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SELECTED ASPECTS OF COUPLE FUNCTIONING IN POLAND AND JAPAN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ABSTRACT. Hirayama Maki, Pacher Alice, Klon Weronika, Waszyńska Katarzyna, *Selected Aspects of Couple Functioning in Poland and Japan During COVID-19 Pandemic* [Wybrane aspekty funkcjonowania par w Polsce i w Japonii w czasie pandemii wirusa COVID-19]. *Studia Edukacyjne* no. 63, 2021, Poznań 2021, pp. 81-99. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 1233-6688. DOI: 10.14746/se.2021.63.6

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global one, but the effect is different for each country and society and has different dimensions. The study investigated couple relationships during the first lockdown (also called emergency state) in Poland (N = 235) and Japan (N = 420). Based on a quantitative survey, it focuses on socio-economic issues and related concerns. The survey inquired opinions about changes in the depth of the relationships, attitude to the partner, and frequency of arguments during the lockdown.

From among Polish and Japanese respondents, more than 60% declared that their current partner is the best one for the isolation. Both Japanese and Polish males seem to be more satisfied with their spouses than the female partners. The results indicate that there is a need to make more detailed cross-country comparisons in terms of the functioning of relationships during lockdown and isolation. The observations made imply that there are areas to investigate more in-depth. A follow-up survey is needed to understand whether the issues in intimate relationships will be long-term ones or whether we see them only during the pandemic.

The questionnaire domains: changes in the depth of relationships, attitude to the partner and frequency of arguments during the lockdown.

Method: quantitative research, survey, online questionnaire, voluntary participants collected by social media.

Key words: relationship functions, COVID-19 pandemic, first lockdown, socio-cultural comparison, Japan, Poland

Introduction and Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes in people's lives, affecting the entire population of each country. The COVID-19 pandemic began in late 2019, being first documented in China and spreading rapidly around the world. Ways of dealing with the restrictions have differed among societies.

In Japan, the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed by January 2020. In response to the large escalation of infections, restrictions on social activities started with a sudden order to close elementary, junior high, and high schools from March 2nd nationwide (until the beginning of June). Especially mothers faced a struggle to combine their daily routine and include caring for and educating their children at home. The first state of emergency was issued from April 7th (seven prefectures, and on April 16th nationwide) to May 25th. In some countries, the lockdown was enforced with penalties, whereas in Japan, the government "requested" self-restraint and social distancing from people. Citizens have not been penalized, but repeatedly asked to wear masks and keep social distance in the public. As an infection control measure, especially during 2020, the officials tried to identify the infection route of newly infected people, so their actions and whom they had met were investigated in detail. Because of this measure, secret activities such as meeting extramarital partners were supposed to have been greatly suppressed. In July 2020 when the number of new cases was minor for a while, the government launched a major traveling and eating out campaign to revitalize the economy. As a result, the number of new cases increased drastically, so that the second state of emergency was to be issued from January 8th to March 21st 2021. The state of emergency was quite effective in the first round, with most of the shops and restaurants closed, but it gradually became ineffective in the second and third rounds. The government has provided various financial support to individuals and companies, however many people were still in need and even lacked food. Prime Minister Suga decided to resign in September 2020 being strongly criticized for not being able to lead in pandemic measures of the country.

Furthermore, the first case of COVID-19 in Poland was registered on March 4, 2020, and the first death as a result of this disease was recorded on March 12 this year. On March 10 the first restrictions in Poland related to the cancellation of major mass events were introduced. From March 15, 2020 to the be-

ginning of April, the “Flight home”¹ campaign was carried out, as a result of which about 54 thousand² citizens who were abroad returned to Poland. On March 20³, the Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, declared the pandemic in Poland. Four days later, restrictions were tightened: travel restrictions in the country, restrictions on leaving home. In the following days, hairdressing and beauty salons, shops, and restaurants were closed, and a distance learning system was introduced at the beginning of April.

