemic and this emerging new life form, parents are trying to fulfill their work responsibilities, on the one hand, and they are trying to fulfill their increasing responsibilities for their children, on the other hand (Fraenkel & Cho, 2020, Goldberg, McCormick & Virginia, 2021). Therefore, this can cause them to experience more stress than usual. According to and Cho (2020), a large number of individuals try to maintain their daily life in the cycle of meeting basic needs and fulfilling domestic responsibilities. Moreover, some families have to grapple with additional stressors such as pandemic-induced unemployment and economic instability (Fraenkel & Cho, 2020). Spouses may also find themselves under stress from different aspects of the pandemic. For example, one spouse may have to take the risk of contagion in his job, while the other may have to take on the sole responsibility of managing household chores and children's online learning. These different stress experiences can tear couples apart, making it harder for them to empathize with each other's struggles. In addition to all these, the difficulty of protecting personal space, one of the most basic points in the continuation of a healthy couple relationship, may also affect the relationship adversely (Pappas, 2020).

Independently of the process, couples on the verge of divorce may enter into more intense conflicts during the quarantine since their commitment to each other, motivation to cooperate, and communication skills will be limited. There is a high possibility that couples with a high risk of contracting

coronavirus will have problems in their spousal relationship due to this increased stress factor (Fraenkel & Cho, 2020). During this period spent at home, while some married individuals have considered spending more time as an opportunity and become more attached to their relationships (Monmouth University Polling Institute, 2020), the others may have become emotionally divorced due to negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, hurt, anger, dislike, or hatred (Hashemi & Homayuni, 2017). An emotionally divorced person may feel that he and/or his/her partner become distant (Hashemi & Homayuni, 2017). However, the expectations of partners from the couple relationship are that their partners are helpful and supportive (Gagliardi, Bodenmann, Heinrichs, Bertoni, Lafrate & Donato, 2013).

As is known, the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected all living areas - especially couples and families. In this process, we have minimized our social relationships and increased the distance. We put ourselves under quarantine, we had to carry our working life to home (home office) and if there was a pupil in the house, we had to move the school to home (homeschooling) - even if our preference was not in this direction. COVID-19 transformed the quantity and quality of the relationship with the household. Previous potential conflict issues started to come to the forefront, and new problems started to emerge due to this stress factor. Of course, it is not possible to say that all married individuals have been affected by this new lifestyle imposed by COVID-19 in the same way and to the same extent. According to Gottman (1994), while the parties try to solve and reconcile problems in an objective way in a constructive marriage, the married individuals who avoid conflict are drawn into themselves. There are intense conflicts and arguments in impulsive marriages. In this new life form that started with COVID-19, it was assumed that if married individuals solved their problems jointly or reached a consensus on this issue, they would be more adversely affected by this process. Thus, many researchers indicate that spouses' conflict resolution skills and relationship patterns are important predictors of marital adjustment and divorce (Firestone and Catlett, 1999; Gottman, 1994; Karney and Bradbury, 1995; Levenson, Carstensen and Gottman, 1993; Prado and Markman, 1999).

Some of these explanations indicate that the married individuals' internal conditions constitute the basis for relationship crises. However, this study is based on the view that external conditions significantly destabilize the bilateral relationship, as stated by Bodenmann (2002). According to Bodenmann (2002), emphasizing that stress can have a devastating effect on the couple's relationship, stress can cause couples to establish negative communication or to withdraw themselves and spend less time. In that case, emotional sharing decreases and results in not being involved in the development of the other. Ultimately, alienation can be observed in the parties, which reduces the quality of the couple's relationship and increases the risk of divorce (Bodenmann, 2002). In our study, it was assumed that staying at home due to COVID-19 was a source of stress. It is thought that married individuals can be committed to dyadic coping with stress caused by the lockdown or pandemic process and problem-solving. The findings to be obtained from here will be useful for both future researches and psychological counselors working in the field of family counseling. Accordingly, the hypotheses of this study were determined as follows:

1. The score that married individuals obtain from the Dyadic Coping Inventory negatively predicts the score they obtain from the COVID-19 Impact Index.
2. The score that married individuals obtain from the Marital Problem Solving Scale negatively predicts the score they obtain from the COVID-19 Impact Index.

