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Couples' Functioning during Weekdays and Weekends at the Time of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed at analyzing differences between weekdays and weekends in psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, and dyadic coping, as well as their associations, before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Italy. Individuals in a couple's relationship completed an online questionnaire before ($N = 76$) and during ($N = 50$) the COVID-19 lockdown. With regard to the first aim, participants in the COVID condition reported greater psychological well-being during weekends than during weekdays. In addition, participants showed greater relationship satisfaction during weekdays than during weekends, independently of the COVID-19 condition. As for the dyadic coping process, only in the Pre-COVID group, individuals communicated their stress more frequently during weekdays than during weekends. Finally, regardless of the COVID condition, they reported higher positive and common dyadic coping responses during weekends than during weekdays. As for the second aim, a positive effect of common dyadic coping responses on both psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction emerged during weekdays and weekends. Positive dyadic coping positively predicted relationship satisfaction during weekdays and weekends. Higher negative dyadic coping was associated with lower psychological well-being (in the Pre-COVID group only) and lower relationship satisfaction during weekends.

KEYWORDS

couple; COVID-19; dyadic coping; psychological well-being; relationship satisfaction; weekday; weekend

Couple relationship during weekdays and weekends

Partners' psychological well-being and couple relationship outcomes face fluctuations in daily life, though research on differences between weekdays and weekends for couples is still scarce. In particular, research has investigated whether *psychological* well-being varies during weekdays and weekends. This is because weekdays and weekends are socially structured in different ways. Weekends can be considered as a period in which people can dedicate more time to themselves, to their partner, and to their families

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as compared to weekdays (Helliwell & Wang, 2014). Stone et al. (2012), in fact, demonstrate that people have a better mood during weekends, and this has been called the "weekend effect." Helliwell and Wang (2014) reported that people (especially males and married individuals) showed higher levels of happiness, laughter, and enjoyment on weekends (and in general during holidays) than on weekdays. Weekdays, instead, were characterized by more anxiety, sadness, and anger, and this was true mainly for men. Cranford et al. (2006) study also showed that during weekends there was a decrease in negative mood and fatigue and more vigor. The "weekend effect" has been studied also in relation to work. In fact, Helliwell and Wang (2014) found that the effect was higher for full-time paid workers than for the rest of the population and was smaller for people who had a collaborative view of their relationship with their chief and for those who perceived a climate of openness and trust in their work environment. In the same way, Ryan et al. (2010) proved that weekends and holiday periods were related to enhanced well-being. The existence of a "weekend effect" highlight a relation between the satisfaction of psychological needs and the individual's psychological well-being. Reis et al. (2000) stated that the "weekend effect" exists because during weekends in comparison with weekdays people are more autonomous and they can enjoy their relationships more.

Studies specifically focused on partners' *relational* well-being during weekdays and weekends report rather inconsistent findings. Duck et al. (1991) showed that there is more conflictive communication during weekdays, especially on Wednesdays. Halford et al. (1992) showed a similar pattern: Interactions were more positive during weekends when there was the lower level of stress. Bodenmann et al. (2010) found that couples had more sexual activity on the weekend, suggesting that during weekends partners may be less affected by stress and consequently have more time for each other. Alberts et al. (2005) found a higher couple satisfaction, but also more conflicts during weekends than during weekdays, thereby showing a more complex picture of couples' outcomes during weekdays and weekends. In this vein, a daily diary study by Milek et al. (2015) highlighted that, for women, spending more time with their partner was more beneficial for the couple during weekdays than weekends, as long as they experienced lower relational stress or higher intimacy.