The pandemic has triggered professional problems for some Poles: (loss of job, financial liquidity, change of the mode and conditions of work: home office). The changes also concerned social life: social distancing and social isolation were imposed. Limited access to healthcare (“non-covid”) has also become a problem. Changing the mode of stationary education to remote education forced the children, but also their parents/ guardians, to adjust their home conditions to the requirements of school activities. Combining work done now at home with childcare and education has become a challenge for many Poles.

The restrictions in the country in the following months were alternately gradually loosened and tightened depending on the epidemiological situation. It all influenced the mental functioning of people, their well-being, and their relationships.

Research on couples functioning during Covid-19 pandemic

Covid-19 lockdown has radically changed the way we lived. The lockdown or state of emergency (in Japan) forced the population to stay more at home, home office and online schooling were introduced. The reduced physical and social contact with people and limitation of people’s freedom can also affect intimate couple relationships. Previous research has shown that in times of crisis, stress impacts the relationship quality (Randall and Bodenmann 2009, Williamson 2020). Although the global pandemic generates stress in many life areas and also in social interaction, previous research on how the Covid-19 pandemic affects intimate couple relationships shows two-sided results, namely positive and negative changes.

¹ Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej RPO, KPRM: 55 tys. Polaków wróciło do kraju w ramach akcji “Lot do domu”, <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/kprm-do-rpo-55-tys-osob-wrcilo-do-kraju-w-ramach-lot-do-domu> [accessed: August 2021].

² Wikipedia Wolna Encyklopedia, *Polskie Linie Lotnicze LOT*, https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polskie_Linie_Lotnicze_LOT [accessed: October 2021].

³ Medicover, *Pandemia koronawirusa na świecie i w Polsce – kalendarium*, <https://www.medicover.pl/o-zdrowiu/pandemia-koronawirusa-na-swiecie-i-w-polsce-kalendarium,7252,n,192> [accessed: October 2021].

A survey conducted in Australia⁴ shows that a majority of people (52%) spent more time together during Covid-19 lockdown. 42% of people experienced a negative change in their relationship with their partner. Especially, people who reported feeling very lonely were more likely to experience negative relationship changes throughout COVID-19 (Relationships Australia 2021). Another survey conducted by Pew Research Center⁵ shows 33% of Americans experienced positive impact on their relationships. The reasons for that include spending more time with children and enjoying lack of social obligations. A survey conducted in German-speaking countries⁶ (N=4900) shows that people who are in stable committed relationships (44%) were more satisfied. According to 54% of people in the same household, the conflict rate did not increase. 24.9% of the people mentioned having more conflicts while for 21.1% the number of conflicts decreased. Another characteristic shows that people who required family support tend to have more conflicts. As for Japan, many institutions and researchers have conducted surveys on the physical and mental health of people or the changes in their lives. Below are major findings related to changes in relationships.

1. In September 2020, the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare conducted a survey on the mental health status of people in the previous months of the same year⁷ (People over 15 years old, n = 10981). From April to May, 60% of people were found to have felt some kind of anxiety while at other times it was about 50%. The biggest reason for anxiety was 'Fear of infection of myself and my family'. The second and subsequent reasons differed depending on the time of year, including 'shortages of daily necessities' in February 2020 and 'changes in life due to self-restraint' after April. About 40% of the people answered that the volume of physical exercise decreased while for about 20% of the people the computer gaming time increased.

2. OECD global research on mental health during pandemic⁸ shows that the prevalence of mental health conditions which stayed broadly the same

⁴ Relationships Australia, *Covid-19 and its Effect on Relationships*, <https://relationships.org.au/what-we-do/research/online-survey/MaySurveyResults.pdf> [accessed: September 2021].

⁵ Pew Research Center, *In their own words, Americans describe the struggles and silver linings of the Covid-19 pandemic*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/2021/03/05/in-their-own-words-americans-describe-the-struggles-and-silver-linings-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/> [accessed: September 2021].

