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How Teen-Parent Relationships Changed during the Pandemic Period. Teenagers Talk about Themselves

Jak zmieniły się relacje między nastolatkami a rodzicami w okresie pandemii. Nastolatki mówią o sobie

Abstract: COVID-19 has had an indirect impact on families' daily lives: the restrictive measures to limit its spread changed family routines and affected the quality of parent-adolescent relationships. Some research examined changes in parenting and parent-child relationship quality, but there is a lack within scientific literature about what is the adolescents' specific vision about the qualitative changes of their teen-parent relationships during the pandemic period. Teens' qualitative descriptions of relationships with parents are the focus of the explorative research presented in this paper. Fifty-three Italian adolescents described how their family relationships changed during the lockdown (March-May 2020). Most of them describe an increase in the quality of their relationships with parents and relatives and perceive the lockdown as an occasion to grow and to learn about the complex aspects of life. Instead, those who perceived the lockdown as a traumatic period describe a difficult and conflictual domestic setting during their forced isolation at home. Findings show the peculiar resilient competence of adolescents in elaborating stressful situations.

Keywords: adolescence; teen-parent relationships; COVID-19; resilience

Abstrakt: Pandemia COVID-19 miała pośredni wpływ na codzienne życie rodzin – środki restrykcyjne mające na celu ograniczenie rozprzestrzeniania się koronawirusa zmieniły rutyny rodzinne i wpłynęły na jakość relacji rodzic-nastolatek. Niektóre badania dotyczyły zmian w rodzicielstwie i jakości relacji rodzic-dziecko, ale w literaturze naukowej wciąż brakuje informacji o tym, jaka jest konkretna wizja nastolatków na temat jakościowych zmian ich relacji nastoletnich z rodzicami w okresie pandemii. Przedmiotem badań eksploracyjnych przedstawionych w niniejszym artykule są jakościowe opisy 53 włoskich nastolatków dotyczące tego, jak zmieniły się ich relacje rodzinne podczas blokady (marzec-maj 2020 r.). Większość z nich opisała wzrost jakości swoich relacji z rodzicami i bliskimi, a zamknięcie postrzegają jako okazję do rozwoju i poznania złożonych aspektów życia. Z kolei ci, którzy postrzegali zamknięcie

jako traumatyczny okres, opisali trudne i konfliktowe otoczenie domowe podczas przymusowej izolacji w domu. Wyniki wskazują na szczególnie prężną kompetencję nastolatków w radzeniu sobie ze stresującymi sytuacjami.

Słowa kluczowe: wiek dojrzewania; relacje nastolatków z rodzicami; COVID-19; odporność

INTRODUCTION. THE PANDEMIC IN THE ADOLESCENTS' HOMES: QUALITATIVE CHANGES

The parent-child relationship is central to the life of every individual, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, it is a fundamental building block for psychological growth, on the basis of which she/he will decode and take a position in the world. In general, parents play a significant and essential role (Rise, 1990). The family is the place where the child's first socialization takes place, where she/he experiences contact with a social environment and begins to develop her/his first knowledge and affections (Scabini et al., 2011). The quality of these first attachment bonds is internalized over time and forms relatively stable internal models, helping children to configure mental representations of themselves and others in order to regulate the behavior of individuals in relationships (Bowlby, 1982; Cassidy et al., 2011). Indeed, it is starting from these foundations that the child first and then the adolescent gradually builds relational structures, personality, roles, cognitive and emotional resources.

It is therefore not surprising that the psychological well-being of children and young people is largely based on and influenced by the quality of the relationship with their own parents (van Wel et al., 2000; 2002). Individuals who have had caregivers, supportive and sensitive to their needs, will develop a secure attachment bond with consequent better emotion regulation strategies (Mikulincer et al., 2012), while those who have had less helpful caregivers will present an insecure attachment pattern with consequent difficulties in regulating these emotions. Less affective closeness to parents can indeed determine emotional problems (Helsen et al., 2000; Rawatlal et al., 2015) and problem behavior (Lakhdar et al., 2020; Smorti et al., 2014; 2015; Ooi et al., 2006; Liable et al., 2007; Dykas et al., 2008; de Vries et al., 2016; Allen et al., 2007; Charalampous et al., 2018; D'Urso et al., 2019), producing vulnerability and feelings of shortcomings (Shin et al., 2016). Furthermore, these bonds have an important role in the development of identity (Allen et al., 1994; Beyers et al., 2008; Schacter et al., 2008) and for the construction of a positive self-image (Dunlop et al., 2001; Malik et al., 2013) as well as in terms of an anaclitic identification: a positive image of parent enhanced adolescents' self-image, and facilitated psychological well-being of youths (Hashimoto et al., 2011).

The parent–child relationship runs into profound changes during the period of adolescence, also because of the process of accommodation that calls into question the bonds of attachment in a progressive conquest of independence. Teen–parent relationships will pass from one of relatively unilateral authority to one of cooperative negotiation (Smollar et al., 1985). Parents and adolescents have to reorganize responsibilities and move toward a more egalitarian relationship. Although conflicts between parents and children become more intense during adolescence, conflict interactions are a way to negotiate relational changes. “Parent–adolescent dyads with more emotional variability during conflict interactions tend to adapt effectively and reorganize their relationships in response to the developmental needs of adolescents” (Branje, 2018). During adolescence conflict itself is not a sign of poor relationship quality, but the way in which the parent–adolescent dyad negotiates conflicts and supports the relationship will make a difference. Adolescents who feel understood by their parents and trust their commitment to the relationship, even in the face of conflict, move confidently forward toward early adulthood. These securely attached adolescents do not avoid conflict, exploration and individuation, nor do they prematurely push for independence without the support of their parents (Moretti et al., 2004).

