

EDU WORLD 2022**Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues****MARITAL STATUS AND YOUTH'S QUALITY OF LIFE IN
PANDEMIC CONTEXT**

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic disrupted all fields of human life to an unprecedented extent, thus seriously impacting the quality of life all over the globe. People started to perceive differently their position in life in the cultural context in which they live, especially related to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. A sample of 3469 young people, from Constanta County, both married and unmarried, aged between 25 and 35 years old, was assessed with the Quality-of-Life Inventory and with an opinion poll, made by the authors, with questions based on the same dimensions as the inventory. The main objective of the study is the identification of significant differences in the perception of 16 dimensions of the quality of life: health, self-esteem, goals and values, money, job, playing, learning, creativity, help, love, friends, relatives, home, children, neighbourhood, and community. Results show that married couples show greater satisfaction in the areas of self-esteem and children, while unmarried young people are more satisfied in the fields of learning, creativity, help and friends. Quantitative analysis of the responses collected from the opinion poll also showed that unmarried people have been more affected by the pandemic in their professional field, leisure activities, learning opportunities, and familial and social relationships. Results are discussed in the context of the importance of marital status for mental health and wellbeing of young people.

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has seriously affected people all over the world. Although pandemics and epidemics are not unprecedented events in human history, the COVID-19 pandemic was declared one of the most disruptive events of recent history. Countries all over the world, including Romania, have implemented large-scale social restrictions, which have impacted everyday life in all fields of activity. The Romanian Government restricted citizens' activities in specific areas that were assumed to provoke the spread of the virus. It all began with the lockdown policies in March 2020, which lasted for two months, followed by a state of alert which ended on 8th of March 2022. One of the consequences of these restrictions was the fact that citizens had to detach from their families and friends, also dealing with social isolation during the quarantine. Among other important consequences people faced schools' closure, shortages of food and medicine, economic disruption, thus the wellbeing and the quality of life were seriously damaged. People's mental health was affected, and depression, anxiety, frustration, anger, fear, and other stress disorders were raised exponentially (Xiang et al., 2020). In this context, the need for social support became acute.

1.1. The quality of life

The quality of life is a multidisciplinary concept that faces problems of measurement, because of the large number of determinants and conceptualizations (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). One of the difficulties is the fact that this concept integrates both multidimensional objective and subjective indicators (Cella, 1992), a broad range of life domains and individual values (Felce & Perry, 1995), thus including areas like physical, material, social and emotional wellbeing, as well as development and activities. Cummins (1997) argues that an important part of the scientific literatures incorporates a third element in the assessment of the quality of life, which is the perceived wellbeing. Thus, people's satisfaction and the degree of importance must be considered when measurement are made.

Testa and Nackley (1994, p. 538) propose a multidimensional conceptualization that includes the following dimensions: (1) Opportunity - with two domains: social or cultural (access to care, societal stigma, and support), and coping (resilience and the capacity to face psychological or physical stress); (2) Health perceptions - it considers people's general health perceptions (self-rating, worries and concerns), and expectations and satisfaction (related to functioning); (3) Functional - It covers the social domain (work, profession, daily roles), the psychological domain (emotional distress, psychological wellbeing, anxiety, depression, life satisfaction), the cognitive domain (memory, reasoning) and the physical domain (activity restrictions and fitness); (4) Morbidity - it covers signs (clinical indicators), symptoms (subjective evidence that is indirectly observable), self-reports of patients about their symptoms and conditions, physiologic domain which can be described by laboratory measures and pathology, and last, diagnosis and severity; (5) Mortality - is an indicator regarding survival and death on one hand, and the duration of life on the other hand. For our research, the important aspect about the quality of life is the subjective wellbeing, which is composed of (Theofilou, 2013): (1) Pleasant affects - joy, elation, contentment, pride, affection, happiness and ecstasy; (2) Unpleasant affects - guilt and shame, sadness, anxiety and worry, anger, stress, depression, and envy; (3) Life satisfaction - desire to change life,

satisfaction with current life, with past, future and others' views of one's life; (4) Satisfaction regarding the domains of work, family, leisure, health, finances, self and social groups.