⁶ B. Rothmüller, *Intimität und soziale Beziehungen in der Zeitphysischer Distanzierung. Ausgewählte Zwischenergebnisse der Pilotstudie zur COVID-19 Pandemie*, Wien 2020.

⁷ Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, *Shingata Koronakansensyo ni kakaru mentaru herusu ni kansuru tyosa gaiyou ni tsuite*, <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/12200000/syousai.pdf> [accessed: October 2021].

⁸ OECD, *Tackling the Mental Health Impact of the Covid-19 Crisis-An Integrated Whole of Society Response*, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/tackling-the-mental-health-im->

for decades changed in 2020 with the outbreak of the pandemic. In Japan, the level of depression was 7.9% in 2019, however it reaped to 17.3% in early 2020. In 2020 it was more than double that in 2019, which was a similar tendency as in many other countries.

3. According to Marital Relationship Survey⁹ (20s- 60s, n = 2060) conducted by the Recruit Bridal Research Institute from February to March 2021, 67.2% of the respondents were satisfied with the marital relationship. 10.7% of overall participants (11.3% of male and 10.2% of female participants) reported they were more satisfied than before the pandemic, while 10.1% (8.8% of male and 11.2% of female) reported less satisfaction. In couples with a working husband and a housewife, more husbands reported increased satisfaction than wives (13.7%, 9.3%) and more wives reported decreased satisfaction than husbands (7.0%, 12.0%). In couples with a working husband and a part-time working wife, both rates of husbands and wives who reported increased satisfaction (8.8%, 7.2%) were lower than the rates who reported decreased satisfaction (10.2%, 11.6%). For couples where both the husband and wife work full-time, both rates of husbands and wives who reported increased satisfaction (11.8%, 14.7%) became higher than the rates of decreased satisfaction (9.9%, 9.6%).

In terms of Japan, the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on intimate couple relationships has not been strongly highlighted as other topics such as economic crises and increased suicide rates. Only a few topics and more negative aspects have been emphasized in the media, such as the increase of domestic violence and a possible increase in the divorce rate (*koronarikon*). According to Suga,¹⁰ a spate of suicides due to financial difficulties as well as domestic violence (DV) incidents triggered by Covid-19 pandemic has been reported. An expectation that domestic violence will increase was emphasized. The number of domestic violence consultations increased significantly after the pandemic started, which may be because the Japanese government was suggested by WHO to take measures against the increase of domestic violence, and launched consultation hotlines. Suga¹¹ argued that, especially in April 2020, the Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers conducted 13,272 DV consultations, which was 1.3 times higher than the number in April 2019. Yamada¹² mentioned the possibility of increasing inequalities between families.

pact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-an-integrated-whole-of-society-response-0ccafa0b/ [accessed: October 2021].

⁹ Recruit Bridal Research Institute, *Fufu kankei chosa 2021*, https://www.recruit.co.jp/newsroom/pressrelease/assets/20210803_marriage_01.pdf [accessed: October 2021].

¹⁰ T. Suga, *Protecting women: new domestic violence countermeasures for COVID-19 in Japan*, *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters*, 2021, 29(1).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² M. Yamada, *Shingatakakusashakai* 34(40), Tokyo 2021.

As for Poland, scientists and researchers responded to the emergence of the pandemic and the related changes by conducting scientific analyzes of the situation in various areas of social life.

Some of them, related to the subject area of this article, are mentioned below:

1. From March to June 2020, a research entitled: "Health, relationships and sexual life of Polish women and men during the Covid -19 pandemic" was conducted under the supervision of prof. Z. Izdebski. 3,000 people participated in the survey. people in the age group of 18+. The respondents completed the questionnaire independently via the Internet (Computer Assisted Web Interview, CAWI¹³).