To understand the differences in relationship outcomes between weekdays and weekends, it could be therefore important to analyze differences in those couple interactions that can promote lower stress and higher intimacy. One such interaction is the partners' dyadic coping against stress. In the Systemic-Transactional Model (STM) dyadic coping is defined as the process through which partners face stress together (Bodenmann, 2005;

Donato, 2014; Pagani et al., 2019). Faced with a shared stressor, beyond the individual coping efforts, partners cope also collectively as a unit. To start a dyadic coping exchange, a stress communication process is required: Each partner communicates his or her own stress to the other to receive support. The other partner, then, can respond with either supportive or unsupportive coping reactions. Supportive responses include positive and common dyadic coping. Positive dyadic coping refers to the provision of advice and practical help with daily tasks, expressions of empathy and concern, as well as positive reframing. Common dyadic coping refers to joint problem-solving, relaxing together, as well as mutual expressions of solidarity. Negative dyadic coping comprises unsupportive responses, such as showing disinterest, providing ambivalent support that is accompanied by criticism or sarcasm, and minimizing the severity of the stressor. Dyadic coping is a pro-relationship process (Donato & Parise, 2015), aimed at decreasing the partners' levels of stress and improving relationship satisfaction by strengthening intimacy (e.g., Bodenmann, 2005; Falconier & Kuhn, 2019).

With regard to the differences in dyadic coping between weekdays and weekends, it is possible that couples during weekdays have more occasions to incur in stressful events and therefore engage more in dyadic coping than during weekends. On the other hand, couples might have more time during the weekend to discuss and deal with the stress accumulated during the working week and therefore engage in dyadic coping exchanges. Moreover, weekends are not always stress-free: Spending more time with the partner or other family members may increase occasions for tensions and conflicts and the organizations of weekend activities may be stressful in itself. What happens when usual weekly routines are disrupted as a consequence of external circumstances?

The role of COVID-19 pandemic for couple's weekly routines

The COVID-19 pandemic, declared on the 11th March 2020 by World Health Organization (WHO), and the restriction measures imposed by governments to contrast the adverse effects of the virus have impacted on partners' individual well-being and relationship satisfaction. As already shown by the literature on previous epidemics or major stressful events, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, adverse events of such a magnitude significantly impact on individual well-being and couple relationships. For example, related to individual well-being, it was found that the SARS epidemic in 2003 was associated with psychological problems and post-traumatic stress (Tsang et al., 2004; Wu et al., 2005). With regard to couple relationships, studies reported are not clearly emerged. On one hand,

marital dissolution increased after Hurricane Hugo (Cohan & Cole, 2002) and after the SARS epidemic (Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong, 2018). On the other hand, lower divorce rates were observed after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 (Nakonezny et al., 2004) and the World Trade Center terrorist attacks in 2001 (Cohan et al., 2009). As for the COVID-19 pandemic, research has shown higher levels of cognitive rigidity and cognitive instability associated with concerns related to the COVID-19 outbreak and a deteriorated mental health during the lockdown (Pagnini et al., 2020; Villani et al., 2021). In addition, studies found lower scores on relationship satisfaction, love, intimacy, and passion post-lockdown compared to pre-lockdown (e.g., Ahuja & Khurana, 2021) and higher divorce rates after the lockdown in China (Prasso, 2020). On the other hand, research has shown that COVID-19 concerns also elicited the dyadic coping process, which was found to be protective of partners' individual well-being (Donato et al., 2020) and relationship satisfaction (Randall et al., 2022).

Less is known, however, about how couples experienced their daily life (Aymerich-Franch, 2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced people to radically change their routines and habits since during lockdown (i.e., the restriction of movements instituted as a security measure against the spread of the virus by most governments during the virus outbreak) most individuals spent their entire day at home. Cohabiting partners found themselves living together for a rather unusual amount of time. During such a prolonged cohabitation, the boundaries between private and work life became less clear and, as a consequence, the negative spillover of work stress on the quality of family relationships and psychological well-being may be higher (Sahay & Wei, 2021) since many companies switched to teleworking and schools were closed. Especially mothers spent less time working because of a higher demand for childcare (Andrew et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2020; Collins, 2021). During the lockdown, the high demand for flexibility in switching between work and private life, the extended couple and family time due to forced cohabitation, as well as the restrictions in leisure activities and movements could translate into smaller differences between weekdays and weekends in partners' well-being and couple interactions as compared to pre-lockdown periods. Research has shown, for example, that the usual differences between workdays and free days in rest-activity rhythms were smaller during the phase with rigorous COVID-19 restrictions (Blume et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020). We are unaware of any studies that have investigated, whether psychological well-being and relational functioning after the COVID-19 outbreak differ between weekdays and weekends.

