The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Family Cohesion. Results from an International Study

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Introduction:
The lives and relationships of many have been influenced by changes imposed by Covid-19, especially the strict lockdown which was imposed during the first months of the pandemic. The aim of the current study was to document how the pandemic affects family relations.

Methods:
Participants from 46 countries were asked to complete an online survey including the Penn State Worry Questionnaire (PSWQ) and the newly devised Athens family cohesion scale (AFCS), comparing the periods before and during the pandemic.

Results:
Two-thirds of the participants (N = 481) were women; mean age 36.7 ±14.6 years old. Mean score of the PSWQ was 50.6 ±13.1. Worsening of family cohesion was reported by 22% of the participants, while 40.7% reported a better family cohesion after the pandemic started. Total score of AFCS was correlated negatively with PSWQ by linear regression analysis of AFCS on sex, age and PSWQ (beta= -0.058 ±0.023, p=0.012), showing that family cohesion was better the lower the worry. Change of family cohesion was not found to be correlated to PSWQ nor to total score of AFCS.

Conclusions:
Family cohesion during the pandemic seems to be related to the level of worry of the reporting individual; in the majority of cases family cohesion did not change (neither improved nor deteriorated) during the lockdown.

Key messages:
- Family cohesion generally is unchanged under strict situations such as the lockdown.
- Family cohesion is related to the levels of worry as reflected in the Penn State Worry Questionnaire.