METHOD

In line with the hypotheses of the study, the relational survey model, one of the general survey models, was used in this study. Relational survey model aims to determine the existence or degree of co-variance between two or more variables (Karasar, 2011). The study group consists of 487 (%77 women, %23 men) participants living in Turkey. The age range for the participants varied between 23 and 65 years. The mean age was calculated as 37.3 years. The information about the employment status of the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic (See Table 1) and the employment status of their spouses (See Table 2) is presented below.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Values of Working Status of Participants in the Pandemic Process

		Not working	Went to work	Worked from home	Always work from home	Total
Women	<i>f</i>	99	226	34	15	374
	%	26.5	60.4	9.1	4.0	100
Men	<i>f</i>	5	73	26	8	112
	%	4.5	65.2	23.2	7.1	100
Total	<i>f</i>	104	299	60	23	486
	%	21.4	61.5	12.3	4.7	100

As seen in Table 1, 60% of women and 65% of men went to work during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the rate of women who stated that they did not work was 27%, this rate was calculated as approximately 5% in men. While 9% of women stated that they worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, this rate was calculated as 23% for men. Of women, 4% and 7% of men indicate that they always work from home.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Values of Working Status of Participants' Spouse's in the Pandemic Process

		Not working	Went to work	Worked from home	Always work from home	Total
Women	<i>f</i>	29	188	146	12	375
	%	7.7	50.1	38.9	3.2	100
Men	<i>f</i>	38	57	9	8	112
	%	33.9	50.9	8.0	7.1	100
Total	<i>f</i>	67	245	155	20	487
	%	13.8	50.3	31.8	4.1	100

As seen in Table 2, 8% of women and 34% of men state that their spouses are not employed. Of women, 50% and 51% of men stated that their spouses went to work during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it was observed that the rate of women saying that their spouses worked from home was 39%, and this rate for men was 8%. Of women, 3% and 7% of men state that their spouses always work from home.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage Values Regarding the Financial Status of the Participants During the Pandemic Process

		Decreased	Increased	Remained the same	Total
Women	<i>f</i>	122	8	245	375
	%	32,5	2,1	65,3	100
Men	<i>f</i>	57	3	52	112
	%	50,9	2,7	46,4	100
Total	<i>f</i>	179	11	297	487
	%	36,8	2,3	61,0	100

Of the participants in the study group, 37% stated that their financial situation "decreased" during the pandemic, 2% stated that it "increased," and 61% stated that it "remained the same."

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage Values of Participants' Educational Status

		Elementary School	Middle School	High School	Bachelor	Postgraduate	Total
Women	<i>f</i>	2	1	19	229	124	375
	%	0,5	0,3	5,1	61,1	33,1	100
Men	<i>f</i>	0	1	6	71	34	112
	%	0,0	0,9	5,4	63,4	30,4	100
Total	<i>f</i>	2	2	25	300	158	487
	%	0,4	0,4	5,1	61,6	32,4	100

When the study group is examined in terms of education level, it is observed that the majority (62%) are university graduates, followed by postgraduates with 32% and high school graduates with 5%. Only about 1% of them reported their education level as elementary and middle school. In terms of the number of children, 189 of the 487 participants stated the number of children as 1 (39%). While the number of participants who stated that they had no children was 118 (24%), the number of those who stated that they had two children was 157 (32%). Twenty-one (4%) participants reported the number of children as 3, and one participant stated that they had 4 and 5 children.

Data Collection Tools

COVID-19 Index for Married Individuals: The index prepared by the researchers to understand changes in the marital relationship during the pandemic consists of 24 items. The existing literature was reviewed in the creation of the index and writing of indicators that might affect daily interaction (e.g., Bodenmann, Meuwly, Germann, Nussbeck, Heinrichs & Bradbury, 2015; Driver, Tabares, Shapiro & Gottman, 2012; Falconier, Nussbeck, Bodenmann, Schneider & Bradbury, 2015). The items in the COVID-19 Index for Married Individuals are expressed in the following contents: "Our respect for each other decreased during the pandemic," "Our sexual intimacy decreased during the pandemic," "We became emotionally distant from each other during the pandemic," "We started to empathize with each other more during the pandemic," and "Our sharing increased during the pandemic." As is known, indices are classified into three groups: unweighted additive, weighted additive, and multiplicative indices (See Bortz & Döring, 2006, ss.143-149). The COVID-19 Index for Married Individuals is an unweighted index since no weighting is performed for the indicators in the index. This indicates that all items are considered to have an equal value. The index is rated between 2 and 0 (yes, nothing has changed, no), and a high score indicates the negative impact of COVID-19 on the married individuals' relationship. While the percentage of variance explained by the index was approximately .50, the calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated as .95. This internal consistency coefficient obtained reveals that the index has the characteristic of being a reliable index.

Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI). The inventory developed by Bodenmann (2008) to measure coping with stress as a couple and stress communication in romantic relationships is a 5-point Likert type and consists of 37 items. The scale can be applied to married individuals and couples. DCI includes five subscales for the Self and corresponding subscales for the Partner (Stress Communication, Emotion-Focused Supportive Dyadic Coping (DC), Problem-Focused Supportive DC, Delegated DC, Negative DC). The DCI also assesses two Common DC behaviors (Emotion-Focused and Problem-Focused Common DC). The total score can be obtained from the scale as well as the subscale scores. The internal consistency coefficients (Croanbach's alpha) of the inventory were .92 for women and .93 for men in

total score. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis conducted in the Turkish adaptation study of the inventory (Kurt & Akbaş, 2019) showed that individuals had an acceptable level of adjustment for self-coping ($\chi^2/sd=3.76$, RMSEA=.06, CFI=.94, GFI=.95, SRMR=.04), spouse's perception of coping ($\chi^2/sd=4.50$, RMSEA=.06, CFI=.95, GFI=.94, SRMR=.04) and perception of common coping ($\chi^2/sd=1.10$, RMSEA=.01, CFI=1, GFI=.99, SRMR=.01). In the internal consistency analysis performed to determine the reliability of the inventory, Cronbach's alpha values ranged between .63 and .87 on the basis of sub-dimensions, and quasi-test values ranged between .63 and .85.

Marital Problem Solving Scale. The scale, which was developed by Baugh, Avery and Sheets-Hawth (1982) to determine the perceptions of married individuals about their ability to solve the problems they encounter in marriage, was adapted into Turkish by Hünler and Gençöz (2002). The original of the scale had 9 items with 7 grades, and the internal consistency coefficient was .95, the test-retest correlation coefficient was .86 ($p<.001$), and the correlation with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale was .61 ($p<.001$). While adapting the scale, which was evaluated out of 9 in the original form, it was converted into a 5-level rating scale for ease of response. In the factor analysis, the single factor structure was preserved, alpha coefficient was found to be .91, internal consistency coefficient was .88 ($p<.001$), and item-total correlation was found to vary between .63 and .73.

Personal Information Form. The form prepared by the researchers aims to describe the demographic information of the people in the study group. With the form, participants' gender, age, education level, employment status, etc. demographic information is obtained.

Procedure

Within the scope of this study, which examined problem-solving in marriage and dyadic coping with stress in predicting the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on married individuals, data were collected from the study group between March 2020 and May 2020 on the internet using an online form.

Data Analysis

Hierarchical (ordinal) multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether the score obtained from the COVID-19 Impact Index for Married Individuals, developed within the scope of this study, was predicted by the variables of married individuals' problem-solving in marriage and dyadic coping. Before this analysis, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationships between the COVID-19 Stress Index for Married Individuals, Marital Problem Solving Scale and Dyadic Coping Inventory. The financial situation and the employment status of the person and his/her spouse were used as control variables in the analysis.

RESULTS

Inter-Variable Relationships

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient results regarding the relationships between the scores obtained from the COVID-19 Impact Index for Married Individuals, Marital Problem Solving Scale, and Dyadic Coping Inventory are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation Coefficients Between Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. COVID-19 Index for Couples	-		
2. Marital Problem Solving Scale	-.67**	-	
3. Dyadic Coping Inventory	-.56**	.69**	-

** $p < .01$

When the relationships between the variables in Table 5 are examined, there is a significant negative relationship between the COVID-19 Impact Index for Married Individuals and Marital Problem Solving Scale ($r = -.67, p < .01$) and Dyadic Coping Inventory ($r = -.56, p < .01$). On the other hand, it is observed that there is a significant positive relationship ($r = .69, p < .01$) between Marital Problem Solving Scale and Dyadic Coping Inventory.

Prediction of the COVID-19 Impact Index by Marital Problem Solving Scale and Dyadic Coping Inventory

It was determined by multiple regression analysis whether the levels of married individuals' marital problem solving and dyadic coping predicted the score obtained from the COVID-19 Impact Index. In the analysis, financial situation and the employment status of the person and his/her spouse were entered into the model in the first step as a control variable. Table 6 contains the findings regarding predicting the COVID-19 impact index by the levels of marital problem solving and dyadic coping.