22% of respondents indicated that their relationship had strengthened during the pandemic. 66% of respondents assessed that nothing had changed in their relationship during the isolation. However, 8 percent believe their relationship has worsened, and 5 percent believe that they thought of divorcing for the first time during the pandemic. In the surveyed group, 21% of Poles declared that they would like to have children in the future. Under the influence of lockdown, 14% decided to postpone their procreation plans.

39% of people aged 18 to 29 believe that during the pandemic, their feelings of chronic fatigue, weakness, drowsiness, and difficulty in concentrating have increased. Respondents from this age group also indicated that they experienced bouts of anger, aggression, or frustration more often. The young people also felt loneliness the most, but it should be remembered that this study covered the first three months of the pandemic in Poland, i.e. only the period of the first wave. From the speech of prof. Izdebski, in an interview with PAP, you can also learn that: "During the pandemic, interest in online pornography has increased, and there are more conflicts and domestic violence in Polish relationships, including sexual violence. Social isolation is often a test of survival in a relationship"¹⁴.

2. Another study examined the severity and determinants of depression and generalized anxiety symptoms in adult Poles during the COVID-19 pandemic. A nationwide sample of adults was surveyed online four times (in May, June, July, and December 2020). 1,179 people took part in the first wave of the study and it was a representative sample of adult Polish residents in terms of age, gender, and size of the place of residence. In the second wave,

¹³ Z. Izdebski, *Zdrowie, relacje w związkach i życie seksualne Polaków*, <https://www.uw.edu.pl/zdrowie-relacje-w-zwiazkach-i-zycie-seksualne-polakow/> [accessed: September 2021].

¹⁴ Z. Wojtasiński, *Prof. Izdebski o związkach i życiu seksualnym Polaków w czasie pandemii*, *Nauka w Polsce* <https://naukawpolsce.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C82292%2Cprof-izdebski-o-zwiazkach-i-zyciu-seksualnym-polakow-w-czasie-pandemii.html> [accessed: September 2021].

1,014 people were examined, in the third 857 people, and the last fourth 688 people. It turned out that:

- Polish women and men showed the highest intensity of symptoms of depression and generalized anxiety in May and December, while the lowest intensity in July 2020

- Symptoms of depression and generalized anxiety were most strongly associated with the difficulties experienced at home (difficult relationships with relatives, a sense of lack of privacy, fatigue with excessive duties) as well as anxiety and uncertainty related to the spread of the epidemic. Parents of children up to the age of 18 had greater severity of depression symptoms in December 2020 than those who did not have children at that age. In this group of parents, symptoms of depression and anxiety were more strongly associated with the difficulties experienced at home, as well as the perceived health and life risk of COVID-19, than in those who did not have children at that age.

- Better financial situation of the family and ensured continuity of remuneration was associated with a distance relationship lower intensity of symptoms of depression and generalized anxiety in May, June, July, and December 2020.¹⁵

3. "Everyday life in times of pandemic" is a research project carried out by members of the Department of Theory and Research of Social Practices at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.¹⁶ The first stage of the research was carried out between March 19 and 24, 2020 using an online survey created on the Google Forms platform. The second stage was carried out between March 31 and April 8, 2020. 1,294 people took part in the second stage. The respondents were asked, inter alia, to provide three words that, according to them, best describe the current situation. Among almost 4,000 expressions of this type left by the respondents in the questionnaire, the majority of those referring to uncertainty and emotional states it entails: fear, nervousness, anger, helplessness. "Almost 1/3 of respondents indicating the occurrence of significant transformations in everyday life during a pandemic describe changes in well-being, mood, and mental health, or an increase in anxiety, stress, and deterioration of the general psychophysical condition".¹⁷

4. According to CBOS research - during the pandemic period, the mental well-being of Poles deteriorated and they rated 2020 not only as much wor-

¹⁵ M. Gambit et. al., *Objawy depresji i lęku wśród Polaków w trakcie pandemii COVID-19. Raport z badań podłużnych*, http://psych.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/sites/98/2021/01/Raport_objawy_depresji_leku_IV_fale.pdf [accessed: October 2021].

