Abstract

We assessed how behaviors and attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic of participants and their romantic partners are related to their relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was not associated with the similarity of attitudes and behaviors between romantic partners regarding COVID-19. However, the lack in variability in our sample for relationship satisfaction and difference scores for attitudes and behaviors may be masking potential effects of COVID-19 attitudes and behaviors on relationship satisfaction.

Introduction

With the current state of life during the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to explore the psychological effects of the pandemic—specifically in the context of romantic relationships. External stressors like job loss or financial instability can create conflict in romantic relationships and can lead to decreased satisfaction within the relationship (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). COVID-19 has been a major stressor over the past year and many people approached the pandemic differently (CITE) and the dissimilarities in approaches between partners may lead to lower relationship satisfaction (Gaunt, 2006). This relationship may be exacerbated when the dissimilarities are related to an extreme stressor like COVID-19 (Goodwin et al., 2020; Luekte et al., 2020; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020). The purpose of this study was to explore how the self-reported attitudes and behaviors of the participant and their reports of the partner’s attitudes and behaviors affect relationship satisfaction. It was expected that participants who respond similarly to their partners’ attitudes and behaviors to the pandemic will report greater relationship satisfaction.

Methods

This study was nested into a larger study

Participants:
- Midwestern campus through online participant pool, In a current romantic relationship (N = 107, MAge = 19.04, SDage = 1.380, 64.5% Female participants)

Measures:
- Participants reported their attitudes and behaviors regarding COVID-19 as well as reported their romantic partner’s attitudes and behaviors regarding COVID-19; the difference between the participant and their partner was used to create the scale
  - COVID-19 attitudes
    - 8 items (e.g., COVID-19 is no more serious than the flu; α = .828)
  - COVID-19 behaviors
    - 16 items (e.g., worn a mask when indoors in public; α = .621)
  - Relationship satisfaction (Murray et al., 1996)
    - 3 items (e.g., I am extremely happy with my current relationship; α = .818)

Results

There was no relationship between relationship satisfaction and the difference scores of the participants and participants’ partners reported attitudes and behaviors regarding COVID-19.
- Attitude difference scores toward COVID-19, r (103) = .014, p = .887
- Behavior difference scores during COVID-19, r (103) = -.052, p = .597
These results may be due to the lack of variability in scores of relationship satisfaction and the reported difference scores of COVID-19 attitudes and behaviors (see Figure 1, 2, and 3).

Conclusion

- Attitude and behavior difference scores were not associated with relationship satisfaction; however, the lack of an association could be due to the lack of dissimilar attitudes and behaviors actually occurring in the relationship.
- A limitation of this study was using self-report of both the participant’s behaviors and the perceived attitudes and behaviors of the partner from the participant’s perspective.
- Another possibility is to analyze the data using non-linear methods.
- Overall, people may not be in relationships with people who are different from themselves and further research is needed to understand the relationship of COVID-19 attitudes and behaviors and relationship satisfaction

References

Goodwin, R., Hou, W., Sun, S., & Ben (1998). Variability in scores of relationship satisfaction within the relationship (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). COVID-19 has been a major stressor over the past year and many people approached the pandemic differently (CITE) and the dissimilarities in approaches between partners may lead to lower relationship satisfaction (Gaunt, 2006). This relationship may be exacerbated when the dissimilarities are related to an extreme stressor like COVID-19 (Goodwin et al., 2020; Luekte et al., 2020; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2020). The purpose of this study was to explore how the self-reported attitudes and behaviors of the participant and their reports of the partner’s attitudes and behaviors affect relationship satisfaction. It was expected that participants who respond similarly to their partners’ attitudes and behaviors to the pandemic will report greater relationship satisfaction. This study is nested into a larger study and is pre-registered on OSF (https://osf.io/35fd6bb2124f38f1a525ca9a4300aa).