Table 6. Regression Analysis Results on Predicting the Effect of Covid 19 on Marital Problem Solving and Dyadic Coping

Model	Predictive	<i>B</i>	<i>ShB</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
1	Constant	16.18	1.77			
	Working in the epidemic	- 1.08	0.75	- 0.07	- 1.43	
	Spouse's work in the epidemic	0.66	0.75	0.41	0.89	.00
	Financial status	- 0.69	0.58	- 0.06	- 1.19	
2	Constant	53.33	2.49			
	Working in the epidemic	- 0.42	0.56	- 0.03	- 0.76	
	Spouse's work in the epidemic	0.64	0.55	0.04	1.16	.46
	Financial status	- 0.25	0.43	- 0.02	- 0.59	
	Marital Problem Solving	- 0.81	0.07	- 0.54	- 11.56*	
Dyadic Coping	- 0.12	0.03	- 0.18	- 3.83*		

According to the analysis results in Table 6, it is understood that the regression model is significant [$F(2, 477) = 80.85, p < .01$] and 46% of the COVID-19 pandemic effect ($R^2 = .46, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .45$) is explained by marital problem solving and dyadic coping entered into the model. As seen in Table 6, both marital problem solving ($\beta = -.54, p < .01$) and dyadic coping ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$) significantly predict the levels of married individuals being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the negative direction. The effect sizes of both predictor variables in the regression model were calculated with Cohen f^2 . Accordingly, while the effect size for marital problem solving was calculated as .28, the Cohen f^2 value for dyadic coping was calculated as .04. The effect of both predictor variables on the COVID-19 Impact Index was moderate ($f^2 = .32$; for reference values, see Cohen, 1988).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine how married individuals are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of dyadic coping with stress and problem-solving in marriage. Within the scope of the present study, it is observed that both alternative hypothesis was confirmed. Accordingly, both problem-solving in marriage and dyadic coping with stress predict the score obtained from the COVID-19 Impact Index significantly in the negative direction. It is supported by studies (Donato, Parise, Pagani, Lanz, Regalia, Rosnati, & Iafrate, 2021; Fraenkel & Cho, 2020; Leonard, Giraud, & Abraham, 2022; Pappas, 2020; Randall vd., 2021) that married individuals may be affected by these two variables in the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, as Olekers-Ax and Zwack (2020) revealed in their study, social inequality, domestic violence, and stress factors increased dramatically during this period.

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in this study. The reason for needing this was the desire to control whether one or both spouses worked during the pandemic. In the same way, financial income was also controlled. Thus, according to Bodenmann (2016), the fact that one or both of the spouses brings stress to home from outside (e.g., the workplace) poses a risk in terms of the relationship. The partner under stress may be reactive and aggressive or may withdraw from the relationship to be at peace. As a result, both behavior patterns reflect negatively on the partner and may even lead to a conflict. The presence of persistent stress frequently causes a relationship to become negative. Therefore, it is of great importance to know how each partner copes with stress individually and their dyadic coping strategies to establish a positive relationship between spouses (Bodenmann, 2016). However, within the scope of this study, although dyadic coping with stress indicates that married individuals are adversely affected by COVID-19, it actually does not have decisive significance considering the effect size. In other words, although our directional alternative hypothesis was confirmed, we obviously expected that dyadic coping with stress would affect married individuals more clearly in the COVID-19 pandemic. Explanations on the possible reasons for obtaining such findings are presented below.

According to the Systemic Transactional Model of Bodenmann (1995;1997; 2005), when individuals in a relationship encounter a stressor that affects them both directly and simultaneously, they define it as a source of stress and dyadic stress is observed. Studies demonstrate that stress arising from outside the spousal relationship (economic crisis, work problems, parenting stress, relationships with relatives-friends, etc.) has a strong and more harmful effect on the relationship and brings new problems to the marital relationship (Neff and Karney, 2017; Randall and Bodenmann, 2009; Randall and Bodenmann, 2017). For example, a study obtained results showing the potentially devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sexual routines of single or partnered adults (Hille, Oezdemir, Beier & Hatzler, 2021). Another study reports that the frequency of solo sex and partnered sexual behavior decreased in those who had conflicts with their partners due to the coronavirus than those who did not have conflicts (Luetka, Hensel, Herbenick & Molly-Rosenberg, 2020).

