Family Social Capital's Impact on the Family Stress Model: A Cross-Sectional Spanish Study During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: This article has a dual purpose. First, it corroborates the empirical evidence of the Family Stress Model (FSM) to the Spanish population during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, this article contributes to extending the FSM by investigating the impact of Family Social Capital (FSC) on the well-established FSM. In other words, it assesses if families with high FSC, when affected by economic hardship and distress, avoid the deterioration of their inner relationships. We conducted empirical analyses through data collected from *N* = 583 (mean age = 49.5 years) from Spanish families with diverse working situations using the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique to test the theorized model. Our results suggest the validity of the FSM in the context of the economic crisis due to COVID-19 in Spain and then, by complementing the FSM with FSC, demonstrate that FSC can be considered as an accommodating protective factor for sustaining couple and children relationship quality for families facing economic difficulties. Also, in this article, the positive effects of FSC are studied within families in an original way, unlike past studies, which mainly used the FSC to relate civic social capital and showed its beneficial effects in extra-familial areas.

Keywords: family social capital, family stress model, economic crisis, COVID-19, Spain

Résumé : Cet article a un double objectif. Tout d'abord, il corrobore les preuves empiriques du Modèle de Stress Familial (FSM) pour la population espagnole pendant la pandémie de COVID-19. Deuxièmement, cet article contribue également à étendre le FSM en examinant l'impact du Capital Social Familial (FSC) sur le FSM bien

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établi. En d'autres termes, il évalue si les familles dotées d'un FSC élevé, lorsqu'elles sont touchées par des difficultés économiques et du stress, parviennent à éviter la détérioration de leurs relations internes. Nous avons effectué des analyses empiriques à l'aide de données recueillies auprès de N = 583 (âge moyen = 49,5 ans) de familles espagnoles aux situations professionnelles diverses en utilisant la technique de Modélisation par Équations Structurelles (SEM) pour tester le modèle théorisé. Nos résultats suggèrent la validité du FSM dans le contexte de la crise économique due à la COVID-19 en Espagne et montrent ensuite, en complétant le FSM avec le FSC, que le FSC peut être considéré comme un facteur protecteur accommodant pour maintenir la qualité des relations de couple et d'enfants au sein des familles confrontées à des difficultés économiques. De plus, de manière originale, cet article étudie les effets positifs du FSC au sein des familles, contrairement aux études antérieures qui utilisaient principalement le FSC pour relier le capital social civique et montrer ses effets bénéfiques dans des domaines extra-familiaux.

Mots-clés : capital social familial, modèle de stress familial, crise économique, COVID-19, Espagne

Introduction

The present research focuses on a highly relevant topic: the impact of economic crises on families' relationships and reactions. This study was realized during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Spain. The COVID-19 health crisis has not only brought a new virus, but it has also brought uncertainty, despair, distress, job loss, and economic strain, among other issues. According to Deb et al., (2020), the containment measures have had an essential impact on economic activity with a reduction of 15 % in industrial production over 30 days after their implementation. Indeed, the pandemic has been a turning point in our lives and the family has not been immune to it. The family is a dynamic social system that reacts to exogenous and endogenous changes (Cui & Hong, 2021; Laszloffy, 2002). Therefore, the pandemic created unprecedented stress within families, affecting various aspects of their daily lives and, founding themselves "in suspense"[1] (see Centro di Ateneo Studi e Ricerche sulla Famiglia, 2020).

This situation raises the need to understand how family dynamics are influenced by external factors such as economic hardship, and how families face them. Spain had been one of the countries most affected by the pandemic. Indeed, previous research has shown that the lockdown in Spain worsened previous family and mental health problems such as anxiety and loneliness due to the lack of support (Hervalejo et al., 2020). In a similar vein, Bernedo et al., (2022) noticed different sociodemographic variables that influence the perception of the confinement and adaptation to it, for instance, women underwent more family stressors during the lockdown and worse family adaptation compared to men, but also the income of the family affected how the confinement was experienced. Regarding adolescents, previous studies suggested that they were a collective especially hit psychologically, in particular, the ones that

were within a low-income family or that reported a family income loss suffered poor well-being (Folch et al., 2022).

