

Families with a team mindset strengthened their bonds during COVID-19 pandemic

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Despite reports of families disintegrating under the hardships and constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new study suggests that many families may have formed stronger bonds instead.

One key difference between families that emerged from the pandemic

stronger and unified compared with those that struggled was having a cohesive, family-oriented mindset. Families in which individuals perceived themselves as members of a team who were working for their collective benefit and found personal fulfillment in meeting the wants and needs of the other members were more likely to improve their family's well-being during the pandemic, the researchers found.

Published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, the findings come from a nationwide survey of more than 590 people conducted in September 2022 that explored changes in family relationships during the pandemic and identified the factors associated with resilient families.

"Although many studies have examined resilience in individuals in the aftermath of the pandemic, our study is one of the first to investigate resilience at the family level," said first author Allen W. Barton, a professor of human development and [family studies](#) and an Extension specialist at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. "Prior scholars have theorized about the importance of a cohesive family mindset for promoting resiliency when families face adversity, but [empirical research](#) investigating this idea has been almost nonexistent."

Barton's co-authors were Scott M. Stanley, a research professor and co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver; and U. of I. graduate students Noah B. Larsen and Qiujie Gong.

In the study, individuals were asked how aspects of their family life had changed during the pandemic—specifically, their marriage or current romantic relationship, their relationships with their children and other immediate family members they lived with, as well as those with members of their extended family.

Respondents provided information about various individual and family-

level factors that could characterize pandemic-related changes in well-being, such as destructive communication patterns, how much they felt their spouse or partner appreciated them, and levels of perceived stress, loneliness and financial hardship.

The participants, who were recruited through the research survey firm Prolific, were over age 18, parenting at least one child between the ages of 4 and 17, currently in a romantic relationship and U.S. residents.

A slight majority (53%) of the participants were women, who ranged in age from 24 to 75, were white (88%), married (82%) and with a median household income between \$75,000 and \$85,000, according to the study.

Using the analytic technique of latent profile analysis, which grouped participants based on similarities in their responses to four COVID-19-related questions, the researchers identified three groups of families—those whose functioning worsened across multiple [family relationships](#), who composed about 10% of the sample; those whose family well-being improved (42%); and those whose family dynamics remained stable (48%).

The researchers looked at several variables as potential predictors that differentiated individuals in these three [family groups](#), including individual and demographic factors such as income, [education level](#) and [financial hardship](#), along with family-level factors such as couples' communication, their levels of social integration, their perceptions of their partners' gratitude toward them and a cohesive family mindset.

The study results showed significant differences among the groups for several couple and family factors but few differences in the individual and demographic factors. However, only one variable significantly differentiated individuals across the three family groups—a cohesive family mindset.

Those in the improved family functioning group reported the highest levels of this mindset, while those in the worsened family functioning group reported the lowest levels of it, the researchers found.

"During times of adversity and hardship, orientations to family life that emphasize teamwork and personal fulfillment through meeting the needs and wants of the broader family unit, versus meeting the needs and wants of oneself, may provide a unique strength-based asset for families," Barton said.

As individuals adopt this type of mindset, their personal desires may align with familial investments, the researchers hypothesized in the study.

"A cohesive family mindset creates a home in which the sacrifices necessary for the good of the family are not a barrier to one's happiness, but another means by which happiness can be realized," Barton said.

Individuals in the worsened functioning group indicated their family members engaged in more destructive communication during conflicts, such as heated arguments and incivility; and the adults had lower levels of perceived gratitude from their partners than those in the other two groups, who scored similarly on both factors, according to the study.

Likewise, the researchers found that individuals in the worsened family functioning group had higher levels of both perceived stress and loneliness compared with their peers in the improved [family](#) functioning group.

More information: Allen W. Barton et al, Family resiliency in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic: A latent profile analysis, *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12929](https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12929)

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