Sleep, mental health, and the need for physical and real-life social contact during the COVID-19 pandemic: A Bayesian network analysis

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Background
COVID-19-related lockdown
- mental health
  - (1)
- insomnia
  - (1)
- longing for physical touch (‘skin hunger’)
  - (2)

Research questions
- Main: How were sleep, mental health, and the desire for physical and real-life social contact interconnected?
- Additional: Was the need for physical contact and for real-life social contact (meaning not though screens or social media) with family and non-family members different during the second lockdown than before the COVID-19 pandemic?

Method
- 2827 adults
- online survey during the second COVID-19 lockdown
- Main statistical analysis: Bayesian gaussian copula graphical model (BGCGM) and Bayesian directed acyclic graph (DAG)
- Additional statistical analysis: t-tests

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-lockdown (M, SD)</th>
<th>Second lockdown (M, SD)</th>
<th>t(df)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NPC family</td>
<td>3.37 (0.93)</td>
<td>3.39 (1.00)</td>
<td>-0.83 (2094)</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPC non-family</td>
<td>2.70 (1.10)</td>
<td>2.43 (1.19)</td>
<td>12.55 (2091)</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRL-SC family</td>
<td>3.43 (0.98)</td>
<td>3.55 (1.05)</td>
<td>-6.45 (2092)</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRL-SC non-family</td>
<td>3.24 (0.74)</td>
<td>3.23 (1.12)</td>
<td>0.81 (2090)</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Having a particularly high need for physical and real-life social contact might be a sign of a bad mental health. In contrast, people with mental health struggles will not necessarily have a need for physical contact nor for real-life social contact. This might be due to their attachment style or negative attitudes towards others and towards physical contact (3).

During the second lockdown, people craved less physical contact with non-family members. Having already experienced a lockdown and a loosening of social distancing measures before, the second lockdown may have caused the installement of a sense of habituation and acceptance of the ongoing abnormal and uncontrollable social circumstances (4).