Although the pandemic hit Spain prominently, Spanish families have vital aspects that may help to soften the crisis. In Spain and Southern European welfare states, family solidarity plays a crucial role in social protection (Castles, 1995; Ferrera, 1996; Martin, 1996). Therefore, as a family is a strong cornerstone, we may presuppose that despite the uncertainty and stress, Spanish families can find internal resources to alleviate the situation.

Most studies examining the influence of economic stress on families often apply the FSM as a framework (Conger et al., 2002; Conger et al., 1990). This model suggests that economic challenges, like job loss, not only affect individuals financially and emotionally but also strain couples' relationships and parenting. Nonetheless, researchers are actively investigating factors that can counteract these negative effects. Personal resources like self-control, optimism, and coping strategies have been suggested as potential mitigators (Cui & Hong, 2021; Taylor et al., 2012; Wadsworth et al., 2011, 2013), along with individual commitment to family well-being (Cui & Hong, 2021). Social resources, such as effective couple problem-solving skills (Masarik et al., 2016) and community support (Krishnakumar et al., 2014), have also been identified as protective factors.

Despite the various attempts and interpretations of strategies that prevent the effect of economic stress in the family sphere, the literature has rarely considered the internal resources that families can use to mitigate the negative spillover effects. In this paper, we want to shed some light on this gap by exploring whether and how Family Social Capital (FSC)—the relational good that arises from interactions between family members, characterized by trust, support, and reciprocity—(Donati, 2003; Donati et al., 2008; Di Nicola et al., 2011; Prandini, 2014), helps to mitigate th[e] turmoil that was disrupting families during the COVID-19 crisis. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it wants to verify the applicability of the FSM to the Spanish population during the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, it extends the FSM by investigating the impact of (FSC) on the well-established FSM. The paper offers an extension to the empirical consideration of the FSM by showing how families' internal resources can, indeed, dampen external disruptions. The study illustrates not only the importance of working on family relationships to mitigate external challenges but also the strength that the family has to overcome any obstacle.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical background of this paper lies in the FSM (see Conger et al., 2002; Conger et al., 1990) and the concept of FSC (see Donati et al., 2008; Donati & Tronca, 2003; Di Nicola et al. 2011; Prandini, 2014).

The Family Stress Model

The FSM was originally conceived to study how the farm crisis affects families in the U.S., and it has been validated and established to consider different types of

exogenous crisis such as economic crises (see, e.g., Aytaç & Rankin, 2009; Hraba et al., 2000; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998; Layte & McCrory, 2018). In that sense, the model proposes that families (i.e., couples and children) are influenced by three main triggers: economic hardship, economic pressures, and emotional and psychological distress. These triggers have an impact on the quality of couples' relationships and disrupt parent-children interaction.

Economic hardship refers to economic adversities that individuals may suffer. As stated by the FSM, monetary crises or macroeconomic downturns may provoke job loss or other negative financial events (i.e., a decrease in workload) (Conger et al., 1990; Masarik & Conger, 2017). Previous studies have considered two main forms of economic hardship.

On the one hand, there is long-standing economic hardship such as the low-income family per capita (Conger et al., 2002). On the other hand, economic hardship has also been conceived as acute economic adversities due to exogenous negative financial changes such as income or job loss (Conger et al., 2002; Elder & Caspi, 1988).

According to the FSM, the fact that individuals experience economic hardship will generate widespread economic pressure; in other words, the economic difficulties that individuals may experience produce strains in their daily living (i.e., unable to purchase necessary goods, having to reduce their daily expenditure due to the limited economic resources) (Conger et al., 2000; Conger et al., 1990).