During early adolescence (10–12-year-olds), peers’ relationships come about alongside the relationships with parents: bonds with peers increase in importance while parental support decreases. The time spent with the family decreases and becomes more fragmented (Schachter et al., 2008), while the search for support, comparison and closeness of peers increases (Dunlop et al., 2001; Malik et al., 2013; Hashimoto et al., 2011; Smollar et al., 1985). If parental and friends’ support seem to be relatively independent relationships, the parental support remains the best indicator of emotional problems during adolescence (Helsen et al., 2000): indeed this is a period of psycho-social changes (Sanders, 2013) which have a salient impact on parent–child relationships also in terms of the increase in conflict and less warm interactions in relationships between parents and children during puberty (Paikoff et al., 1991). Adolescents report that their parents are less supportive in early (10–12-year-olds) to middle adolescence (13–16-year-olds), and they gradually perceive their parents as less powerful and controlling over the course of adolescence (De Goede et al., 2009; Keijsers et al., 2009). Laursen et al. (2018) in their meta-analyses showed that conflict rates decline from early adolescence to mid-adolescence and from mid-adolescence to late adolescence, whereas the emotional intensity of conflict increases from early adolescence to mid-adolescence: in summary, conflict rates decrease with adolescent age, and conflictual affects increase with adolescent age and pubertal maturation. Transformations, rather than disruptions, characterize these relationships: increases in conflict affective intensity coincide with increases in

autonomy and emotional dysphoria that occur as adolescents spend more time with friends (Fisher et al., 1995).

With the explosion of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the consequent measures implemented by the government to contain it, adolescents globally experienced a prolonged state of psychological and physical remoteness from their friends, classmates, teachers, relatives (Pediconi et al., 2021). The lockdown quite strongly changed the habits of adolescents in terms of hours spent with members of family and friends substantially changing the relationship between them. Secure peer attachments proved to be the pivotal factor against social disconnection at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, while fear of missing out was identified as an independent risk factor (Parent et al., 2021).

Parent-child relationship quality was a potential protective factor against isolation, feelings of loneliness, limited physical-social interaction: when the quality of parent-child relationships is poor before a new incoming challenge, this can limit family resilience and the adversity may further worsen the relationship. At the same time, when there is already a conflictual relationship between parent and adolescent this may increase the distress during the problematic situation and exacerbate the level of conflict in the family (Henry et al., 2015). If on the one side some parent-adolescent relationships seemed to have benefited from spending more time together, strengthening the feelings of affective closeness and warmth, on the other, the functioning of some families resulted poorer due to rising conflicts (Bülow et al., 2021; Janssen et al., 2020). Qu and colleagues (2021) showed that high levels of parent-adolescent conflict and lower levels of parent-adolescent intimacy may lead youth to experience increased depressive symptoms and anger problems over time, as well as highlighting the important role of parent-child relationships in shaping adolescent's mental, coping skills and resilience (Qu et al., 2021; Klootwijk et al., 2021; Prime et al., 2020). In other words, the more functional families are those that put even conflicts to good use to restore their bonds as moments for discussion and space to elaborate experiences by reducing demands (e.g. conflict resolution) or increasing capabilities (e.g. coping behaviors). The successful family adaptation is in fact the continued ability to promote development of the individual family members in light of adversity or stress (Patterson, 1988).

COVID-19 have had an indirect but serious impact on families' daily lives: the restrictive measures to limit its spread changed family routines and affected the quality of parenting and the parent-adolescent relationship. COVID-19 affected the parent-child relationship during the adolescence as a period with so delicate and important changes. Parental support, guidance, and structure accompany the healthy development of adolescents (Branje et al., 2002) even if relationships between adolescents and parents become more egalitarian, with an increase in conflicts (Branje et al., 2012) and a decrease of parental control during early adoles-

cence (De Goede et al., 2009) with a gradual accommodation of parents to the autonomy of their children (Branje, 2018; Keijsers et al., 2009).

Some research (Donker et al., 2021; Tambelli et al., 2021a; Öngören, 2021) examined changes in parenting and parent–child relationship quality, but there is a lack within scientific literature about what is the adolescents' particular vision about the qualitative changes of their teen–parent relationships during the pandemic period. The qualitative description of relationships with parents is the focus of the explorative research presented in this paper, according to studies that privilege the analysis of adolescents' narrative (Fioretti et al., 2020).

On the one hand, we can expect an increase during the COVID-19 period of parental support, as parents and adolescents are more at home and spend more time together. On the other hand, we also expected an increase of negative interactions and parent-reported discipline practices for adolescents, because parents and adolescents had less freedom to go outside or spend time with friends, and stricter rules and disciplinary measures needed to be applied in order for this close symbiosis to function for all. We expected significant changes in parent–adolescent relationships.

METHOD

Studies that explore the COVID-19 experience based on narratives are still rare. But we know the importance of giving voice to the autobiographical past in order to qualitatively explore participants' experiences. The written narrative is a way to collect information on personal experience and to generate research insights (Fioretti et al., 2020). According to Bruner (1990), the possibility to talk about her/his own experience allows the narrators emotional disclosure and gives meaning to her/his life story (McAdams et al., 2006). Autobiographical process skills are even more important for adolescents who are looking for identity definition (Habermas et al., 2000). In our research, adolescents' narratives in this pandemic period was the way to collect information promoting well-being through emotional and intrapsychic disclosure.

Qualitative research allows researchers to define the world in which people live based on the experiences that they have, and the meanings assigned to these experiences. We performed a qualitative study to explore adolescents' feelings and thoughts about how their relationships changed during the pandemic period. According to Green and Thorogood (2018), the qualitative research design allows the increase of knowledge about well-being based on personal perceptions of individuals. In this direction, the written narrative becomes a privileged way to explore autobiographical experiences in terms of thoughts, emotions, and feelings

as well as affective meaning-making (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker et al., 2003). According to Bruner (1990), elaborating life episodes and generating meanings about them increase knowledge about autobiographical experiences in both normative and non-normative life transitions, when the need for meaning-making about the self is decisive (Fioretti et al., 2020). Based on this scientific evidence, our research design was exploratory with the aim of understanding how adolescents were affected by the pandemic period starting from the adolescents' experiences narrated in their own words.