Current study

The present longitudinal study aimed at understanding if there were differences in the levels of psychological well-being and relational functioning, in terms of relationship satisfaction and dyadic coping, during weekdays and weekends. As the virus spread during data collection, we had also the possibility to examine whether the restriction measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on couples' weekly routines.

The first aim of this study was to analyze whether and how (i.e., in which direction) participants' levels of psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, and dyadic coping (in terms of one's own stress communication, partner positive dyadic coping, partner negative dyadic coping, and common dyadic coping) differed between weekdays and weekends as well as before or during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

Specifically, we expected to find higher psychological well-being during weekends than on weekdays (the so-called "weekend effect"; Stone et al., 2012; H1). In addition, given the lacking or contradictory findings related to relationship satisfaction (RQ1a) and dyadic coping components (RQ1b) we did not hypothesize specific directions of the effects. Moreover, given the lack of studies on differences before and after the COVID-19 lockdown on psychosocial variables, we did not hypothesize specific directions of the effects with regard to psychological well-being (RQ2a), relationship satisfaction (RQ2b) and dyadic coping components (RQ2c). Finally, we expected the COVID-19 situation, when weekly routines could be disrupted, that smooths the differences in psychological well-being (H2a), relationship satisfaction (H2b), and dyadic coping components (H2c) between weekends and weekdays.

The second aim of this study was to examine whether dyadic coping components were significant predictors of participants' psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction on weekdays and weekends. We also explored whether the above associations differed before or during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

We expected stress communication and supportive forms of dyadic coping (i.e., positive and common dyadic coping) to be positively associated with psychological well-being (H3a) and relationship satisfaction (H3b). Conversely, we expected negative dyadic coping to be negatively associated with psychological well-being (H4a) and relationship satisfaction (H4b). We expected these associations to be consistent on both weekdays and weekends. Finally, we expected the impact of dyadic coping components on psychological well-being (H5a) and relation satisfaction (H5b) to be stronger during the COVID-19 lockdown, given the importance of coping mechanisms to face this major stressor.

Method

Participants and procedure

The sample was composed of 126 Italian individuals (50% females) aged 25 to 55 years ($M = 36.79$; $SD = 8.78$) involved in a couple relationship. Sixty-five percent of participants were cohabiting, while 35% were married, with an average relationship duration of 9.94 years ($SD = 8.11$). Precisely 38.1% of participants had children. Participants' yearly gross income was as follows: between 0 and 5.000 Euros (19%); between 5.001 and 15.000 (27%); between 15.001 and 28.000 Euros (35.7%); between 28.001 and 55.000 (15.1%); between 55.001 and 75.000 (3.2%). The distribution of education completed by participants was as follows: 5 years (1.6%), 8 years (0.8%), 13 years (38.8%), and 18 years (58.7%). Inclusion criteria were: (1) being involved in a couple relationship for at least 2 years; (2) cohabiting with the partner; (3) being aged 25–55. Eligible participants were contacted via social networks and through snowball sampling and informed about the research goals and procedures. The research design comprised two assessment points: one during the week and one during the weekend. After providing their informed consent, participants filled in two sets of an online questionnaire provided in Italian, one during a weekday and another one during the weekend. The study was approved by the IRB of Sapienza University of Rome (protocol n. 13/20). Seventy-six individuals (Pre-COVID group) participated in the study before the COVID-19 outbreak (between the 27th of January and the 10th of March), while 50 participated in the study during the Italian lockdown (starting from the 11th of March 2020 till the 4th of May 2020) due to the COVID-19 emergency (COVID group). No significant differences between these two groups emerged in both structural characteristics and study variables, except for positive dyadic coping scores which were slightly higher in the COVID group when measured both on a weekday [$t(124) = -2.26$; $p = .026$; COVID group: $M = 3.90$, $SD = .72$; Pre-COVID group: $M = 3.59$, $SD = .79$] and a weekend [$t(124) = -2.08$; $p = .040$; COVID group: $M = 3.90$, $SD = .74$; Pre-COVID group: $M = 3.64$; $SD = .66$].