H1: Parents with more economic hardship will experience greater economic pressure.

Economic Pressure. Previous studies have demonstrated that economic pressure illustrates the living experience of economic hardship (Conger et al., 2002). In that sense, experiencing economic strains in our day-to-day lives impacts our psychological and emotional well-being. Thus, it works as the explanatory factor between economic hardship and psychological distress (Masarik & Conger, 2017). Following this line of thought, there have been many studies that have supported this idea. Conger et al., (2002) showed that negative financial events foretell economic strains that generate feelings of discouragement and hopelessness. Similarly, it has been argued that low-income mothers showed economic difficulties that led to depression, hostility, and anxiety (Newland et al., 2013). Likewise, various empirical studies have noted the indirect reactions, from economic hardship to parents' psychological distress through the increment of economic pressure (Hardaway & Cornelius, 2014; Iruka et al., 2012; Neppl et al., 2016; Ponnet, 2014).

H2: Parents experiencing economic pressure will experience higher levels of emotional and psychological distress.

The Emotion and Psychological Distress unleashed by economic hardship and economic pressure has an impact on the relational sphere with other family

members (i.e., couple relationships and parent-children interaction), (Conger et al., 1990; Conger & Conger, 2002). In that sense, previous research has shown that depressive symptoms predict lower couple relationship satisfaction (Dew & Yorgason, 2010; Helms et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2013; O'Neal et al., 2015). Similarly, Hraba et al. (2000) have revealed a connection between economic pressures and marital problems. However, the emotional and psychological distress spill over into other family relationships, such as parent-children interaction (Conger & Conger, 2002; Masarik & Conger, 2017). Following this line of thought, it has been claimed that psychological stress affects parenting practices, resulting in unsupportive parenting (Newland et al., 2013), reduced quantity and quality of time spent with children (Iruka et al., 2012), hostility and harshness (Neppl et al., 2016), poor management of children (Martin et al., 2019; Scaramella et al., 2008), and low warmth (i.e., communication, support, responsiveness) (Barnett, 2008; Neppl et al., 2016), among others. Although the impact on parent-children interaction has been operationalized differently, all can be conceptualized as disrupting parenting or negative parent-children interaction.

H3: Parents presenting higher levels of emotional and psychological distress will experience lower couple relationship quality.

H4: Parents confronting higher levels of emotional and psychological distress will endure greater disrupted parent-children interaction.

Couple Relationship Quality and Disrupted Parent-Children Interaction. Even though some studies show that there is a connection between parental emotional and psychological stress and parent-children interaction, many of those do not consider couple relationships as a potential mediator (Simons et al., 2016). As an exception, Landers-Potts et al. (2015) have demonstrated that parents with more economic stress were more prone to behave in a hostile manner toward their children when they were experiencing couple relationship problems. However, according to the FSM, interparental conflict is assumed to have a negative impact on parent-children interaction (Masarik & Conger, 2017). In this line of thought, some studies have illustrated that interparental conflict spills over into parent-children interaction, and thus, parents experiencing couple relationship conflicts would present hostile parenting (i.e., less warmth and support) and bad child management (Ponnet, 2014; Simons et al., 2016).

H5: Couple relationship mediates the influence of emotional & psychological distress on disrupted parent-child interactions.

Family Social Capital

While research has demonstrated issues that may aggravate the outcomes of the FSM, there can be resources that may reduce or even change their impact (Masarik et al., 2017). In that sense, previous studies have reported that some

