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Family Well-Being Under Pressure: Rhythmanalysis Applied to Post Pandemic Family Dynamics[1]

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Abstract

This contribution deals with the centrality of family relationships for the production of individual well-being, both on a cognitive level, i.e. as an influence on satisfaction with one's own life and, therefore, as the outcome of a cognitive evaluation, and on an experiential and emotional level, i.e. as an influence on moment-to-moment experience. It starts from an analysis of subjective well-being, arriving at a concept of relational well-being, whilst proposing an approach of rhythmanalysis as a tool for understanding the changes occurring in family dynamics in the post-Covid era.

Keywords: well-being, rhythmanalysis, family relationships.

1. Introduction

In a relatively short time, the pandemic crisis has taken on a global character that has united various countries of the world, in scenarios which have dramatic effects on every sphere of society: political, economic and social.

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[1] The paper is the result of collaboration between the authors. In the drafting of the text, paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 were written by Gaetano Gucciardo, paragraphs 5, 6 and 7 by Marianna Siino. The introduction was jointly written both authors.

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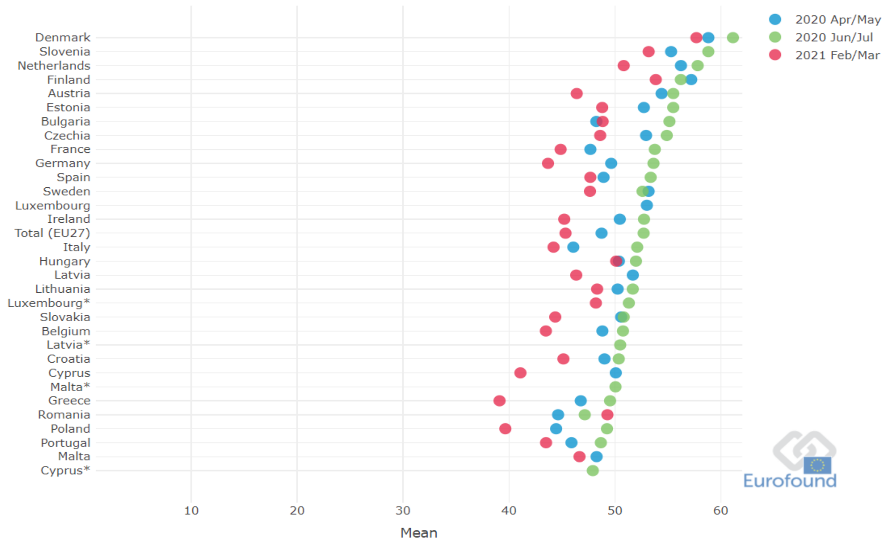
At the European level Eurofound has monitored, since the beginning of the pandemic, the impact on people's lives in the countries of the European Union, with the aim of helping policy makers to find appropriate solutions to launch and sustain the recovery from the crisis. This survey aims to examine the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, in particular on well-being, health and safety, on work and the way it is carried out, on work-life balance, on the economic situation. Administration took place online and has, so far, involved nearly 190,000 respondents, aged 18 and older and with internet access. Three surveys were conducted to monitor the changes taking place: the first in April 2020 when almost all member states were in lockdown; the second in July 2020 when society and the economy were slowly recovering; and the third in March 2021 when the various member states were at different levels of lockdown and the vaccination campaign had already begun.

The results of this survey include the lowest average scores since the start of the pandemic on the World Health Organization's Mental Well-being Index (WHO-5).[1]

FIGURE 1. Mental Well-being Index (WHO-5) in the countries of the EU27.



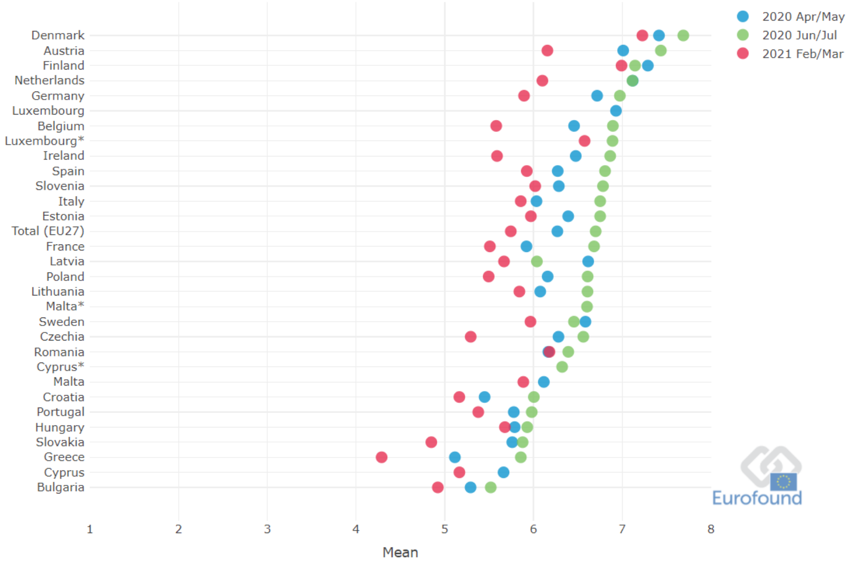
Source: EUROFOUND-2021

[1] The WHO5 index summarizes the following 5 items: I have felt cheerful and in good spirits; I have felt calm and relaxed, I have felt active and vigorous; I woke up feeling fresh and rested; my daily life has been filled with things that interested me.

The average scores recorded in the countries of the EU27 on the WHO-5 (on a scale from 0 to 100) at the three different points in time (see Figure 1) first show an upturn in line with recovery and then, one year after the lockdown, almost all (except Denmark) stabilize at values close to or below 50, values considered by the WHO to be predictive of a higher risk of depression.