¹⁶ R. Drozdowski et. al., *Życie codzienne w czasach pandemii. Raport z drugiego etapu badań*. Wersja skrócona, http://socjologia.amu.edu.pl/images/pliki/dokumenty/Do_pobrania/Zycie_codzienne_w_czasach_pandemii._Raport_z_drugiego_etapu_badan_wersja_skrcona.pdf [accessed: September 2021] p. 50.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 50, 52.

se than the previous year in private and public terms but also the worst for Poland, since 1984 (then CBOS research in this area was monitored) CBOS survey No 5/2021 on life satisfaction.

However, despite the research that has emerged in response to the new social reality, there is still a gap in portraying the cultural context. We hope that the research carried out in Poland and Japan, although to some extent, will fit into this gap.

Material and methods

Considering the limited number of studies published on couple relationships during the Covid-19-pandemic, the authors conducted survey with the aim to address how the lockdown (the physical distance in everyday life) affected couple relationships. The results show how areas under investigation differ between Japan and Poland, male and female of both countries, and Polish, and Japanese participants in different types of the relationships.

Tables No 1 and 2 show socio- demographic characteristics of the groups of the Japanese and Polish respondents. They include the abundance of subgroups of gender identity which are male, female, and other. Also they describe age categories: under 19 years old, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and 50 or more years old.

Table 1
Demographic characteristic (Japanese survey)

	N	%
Gender		
Male	171	41
Female	243	58
Other	6	1
Age category		
<19	34	6
20-29	183	32
30-39	135	24
40-49	143	26
>50	68	12

Relationship status		
In a committed relationship and living together	262	47
In a committed relationship but living apart from each other (it is still possible to meet each other regularly)	127	23
Long-distance relationship	26	4,6

Demographic characteristic (Poland survey)

Table 2

	N	%
Gender		
Male	72	30,64
Female	162	68,94
Other	1	0,42
No answer	0	0
Age category		
<19	3	1,3
20-29	105	44,7
30-39	41	17,4
40-49	63	26,8
>50	23	9,8
Relationship status		
In a committed relationship and living together	164	72,9
In a committed relationship but living apart from each other (it is still possible to meet each other regularly)	49	21,8
Long-distance relationship	12	5,3

The survey covered 420 (F-243, M-171, Other-6) respondents from Japan, and 235 respondents from Poland living in intimate relationships (F-162, M-72, Other-1). Analysis focused on male and female groups because of the abundance of the gender subgroups. The participants were recruited through social media. The whole questionnaire contains 52 questions about features

of relationships and sexual life during the pandemic lockdown in 2020. The first version of the questionnaire was used in the German study (Rothmueller 2021), but was modified for current research requirements. This analysis contains a description of the results of questions correlated with concerns about social, economic, and private life, and with the condition of the intimate relationship during the pandemic lockdown and social isolation.

Results

The article compares results from the Polish and the Japanese surveys. There are comparisons including division between Polish and Japanese participants, male and female from both countries, and participants in different types of relationships. There are subgroups of people living together with their spouses, living apart, and long distance relationships. Some of the scales used in the research were ordinal and some of them were nominal. Thus part of the results is shown as percentages (nominal scales), and others as median values (ordinal scales).

Concerns

Tables No 3, 4 and 5 present the comparisons of the topics of chosen concerns expressed by people during the pandemic lockdown. The scale used in this type of questions was the ordinal one and had 4 steps corresponding with different intensity of the anxiety about included topics.