Our research aims to explore how the family relationships of adolescents changed during the period of the pandemic based on their own words. It is a qualitative explorative research closer to teens' experience while avoiding the influence of researchers' theoretical prejudices. The possibility to analyse the written words of teens is a privileged way to enter into their own experiences and learn how they faced such a difficult period of the pandemic and how they managed the relationships with their parents and family members and relatives living at home with them.

We asked 53 teens – 23 pre-adolescents (13 years old), and 30 adolescents (16 years old), 25 boys and 28 girls, to write an open text about this explicit theme: “How did relationships with your parents and the people who lived at home with you during the lockdown change?”. They had no limits of words nor time in writing (Scabini et al., 2011). We asked for a written text 12–18 months after the first lockdown in order to have a retrospective description based on their autobiographical memories (Brown, 2021). We analyzed the texts based on three research questions:

RQ1. How teen–parent relationships changed during lockdown: if they indicate a relational improvement or not; if there were differences based on age and gender.

RQ2. How adolescents perceived domestic sharing during lockdown: if they describe a pacific or conflictual household.

RQ3. How adolescents felt during the period of lockdown: if they describe the lockdown as an occasion to live and learn something new or to recover more positive dynamics with their parents or if they felt the lockdown as a traumatic period.

The written texts were analysed and labelled by three independent observers that ascribed the following indicators:

- 1) Teen–parent relationship: Improved or Not Improved
- 2) Domestic sharing: Pacific or Conflictual
- 3) Main feeling about lockdown: Occasion or Repair or Trauma

In addition, we selected the most significant sentences for each indicator in order to put into evidence the teens' specific words used to describe their experience and their feelings. Although the sample was limited, we applied some statistical operations in order to observe the relations among indicators.

FINDINGS

First results

RQ1. How teen–parent relationships changed during lockdown. In Figure 1, we observe that 67.9% of children write that relationships with their parents improved. In the group of those who affirm that the relationship with their parents did not improve (32.1%) we find both those who declare it remained as good as it was before the lockdown and those who describe it as having worsened: in both cases they do not report any progressive movement.

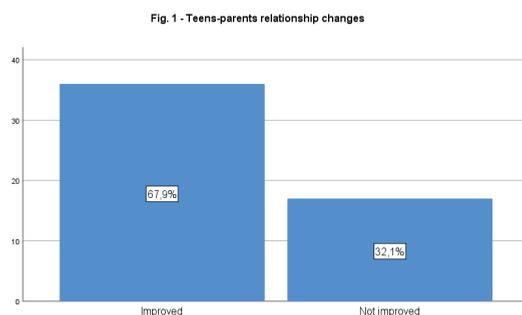


Figure 1. Teen–parent relationships changes

Source: Author's own study.

RQ2. How adolescents perceived domestic sharing during the lockdown. Figure 2 shows that 49.1% of our teens describe living under the same roof during the lockdown as pacific, while 50.9% describe it as conflictual.



Figure 2. Domestic sharing

Source: Author's own study.

RQ3. How adolescents felt during the period of lockdown. Figure 3 shows the main feelings that teens attribute to the experience of the lockdown: for 37.75% it was an opportunity for growth and discovery, for 24.5% it was an opportunity to repair relationships with their parents which had previously been perceived as conflicting; for 37.75%, the lockdown was a traumatic period.

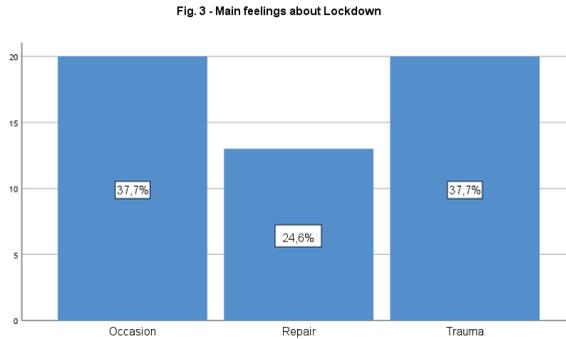


Figure 3. Main feelings about lockdown

Source: Author's own study.

No differences related to age and gender

Although not statistically significant, differences were found, it may be useful to note some details that could be further investigated by involving a sample with a greater number of adolescents.

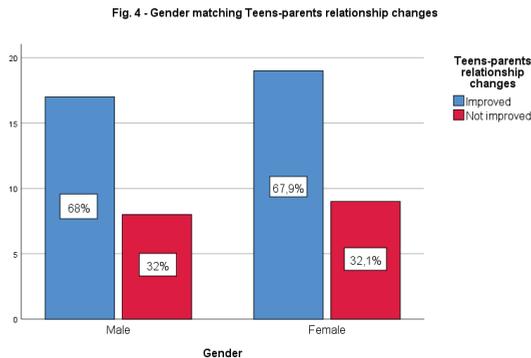


Figure 4. Gender matching with regard to teen–parents relationship changes

Source: Author's own study.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the perception of changes of teen–parent relationships during the lockdown for the 25 boys and 28 girls of our sample. In both subgroups, we see a majority describing improved relationships (68% of boys and 67.9% of girls). We find the same parallel distribution when they describe their domestic life during the lockdown: among the males, 48% describe a pacific one, 52% wrote about conflicts; among the girls, the descriptions are divided exactly in half between pacific and conflictual.