Studies conducted between 2020 and 2021 provide multiple evidence regarding the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of life. With a number of 6.14 million death worldwide (according to <https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer>), the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most lethal disease in recent history, thus creating a major impact on clinical and public healthcare system all over the world (Ferreira et al., 2021). Trade and businesses were reduced, as production and consumption were scaled back (Debata et al., 2020). Sectors like tourism, agriculture, construction, or transports reported heavy losses. Although lockdown measures and restrictions helped in reducing the spread of the virus (Atalan, 2020), this situation had its toll: an impact on psychological wellbeing, which was a point of interest for many researchers, all of whom argued negative consequences related to the lack of movement and physical activity (Maugeri et al., 2020), to decreased access to support and resources (Alradhawi et al., 2020), to increased levels of anxiety, depression, emotional distress and other stress-related behaviours (White & Van Der Boor, 2020), to fluctuations in resilience capacities (Paredes et al., 2021), encountered at all ages.

1.2. Marital status in youth

In adolescence, the family life and its roles become important, and adolescents test different roles, thus actively discovering the implications of a life in couple. In young adulthood there is a certain stability and psychological maturation in terms of social, professional, marital, and parental identities (Verza & Verza, 2000), which is finalized with gaining a certain status. Young people separate themselves from their parents, develop the capacity of intimacy with a partner, face the decision of whether marry or not, have children and relate with them. A consolidation of personality structures occurs, and young adults become more actively involved in the actual implementation of their life projects (Crețu, 2009). Between 25 and 35 years old a maturation of self and identity occurs, and also the independence of personal relationships and the manifestation of protective attitudes (Birch, 2000). The interest for marital identity grows, even though people tend to postpone building their own family until the professional aspect is resolved.

Marital status is a demographic parameter that indicates the position of an individual, and has several forms, like single, married, widowed, divorced, separated, and registered partnership (Rusu & Mureșan, 2014). Beginning with the mutual adaptation of the spouses and with the accommodation to the specific marital roles, both partners start their family, shape their life, try to ensure their home comfort, and become increasingly aware of their roles and mutual obligations. Young adults choose their partners based on a series of criteria (Enăchescu, 2003), like similarities with the partner, sociological factors (age, religion, race, origin, residence, socio-economic status, profession, and education), anthropological factors (physical characteristics) and psychological factors (common personality traits, intellectual skills, individuals' previous experiences and feelings of love). The marital couple is based on both a legal contract, and a strong emotional relationship. Maintaining the couple is also an important endeavour, influenced by common interests, mutual attraction, recognition of the fact that the two partners suit each other, complementarity and establishing a mutual ideal of life. If these conditions are kept in a positive

balance, marital satisfaction arises. Rusu and Mureșan (2014) argue that marital satisfaction is based on equity, communication and negotiation skills, emotional expressivity, understanding, empathy, agreeableness, loyalty, respect, moral values, the desire of being a good parent and a good partner. Each couple must build a personal way of life. Usually, each partner's conduit is influenced by their own family models, and thus adjustments must be made in concordance to the particularities of the other partner. When the two models combine, a new approach of life emerges, and this will influence the configuration of the intimate space of the family.

2. Problem Statement

Studies show that marital status is associated with different health outcomes, both mental and physical (Joung, 2007), being strongly related to life satisfaction for both older and younger adults (Mannell & Dupuis, 2007), because marriage provides social support and companionship. On the other hand, there are other studies that stress that sometimes single people do just about as well as married ones and even show a better physical health than the married ones (DePaulo, 2016). This raises the question of certain differences that may exist in the perceived quality of life in the pandemic context, based on the marital status.

3. Research Questions

We proposed 16 hypotheses that assumed the existence of differences between married and unmarried young people, regarding 16 dimensions of the quality of life: health, self-esteem, goals and values, money, profession, leisure, learning, creativity, help and support, love, friendship, children, relatives, home, neighbourhood, and community.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main objective of our research is the identification of significant differences in perception of the quality of life based on the type of marital status, in the context of COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this purpose, we used a convenience sample (meaning available subjects) that comprised 3496 young adults, aged between 25 and 35 years old, out of which 1736 male, namely 50.04% of our respondents, and 1733 (49.95%) female, all residents of Constanta County, 66.01% from urban areas and 33.98% from rural areas. Marital status shows 43.93% married respondents, and 56.06% unmarried. The respondents volunteered to participate in this research. After obtaining the informed consent from the respondents to participate in this research, that was conducted through both online and face-to-face surveys, we collected the data in February - June 2021. The surveys were applied through Google forms, and we ensured the confidentiality of the responses. Our students from the specialization Psychology and Special Psychology, second year of study, were used as interviewers, and provided support in the process of scoring the questionnaires.