Measures

Psychological well-being

The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007; Gremigni & Stewart-Brown, 2011) was used to capture a broad conception of psychological well-being in terms of affective-emotional aspects, cognitive-evaluative dimensions, and psychological functioning. Participants were asked to assess 12 items, based on the previous two weeks, on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time).

Sample items are: "I've been feeling optimistic about the future," "I've energy to spare," "I've been thinking clearly." Items were averaged to compute a psychological well-being index: Higher scores represented better psychological well-being. Reliabilities assessed through Cronbach's Alphas were all good ($\alpha = .83$; .80; .87; .87 for weekdays Pre-COVID group, weekend Pre-COVID group, weekends Pre-COVID group, and weekends COVID group, respectively).

Relationship satisfaction

To assess relationship satisfaction, we used the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007). This version includes 32 items: The first item asked to rate the level of happiness in the relationship on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 = extremely unhappy to 6 = perfect, the other 24 items addressed relational satisfaction (e.g., "How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?"; "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?") and were rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from not at all to complete. For the last 7 items, participants were asked to rate how they felt about their relationship by choosing their position, on a 6-point Likert scale, between 7 couples of adjectives of opposite nature (e.g., "interesting-boring," "bad-good," "full-empty"). We summed the responses across all of the items to create a total score in which higher scores indicate higher levels of relationship satisfaction, while scores falling below 104.5 suggest relationship dissatisfaction. Reliabilities assessed through Cronbach's Alphas were all very good ($\alpha = .97$; .94; .98; .96 for weekdays Pre-COVID group, weekend Pre-COVID group, weekends Pre-COVID group, and weekends COVID group, respectively).

Dyadic coping

To assess dyadic coping, we used 41 items from the Dyadic Coping Questionnaire (Bodenmann, 1997, 2000; Donato et al., 2009). Participants were asked to assess perceptions of one's own and one's partner's stress communication, the perceptions of one's own and one's partner's dyadic coping behaviors in response to one's communication of stress, perceptions of the couple's coping behaviors partners enact together in response to common stressors, and perceptions of one's own satisfaction and efficacy of dyadic coping. For this study, we focused on the items measuring perceptions of one's own stress communication, and on the items assessing the partner's positive and negative dyadic coping responses and common dyadic coping. Responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). We averaged the 4 items measuring one's own stress communication (e.g., "[When I'm stressed,] I let my partner know that I appreciate his/her

practical support, advice, or help"), the 7 items measuring partner's positive dyadic coping responses (e.g., "My partner helps me to see the stressful situation in a different light and to put the problem in perspective"), the 5 items measuring partner's negative dyadic coping responses (e.g., "My partner shows me that he/she doesn't want to be bothered with my problems"), and the 7 items of common dyadic coping responses (e.g., "We try to cope with the problem together and search for practical solutions") into three separate indices. A higher score indicated a greater level of stress communication or of the relative dyadic coping response. Reliabilities assessed through Cronbach's Alphas were all good (Stress communication: $\alpha = .72$; .75; .88; .86 for weekdays Pre-COVID group, weekend Pre-COVID group, weekends Pre-COVID group, and weekends COVID group, respectively; Positive Dyadic Coping: $\alpha = .87$; .85; .90; .90 for weekdays Pre-COVID group, weekend Pre-COVID group, weekends Pre-COVID group, and weekends COVID group, respectively; Negative Dyadic Coping: $\alpha = .74$; .81; .84; .86 for weekdays Pre-COVID group, weekend Pre-COVID group, weekends Pre-COVID group, and weekends COVID group, respectively; Common Dyadic Coping: $\alpha = .71$; .73; .71; .70 for weekdays Pre-COVID group, weekend Pre-COVID group, weekends Pre-COVID group, and weekends COVID group, respectively).