Fig. 5 - Gender matching Main feelings about Lockdown

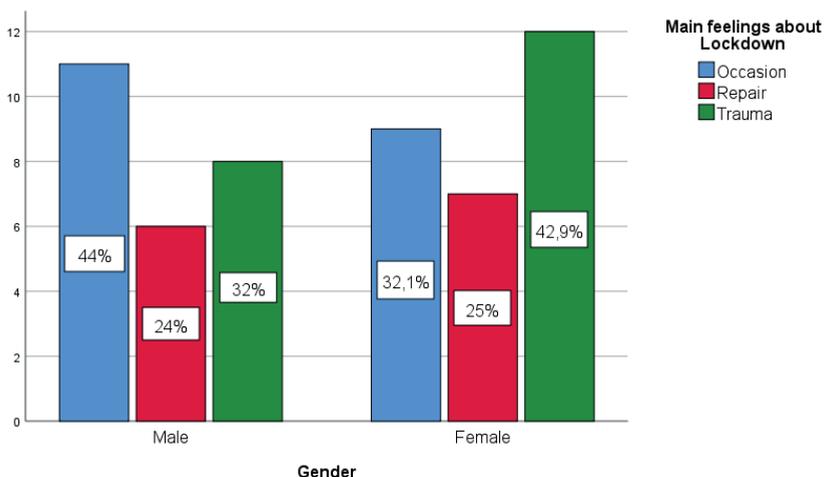


Figure 5. Gender matching with regard to main feelings about lockdown

Source: Author's own study.

A different distribution is also observed, although not statistically significant, related to the general feelings attributed to the lockdown (Figure 5): among the boys the percentage of those who speak of the lockdown as an opportunity to grow and learn (44% of boys; 32, 1% of girls) is higher than among the girls, whereas there are more girls who describe the lockdown as a traumatic period (32% of boys; 42.9% of girls).

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the perception of changes in parental relationships during the lockdown in 23 pre-adolescents and 30 adolescents. Even if, in both groups, we find the majority describing improved relationships (78% of pre-adolescents; 60% of adolescents), and, although not statistically significant, there is a notable increase in numbers of those who wrote they had not noticed progress in their relationships with their parents (21% of pre-adolescents, 40% of adolescents).

Fig. 6 - Age matching Teens-parents relationship changes

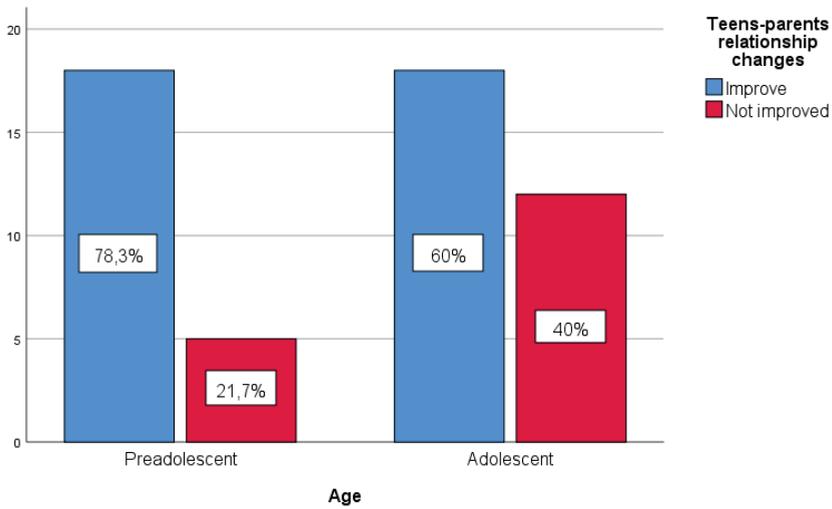


Figure 6. Age matching with regard to teen–parent relationship changes

Source: Author’s own study.

Fig. 7 - Age matching Domestic sharing

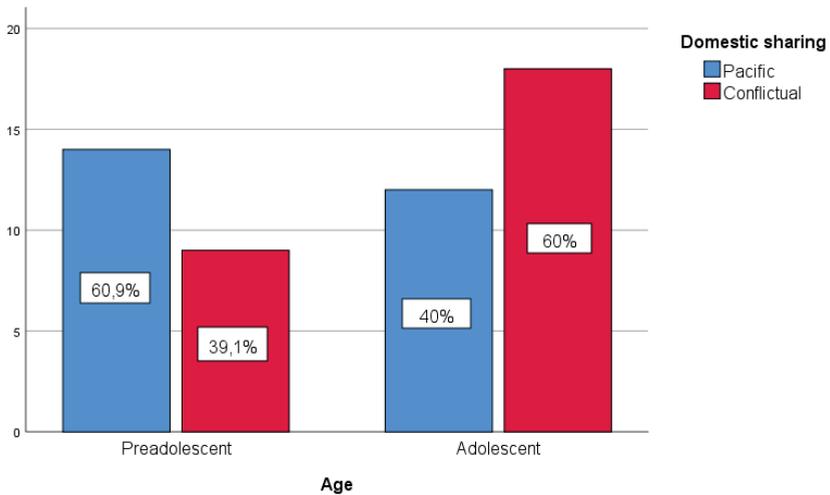


Figure 7. Age matching with regard to domestic sharing

Source: Author’s own study.

The difference based on age becomes a little more marked in the descriptions of living under the same roof during the lockdown (Figure 7): pre-adolescents tend to describe it as pacific (60.9% of pre-adolescents; 40% of adolescents), while adolescents characterize it in a conflicting way (39.1% of pre-adolescents; 60% of adolescents).

We found another slightly different trend between the two groups, but not yet statistically significant, about descriptions of the main feelings attributed to the period of the lockdown: most of the pre-teens experienced the lockdown as a time to repair (39.1%) or as an opportunity (34.6%) for growth and discovery, a minority – as an opportunity to repair a previous negative relationship (26.1%). Even among adolescents there is a minority who describe the lockdown as an opportunity to repair (23.3%), while the majority describe it as an opportunity for growth and discovery (40%), leaving those who describe it as a traumatic period (36.7%) in second place.

Significant relations among indicators

Figure 8 shows the significant relationship between the description of domestic sharing and the perceived changes in the relationship with parents. Most of the teens who underlined progress with their parents described a pacific domestic sharing (66.7%), while 33.3% did not perceive an improvement in the relationship with their parents. The majority of children who experienced a conflictual domestic sharing seem to limit themselves to saying that the relationship with their parents did not improve (88%), while only very few (11.8%) noticed progress with their parents.