Although there are studies indicating the adverse effects of the pandemic, people usually want to protect their comfort zones by seeking safety and comfort from their closest relatives in disasters that threaten people's existence (hurricane, storm, terrorist attack, etc.) (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Thus, there are studies in the literature showing that the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive effect on the married individuals' relationship. For example, in an online study, while 22% of couples stated that their relationships became even closer, 82% agreed that their partner was the best individual for isolation (Rothmueller, 2020). Additionally, significant life events accompanied by stress related to job loss, injury or illness, and parenting concerns can exacerbate pre-existing marital problems or create new challenges

(Cohan, 2010). In the COVID-19 outbreak, as in similar examples in history, couples faced a possibly long restructuring event for an unknown period. In this process, spouses were exposed to numerous and various kinds of stressors (loss of income, loss of job, increased responsibility for the care of children, etc.). According to Pietromonaco and Overall (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic created various external stressors, which reduced the quality of the relationship and damaged the stability of the relationship. In this bidirectional process, weaker bilateral processes also strengthen the effect of external stressors.

According to the study carried out by Donato, Parise, Pagani, Lanz, Regalia, Rosnati and Lafrate (2021), concerns caused by COVID-19 significantly threaten the psychological well-being of individuals. Furthermore, these concerns positively predict open stress communication, which primarily predicts the perceived partner's dyadic coping responses positively and, as a result, positively predicts psychological well-being. According to Bodenmann (2005), coping with stress as a couple includes commitment in which both spouses provide satisfaction and well-being of the other. At the same time, this is ensuring the person's own satisfaction and well-being and ensuring that the spousal relationship continues to function as a whole. All this information supports the finding of the current study, indicating that dyadic coping with stress reduces the impact of COVID-19-induced stress on the spousal relationship. The effect of dyadic coping with stress on the relationship functions, satisfaction, and quality has already been proven by empirical findings (Bodenmann, Charvoz, Cina & Widmer, 2001; Bodenmann, Perrez, Cina, & Widmer, 2002; Bodenmann, Pihet, Shantinath, Cina, & Widmer, 2006; Ledermann, Bodenmann, & Cina, 2007; Pihet, Bodenmann, Cina, Widmer & Shantinath, 2007). However, in this study, considering the effect size of the finding obtained, the existence of other variables that affect the effect of COVID-19-induced stress on the spousal relationship comes to mind. Furthermore, it is important for both spouses to perceive the source of stress as a threat for the dyadic coping mechanism to go into action. We can say that the way spouses perceive the source of stress is an important factor in explaining the obtained finding. Moreover, the level at which stress is perceived as threatening is an important determinant in activating the resources to cope with stress. Studies demonstrate that individuals' levels of COVID-19-induced stress perception can be attributed to various factors such as gender, social support, special experiences with COVID-19 infection, the duration of isolation, the amount of exposure to media, and being under quarantine (Brooks, Webster, Smith, Woodland, Wessely, Greenberg, & Rubin, 2020; Zhang, Lu, Zeng, Zhang, Du, Jiang, & Du, 2020). Additionally, the dyadic perception of stress by spouses (we-stress) also increases the need for receiving support and collaborative coping (Rusu, Nussbeck, Leuctmann & Bodenmann, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the extent to which individuals perceive this process as a threat and the individual differences that affect these perceptions can be the subject of important research.

Another variable that explained the adverse effects of COVID-19 and was also investigated in this study is problem-solving in marriage. Problem-solving takes an important place in the STM. The theory of Bodenmann mentions the problem-solving processes of couples in the types of dyadic coping with stress and supportive coping. Joint problem-solving includes strategies such as seeking a common source of help, sharing feelings, mutual devotion, or relaxing together. Problem-focused support, on the other hand, is directed toward the source of stress (offering suggestions for a solution, helping the spouse to change his/her perspective on the situation, etc.) (Bodenmann, 1997; 2005). The satisfaction of couples with each other, especially during the crisis, depends on their joint problem-solving. Otherwise, the crisis will deepen, including the couple's relationship. Therefore, communication and problem-solving skills are kept at the center of many structured education programs for couples (Bodenmann, Charvoz, Cina