Data analyses

Data were analyzed using the software IBM SPSS version 22.0 (IBM Corp., 2013). With regard to the first aim, we adopted an analysis of variance approach. Specifically, to explore differences between Pre-COVID and COVID groups as well as between weekdays and weekends, we ran a series of 2 (COVID group: Pre-COVID *vs.* COVID) × 2 (Day of the week: Weekday *vs.* Weekend) repeated-measure ANOVAs on psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, and stress communication. In addition, a 2 (COVID group: Pre-COVID *vs.* COVID) × 2 (Day of the week: Weekday *vs.* Weekend) repeated-measure MANOVA was conducted, assuming as dependent variables the three dyadic coping styles: partner positive dyadic coping, partner negative dyadic coping, common dyadic coping. In the analyses, we controlled for participants' gender, age, and presence of children. Significant interactions were explored through pairwise comparisons (Sidak, 1967).

With regard to our second aim, we ran a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses with the Enter method, separately for weekdays and weekends, to test the associations between predictors (i.e., stress communication, partner positive dyadic coping, partner negative dyadic coping, and common dyadic coping) and outcomes (i.e., psychological well-being;

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables.

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Own stress communication	126	3.56	0.71	—					
2. Partner positive DC	126	3.73	0.71	.51***	—				
3. Partner negative DC	126	1.57	0.62	−.12**	−.47***	—			
4. Common DC	126	3.63	0.64	.44***	.74***	−.43***	—		
5. Psychological well-being	126	3.49	0.55	.26**	.43***	−.11	.54***	—	
6. Relationship satisfaction	126	121.47	23.40	.31***	.73***	−.57***	.74***	.38***	—

DC: dyadic coping.
Note. $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

relationship satisfaction), controlling for participants' gender, age, and presence of children. In addition, we tested whether these associations differed across COVID groups. To this aim, all predictors were standardized and product terms representing the interaction between each predictor and the moderator (i.e., Covid group), used as a dummy variable (0,1), were computed. These variables were entered in the regression equation. Specifically, we entered the predictor and the moderator in the first block, and in the second block, we added the product term as a third predictor variable. Whenever significant interactions emerged, simple slope analysis was performed using *Interaction!* (Soper, 2020).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables can be found in Table 1. Participants reported on average moderate levels of stress communication, positive dyadic coping, common dyadic coping, psychological well-being, and relationship satisfaction as well as low levels of negative dyadic coping, as expected in a community, non-clinical sample. Moreover, stress communication, dyadic coping responses, psychological well-being, and relationship satisfaction were significantly correlated with each other (Pearson's r ranging from .12 to .74) in the expected directions, with the only exception of the non-significant association between negative dyadic coping and psychological well-being.

With regard to the first aim (Table 2), the results of repeated-measure ANOVAs revealed a significant main effect of Day of the week [$F(1,123) = 4.296$, $p = .040$; partial $\eta^2 = .034$] on psychological well-being. This effect was further specified by a significant interaction effect between COVID group and Day of the week [$F(1,123) = 6.291$, $p = .013$; partial $\eta^2 = .049$]: Participants only in the COVID condition reported greater psychological well-being ($p = .005$) during weekends ($M = 3.54$) than during weekdays ($M = 3.39$). In addition, a significant main effect of Day of the week [$F(1,119) = 23.537$, $p < .001$; partial $\eta^2 = .116$] was found for relationship satisfaction: Participants reported greater relationship satisfaction during weekdays ($M = 127.56$) than during weekends ($M = 118.58$). Also, a

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of study variables during weekdays and weekends, in both pre-COVID group and COVID group.