Figure 9 shows the significant relationship between the main feelings associated with the lockdown and the description of changes in the relationship with parents. Teens who describe the improved relationship with their parents experienced the lockdown as an opportunity for growth and discovery (55.6%); a good number experienced it as an opportunity to repair negative aspects previously suffered in the family (33.3%) and a small minority (11.1%) experienced lockdown as a traumatic period. Among those who limited themselves to saying that the relationship with their parents did not improve, not one experienced the lockdown as an opportunity for growth, very few describe it as a time of repair (5.9%), while the vast majority experienced it as a traumatic period (94.1%).

Figure 10 shows the significant relationship between the description of family life during the lockdown and the affective perception of that period of forced isolation. The feeling of a growth in the relationship with parents is mostly associated with a description of a pacific household (70%). Even those who perceived the lockdown as a time to repair previous difficulties perceived domestic sharing in a peaceful way (61.5%). On the contrary, among those who linked the period of isolation to traumatic feelings, the majority reported a conflictual family environment (80%).

Fig. 8 - Teens-parents relationship changes matching Domestic sharing

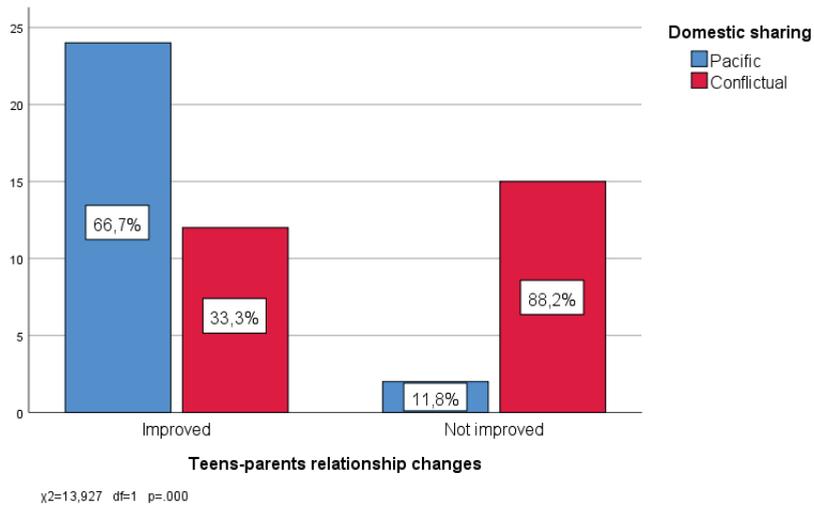


Figure 8. Teen–parent relationship changes matching domestic sharing

Source: Author’s own study.

Fig. 9 - Teens-parents relationship changes matching Main feelings about Lockdown

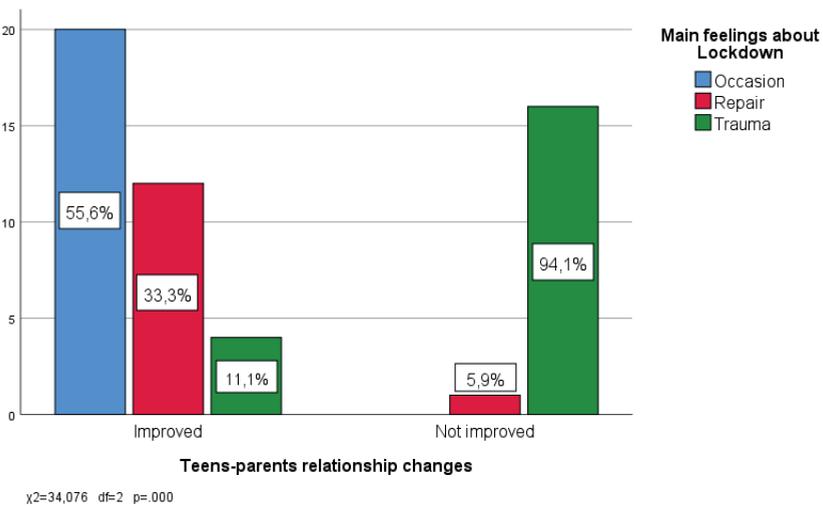


Figure 9. Teens–parent relationship changes matching main feelings about lockdown

Source: Author’s own study.

Fig. 10 - Main feelings about Lockdown matching Domestic sharing

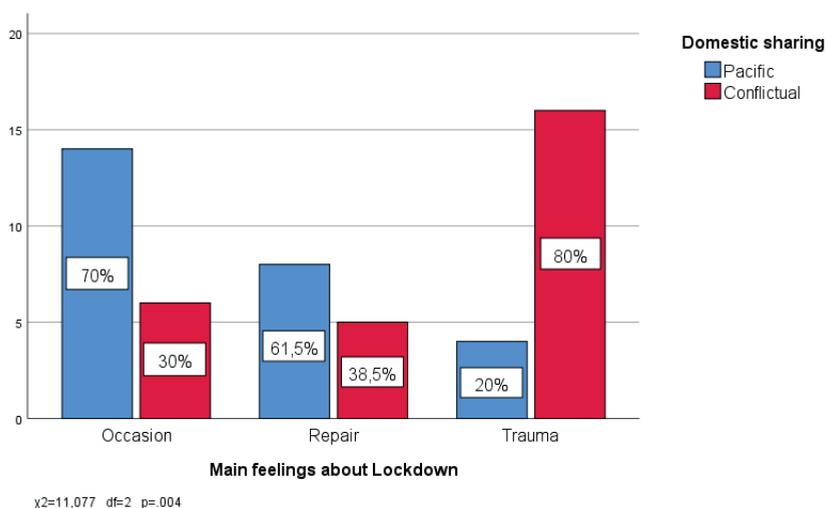


Figure 10. Main feelings about lockdown with regard to domestic sharing

Source: Author's own study.

The teens' words

To deepen the understanding of the experience of the adolescents during the lockdown, it can be very useful to reconfigure the indicators that we have extracted from their written compositions on the basis of their words.