Table 3
Median values of the concerned topics in the respondents' group

OBJECT OF CONCERN	ALL PARTICIPANTS JAPAN	ALL PARTICIPANTS POLAND
FINANCIAL PROBLEM	3	2
DAILY LIFE DISRUPTION	2	2
RELATIONSHIP DISRUPTION	2	3
DISRUPTION IN FAMILY LIFE	2	3
HEALTH CONDITION OF THE PERSONS TO CARE ABOUT	3	2
OWNHEALTHCONDITION	3	2

WORK DISRUPTION (NEGATIVE EFFECT ON WORK/ BUSINESS RESULT, UNEMPLOYMENT, BANKRUPTCY)	3	3
NEGATIVE CHANGES IN THE WORK CONDITION (OVERWORK, CHANGE TO TELEWORK)	2	3
MORE FAMILY BURDENS	2	3
RESTRICTION ON ACTIVITIES OTHER THAN WORK	3	2
LACK OF ACCESS TO DAILY NECESSITIES	2	2
DISRUPTION IN CHILDREN EDUCATION	3	2

Table 4

Median values of the concerned topics in the respondents' gender subgroups

OBJECT OF CONCERN	FEMALE JAPAN	FEMALE POLAND	MALE JAPAN	MALE POLAND
FINANCIAL PROBLEM	3	2	3	2
DAILY LIFE DISRUPTION	2	2	2	2
RELATIONSHIP DISRUPTION	2	3	2	3
DISRUPTION IN FAMILY LIFE	2	3	2	3
HEALTH CONDITION OF THE PERSONS TO CARE ABOUT	3	2	3	2
OWN HEALTH CONDITION	3	2	3	3
WORK DISRUPTION (NEGATIVE EFFECT ON WORK/ BUSINESS RESULT, UNEMPLOYMENT, BANKRUPTCY)	3	2	3	3
NEGATIVE CHANGES IN THE WORK CONDITION (OVERWORK, CHANGE TO TELEWORK)	2	3	3	3
MORE FAMILY BURDENS	2	3	2	3
RESTRICTION ON ACTIVITIES OTHER THAN WORK	3	2	3	2
LACK OF ACCESS TO DAILY NECESSITIES	2	2	2	2
DISRUPTION IN CHILDREN EDUCATION	3	2	3	3

Table 5

Median values of the concerned topics in the respondents' relationship status subgroups

OBJECT OF CONCERN	LIVING APART JAPAN	LIVING APART POLAND	LIVING TOGETHER JAPAN	LIVING TOGETHER POLAND	LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS JAPAN	LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS POLAND
FINANCIAL PROBLEM	3	3	3	3	3	3
DAILY LIFE DISRUPTION	2	3	2	3	2	3
RELATIONSHIP DISRUPTION	2	2	2	2	2	4
DISRUPTION IN FAMILY LIFE	1	2	2	2	2	2&3
HEALTH CONDITION OF THE PERSONS TO CARE ABOUT	3	3	3	3	3	4
OWN HEALTH CONDITION	3	3	3	2	3	3
WORK DISRUPTION (NEGATIVE EFFECT ON WORK/ BUSINESS RESULT, UNEMPLOYMENT, BANKRUPTCY)	2	3	3	2	3	4
NEGATIVE CHANGES IN THE WORK CONDITION (CHANGE TO TELEWORK, OVERWORK)	2	3	2	2	3	3&4
MORE FAMILY BURDENS	2	3	2	2	1	2&3
RESTRICTIONS ON ACTIVITIES OTHER THAN WORK	3	3	3	3	3	3&4
LACK OF ACCESS TO DAILY NECESSITIES	2	3	2	3	2	3&4
DISRUPTION IN CHILDREN EDUCATION	3	3	3	3	1&2	3&4

Table No3 shows the comparison between Polish and Japanese respondents, No4 contains results in female and male subgroups both Polish and Japanese, and No5 presents subgroups of people living together, living apart and in long- distance relationships in both countries. Most of the medians vary between 2 and 3 which corresponds with the medium intensity of anxiety. In table No5 there is one score "1" (the lowest intensity) in the "Disruption of daily life" point in Japanese participants living apart from their partners. Also the same score is in the point "More family burdens" among Japanese respondents living in long distance relationships. There are also some scores of "4" (the highest intensity of anxiety) in the long distance relationships group of Polish participants, which is also a less numerous subgroup.