5. Research methods

We used Michael Frisch's Quality of Life Inventory, a Romanian adapted version and for additional information we made an opinion poll. The questions in this opinion poll were grouped on the same dimensions as the inventory, and respondents had to choose on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest level of disruption) how much they consider that the COVID-19 pandemic affected them, for each situation described in the questions. We used these data to qualitatively interpret our results.

6. Findings

We applied the Shapiro-Wilk normality coefficient and we obtained asymmetric distribution of scores on all variables. Thus, we used Mann-Whitney U Test to verify our hypotheses. The marital status was operated in terms of married and unmarried young people. We obtained the results shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Differences in the perception of the quality of life dimensions based on marital status

Quality of life dimension	Marital Status	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U Test / Sig. (2-tailed)
Health	Married / Unmarried	1728.10 / 1739.52	1471569.000 / p=.731
Self-esteem	Married / Unmarried	1772.69 / 1705.47	1424648.500 / p=.045
Goals and values	Married / Unmarried	1711.94 / 1753.07	1446950.500 / p=.219
Money	Married / Unmarried	1757.09 / 1715.91	1445189.000 / p=.221
Profession	Married / Unmarried	1723.62 / 1743.92	1464746.000 / p=.548
Leisure	Married / Unmarried	1736.10 / 1734.13	1480407.500 / p=.953
Learning	Married / Unmarried	1686.86 / 1772.72	1408726.500 / p=.011
Creativity	Married / Unmarried	1696.13 / 1763.63	1422505.500 / p=.045
Help and support	Married / Unmarried	1677.49 / 1779.19	1394450.000 / p=.003
Love	Married / Unmarried	1735.82 / 1734.36	1480843.000 / p=.965
Friendship	Married / Unmarried	1673.89 / 1782.88	1388961.000 / p=.001
Children	Married / Unmarried	1897.04 / 1607.08	1233614.500 / p=.000
Relatives	Married / Unmarried	1748.77 / 1724.21	1461101.000 / p=.467
Home	Married / Unmarried	1753.39 / 1720.59	1454061.000 / p=.322
Neighbourhood	Married / Unmarried	1759.29 / 1715.97	1445067.000 / p=.200
Community	Married / Unmarried	1738.16 / 1732.52	1477268.500 / p=.868

Table 1 shows are statistical results, obtained after processing the weighted satisfaction of life, a coefficient that resulted after multiplying the importance that the dimension has for the respondent by the perceived satisfaction for that same dimension. Thus, a medium satisfaction index was obtained and used in the statistical analysis. Results confirm part of our hypotheses and show that married couples have greater satisfaction in the areas of self-esteem and children, while unmarried young people are more satisfied in the fields of learning, creativity, help and support, and friends.

Scientific literature shows that people who are married are healthier and more satisfied with their lives (Fu & Noguchi, 2016), also describing that not having children or living alone have negative consequences on emotional and physical welfare (Williams et al., 2017) at all ages. Married individuals reported high self-esteem and coped better with the stressful situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Lawal et al., 2022). On one hand, we think that higher self-esteem of married young people is because having someone to share experiences with, worries and thoughts may provide the needed emotional and

social support, especially during restriction periods. Our respondents reported that the feeling of belonging, self-trust and unconditional self-acceptance were not as severely affected by the pandemic as we might expect, because they had the possibility to turn to their partners for managing frustration, support and could mutually assume responsibilities. Thus, adjustment to the constant changes and disruptions caused by the pandemic was facilitated by the spouse, even though there were moments when young people felt they were not in control of their own life. Furthermore, for many families, the lockdown and the restrictions imposed by the government offered the opportunity of reconnecting with their spouses, to spend more time together, thus enhancing love, bonds, and affections with a reduction of the negative emotional impact. Self-esteem is regarded as a personal protective resource (Zhao et al., 2022), having a great influence over anxiety and meaning in life. Self-esteem can enhance subjective well-being and help people to efficiently cope with stress.

Another important aspect is the fact that self-esteem also influences people's behaviour regarding adherence to social norms (Sharma, 2020), which basically means that people model their behaviour by observing what others are doing or what they think others approve or not. Married people can better model and support each other, because of the fact that married life includes mutual decision making, consulting with the spouse, sharing experiences and making adaptive compromises (Papalia et al., 2010). Our subjects reported differences in the quality of the time spent with their spouses, a balanced redistribution of tasks in the household and an increase in the quantity of time spent alongside their partners.