		Weekday		Weekend	
Variable		*M*	*SD* (range)	*M*	*SD* (range)
Own stress communication	Pre-COVID group	3.61	0.73 (1.5–5)	3.48	0.71 (1.75–5)
	COVID group	3.52	0.78 (2–5)	3.65	0.81 (2–5)
Partner positive DC	Pre-COVID group	3.59	0.79 (1–5)	3.64	0.66 (1.61–5)
	COVID group	3.90	0.72 (1.67–5)	3.90	0.74 (1.83–5)
Partner negative DC	Pre-COVID group	1.58	0.62 (1–3.8)	1.60	0.65 (1–3.6)
	COVID group	1.54	0.70 (1–5)	1.52	0.73 (1–5)
Common DC	Pre-COVID group	3.49	0.79 (1.61–5)	3.57	0.71 (1.72–5)
	COVID group	3.77	0.76 (2–5)	3.82	0.82 (1.67–5)
Psychological well-being	Pre-COVID group	3.51	0.58 (2.25–5)	3.49	0.52 (2.5–5)
	COVID group	3.39	0.65 (1.67–4.92)	3.54	0.62 (2.25–5)
Relationship satisfaction	Pre-COVID group	121.36	31.13 (30–159)	114.11	24.16 (32–144)
	COVID group	132.45	25.10 (48–161)	123.35	22.30 (66–145)

DC: dyadic coping.

significant main effect of Day of the week [$F(1,121) = 5.152$, $p = .025$; partial $\eta^2 = .041$] was found for stress communication. However, this main effect was further specified by a significant interaction effect between COVID group and Day of the week [$F(1,121) = 5.703$, $p = .018$; partial $\eta^2 = .045$]. In particular, participants only in the Pre-COVID group communicated their stress more frequently ($p = .048$) during weekdays ($M = 3.61$) than during weekends ($M = 3.48$). With respect to dyadic coping responses, the MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate effect for Day of the week [Wilks' Lambda = .876, $F(3,119) = 5.606$, $p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .124$]. Univariate testing found the effects to be significant for partner-positive dyadic coping [$F(1,121) = 7.041$, $p = .009$, partial $\eta^2 = .055$] and common dyadic coping [$F(1,121) = 6.392$, $p = .013$, partial $\eta^2 = .050$]. No effects emerged for partner negative dyadic coping.

With regard to the second aim, the regression model predicting psychological well-being during weekdays was significant [$R^2 = 0.351$, $F(12, 1125) = 5.093$, $p < .001$]. In particular, the effect of common dyadic coping responses on psychological well-being was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .408$, $p = .004$). In addition, the effect of COVID group was significant: Psychological well-being was lower in the COVID group ($\beta = -.21$, $p = .012$) than in the Pre-COVID one. No other main effects nor interaction effects were found. Finally, in the model predicting psychological well-being during weekends [$R^2 = 0.441$, $F(12,125) = 7.442$, $p < .001$], the effects of common dyadic coping responses ($\beta = .389$, $p = .006$) and age ($\beta = .273$, $p = .004$) were positive and statistically significant. Moreover, we found a significant interaction effect between COVID group and negative dyadic coping responses ($\beta = .278$, $p = .018$). Simple slopes analysis revealed a significant negative effect of negative dyadic coping on psychological well-being only in the Pre-COVID group

(*simple slope* = −.21, $p = .036$), while this effect was not significant in the COVID group (*simple slope* = .048, $p = .657$).

The model predicting relationship satisfaction during weekdays was significant [$R^2 = 0.60$, $F(12, 123) = 14.082$, $p < .001$]. In particular, the effect of positive ($\beta = .369$, $p = .001$) and common dyadic coping responses ($\beta = .375$, $p = .001$) on relationship satisfaction were positive and statistically significant. No other main effects nor interaction effects were found. In line with the previous model, the regression model predicting relationship satisfaction during weekends [$R^2 = 0.67$, $F(12, 122) = 18.298$, $p < .001$] showed positive and significant effects of both positive ($\beta = .353$, $p = .005$) and common dyadic coping responses ($\beta = .372$, $p = .001$). In addition, negative dyadic coping responses were negatively and significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.192$, $p = .027$). No other main effects nor interaction effects were found.