Condition of the relationship

Results of the questions about changes in depth of the relationship, attitude to the partner, and amount of the arguments during the lockdown are shown in the tables No 6, 7, and 8. The division for the subgroups is similar to the previous part of the result. Scales in these questions were ordinal for the changes in depth of the relationship, and amount of the arguments, and nominal for the question about attitude to the partner.

Table 6
Condition of the couple relationship in the respondents' groups

		ALL PARTICIPANTS JAPAN	ALL PARTICIPANTS POLAND
RELATIONSHIP DEPTH (MEDIAN)		3	3
ATTITUDE TO THE PARTNER (PERCENTAGES)	The best partner for the isolation	65,3%	66,2%
	No. I do not think so.	12,5%	15,8%
	I do not know because we do not live together	19,4%	18,0%
RELATIONSHIP ARGUMENTS AMOUNT (MEDIAN)		3	3

Table 7

Condition of the couple relationship in the gender status subgroups

		FEMALE JAPAN	FEMALE POLAND	MALE JAPAN	MALE POLAND
RELATIONSHIP DEPTH (MEDIAN)		3	3	3	3
ATTITUDE TO THE PARTNER (PERCENTAGES)	The best partner for the isolation	59,7%	61,6%	73,0%	77,1%
	No, I do not think so	11,5%	15,2%	13,8%	17,1%
	I do not know because we do not live together	24,7%	23,2%	12,0%	5,8%
RELATIONSHIP ARGUMENTS AMOUNT (MEDIAN)		3	3	3	3

Table 8

Condition of the couple relationship in the respondents' relationship status subgroups

		LIVING APART JAPAN	LIVING APART POLAND	LIVING TO- GETHER JAPAN	LIVING TO- GETHER POLAND	LONG- DISTANCE RELA- TION- SHIPS JAPAN	LONG- DISTAN- CE RE- LATION- SHIPS POLAND
RELATIONSHIP DEPTH (MEDIAN)		3	3	3	3	3	3&4
ATTITUDE TO THE PARTNER (PERCENTAGES)	The best partner for the isolation	50.0%	36,7%	82.6%	78,9%	22,2%	16,7%
	No I do not think so.	4.0%	6,1%	17.0%	19,9%	3,7%	0%
	I do not know because we do not live together	46.0%	57,2%	0.3%	1,2%	74,0%	83,3%

RELATIONSHIP ARGUMENTS AMOUNT (MEDIAN)		3	3	3	3	3	2
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In the question about opinions about relationship depth in almost every subgroup the score is "3" which corresponds with the middle answer associated with no changes in the relational closeness during lockdown. The only one median of "4" is in the group of Poles living in long distance relationships. Attitudes to the partner are very similar in groups of Polish and Japanese respondents and more than 60% percent of both of them declared that their current partner is the best one for the isolation. In the subgroups divided by gender both Japanese and Polish male seem to have a higher percent of participants satisfied with their spouses. The last division is about the type of the relationship. In both countries respondents living together most often declared that their partner is the best one for lockdown. Subgroups living apart were in second place, although the Japanese group characterised higher percent of satisfied individuals. Long- distance relationship subgroups most often declare that they don't know if their partner is the best one because of living apart. Almost all groups got a score of "3" with the question about changes in argument in the relationship amount. This is a median rate which is associated with no changes in the questioning area. The group of respondents living in long distance relationships in Poland got a score of "2" which is correlated with a bit lower number of arguments.

Relationships violence

The last described area is the one about emotional and physical violence in the relationships during the pandemic lockdown. The used scale was nominal and answers are represented in percentages. Respondents could indicate how often they experienced violence in the relationship.