external elements may alleviate part of the stress process. For instance, McConnell et al., (2011) demonstrated that parents receiving social support demonstrated more effective parenting. In addition, there may also be some interpersonal resources that contribute to the mitigation. This is the case of coping tactics that may decrease psychological distress (Wadsworth et al., 2011; Wadsworth et al., 2013). Likewise, Masarik et al., (2016) indicated that effective problem-solving reduces interparental angry and hostile behaviors. Finally, the literature has also revealed that there are cultural factors that may influence parents and parenting practices (Coltrane et al., 2004; Halgunseth et al., 2006). This is the case of familism values, that is, the importance of family obligations and the tendency to count on the family as the main source of support (Knight et al., 2010). In this line of research, previous studies have demonstrated a positive influence of familism on parenting, thus showing how cultural values may moderate the assumed FSM associations (see Gonzales et al., 2011; White et al., 2015; White & Roosa, 2012). However, fewer studies have tried to analyze and explain whether and how parents present internal family resources that may lessen the blow. In this paper, we want to explore whether parents possess important family resources to sustain critical moments and ensure their family relationships are not compromised despite a negative situation. To do that, our paper draws on Family Social Capital.

While widely known experts such as Bourdieu (1993), Coleman (1988), Fukuyama (1999), and Putnam (1995) consider FSC as the cornerstone of social capital, studies on the concept are relatively scarce. In some cases, the idea of family is jeopardized by the increasingly individualistic Risk Society (Winter, 2000; Meil, 2011), even though specific references to its benefits at the community level are acknowledged (Colozzi, 2007); in other studies, even the connection to the concept of family has disappeared (Prandini, 2007; Stone & Hughes, 2000).

Many scholars identify social relationships as basic constitutive elements of social capital, thus defining it as a relational phenomenon. As such, it emerges through the interaction of the following aspects: values, norms, goals, and resources (Donati, 2003; Tronca, 2016). To achieve common goals, social relationships mobilize a set of cooperation and reciprocity norms between different subjects, leading to associations that represent different combinations of said elements. In turn, these generate a plethora of so-called 'social capitals:' familial, community, associative, and generalized (Donati & Tronca, 2008). Within this family-related capital, the tendency towards complete reciprocity, commonly known as 'love,' produces primary relational goods (Amato et al., 2009; Donati, 2003).

The abovementioned goods can be defined as those goods consisting of social relationships that emerge between agents/actors, reflexively oriented to produce and enjoy together goods that they cannot obtain in other ways (Donati & Solci, 2011). Relational goods are characteristic assets of informal networks, where they are called primary relational goods, and associative networks, where they are called secondary relational goods; they must be produced and used by

those who participate in a specific activity. Some examples of relational goods may include caring mutual support, a shared sense of belonging, a calm and trustful atmosphere, interpersonal communication and understanding, and joint commitment to solidarity projects.

FSC is one of those relational goods, as it is defined by relational sociology as a good that arises from interactions between family members and is characterized by trust, support, and reciprocity.

Reciprocity means to realize a symbolic exchange that has an intrinsic value in the relationship motivated by the value it has for the subjects (Donati & Colozzi, 2004), who act through this symbolic exchange 'to remain in a circle of subjects who consider the value of their social relationship superior to the results or the individual performances that this relationship offers or produces' (Donati & Colozzi, 2004, p.29).

On another note, *trust* is defined as confidence in the dependability of someone or something (VandenBos, 2015), which in interpersonal relationships results in the reliance that a person has on the reliability of another person or a group. Trust is a key value to the development and maintenance of a cohesive society, as well as a fundamental component in durable relationships.

Lastly, *support* includes all the resources that are exchanged among members of a family, including those that target the emotional dimension throughout challenging times (Dolan et al., 2018; Herrera-Pastor et al., 2020). As stated earlier, *FSC is the relational good that comprises interpersonal reciprocity, trust, and mutual support among family members*.

H6a: Parents in families with higher FSC will not experience deterioration in the quality of their couple relationship.

H6b: Parents in families with higher FSC will experience deterioration in the disrupted parent-child interactions.

H6c: Couple relationship mediates the influence of FSC on disrupted parent-child interactions.