Discussion

The study was aimed at understanding differences between weekdays and weekends in psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, and dyadic coping, as well as their associations, before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Italy. In particular, the first aim of this study was to analyze whether and how (i.e., in which direction) participants' levels of psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, stress communication, and dyadic coping responses differed between weekdays and weekends as well as before or during the COVID-19 lockdown period (i.e., Pre-COVID *vs.* COVID groups, respectively). Our results showed that individuals in couples reported greater psychological well-being during weekends than during weekdays (i.e., the "weekend effect"), only in the COVID group (see H2a). This finding only partially confirms the existence of a "weekend effect" on psychological well-being (H1). Moreover, by observing participants' mean values, it seems that the difference between weekdays and weekends in the COVID group could be driven by the fact that psychological well-being during weekdays in this group was lower than average, thereby confirming how participants in the COVID group had quite challenging weekday routines to deal with, in addition to concerns related to the pandemic.

With regard to relationship satisfaction, our study showed greater relationship satisfaction during weekdays than during weekends (RQ1a), independently of the COVID-19 epidemic (see H2b). Within the inconsistent literature on the effects of the day of the week on relationship outcomes, our data show a reversed "weekend effect": Both before and during COVID-19 lockdown, partners were less satisfied with their relationship during weekends, probably because of the high expectation for quality time

and intimacy during weekends that can be frustrated by the extra-work engagements that families still have in these days (e.g., shopping, visiting relatives, children's homework). Although outdoor activities were partially reduced during the lockdown, some of these engagements became even more challenging (more time-consuming shopping and homeschooling; more difficult ways of contact with relatives, etc.). The absence of effects related to the COVID group is related to similar levels of relationship satisfaction before and after the COVID outbreak (RQ2b). It may be that in our study examining the first period of the pandemic, the effects on relationship outcomes were not evident yet. Research on other stressful events, such as one partner's cardiac event, actually found that partners maintain high levels of relationship satisfaction after the cardiac event (Bertoni et al., 2015). Future longitudinal research on subsequent phases of the pandemic should examine whether the stress induced by the pandemic had a longer-term effect on relationship outcomes.

As for the dyadic coping process, our findings showed that, only in the Pre-COVID group, individuals communicated their stress more frequently during weekdays than during weekends (see H2c). This finding highlights that, in the pre-COVID group, where individuals spent much more time outside their house and less in the company of their partners during weekdays, the need for sharing stressful encounters was greater during weekdays than during weekends. During the COVID-19 lockdown, instead, forced cohabitation made stressful communication with the partner less necessary, as partners shared time was much longer and the occasions for witnessing the other's stressors were greater. With regard to dyadic coping responses, our findings highlighted that partners enacted more positive and common dyadic coping behaviors during weekends than during weekdays (RQ1b), regardless of the contextual situation (i.e., pre-Covid or during the COVID emergency; RQ2c). Probably, during weekends partners had more occasions to spend time and cope together. This pattern did not change before and after the COVID outbreak. Overall, our data seem to highlight a weekly pattern of dyadic coping in which partners are more prone to engage in stress communication during the week and use their shared time available over weekends to cope together. Future intensive longitudinal studies should confirm this pattern.

Results regarding the first aim of this study showed nearly no evidence of a flattening effect of COVID-19 on differences between weekdays and weekends in psychological well-being (H2a) and couple functioning (H2b and H2c). The only exception in this respect was related to stress communication. This pattern of findings therefore could suggest that the temporal structure of the week remained unchanged for individuals in couples, notwithstanding the COVID-19 lockdown. This could be due to the fact that many weekly tasks were actually maintained, while the most relevant

changes referred to prolonged cohabitation and lack of traveling, which may explain the differences in stress communication only. This could also suggest that the temporal patterns and routines may fulfill a basic psychological need for rhythm, organization, and coherence, not only in normal but also in extraordinary and dramatic circumstances. Conservation of resources theory (COR), in fact, posits that maintenance of routines after a natural disaster can improve the "lifeway disruptions" frequently associated with post-disaster recovery (Hobfoll et al., 2015). Regular routines, in fact, were found to play an important role in individuals' mental health, especially buffering the deleterious effects of stress (Goodwin et al., 2020).