Even the data regarding satisfaction expressed with regard to one's own life[2], show, after more than a year, a decrease in all the countries involved and values mostly below 6 (see figure 2).

FIGURE 2. Satisfaction expressed with regard to one's own life in the countries of the EU27.



Source: EUROFOUND-2021

This empirical evidence is an indicator of a widespread malaise, a symptom of an objectively more complex situation. The pandemic has exacerbated already existing inequalities, causing an even greater impact on the most vulnerable. The risk in a globalized and interconnected society, as Beck (2008) argues, is global and democratic, but the effects are greater for the most vulnerable social groups (Di Nicola, Ruspini, 2020). Women, youth, and those on the margins of society are the groups most affected by job loss, poor work-life balance, and economic insecurity.

[2] Respondents expressed their satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means very dissatisfied and 10 means very satisfied, by answering the following question: All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your life these days?

The effects of Covid can be read starting from three important findings, underlined by Di Nicola and Ruspini (2020), on three levels: on a macro level, the interdependence between countries, the result of globalization, has caused a greater spread of the virus; on a meso level, the community during the emergency phase is no longer a source of support and solidarity for the individual, but a source of danger; on a micro level, the family is subjected to high levels of stress and fatigue related to the management of children and the home in the new configuration of the #restoacasa, in which everything becomes "narrower". The family returns to being a unit of consumption and production, but within families there are different dynamics compared to the past and extremely complex.

The state of uncertainty has spread like wildfire in society, from the more individual and subjective dimensions to the more material ones: from the fear of illness to concrete economic difficulties.

The long forced isolation which individuals have endured has strongly affected the relational dimension that is the pivot of all human activities, generating a widespread malaise across gender, age and cultural levels.

The prolonged restrictions put in place to reduce the spread of the virus have had and will have long-term effects that make it necessary to take targeted action to stem the "damage" and restore a balance between the need for security and the need for freedom that can ensure a satisfactory level of well-being.

This contribution focuses on the centrality of family relationships in engendering individual well-being, both on a cognitive level, i.e. as an influence on satisfaction with one's own life and, therefore, as the outcome of a cognitive evaluation, and on an experiential and emotional level, i.e. as an influence on moment-to-moment experience. It starts from an analysis of subjective well-being and arrives at the concept of relational well-being, proposing the approach of rhythmanalysis as a tool for understanding the changes that are occurring in family dynamics in the post-Covid era.

2. The dimensions of subjective well-being

From a sociological perspective, the topic of subjective well-being is part of a broader reaction beginning in the 1970s to the centrality given to economic indicators for detecting levels of well-being. It was expressed primarily in the context of social indicators research (Veenhoven, 2018). Since then, surveys of well-being levels have become common practice, and we now have data with global coverage and long enough time series to detect trends.

In literature, in philosophy, in social research, there are essentially three dimensions of subjective well-being identified: the cognitive dimension, the experiential dimension and the eudemonic dimension. The first has to do with the evaluation that each person makes of his or her current life and, therefore, the degree of satisfaction with it. This dimension is different and distinct from the experiential dimension of well-being. The latter, in fact, has to do with what we experience moment by moment and therefore concerns more the moods, the emotions, the hedonic dimension of life. There is also a third dimension of well-being that recalls Aristotle's eudemonia and concerns the meaning that each person attributes to his or her own life, or rather, the extent to which each person feels that his or her life has meaning, the extent to which each person feels that he or she has a perspective of meaning towards which to direct his or her existential commitment, feeling useful and important, oriented towards a meaningful purpose.

The dimension that, on an empirical level, would seem to be investigated most is the cognitive one. In the first world-research on subjective well-being, conducted in 1965, the self-anchoring striving scale was used, a subjective indicator of satisfaction with one's own life (Davies, 2016: 120)[3]. With that scale, respondents were essentially asked to score their satisfaction with their current life from 0 to 10. This instrument continues to be used and is the one that basically discerns the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being.

Using this instrument, we rely on people's judgments about their own well-being: we ask them to make an assessment and summarize it in a number. Now, present research documents the extent to which this judgment is exposed to heavy distortions. Indeed, in an experiment by Kahneman, the judgment varied if the subjects were made to find a coin in an apparently random and fortuitous way: those who had found it expressed higher levels of satisfaction with life than those who had not found the coin (Kahneman, 2006). We know how retrospective memory is conditioned by the final moments of an experience rather than by the whole, and what we experience moment by moment is one thing, quite another what we remember of what we experienced. In any case, in spite of all the skepticism that can be harbored towards such instruments, the data show that they have some coherence and the answers are, therefore, substantially reliable. Satisfaction measured by Cantril's instrument is associated with income, it is associated with education, it is associated with health, it is associated with visible signs of well-being such as the frequency of smiles (Kahneman, Krueger, 2006). It does really tell us something about people's subjective well-being.

However, Kahneman's remarks opened the way for the exploration of the second dimension of well-being, the experiential dimension. Kahneman explains that the questions designed to detect subjective satisfaction are

[3] The research is that of Hadley Cantril (1966).

basically directed at what he calls the mnemonic self, that is, the memory one has of oneself and one's life. Since his experiments had shown that the mnemonic self was exposed to a number of biases, he concluded that it was not a reliable witness. He found it more effective to address the experiential self, i.e., the self that experiences moment to moment its own states of mind. Using a method that invited people to reconstruct their previous day by dividing it into a series of moments, they discovered that American women spent about 19% of their time in an unpleasant state, French women 16% and Danish women 14% (Kahneman, 2012: 529). Kahneman thus constructed the U-index i.e. the percentage of time an individual spends in an unpleasant state.