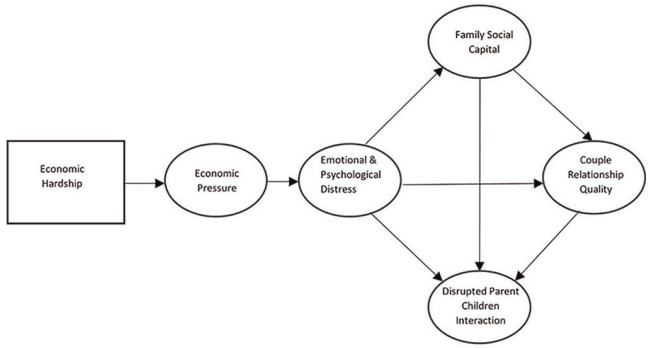
The hypothesized theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

Methods

Participants

Data collection was finalized based on a cross-sectional study through an online survey of 1177 Spanish citizens. The survey included an instrument developed by the Family Studies and Research University Centre of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan. The Italian version of the instrument was then translated into Spanish with back-to-back translations by professionals and natives of both Italy and Spain. The online survey was designed to be filled out on a personal computer, laptop, tablet, or mobile phone, which included both demographic

Figure 1. Theoretical model



Note: *This figure represents the proposed theorized FSM.*
Source: Authors.

sections and specific psychometric instruments that have been commonly used in past studies to measure the different variables regarding family relationships. The recruitment strategy involved reducing the risk of sampling bias as much as possible, using regional differentiation within Spain, including various recruitment channels like interest groups, support agencies, and municipalities. Data were collected between March 2020 and June 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown. A total of 713 participants, stratified as fathers or mothers, were finally included in the study, each representing a single family from various regions of Spain within the 19 provinces. However, 130 responses were eliminated as it was detected to be invalid or missing data, so a total of 583 responses were included in the final data analysis.

All participants came from the active population and were living with their partners and with other family members. The representativeness of the participants in terms of gender, age, and rural-urban location was cross-checked against the national statistics of Spain (INE) and considered satisfactory. Working situations were also quite diverse: 24.02% were teleworking, 20.54% were going to their workplace, and 43.1% were unemployed during the time of the survey. The participants had various living and personal situations, including 56.05% who were married and 18.73% who were living together as unmarried couples, with a mean income level of 33.45%. Among the participants, 50% were men, and 49.93% were women, with an average age of 49.54 years (SD = 10.692), having one to six children less than 18 years old and living with their parents. We conducted an ANOVA to compare the families with children of different ages (0 to 5 =1; 6 to 10 = 2; 11 to 15 = 3; 16 to 18 = 4) and found no significant differences among the family life cycle with the variables under study.

Measures

All the measures used in the present study were assessed using Likert-scaled items except for the variable's economic hardship and couple relationship quality, which were based on single-item indicators. These variables were consistent with the use of single-item hands, given their nature of concreteness and high semantic redundancy, based on recommendations provided by previous studies demonstrating their psychometric qualities (Elo et al., 2003; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Sawyer et al., 2008; Wanous & Hudy, 2001).

Economic Hardship was measured based on one indicator that asked about the labor situation. For the purposes of this study, we consider the individuals who responded as either unemployed before COVID-19 or whose work activity had been suspended due to the pandemic as unemployed. The variable was measured using a dichotomous nature of 1 = *yes* if unemployed and 0 = *no* if employed.

Economic Pressure was assessed on two dimensions: economic strain and financial stability (adapted from Sorgente & Lanz, 2019), using an 8-item scale with responses ranging from 1 (absolutely nothing) to 5 (very much) or responses from 1 (completely false) to 5 (completely true). The items included statements and themes such as 'worried about the economic strain,' 'not having enough money to pay the bills,' or 'not having enough money to buy what I need.' Alpha coefficients for the current study were 0.89 for economic strain and 0.85 for financial stability perceptions. The factor loadings ranged between 0.55 and 0.78, accounting for 65.2% of the variance. Confirmatory factor analysis of the items in the present sample supported the construct of two subscales with the relevant items. Absolute fit measures: $\chi 2 = 116.09$; ($p < 0.05$); $\chi 2$ /df = 13; RMSEA = 0.03; incremental fit measures: TLI = 0.95; CFI = 0.97.