With regard to our second aim, which is the analysis of the associations of dyadic coping with psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction, the present findings show a positive and statistically significant effect of common dyadic coping responses on both psychological well-being (see H3a) and relationship satisfaction during weekdays and during weekends (see H3b). As shown in previous studies as well (Rottmann et al., 2015), when partners cope together against stress as a team, they also report better psychological well-being. Also, the beneficial effect of positive and common dyadic coping responses on relationship satisfaction confirms our expectations and extends what was found in previous research (Falconier & Kuhn, 2019) to the COVID emergency as well (Donato et al., 2020).

Moreover, we found that higher partner negative dyadic coping was associated with lower psychological well-being, in the Pre-COVID group only (see H5a), and lower relationship satisfaction during weekends (see H5b). No associations of partner negative dyadic coping with psychological well-being (see H5a) and relationship satisfaction (see H5b) were found during weekdays. It may be that, during weekdays, partners may be more prone to attribute the partner's negative reactions to their stressful day and to circumstances external to the relationship, thereby interpreting it in a more benevolent manner. During weekends, instead, partners may be less willing to discount negative behaviors to the partner as well as spend more time together, thereby having more room for experiencing the negative impact on their well-being and relationship. With regard to psychological well-being, this pattern was found in the Pre-COVID group only. It is worth noting that data collection for the COVID group was completed during the first phases of the pandemic in Italy and during the very first lockdown period. It could be that such dramatic and challenging moments may help interpreting the partner's negative reactions in light of the current extraordinary, novel situation and individuals may not feel bad about it. This seems not sufficient, however, to buffer the effects of negative partner behaviors on relationship satisfaction.

Limitations and implications for research and practice

The present findings should be considered in light of the following limitations. First, our sample was limited in size and composed of relatively well-adjusted and satisfied couples, thereby preventing us from generalizing our findings to the general population, and especially to couples marked by dissatisfaction and dysfunctional patterns. Second, we collected data only from one partner per couple and, therefore, we could not analyze reciprocal and cross-partner effects. Third, our study is correlational in nature so no causal interpretation can be made. Finally, we did not collect information about potential factors associated with the processes under investigation, such as whether partners continued to work during the lockdown as well as their previous and current health status. Nonetheless, this was among the few studies aimed at addressing the differences between partners' functioning during weekdays and weekends, highlighting the role of the temporal and rhythmic structure of couples' life. Moreover, the present study also allowed us to analyze the differences between weekdays and weekends both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, a common stressor that specifically required partners to adopt a conjoint form of coping.

Our findings also have implications for clinical practice. They showed the importance of temporal patterns in couples' life, which remained even during the COVID-19 lockdown, when daily and weekly routines were disrupted. Clinical and preventive interventions with couples could therefore target this relatively overlooked issue. Inviting partners to reflect on the expectations they may have on different phases of the week as well as on the couple's life may help them avoid unrealistic idealizations and be more in contact with their moment-to-moment interactions.

Our findings also point to the potential role of couple attributions to explain differences between more or less stressful circumstances (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). With regard to COVID-19, our study showed how it undermined psychological well-being while fostering relationship satisfaction. Research has shown that, although partners may be willing to sacrifice their individual well-being for the sake of the relationship (Coyne & Smith, 1994; Van Lange et al., 1997), for the long-term health of the relationship both individual and relational needs should be preserved, since they are deeply interconnected (Randall & Bodenmann, 2009; Repetti, 1989). Scholars have argued that stress can be an opportunity to identify and activate coping resources for both individuals (Crum et al., 2020) and couples (Donato et al., 2020).

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