The mood depends on the moment and the contingent circumstances. For example, mood in the workplace is "hardly affected at all by the factors that determine a person's general level of satisfaction (with his or her profession) such as economic benefits and status" (Kahneman, 2012:531). Kahneman noted that the attention one pays to the task at hand is decisive. It is true that the state of mind is conditioned precisely by what is happening at the moment, but as attention varies, so does the pleasure or displeasure regarding what is taking place in the present moment. If, while you are eating, you are doing something else, you will have less pleasure than someone who is concentrating only on eating. Here, the use of time is strategic to experiential well-being.

Gallup surveys capture emotions experienced the day before and have confirmed the importance of situational factors, physical health, and social contact for mood.

We know from the Gallup data that education is associated with higher satisfaction with one's life but not with higher experienced well-being (Kahneman, 2012: 533). There are things that positively affect well-being ratings, i.e., satisfaction with one's life, but negatively affect experienced well-being. For example, poor health and living with children are sources of negative expressions of mood but not of satisfaction with one's life. The opposite happens with religious practice: it positively affects experienced well-being more than life evaluation (Kahneman, 2012: 533). Money also has a curious behavior: being rich increases satisfaction but does not improve experienced well-being.

Kahneman's conclusion is that "satisfaction with quality of life is not a faulty measure of experienced well-being but something else entirely" (Kahneman, 2012: 535).

In a scene from Desperate Housewife, Gabrielle, the attractive model carrying on an extramarital affair, married to a brutal and possessive man, asks the priest if repentance will still be valid if, instead of repenting for her sins now, she repents later. The priest confirms to her that if repentance is sincere it will still be effective. This is what Gabrielle wants to hear and, relieved, she goes to leave. But before she has gone through the exit door, the priest asks her: "Each of us is responsible for our own choices. Don't you want to be a good person?" Gabrielle's answer is sincere: "I want to be happy." "That's the response of a spoiled child," the priest callsback. We see laid out here the difference between two conceptions of how to direct one's life. Gabrielle recognizes a gap between being happy and being good; she cannot be one if she wants to be the other. Happiness can be pursued through a search for opportunities for personal fulfillment and satisfaction or through adherence to the principles of a virtuous life that takes into account others, their needs, their expectations and respects them with a sense of responsibility.

The concept of well-being examined up to this point is the hedonic one, i.e., the one that results from levels of personal satisfaction and from the experience of positive emotions and low levels of negative emotions (Diener, 1984, 1994).

We come here to the third dimension of well-being, the eudemonic dimension. It is a dimension that, as Aristotle taught, has to do with the idea of an ultimate goal in life, which for Aristotle coincided with the virtuous life (and, also, with dedication to philosophy). Well-being as eudemonia is defined as "the fulfillment that comes from engaging in meaningful activities and actualizing one's potential" (King, 2008).

Layard focuses on the difference between the idea of happiness that is prevalent today and which we have inherited from the Enlightenment and the Aristotelian concept. The one we have inherited from the Enlightenment is of Benthamian origin, subsequently developed by Adam Smith and basically states that what matters is "how people feel". It is a concept of happiness very much related to "how we perceive our lives as we live them." (Layard, 2005: 36). The Aristotelian concept, on the other hand, emphasizes "the centrality of the ultimate goal of life" and thus the presence of a unitary meaning of life that directs it. Somehow it assumes that it is not enough to be happy, one must be happy for the right reasons.

From the point of view of eudemonia, the studies of Carol Ryff are fundamental (Ryff, 1989). According to the model developed by this scholar, individual well-being depends on six factors: positive relationships with others, personal mastery, autonomy, feeling of having a purpose in life that gives it meaning, self-acceptance, growth and development as a person.

Beyond the difference in conceptual and philosophical terms, and in terms of the means by which people's actual status on the various dimensions of happiness is measured, the scores obtained on the eudemony index correspond substantially with those obtained on traditional measures of well-being, such as questions about how happy you are and how satisfied you are with your life (Layard, 2005: 36). Thus, it would seem that there is substantial practical correspondence between happiness conceived as what people feel and judge about themselves and happiness as the outcome of the disposition of a range of abilities and assets.

3. Generative factors

The question of the factors underlying people's subjective well-being generates a series of cross-references between philosophy, socio-psychological theories and empirical data.

As we have seen, on a philosophical level, since the dawn of philosophical reflection, positions that may appear divergent with regard to how to establish the happiness of people have been compared; these range from subjectivist approaches aimed at relying on the judgment of the individual, who in turn relies on his or her personal feelings and approaches that aim in order to identify what the requirements are for a life to be called satisfactory, and he/she who lives it to be happy.

It could be considered that theoretical research on well-being can be divided into these two areas, as proposed, in fact, by Deci and Ryan (2000), i.e. well-being in terms of eudemonia and well-being in hedonic terms (not hedonistic).[4] One might think that eudemonic well-being includes something further and higher than simply being happy. Indeed, by definition, subjective well-being is focused on how people feel about themselves and their lives, how happy they are.

However, even if we stick to the literal meaning of hedonic in terms of happiness as pleasure, even Aristotle included hedonic in eudemonic. So, from a theoretical point of view, the distinction might be artificial. On the other hand, many components of the good life, such as warm social relationships, personal competence, a purpose in life and autonomy, are strongly correlated with subjective well-being.

Beyond the broad overlap between how one feels, i.e. between subjective well-being and eudemonic well-being, between feeling good and living well, the subjective dimension of well-being, feeling good, feeling happy and satisfied are associated with and even precursors of elements traceable to the eudemonic dimension such as generosity, kindness, creativity, the enthusiastic pursuit of goals, the meaning of life. This is why King concludes that "the search for something higher than simply feeling good about one's life is unnecessary and subjective well-being may be our best guide to the good life" (2008: 434).

[4] Note the difference, hedonic does not mean hedonistic, it is not about well-being in terms of pleasure but well-being in terms of happiness.