RQ1. How teen–parent relationships changed during lockdown. Teens who describe improved relationships with their parents (Table 1) feel their family is more united, they know and understand each other better. Adolescents who do not admit an improvement do not even report a real deterioration. Often, they just say that the relationship has remained what it was before the pandemic. However, the tension of a dormant conflict can be read between the lines.

RQ2. How adolescents perceived domestic sharing during the lockdown. Teens who described pacific domestic sharing (Table 2) underlined the time spent together and the creative activities that enlivened their forced isolation. On the other hand, those who denounced a conflictual family environment underlined the cramped spaces, repetitive activities, boredom and quarrels with negative repercussions on family relationships. In the more severe descriptions there is also real avoidance.

Table 1. The change in the teen–parent relationships during lockdown (teens’ perceptions through their own words)

Improved relationships	Relationships not improved
<p>Our relationship improved a lot, it was already beautiful as it was, but now it is much more beautiful. COVID has made me reach a higher goal, to be more united than before.</p> <p>When quarantine was put in place, relations with my parents changed a little, now I must say that we are a little more united.</p> <p>I would say that the lockdown was overcome with serenity and strengthened my family bonds.</p> <p>In my parents I rediscovered their inner child which they still have, but which they are not used to showing, like most adults.</p> <p>Let’s say that the lockdown taught us to understand each other more.</p> <p>This period of isolation made us stronger and united us even more, we discovered the joy of being together without being caught up in the thousand things to do.</p>	<p>We can say that the relationship with my parents during the pandemic sometimes seemed to have changed, but instead there were a few days that I just couldn’t stand them.</p> <p>My parents breathed down my neck even more, this bothered me and didn’t let me have my own personal space.</p> <p>Relationships with my parents haven’t changed all that much; they bothered me during lessons, sometimes they listened to me during the oral tests, but beyond these little things our relationship has always remained the same.</p> <p>I withdrew into myself. Of course, this led me to be less patient with my sister and more irritable with my mom. Conversation dwindled and the only times we got together were at meals, when we discussed the news on TV and our thoughts and uncertainties.</p>

Source: Author’s own study.

RQ3. How adolescents felt during the period of lockdown. Teens who describe the lockdown as an opportunity to grow and learn (Table 3) underline the growth of mutual esteem and the possibility of relying on family ties to overcome difficulties and of cultivating positive thinking. Even those who described the lockdown as a period that gave them the possibility to repair and correct difficult relationships with parents and other family members, say they took advantage of the time spent together to get to know each other and share aspects both of themselves and external reality. It was a renewed closeness that they felt with satisfaction. Instead, the words of the children who experienced traumatic feelings are dramatic: fear, terror, isolation, anger, insecurity. Trapped, suffocated by the fear of not being able to return to normality. Many of them talked about these traumatic affects as having passed, but we cannot exclude that they remain as open wounds in the recesses of their minds.

Table 2. Domestic sharing during lockdown (teens' perceptions through their own words)

Pacific	Conflictual
<p>We started spending whole days together playing, talking or watching something together.</p> <p>We discovered the joy of being together without being busy, without having to do the thousand things that each day brought us and be different.</p> <p>We spent some time having fun, without always doing the usual things.</p> <p>We rediscovered the pleasure of living in our home calmly and without being in a rush.</p> <p>I ate all daily meals with them, in the evening, I often watched movies with my father, in the afternoon I trained with my sister, we always played card games after dinner.</p>	<p>I was forced to live locked up in my room precisely because I wanted to avoid them.</p> <p>The lockdown complicated relationships with my family, forcing us to play board games or to cook together to pass the time without getting bored, on the other hand, it worsened our relations.</p> <p>During the period of the lockdown, relationships with my parents deteriorated a lot, being at home all day there were constant quarrels.</p> <p>During the lockdown our relationships worsened because I had more opportunities to talk to them and involuntarily during any quarrel I let slip a few words about what I really felt towards them.</p> <p>Imagine four people, totally different one from the other forced into an imposed coexistence, compulsorily, 24 hours a day. Hell! Quarrel after quarrel, words spat into the air, thoughtless words, not true words.</p>

Source: Author's own study.

Table 3. Main feelings about lockdown (teens' perceptions through their own words)

Occasion	Repair	Trauma
<p>From this experience my family and I came out strengthened, indeed, even if now our activities have started again, we decided to always find a moment for each other, because we are and will be more important than anything else.</p>	<p>My parents and I had a relationship but not very nice one, because we were very detached, because we didn't spend time together, because they worked, and I did my homework, I didn't see them often. When we were in quarantine our relationship changed, I saw them every day, we were more attached, we talked about everything that was going on, we spent a lot of time together and it made us reflect more.</p>	<p>At home I felt safe, also because thinking about leaving the house terrified me: my parents made me feel a little anguish and fear because they worked in the hospital.</p>

Occasion	Repair	Trauma
<p>Relationships with them have changed, I no longer see them as authorities who make decisions for me without consulting me, but as adults who want my good first and foremost and make decisions consulting me when they deem it necessary.</p> <p>In my opinion, ties with them have strengthened a lot during this period as we have had to overcome many difficulties, not only among ourselves but because it was impossible to see anyone else.</p> <p>I was able to appreciate those little things that I hadn't thought about before.</p> <p>We tried to see the bright side of the situation.</p> <p>We found ourselves talking a lot more and appreciating every single moment we spent together even if it wasn't always easy.</p> <p>We faced a challenge of changes and we succeeded together.</p> <p>Thanks to this event I understood who I really need and who will remain despite everything.</p>	<p>I was able to regain an affective bond with my parents, I lived and am still living a different period from the "normal" and I have learned many important things.</p> <p>I never thought I'd be able to establish a certain type of bond with my family that was formed thanks to a global pandemic.</p> <p>Sometimes I think I want to go back to that time just to get that relationship with my parents back even though it's getting better now that we've solved some problems.</p> <p>Before, my parents and I had a very detached relationship, I mean that I didn't listen to them and I stayed clear of them. But now we have a beautiful relationship, the most beautiful ever, now I listen to them and I am very close to them because I understand if you don't have a good relationship with your parents you are lost in life.</p>	<p>The melancholy that the prison called "home" gave us in 2020 caused me, my father and my mother to feel the fear of being trapped there again and for this reason I find them more nervous, thoughtful, perhaps even a little angry.</p> <p>The situation was catastrophic and they said we had to start living with the coronavirus, obviously these words scared me and therefore I thought I would never go out.</p> <p>The following year it was difficult to start over again after being locked up at home for many months.</p> <p>I became neurotic, irritable, I had so many things on my mind and IN my heart that they all occurred in the same way: with anger! Either I repressed it or I vented it in an exaggerated way since it was the accumulation of months and months, problem after problem, uncertainties about safety.</p> <p>After so many days in the house, I began to feel loneliness and sadness and I thought that this situation was no longer going to go back to normal.</p>

Source: Author's own study.