Table 9
Violence in the couple relationship in the respondents' groups

		ALL PARTICIPANTS JAPAN	ALL PARTICIPANTS POLAND
EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE	Never	91%	85,6%
	One time	2%	6,3%
	Few times	7%	8,1%

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	Never	99%	98,2%
	One time	0%	1,3%
	Few times	1%	0,5%

Table 10
Violence in the couple relationship in the respondents' gender subgroups

		FEMALE JAPAN	FEMALE POLAND	MALE JAPAN	MALE POLAND
EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE	Never	89%	86,2%	95%	84,3%
	One time	3%	6,2%	0%	4,3%
	Few times	8%	6,6%	5%	11,4%
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	Never	98%	99,3%	99%	95,7%
	One time	0%	0,7%	0%	2,9%
	Few times	2%	0%	1%	1,4%

Table 11
Violence in the couple relationship in the respondents' relationship status subgroups

		LIVING APART JAPAN	LIVING APART POLAND	LIVING TOGETHER JAPAN	LIVING TOGETHER POLAND	LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS JAPAN	LONG-DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS POLAND
EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE	Never	93,1%	89,8%	89,0%	84,5%	100%	83,4%
	One time	1,5%	6,1%	2,6%	6,2%	0%	8,3%
	Few times	4,6%	4,1%	8,3%	9,3%	0%	8,3%
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	Never	99,2%	97,9%	98,1%	98,2%	100%	100%
	One time	0,8%	2,1%	0,4%	1,2%	0%	0%
	Few times	0%	0%	1,5%	0,6%	0%	0%

In all divisions the obtained results seem to be quite similar. The vast majority of the respondents declared that they were never the victim of the violence. The lowest result in this type of answer is 83,4% and it is correlated with emotional violence in long- distance relationships in Polish subgroup. There are also three cases when 100% of the participants had chosen that they were never the victim of the violence. All of them are the groups in long- distance relationship. Japanese respondents had chosen this type of answer due to both emotional and physical violence, when the Polish ones had made that choice only about the physical type.

Discussion

This aim of the study was to examine the similarities and differences in relationship functioning in Japan nad Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous researches¹⁸¹⁹²⁰ suggest that the reduced physical and social contact with people and the limitation of people's freedom due to the COVID-19 pandemic can also affect intimate couple relationships in a negative way. It has shown that in times of crisis, stress impacts relationship quality.

Polish previous research shows that more than half of the respondents declared no changes in their relationship during pandemic. But there is also a noticeable difference between number of the participants perceiving their relationship as stronger that before lockdown and those who think the opposite, where the first group is definitely more numerous.

However, a deeper analysis of the correlation between the concerns and the relationship status is needed for further studies. A follow up survey is also needed to understand whether the changes in intimate relationships will be long-term changes or whether we see these changes only during the pandemic. Additionally a further investigation on how couple relationships might change after the pandemic is needed.

Limitations

The present research has few limitations that need to be addressed. To understand the influence among different kinds of relationship functions, further investigation should be done to estimate the influence of Covid-19 pandemic in a broader frame of relationship function.

Among both Polish and Japanese respondents, more than 60% declared that their current partner is the best one for the isolation. Both Japanese and Polish male seem to have a higher percent of participants satisfied with their

¹⁸ T. Suga, *Protecting women: new domestic violence countermeasures*.

¹⁹ M. Yamada *Shingatakakusashakai*.

²⁰ Recruit Bridal Research Institute, *Fufu kankei chosa 2021*, https://www.recruit.co.jp/newsroom/pressrelease/assets/20210803_marriage_01.pdf [accessed: October 2021].

spouses than female. Results indicate that there is a need to make more detailed cross-countries comparisons in the area of functioning of the relationship during lockdown and isolation.

This paper represents obtained results in a descriptive manner. As a result, it is impossible to draw unambiguous conclusions. Also this paper shows some directions for further investigations but doesn't lead to any formal statements. Furthermore, the effect of the described research shows the need of deeper investigation in the areas included in this work

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