Therefore, although in the abstract we continue to oppose good life and happy life, Aristotle and Aristippus, in the end the two tend, from the empirical point of view, to coincide.

On the level of socio-psychological theories, the reference can only be to Maslow's theory of needs, which argues that, given a certain hierarchy of needs, well-being depends on the progressive and respectful satisfaction of the hierarchy of these same needs, so that social or psychological satisfaction cannot exist if, first and foremost, essential primary needs are not satisfied. In short, we cannot derive valid satisfaction from meaningful social relationships if we do not have a roof over our heads and live in constant state of anxiety regarding our daily meal.

This theory invokes the question of the role of material wealth in generating subjective well-being. What we know from the data is that the relationship between material wealth and subjective well-being is weak, although positive: money is correlated with subjective well-being, especially at the lowest levels and therefore the relationship is almost curvilinear, i.e. as income increases, the relationship between wealth and subjective well-being weakens. This fact supports Maslow's theory of basic needs. However we also know that Maslow's theory of basic needs requires some integration, because it does not seem correct to consider that basic needs comprise a roof over our heads and access to food. Among basic needs, perhaps, some social and psychological needs should be added (Biswas-Diener, 2008: 318).

As for the generative factors of subjective well-being that emerge from empirical research, many things have been clarified in recent years. The main one is that subjective satisfaction depends greatly on personality-related factors and thus presents itself as a kind of character predisposition that is relatively resilient to objective conditions.

As Haidt points out, decisive discoveries about the nature of happiness were made in the 1990s: the first is that happiness is very much linked to the genetics of individuals, the second is that happiness is relatively independent of environmental circumstances (which are two sides of the same coin) (Haidt, 2007: 110).

Personality traits related to subjective well-being would be extroversion and a propensity for neurosis (Larsen, Eid, 2008: 6). Extroverts are more likely to experience positive emotions, and conversely, neurotic personalities are more likely to experience negative emotions. Studies of monozygotic and dizygotic twins confirm that genes linked with propensity toward depression or extroversion and neurosis could be responsible for the genetics of subjective well-being (Larsen, Eid, 2008: 6).

Other studies have shown that the subjective well-being levels of individuals who have suffered severe impairments, due to accidents, and individuals who have undergone sudden improvements in their living conditions, such as millionaire lottery winners, after a number of months return to the levels of well-being prior to the turning point in their lives (Clark et al., 2008. See also: Albrecht, Devlieger 1999; Skotko et al. 2011; Leeuwen et al. 2012). This is the set point theory (Easterlin, 2003): it is as if individuals, suggests Haidt (2007), had a sort of internal thermostat that brings subjective well-being back to a basic level.

These studies document what we might consider to be a sort of resilience of individuals' levels of well-being with regard to external events and conditions, but should not lead us to believe that well-being is independent of them. Evidence for this is the wide-scale variability we find among people living in different social, economic, cultural, and psychological conditions, and the wide variety of average levels of subjective well-being of citizens across nations, differences that certainly cannot be explained by the "genetics" of the nations themselves. Haidt (2007: 111) proposes this happiness equation: $F = P + C + A$ where P stands for "biologically determined point," C stands for "Living conditions," and A stands for "Activities performed." P is a black box, a thermostat, Haidt calls it, which we have in our heads and which everyone has calibrated to a certain level, and which is more or less geared to being happy and satisfied. We can try to give an identity to the other two factors. What might they be? Among the conditions we can include: health, education and employment; marital status, integration into social networks (social capital); among the activities: the family understood as having someone to take care of, social participation in a broad sense.

Typical external factors that affect subjective satisfaction and well-being are employment, marriage, widowhood (Larsen, Eid, 2008: 7). As King writes, "the recipe for happiness might list ...: a good marriage, job satisfaction, warm friendships, a long healthy life."

Robert and Edward Skidelsky (2013: 212-15) argue that the elements of the good life are health, respect, security, autonomy, harmony with nature (i.e., a comfortable environment), friendship and leisure. It is a list that could be lengthened because, for example, as we have seen, Ryff would add the central factor of the Aristotelian concept, i.e.to feel that you have a purpose in life that gives it meaning, or self-acceptance and growth and development as a person.

However, to achieve happiness there is not just one ingredient, but a combination of ingredients, some essential, others helpful.

It seems, however, that well-being is linked to its generative factors in ways that are difficult to ascribe to formulas that make the relationship predictable: no one factor (wealth, health, social relations) would seem sufficient and not one would seem necessary, and no factor is proportional, due to its variations, to variations in levels of well-being (Tatarkiewicz, 1976).

This could explain the drive to direct research towards the detection of subjective well-being, i.e., the level of satisfaction perceived by individuals.

A study of 55 countries (Diener, Diener, Diener, 1995) showed that the main personal and environmental factors correlated with subjective well-being are high income, a culture oriented towards individualism, respect for human rights and social equality. In particular, individualism is persistently correlated with subjective well-being, all other factors being equal. Individualism should be understood in terms of a culture opposed to the collectivist: in individualistic societies people are oriented towards their personal desires and goals and they perceive the individual as the basic unit, as opposed to collectivist societies, which, on the other hand, give primary importance to the group. According to the authors, a possible explanation for the role of individualistic culture in increasing average levels of subjective well-being is, on the one hand, the very freedom to be able to choose one's own course of life and, on the other, individuals are more inclined to attribute credit for their successes to themselves.

The centrality of freedom of choice for subjective well-being has also recently been underlined by Inglehart on the basis of the international surveys of the World Value Survey and which he traces back not only to cultural but also structural factors: it is the overall, better living conditions that extend people's possibilities of choice. As he writes: "From 1981 to 2007, economic development, democratization, and the growth of social tolerance have increased the extent to which people in most countries have freedom of choice in economics, politics, and daily life, leading to higher levels of happiness and satisfaction" (2018: 141).