DISCUSSION

How did relationships with your parents and the people who lived at home with you during the lockdown change? Analysis of the written texts of our sample shows us quite a positive context: the majority perceived an improvement in their relationship with their parents (“This period of isolation made us stronger and united us even more; we discovered the joy of being together without being caught up in a thousand things to do”), although living under the same roof during the period of isolation was described as conflicting by little more than the majority of the sample (“Imagine four people, totally different one from the other forced into an imposed coexistence, compulsorily, 24 hours a day. Hell! Quarrel over quarrel, words spat into the air, thoughtless words, not true words”). The feelings with which our teens characterize the lockdown, adding up those who describe it as an opportunity to grow and learn (“I was able to appreciate those little things that I hadn’t thought about before”), and those who tell it as a period to repair previous relational shortcomings (“I was able to regain an affective bond with my parents, I lived and am still living in a different period from the »normal« and I have learned many important things”), are positive. A significant piece of data comes from more than a third of the sample that connotes the isolation as a traumatic experience (“After so many days locked up in the house I began to feel loneliness and sadness and I thought that this situation was no longer going to go back to normal”). This general picture does not show differences based on gender or age, confirming that boys and girls, pre-teens and adolescents have tried to elaborate as best as possible the impact with COVID-19, a phenomenon as unexpected as it was unknown.

The qualitative analysis of autobiographical memories has allowed us to obtain a retrospective view of the impact on the pandemic period that turned the everyday life of individuals and families upside down. A shock which in the case of adolescents touches an evolutionary moment of ordinary transformation of the relational structures and equilibrium previously experienced in their childhood. We can ask ourselves how the generational conflicts that we commonly find between adolescents and parents were transformed, if the close proximity between children and significant adults helped to repair past shortcomings or if the stringency of relationships in the family was not able to stem the impact on a potentially traumatic situation that could lead to the persistence of long-term psychological suffering (Pediconi et al., 2021).

Indeed, the picture of the experience the teens in our sample went through becomes more complex when analyzing the relationships between the perception of changes in the relationship with their parents, the description of their domestic setting during the period of isolation and the main feelings with which the adolescents characterize the first lockdown.

The teens who describe a pacific domestic household during the period of forced isolation showed progress in the relationship with their parents (“We discovered the joy of being together without being busy, without having to do the thousand things that each day brought us and be different”). Instead, those who describe conflictual domestic sharing (“During the lockdown our relationships worsened because I had more opportunities to talk to them and involuntarily during any quarrel I let slip a few words about what I really felt towards them”) in some cases, limited themselves to describing family relationships that have remained the same as before the pandemic and very few noted any progress with their parents (“Relationships with my parents have not changed all that much; they bothered me during lessons, sometimes they listened to me during the oral tests, but beyond these little things our relationship has always remained the same”). By saying that the relationship with their parents remained the same as the pre-pandemic one, do they want to explain family stability or are they shy in admitting a straightforward worsening of the relationship with their parents, which only a few make explicit? However, there remains the significant fact that an unimproved relationship goes together with an experience of conflictual co-existence during the lockdown (“We can say that the relationship with my parents during the pandemic sometimes seemed to have changed, but instead there were a few days that I just couldn’t stand them”). These children have had a more difficult experience and may have wanted, in a certain sense, to preserve the image of the relationship with their parents separate from the conflicts they have experienced. Therefore, in this case too, we can identify the adolescent–parent relationship as a protective factor in favour of resilience (Moretti et al., 2004; Prime et al., 2020).

The analysis of feelings with which our sample characterizes the period of isolation is particularly significant to understand the quality of the relational changes experienced by the adolescents in the pandemic period. Resilient teens who described the lockdown as a time of learning and discovering new things state that the relationship with their parents has improved (“In my opinion, ties with them have strengthened a lot during this period as we have had to overcome many difficulties, not only among ourselves but because it was impossible to see anyone else”). An improvement has also been noted even by those who actually describe the lockdown as a time to repair relationships in the family, as a privileged opportunity to repair the weaknesses and shortcomings that weighed down family relationships before the pandemic (“Before, my parents and I had a very detached relationship, I mean that I didn’t listen to them and I stayed clear of them. But now we have a beautiful relationship the most beautiful ever, now I listen to them and I am very close to them because I understand if you do not have a good relationship with your parents you are lost in life”). Feelings of repara-

tion signal the quality that attachment to parents assumes in mitigating negative effects (Mikulincer et al., 2012), especially in response to stressful experiences (Tambelli et al., 2021b).

The children who, instead, experienced the period of isolation as a traumatic time do not describe improvements in the relationship with their parents: in some cases they make the conflict explicit, but in some cases they limit themselves to saying that the relationship has remained what it was before the pandemic. This connection between feelings and the evaluation of the quality of the relationship with their parents also suggests a role of “a neutralized holding”. The teens do not go so far as to denounce the relationship with their parents so as not to damage the last anchor holding in such a stormy time. In this way they also confirm support from parents and family relationships as a protective factor (Liang et al., 2021).