Another confirmed difference between married and unmarried young people is the one concerning children. Evidently, for married people children have a great importance and provide more satisfaction than for single young adults. Although parenthood sometimes leads to neglect of individual's own health, such as not getting enough sleep, eating nutritiously or getting enough exercise (Klassen et al., 2008), or having to make compromises and personal sacrifices (Beja, 2014), there are certainly enough positive aspects about being a parent. Especially for women, there is a positive impact of having children related to psychological wellbeing (Baranowska & Matysiak, 2011). Families with children have someone to depend on them. In the pandemic context this proved to be a positive aspect because always having to do something and interact with someone can help manage other negative thoughts. Focusing on positive action, trust and communication are important aspects to be taken into account when referring to parenthood on one hand, but on the other hand we feel that these could have an important influence on happiness and well-being. Another important aspect is the fact that opposed to single people who may face routine in their lives, parents may face surprises everyday from their children. Having to always make decisions, to plan, to reason and to make judgements regarding parenting, are elements that help maintain happiness, especially in the situation of so many restrictive measures caused by the pandemic context. Our subjects reported challenges in organizing quality time among the family members and in establishing and implementing extracurricular activities with their children, but on the other hand they also stated that having children is a meaningful experience that gave another purpose to their lives.

Another significant difference we've discovered is the one regarding the higher levels of satisfaction of unmarried people regarding the dimensions of learning and creativity. We interpret these results firstly by the fact that almost half of our sample is comprised with university students. Although in

the pandemic context higher education was severely disrupted, a lot of compensative measures were taken. Thus, the implementation of digital platforms was meant to support remote education. Romanian teachers faced the challenge of developing digital competencies. But we have to admit that the pandemic has also given an appropriate framework for education to change. This change facilitated the attendance of a lot of students that were working, for example. Being able to connect to classes from whatever location, allowed many young people to be more involved in the educational process. Furthermore, activities had to be reconsidered, tasks were modified, and teaching methods were partially changed in order to address the needs implied by the online education. Our respondents stated that there is a certain convenience about online classes, even though there are difficulties in final assessments, in the raising number of homework and in appropriately managing the time to solve all problems of the daily life.

Adapting to online platforms was a challenge, but after almost two years of online education, many skills developed and adjustments were made, so much so that when restrictions have been lifted on 8th of March 2022, many students protested in the context of turning to face-to-face activities at this point in the semester and with such rapidity.

In terms of creativity, studies show that it became a means to well-being during pandemic, namely the perceived impact of COVID-19 was related to creative process engagement, that leads to creative growth and ultimately to a flourishing well-being (Tang et al., 2021). The pandemic context raised a series of challenges that had to be addressed in all fields of human life. Creative solutions had to be found, innovation was required, thus the framework for divergent thinking was set up. Scientific literature states that creativity is a capacity of producing new and appropriate ideas, solutions, and products (Amabile, 1996), thus during pandemic, creativity was put to test in order to solve the avalanche of problems in our everyday life. On the other hand, we feel that for young people, especially in today's society, being creative and stay in touch with novelty is a very important aspect. Young people tend to be up to date to new technologies, information, and other aspects they consider important, which in turn may give them a sense of personal growth, which will subsequently improve resilience and well-being (Tang et al., 2021).

In terms of friends and support, single and unmarried young people tend to be more satisfied. At this point in their live, social groups provide both security, leisure experiences, information, and support. For us, this result not only shows something natural, but also a compensation. We stated that social support and interaction are ensured by the spouse in the case of the married couples, but for single people, the group of peers must compensate. Studies show that in the context in which people felt anxious, stressed, helpless or depressed, an increased support from friends or family members was a positive factor in managing the emotional disturbances caused by the pandemic (El-Zoghby et al., 2020).

7. Conclusions

The main objective of our study was to identify the differences between married and unmarried young people regarding their life satisfaction in the pandemic context. Our results confirmed some of our hypotheses, showing that while married couples have greater satisfaction in the areas of self-esteem and children, unmarried young people are more satisfied in the fields of learning, creativity, help and support, and friends. These results are not surprising, they are authentic in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic,

and especially if we consider the composition of our sample, since a large part of our subjects are university students. But what is important of our results is the fact that they suggest the importance of the need for social support throughout period of social distancing and restrictions, but also argue the necessity of social interrelationships in the context in which people had to readjust to the new normality and to become resilient once again. All these aspects are triggers of a sanogenic approach to quality of life, in which people must redefine normality and the significance of the psychological wellbeing, by repositioning themselves depending on these assessments, and of what they consider to be normal for them.

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