Consistent with acquiring the genetic basis for part of the subjective level of well-being, research has shown that it can also be a predictor of positive outcomes in people's lives, meaning that levels of happiness can be both a consequence of the successes a person achieves and a cause. Positive feelings correlate with virtues such as altruism, sociability, self-esteem, and coping skills. "Happiness is a precursor to a wide range of goods that include satisfying relationships, a successful career, superior coping skills, and even physical health and life expectancy" (King, 2008: 434).

The abundant availability of data allows scholars to draw general conclusions about the distribution and trends related to subjective well-being. Thus, it is that Veenhoven (2018), after a review of the very extensive literature and equally extensive data availability, concludes, using cognitive and hedonic indicators of subjective well-being, that people around the world are quite satisfied with their lives. From the point of view of trends, the data allow us to conclude that, at least since the 1970s, subjective satisfaction is, on the whole, increasing in most countries of the world and is accompanied by economic growth and growth in life expectancy, and is also, higher, in countries that enjoy good governance, and a climate of freedom and tolerance (Veenhoven, 2018).

4. The role of the family as a generative factor of well-being

The determinants of subjective well-being deriving from external conditions and events, as we have seen, for example, with the Haidt equation, are divided into activities carried out and living conditions. Among the conditions of life there is the need to belong, i.e. the need to form and maintain strong and stable interpersonal relationships (Baumeister, Leary, 1995). We form social ties easily and combat their dissolution and the lack of ties is associated with numerous negative effects on physical and mental health. On the other hand, attachment theory has abundantly demonstrated how strong and stable human relationships are essential for psychic development and human (and not only human) well-being.

It is within this centrality of social relationships to well-being that family relationships play an essential role. Campbell et al. in a seminal 1976 study of the United States demonstrated how family life and marriage are fundamental to the subjective well-being of all members. They examined fifteen domains and the family domain (marriage and family life) was the main one, the one best able to predict the subjective well-being of individuals, probably because of the support received from each of the components of family life. A large part of well-being and also the ability to feel well, i.e., to develop the capacity to benefit from situations and circumstances, of spouses as well as of children, depends on the reciprocal relationships of one with another spouses with each other, parents with their children, children with their parents and with each other as brothers and sisters. Nettle (2007: 90-92) comes to similar conclusions, examining data for the United Kingdom: the average levels of satisfaction of married people are higher than the average levels of cohabitants, who are, in turn, higher than the average levels of satisfaction of singles. Nettle points out that family life affects well-being more than social class. Studies reaching the same conclusions are numerous (Haring-Hidore et al., 1985). A longitudinal study of twenty surveys over the years, by the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), confirmed that marriage is associated with a significant increase in levels of subjective well-being (Clark et al., 2008, for a clarifying analysis, see also Easterlin, 2003).

While the family undoubtedly has a positive effect on the sense of satisfaction with life, things are somewhat different with regard to the emotions experienced, i.e., with regard to the dimension of subjective well-being experienced day by day.

Antonucci shows that not all close social relationships are positive for well-being, either in terms of quality or quantity. For males, having relationships that are too demanding and for females, social relationships that "get on their nerves", produce negative effects on well-being. Moreover, for women, contrary to what one might think, too extensive, close networks are associated with lower levels of well-being. In short, studies suggest that particular attention should be paid to the quality of social relationships when examining their effects on subjective well-being.

The restrictive measures imposed to prevent contagion from CoViD-19, namely home confinement, with the consequent adoption of remote work and teaching, have led to a disruption of daily life and home life for individuals and families that cannot but have had consequences on levels of well-being and quality of life, and it is on this issue that we propose here a certain approach of analysis that we believe may be particularly appropriate.

Our hypothesis is that lockdown conditions may have created an overload of care and attention for parental figures such that family relationships and ties that are normally sources of positive emotions are more frequently sources, instead, of negative emotions, physical fatigue and stress.

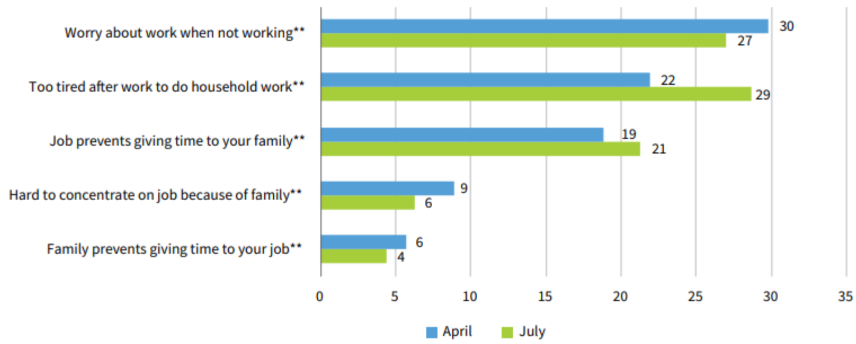
5. COVID-19 and alteration of family rhythms of life

During the pandemic, and especially in conditions of total lockdown, rhythms, times, spaces, roles and relationships within the family have been redefined (Risi, Pronzato, Di Fraia, 2021). On the one hand, the family has shown strong capacities for adaptation and resilience, while on the other, new needs have emerged, highlighted by the accentuation of risk factors and inequalities that already existed even within the domestic sphere.

The "forced" sharing of space and time has accentuated, for example, the risk of domestic violence (Beland et al., 2020). The lack of external support for families with children under 12 has increased levels of relational stress by altering family dynamics (Mazzucchelli, Bosoni, Medina, 2020). The convergence of the home, work, and dedicated spheres has made gender differences in caregiving even more apparent Lagomarsino et al., 2020). Research carried out on the impact of Covid, for example, highlights, at the family level, an overload of the female component, with specific reference to a greater number of "tasks" that are assigned to her, an effect, above all, of the process of re-familiarization of many functions that had been delegated to external services (play centers, centers for the elderly and disabled, services for children, etc.). From a relational point of view, the woman is entrusted with the task of broker, dedicated to maintaining intra- and inter-family ties beyond the physical distance imposed (Fraudatario, Zaccaria, 2020).