A psychodynamic observation of the quality of family relationship changes during the lockdown (Marcinko et al., 2020) shows that pacific domestic sharing fostered feelings of growth, discovery and repair during this period confirming the relational nature of resilience (Klootwijk et al., 2021; Prime et al., 2020). Experiences of conflictual coexistence, instead, increased the traumatic consequences of the forced isolation. Living under the same roof therefore seems to have mediated and attenuated the perception of forced isolation by configuring itself as a protective factor: where young people have been able to experience pacific domestic sharing, they have been able to positively process the shock that COVID-19 brought to the families and the interpersonal relationships of adolescents (Qu et al., 2021). Also in this case, although due to a certain neutralization of conflicting feelings, we can affirm that the attachment figures influence how the individual perceives the stressful stimulus and related seeking of support and reassurance (Rajkumar, 2020). Indeed, the quality of early relationships with attachment figures represents the privileged environment of the children’s and adolescents’ affective life (Cassidy, 1994; Vowels et al., 2021).

The analysis of changes in the quality of the adolescent–parent relationship also allows us an in-depth study of the libidinal relational dynamics between adolescents and parents. Indeed, relational dynamics and affective dynamics are intertwined and mutually influence each other. With Freud we know that we cannot speak of a causal relationship. Those who lived in a pacific domestic environment found fertile ground to think constructively even in a difficult moment such as the lockdown, and were even willing to realize that it could be a moment to repair previous disagreements. Then there are those who were not stopped by the perception of a conflictual domestic setting in focusing on positive feelings towards a difficult period (Postigo-Zegarra et al., 2021; Janssens et al., 2021). It could be hypothesized that in these teens it was precisely the psychic reality that

supported the confrontation of the relational complexities increased by isolation. Finally, some adolescents described the lockdown as a traumatic period: remarkably, all of them perceived sharing a home as conflictual, revealing a dramatic correspondence between the relational difficulty and the emotional bottleneck (Forte et al., 2021). However, as confirmation of the powerful processing strength of adolescent thinking, even those who describe the lockdown as traumatic and dramatically shot through with experiences of disorientation, describe it as a moment in the past, terminated. For this reason, it is important to re-read the lockdown experience through their own words: we can avoid alarmism, estimate the strength of their thinking in progress and focus on a constructive and non-pathological-like follow-through of their recovery. In this intrapsychic study, we follow the Freudian analysis of the effects of mourning as well as dramatic events that can assail the course of life (Freud, 1917). We know that mourning imposes a dramatic passage on individual existence in which the subject detaches himself from the present and the future, experiencing a rupture, albeit temporary, of his existence, which will not necessarily determine a pathological destiny. "It may happen, too, that a person is brought so completely to a stop by a traumatic event which shatters the foundations of his life that he abandons all interests in the present and future and remains permanently absorbed in mental concentration upon the past. But an unfortunate such as this need not on that account become a neurotic" (Freud, 1915, p. 276). According to Freud, we can affirm that even those who have lived traumatic experiences are not destined to a fixation that would determine a long-term pathological outcome. The Ego confirms itself as competent to face and process adversity even by adding advantages coming from difficulties (Contri, 2014).

On the one hand, parents and adolescents might have been more careful not to engage in negative interactions about issues such as homework, irritating behavior and phone or computer time, because they had to spend so much time together and wanted to maintain a positive family climate (Fioretti et al., 2020). The stressful experience that parents and adolescents lived during the lockdown did not affect directly the quality of their relationship (Öngören, 2021).

On the other hand, adolescents experienced their parents' support during the forced isolation as a good substitute for their decreased interactions with peers (Delgado et al., 2022). These adolescents might have perceived more support from their parents and might have been more open to parental efforts to stay with them, using the parenting resources to share with adolescents' resources and to cope with challenging situations (Donker et al., 2021).

According to Tambelli et al. (2021a), there are direct and indirect associations between parental attachment and traumatic experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- even when adolescents become autonomous from their parents and more oriented to stay with their peers, the relationship with parents continues to assume a crucial support role (Delgado et al., 2022; Steinberg et al., 2002; Marzilli et al., 2021),
- even when the supportive role is shared with attachment to peers, parents maintain their place of affective support (Laible, 2007).

Our results confirm that relationships with parents and family members were an important protective factor during the pandemic, also confirming that the relational context constituted a favorable condition for the positive processing of difficulties and a potentially traumatic situation. The family has proved to be a resilient context.

CONCLUSIONS

The deep changes that occurred in health, social, economic, and psychological dimensions during the pandemic period have affected family life and teen–parent relationships. Positive and negative effects occurred in child–parent communication in this period: positive effects were experienced because of the possibility of spending more time together and sharing more with each other. Shared isolation increased supporting each other and positive communication, even if negative aspects were related to conflicts and boredom (Öngören, 2021).

According to Tambelli et al. (2021a), our results confirm that the promotion of supportive parent–adolescent relationships and the ability to recognize and discriminate one’s own and others’ feelings can help adolescents face the current health emergency and prevent psychopathological consequences related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The children in our sample perceived a positive change in the relationship with their parents, although the domestic environment during the period of isolation was described as conflicting by just over half of the sample. The feelings with which they characterized the lockdown are positive: they described it as an opportunity to grow, learn and repair previous relational weaknesses.

Even the children who described a conflictual coexistence or even experienced traumatic feelings during the isolation tended to preserve the image of the relationship with their parents, which also in this case, maintained a protective role in favour of resilience. Our results confirm that the teens’ family relational context during the pandemic constituted the resilient condition to elaborate the difficult and potentially traumatic situation.

LIMITATIONS

Our exploratory study needs further research to confirm the orientation of the first findings, as well as extending the numbers of adolescents involved. It could be important to study specific differences based on age, gender, and social conditions. As the pandemic continues, future studies may benefit from larger sample sizes to obtain more information about several waves of the pandemic, in order to understand possible non-linear effects and to detect predictors and moderators of adolescent psychosocial adjustment to the pandemic. Also, larger samples would enable us to investigate and model parent and adolescent effects as a way to obtain insight into the resilience of the family system.

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