& Widmer, 2001; Sullivan, Pasch, Johnson, & Bradbury, 2010). Actually, conflict issues do not change no matter whether couples are happy or unhappy. What is determinant is how these conflict situations are dealt with. A conflict does not necessarily mean an incompatibility. However, the incompatibility of couples can sometimes turn into a quarrelsome and destructive form in conflict situations (Schindler, Hahlweg & Revenstorf, 2017). The research findings reveal that problem-solving skills (Deniz, Erus, & Batum, 2020; Hünler & Gençöz, 2005) and problem-solving interaction are associated with marital satisfaction (Author, 2021). According to Merz, Meuwly, Randall, and Bodenmann (2014), effective communication, problem-solving, and dyadic coping capacity in the face of stressful events are very important to protect the marriage and family system. In the case of social disasters, external social support is often interrupted, and spouses have to trust each other more (Cohan, 2010). The spouse is the most important source of support that cannot be easily substituted in times of stress (Dakof & Taylor, 1990; DeLongis et al., 2010). If the problems experienced by married couples are not solved effectively through communication, it may damage their marital relationship and adjustment, and conflicts between spouses may increase (Deniz, Erus, & Batum, 2020). According to the findings obtained by Donato, Parise, Pagani, Lanz, Regalia, Rosnati and Lafrate (2021), stress experienced during the COVID-19 process is positively associated with stress communication. Stress communication is the first step in the dyadic coping process. Studies have demonstrated that couples with open communication between both partners report higher levels of satisfaction than those who communicate without examining events or moods (Christensen and Shenk, 1991; Guerrero, Anderson & Afifi, 2011). We know that open communication takes a significant place in problem-solving. Some couples use temporary separation from each other after a conflict to resolve it. Quarantine practices do not allow temporary separations, which are the usual coping strategies, and can make conflicts even worse (Maiti, Singh, Innamuri, & Hasija, 2020).

COVID-19-induced stressors are considerably accompanied by uncertainty. It is difficult to predict which source of stress is short-term and which is long-term. Furthermore, the stress triggered by the pandemic also emerges in the context of ongoing, pre-existing vulnerable points (low income, etc.) (Johnson, Martin, Partika, Phillips, Castle & Tulsa SEED Study Team, 2021), and couples currently struggling to meet basic needs may have limited cognitive, emotional, and social resources to manage additional stress. The key point is the extent to which relationships have been damaged or improved following the COVID-19 pandemic. This largely depends on the broader context of couples' relationships and the extent to which the couple can be involved in adaptive dyadic relationship processes (Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020). Looking at the couple's relationship in a broader context requires a review of the situation before the couple has encountered the source of stress. In the current situation, what couple relationships individuals have had with their spouses before COVID-19 may significantly affect how their relationships have been affected by this process. This view is supported by the finding obtained by Donato, Parise, Pagani, Lanz, Regalia, Rosnati, and Lafrate (2021) indicating that individuals dissatisfied with their dyadic relationship are at a higher risk than those satisfied because they have lower levels of relational resources and well-being. Spouses dissatisfied with the relationship have less open stress communication, fewer positive dyadic coping responses, and lower psychological well-being than satisfied spouses.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Data were collected online over the internet on a voluntary basis in this study. To increase the external validity of the study, more systematic sampling (stratified, incremental sampling, etc.) can be performed. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to re-test the regression model created for this study by transforming

the quality or quality of the relationship, an important confounding variable, into a control variable. Although the predictiveness of variables such as working during the pandemic or having a spouse working during the pandemic was examined within the scope of the study, it would be beneficial to repeat this study in the health business sector, where there is a higher risk of COVID-19 transmission. Likewise, whether the participants had children or not/the number of children was determined by asking a question, but this was not checked. It is known that the responsibilities of married individuals who have children and even married individuals who have school-aged children in the pandemic process are much different. In new studies to be carried out in this context, it would be beneficial to consider the responsibilities that the distance education process has brought to parents and their effect on the spousal relationship. The financial situation, another predictor variable, was tried to be determined by a single question for learning the income status in the personal information form. However, it is thought that it would be beneficial to use a standard measurement tool to determine the socio-economic status. The level of satisfaction with the pre-pandemic marital relationship and the existing problems in the relationship were not taken under control within the scope of this study. Another study can be carried out by controlling these two variables. Research findings may be useful for psychological counselors working in the field of Family Counseling to understand how married individuals or couples are affected by the pandemic in terms of coping with stress and solving problems in marriage.

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Author Contribution

Both authors substantially contributed to this work in each step of the study.

Conflict of Interest

It has been reported by the authors that there is no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Statement

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