Eurofound's first monitoring report (Eurofound, 2020) already highlighted a trend, subsequently increasingly significant, toward altering the boundaries between family time, work time, and time for oneself (see figure 3). In April 2020, respondents were already showing difficulty in balancing their work and personal lives: 30% (27% in July 2020) said they "worry about work when not working"; 22% (29% in July 2020) said they were "too tired after work to household work." In fact, although smart working has been a key factor in ensuring business continuity, it has led to an increase in the number of people working from home, with consequent difficulties created by the intersection of work and personal life and an increase in extra hours of work.

FIGURE 3. Changes in work–life balance at EU level, EU27 (%).

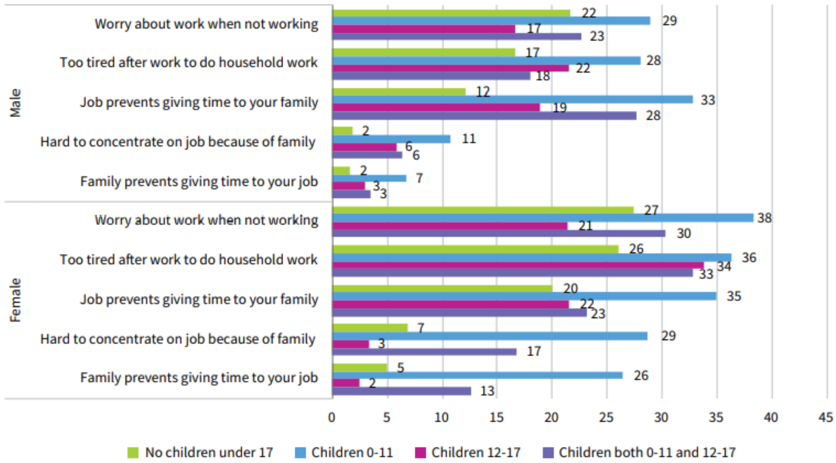


Source: EUROFOUND-2020

Women show greater difficulty than men in reconciling work and their private life, especially if they have young children (see figure 4). Respondents with children under 12 are generally the group that reported more problems adjusting to new work-life arrangements, especially with regard to concentration levels and the ability to manage work and family time. As of July 2020, 34% of respondents with children under 12 reported that their jobs prevented them from devoting time to family, compared with 16% of respondents with children over 17 and 21% of respondents with children between the ages of 12 and 17.

In April 2020, 24% of women said they felt too tired after work to engage in housework, compared to 20% of men. With businesses reopening in July, these percentages increased to 31% for women and 26% for men. Women with children under 12 reported more work-life conflicts in the July survey than both men with children of the same age and respondents without children or with children over 12 (see responses with respect to the statements “difficult to focus on work because of family" and "family prevents time at work”).

FIGURE 4. Work–life balance, by gender and age of children in July, EU27 (%).



Source: EUROFOUND-2020

Confinement within the home, the alteration of the balance between work and family life, as well as the intersection of private space and space made public by the spread of virtual meetings on video, have altered the spatial-temporal rhythms that previously defined family dynamics and, consequently, have had a fallout on levels of individual and family well-being (Mohring et al., 2021).

Faced with this state of alteration and “suffering”, the family dusts off its primary function, based on mutual aid, emotional support, caring, and shows a strong capacity for innovation and internal refunctionalization (Lagomarsino et al., 2020). The question that arises is: how far can the family resist this state of “suffering”?

It is necessary to identify possible solutions that that relieve the family! And to find these solutions, it is essential to start from an analysis of the new rhythms of family life, that is, to understand the dynamics that mark time in domestic contexts.

Understanding the rhythms means identifying the differences that coexist within the same context and distinguishing different contexts by the regularity of their rhythms. Thus, at the basis of understanding family functioning there is a play between homogeneity and heterogeneity, between regularity and difference, which is precisely what determines the quality of family relationships.

The proposed methodological approach recalls the rhythmanalysis proposed by Lefebvre (2019 [1992]) for urban space: the rhythms of life are broken down into routine and extemporaneous and then analyzed. And it is precisely those extemporaries that can be considered indicators of family organization. Each individual becomes the bearer of his or her own time, which intersects with the time of the other inhabitants of the house.

A fundamental step is therefore the understanding of what is perceived as space and time of life by the individual members of the family and what are the elements to take into account so that "living there" is considered by the individual as "good quality" and guarantees both individual and collective well-being.

6. Rhythmanalysis: an approach for the analysis of family contexts

The temporal dimension is fundamental to the study of family dynamics, since the quality of family relationships is strongly correlated with the way in which individual rhythms intermingle within the same nucleus. It is the way that time is spent, the sequence of activities carried out, the sharing or exclusion of other members from a certain activity that configures the family rhythms and, consequently, the relational dynamics. It is the time spent or to be spent that determines the organization of the space-time of daily life. It is fundamentally reorganized taking into account the rhythms of all family members and the balance is only guaranteed by the reconciliation of family time, work time and time for oneself.

Hence the importance attributed to the rhythm as an object of study to be analyzed in order to understand the complexity of current family relationships.

Rhythm consists of mechanical elements that are repeated regularly and are measurable in themselves, and organic, unforeseen, different elements (Lefebvre, 2019 [1992]). Lefebvre proposed the rhythmist's approach to understanding the dynamics that mark time in urban contexts. This same approach could also be used to study the new dynamics in family contexts, distinguishing within them both the regularities and the unexpected elements: within the same context differences can coexist and in different contexts regularities in rhythms can be found. Understanding rhythm means interpreting both elements, homogeneity and heterogeneity.

The rhythms of family units can be broken down into routine and the extemporaneous, and it is precisely the latter that can be taken as an indicator of the specific organization of the family and of the trends to be taken into account in order to propose interventions and solutions to the increasing levels of family fatigue and stress. Each member of the family is the bearer of his or her own time that goes beyond the linear elements of time. The relevance of family rhythms has become even more evident in the pandemic era, in which rhythms are altered and difficult to recompose into repetitive and extemporaneous elements. During the lockdown, and during periods of greater restrictions, the times of daily life are no longer clearly diversified and consequently the way of "living" in the home is also altered.

To detect rhythms, the two quantitative tools that are commonly used to measure budget time can be used: the questionnaire and daily diaries. They allow us to reconstruct the daily routine of an individual: which activities are carried out in a set period of time and in what sequence, the frequency with which they are carried out, how long they last, the exact moment in which they occur.

But if attention to time and the rhythm with which it is marked is aimed at detecting its quality, in order to determine the quality of family relationships it would seem more appropriate to "talk" about time rather than "quantify" it, especially in the case of time spent in the family, which is defined and qualified by an attribution of meaning that is individual, but also collective. With regard to the need to detect the quality of time, we can refer to Gershuny, who highlights the potential of narrative data on time because they are able to document any changes in the social structure. He argues in brief that:

> The new sorts of narrative data provide the essential empirical basis for understanding the relationship between individuals' behavior and social change. (Gershuny, 1999: 278).

The shift from the individual level to the social level could also be scaled back to the level of family relationships, which in this view could be interpreted as the result of the aggregation of individual behavior of individual family members, but also as a determinant of individual behavior within one's own household. Gershuny fits individual actions into a recursive model, according to which whatever people do determines who they are. The characteristics of the social actors with whom we interact and the social and material circumstances of the environment in which we live determine behavior and so on in a circular process:

> We are what we have done, what we are determines what we do next; what we do next determines what we become. And so on. This is a recursive model of determination. (Gershuny, 1999: 278).

Past events can influence future life, either directly, in the case of a single event (birth of a child, winning the lottery, etc.) immediately changing a person's status, or indirectly, through the acquisition of certain skills, abilities, or other characteristics, which can determine future actions and hinge on behavior, opinions, expectations and aspirations.

From Gershuny's perspective, there is no clear separation between an individual's structural characteristics or position within the social structure and behavior. Structure impacts behavior and, in turn, behavior crystallizes into structural features in an infinitely recursive sequence. To understand the importance of particular events or sequences of events, it is necessary to consider the macro-environment in which they occur. Similarly, if we reconsider this recursiveness in a more circumscribed setting, such as the family setting, the individual's interaction with the surrounding environment, which includes other individuals, produces new behaviors and new events. On the basis of these considerations, Gershuny proposes a study of time that minimizes interest in the allocation of budget time among the different activities that constitute the daily, weekly or monthly routine and that focuses more attention on a perspective that considers the use of time as an essential element in creating and structuring reality. Therefore, it proposes paying more attention to time, "not to measure it but to talk about it". And it is precisely this perspective that links time, and in particular rhythms, to the "quality" of family relationships.

Gershuny distinguishes between two types of narrative accounts used to reconstruct temporal routines: long-term narratives and short-term narratives[5]. Both consist of a sequence of events that can be put in time-order by the narrator and fall into a category that is then referred to as continuous-time diaries, as distinct from discrete-time diaries.

This further distinction of tools for the study of daily time, or rather, the timing of daily activities, is made in accordance with the goal of the research. In the continuous time diary, all the activities of the respondents in a given observation period are listed sequentially with the exact time when each activity began and ended, leaving no intervals of time "not devoted" to any activity. This first time sampling methodology, common among sociologists, aims to acquire knowledge about the duration of various activities and their timing. The other tool used is the discrete-time diary, in which respondents report any particular feature of their experience, or any event belonging to a particular type

[5] Long-term narratives, also called event-histories, are divided into work-histories if they deal with work-life issues, and life-histories if they deal with other types of events that have happened over a lifetime, such as marriage or, for example, the birth of a child. Short-term narratives, also called time diaries, are simply diaries used to analyze budget time over a short period. Both time-recording tools are organized in the same way, i.e., they have a "repetitive structure" of events, each of which records the date/time it began, the duration, and the time it ends, i.e., a "calendar" is reported at regular intervals of states, conditions, and activities. Both types of narrative accounts, once collected, can be analyzed using the same description and modeling procedures (Gershuny 2004).

of activity performed during the period concerned or for an ongoing activity chosen at random during the day. This second method is more widely used by psychologists with the intent of acquiring knowledge about the coincidence of certain types of activities with particular subjective mental states. In the first case we speak of time-budget studies, while in the second case of time and affect studies.

Gershuny proposes a complementary and not an alternative use of the two methods, so as to compensate for the distortions they may cause, especially when subjective data on time are collected (Gershuny, 2004).

The continuous-time diary allows the researcher to define the full temporal context and thus gather a large amount of information about all activities, much of which would otherwise be lost by simply using a discrete-time diary. The discrete-time diary allows for the association of mood with daily life, a new perspective that considers not only associations between particular activities and emotional states simultaneously, but also between certain moods, and previous or subsequent activities of different types and durations. This shifts the focus to sequences and not to individual activities, evident in the continuous-time diary, with the trade-off of accepting the risk of non-responses attributable to recall errors[6] and decay of affect[7].

A final methodological issue to note when surveying time is the ability to make inferences about short- and long-term time use from the data collected with these time diaries. This issue is primarily centered on the discrepancy between the reference period of the data (in day-person) as part of a more general research study and the actual time frame in which the researcher is interested (person-to-person-to-month or year). This fact, along with individual variation in daily time use, becomes an important distinction in the data collection phase. In light of this, an individual's time diary showing activities performed over a short period of time does not necessarily reflect potential long-run time use.

In the case of tracking the daily rhythms of a household, the above issues are not relevant. Involving all members allows for more reliable detection of the heterogeneity of daily activities carried out in a household. The problem of long-term variability would remain. In 2010, Frazis and Stewart conducted a

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[6] Recall error is a form of data distortion generated by the fact that respondents generally record an event in the diary when it might be over, even after a long time. Thus memories can be distorted with regard to reality.

[7] The decay of affect bias is generated by the fact that the feelings, the emotions aroused by a specific event over time tend to fade and recall is undoubtedly more difficult. In fact, precisely because of the natural "decay of affect" researchers interested in the relationship between activity and affect rarely use discrete-time logs.

household survey involving multiple members and on multiple days. Collecting time diaries from all members of a family allows the researcher to obtain more detailed information about the distribution of "home" time between work time and leisure time by considering the reciprocal influences created by the sharing of natural activities, moments of time and space, typical of the family setting. This method, as demonstrated by the authors, would capture more of the heterogeneity of daily activities at home, but would not solve the problem of long-term variability. To address this second issue, the researchers propose collecting multiple daily diaries from respondents and sampling the days in a way that ensures that activities are "independent" of each other.

The study of family time no longer from an individual perspective, but by contextualizing individual rhythms in the primary social group to which the individual belongs, seems to be a useful approach to find the new balance, i.e. a constant rhythm of family life that would reduce the levels of stress and fatigue caused precisely by the alteration of daily routines during the pandemic. A consistent daily rhythm of life is considered a protective factor for the family and in light of this, time management becomes a central issue for family and subjective well-being (Dugan, Matthews, Barnes-Farrell, 2012; Gambles, Lewis, Rapoport, 2006). During the first lockdown and later during red zone restrictions, most leisure time also became mandatory family time.

In terms of the study of leisure, the concepts of individual and collective leisure have long since been superseded and the focus has shifted from the characteristics of individuals and the social group to the characteristics of the relationship between people (Stokowski, 1994). It is within the system of social relations, in its structure and in the meanings that are constructed through interaction, that leisure becomes coherent.

Furthermore, social leisure has always been considered a determining factor in an individual's quality of life and consequently also in his/her well-being. Quality of life is largely determined by the quality of the relationship an individual has with his or her network and depends primarily on the level of satisfaction generated by the way time is spent. This further reiterates the need to link well-being to time in a relational perspective, with which the mechanisms that create satisfaction and determine its level are associated.

However, the relational dimension should be placed side by side with the objective dimension of time, which refers to "living conditions", and the subjective dimension, which refers to "life experience".

According to Stokowski's approach (1994), constructing the study of leisure in a network perspective would allow the analysis of the origin of the choice of leisure practice, bringing into play mechanisms that characterize the relationships between individuals and not only the socio-demographic characteristics of the individual.

At the methodological level, this approach to the study of the family and its rhythms would also focus attention on consumption of leisure, not as a practice of time consumption per se but in its dimension of shared social practice, in a condition in which the network involved in leisure is necessarily restricted to the family. The encounter of individual narratives, moreover, would allow one to reconstruct the meaning attributed to collective time, minimizing the distorting effect generated by the difficulty of a univocal definition of space-time perceived as free time by the individual interviewees. The family network would assume, in this sense, an explanatory value, if one takes into consideration the fact that daily rhythms are a particular area of social reality in which social behaviors and their meanings are produced and objectified in the daily encounters that are undergone by individuals.

Assuming that social networks are a privileged setting in which individual narratives are conceived, meet and collide, through which we can enter the "life worlds" of the interviewees and give meaning to what we classify as shared time, the network perspective, thus, becomes an essential background for the reconstruction of new post-pandemic rhythms.

It is believed, in view of the above, that network analysis may represent a further decisive strategy capable of grasping the dynamics of construction and reconstruction of daily routines. This may be used in a complementary way with regard to the more traditional techniques, which are limited to quantifying the content and/or recounting the experience, without considering the relational dimension.

7. Some concluding remarks for understanding new family dynamics

To sum up, there are three concepts on which to focus attention in order to understand the changes that are taking place in family dynamics in the post-covid era:

1) the *authenticity of rhythms*: the time experienced by the family is also the time of representations, which configures that space in everyday life that is a symbolic, personalized space, to which social actors attribute meaning, by using it in an authentic way;
2) the *flexibility of family relationships*: the family context welcomes multiple situations of collective interaction and requires a re-functionalization of shared space-time in accordance with immediate needs, which from time to time allow individuals to share, exclude, observe and involve other members in their activities, while ensuring both the individual's right to express his authenticity and the duty to respect the needs, desires, emotions of other individuals with whom he/she is in a relationship.

3) *relational well-being*, which is not the well-being of the individual nor that of the family group, but is closely linked to the well-being arising from satisfaction with the quality of one's relationships.

In the light of all this, it is fundamental to observe the new family dynamics starting from the analysis of the multiplicity of needs highlighted by the pandemic emergency, but, above all, it is necessary to start again from three cognitive questions:

1) What makes "quality" family space-time?
2) What is it that hinders harmony between individual rhythms?
3) What are the new needs of the post-pandemic family?

It is essential to take an approach that starts from the very definition of family rhythms in line with the representations and visions that individual family members provide, bringing to light the real needs linked to a need for the uniqueness of the individual and the family.

It is fundamental to understand what the latent needs are and to guide families towards the progressive reconquest of their balance in the rhythms of daily life, starting from the authenticity of the needs expressed at a specific time.

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