Emotional and Psychological Distress was measured using two dimensions: the emotional state and psychological distress (adapted from Antonovsky, 1993), using an 11-item scale with responses ranging from 1 (hardly ever/never) to 7 (frequently/always). The items included statements and questions such as 'I have the feeling that the things I do in my daily life don't make much sense', 'I have feelings that I am not sure I can control,' or 'I have felt discouraged and sad.' Alpha coefficients for the current study were 0.84 for emotional state and 0.88 for psychological distress. The factor loadings ranged between 0.62 and 0.83, accounting for 68.4% of the variance. Confirmatory factor analysis of the items in the present sample supported the construct of two subscales with the relevant items. Absolute fit measures: $\chi 2 = 270.49$; ($p < 0.001$); $\chi 2$ /df = 43; RMSEA = 0.03; incremental fit measures: TLI = 0.94; CFI = 0.95.

Couple Relationship Quality (adapted from Norton (1983)) was assessed using the single-item question, 'How do you evaluate the relationship with your couple during this period of crisis? To which the participants responded from 1 (very negative) to 10 (very positive).

Disrupted Parent-Children Interaction was measured with items from the adapted scale of the positive parenting scale (Gómez-Muzzio & Muñoz-Quinteros,

2014), using a 22-item scale with responses ranging from 1(never) to 5 (always). The items included statements and themes such as 'When my children ask for my attention, I respond quickly, in a short time', 'I spend time thinking about how to support my children in the challenges of their age' or 'I have managed to maintain a good family climate for the development of my children'. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 was found.

Family Social Capital (FSC) was constructed with three sub-constructs: trust, support, and reciprocity, with each defined in a subscale.

Trust was measured using a 4-item scale with responses ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (fully satisfied). The items included statements and themes such as 'The way we communicate with each other' or 'our family's ability to share positive experiences.'

Support (adapted from Bodenmann, 2008)) was assessed using a 9-item scale with responses ranging from 1 (nothing) to 5 (very much). The items included statements and themes such as 'My family really tries to help me' or 'My family gives me the emotional support that I need.'

Reciprocity was measured using a 4-item scale with responses ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (fully satisfied). The items included statements and themes such as 'The care each of us pays to the other family members', 'The ability of our family to cope with difficulties', or 'The degree of closeness between us.'

Validation of the FSC scale

Contributions to the operationalization of FSC for empirical purposes are published in the literature (Prandini, 2007; Carrà & Moscatelli, 2019; Marcaletti & Cavallotti, 2021). A recent study submitted for publication (Cavallotti et al., 2022) presented a new categorization of the FSC scale operationalizing the composition of trust, support, and reciprocity within the family. We have adopted this validated FSC scale for the present sample data, showing the effects of the multidimensional composition of FSC measures on the FSM.

For the convergent validity, an oblique rotation and a principal component extraction method were first used. Then, a series of confirmatory factor analyses were conducted using a maximum likelihood solution to compare the fit statistics for the proposed three-factor model to the appropriate statistics of a one-factor model. Using both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis provided distinctive insights into the dimensionality of the focal scales. Consequently, we also conducted a series of experimental and confirmatory factor analyses on the proposed factors for testing discriminant validity. Finally, to assess reliability, we examined the internal consistency of the scales.

For the convergent validity, an eigen cut-off score of greater than or equal to 1.0 was considered to select the number of factors and items with factor loadings above 0.65 on only one aspect that was used. The results yielded a three-factor solution that accounted for 62.5% of the variance. The factor loadings ranged from 0.65 to 0.88 for each of the sub-constructs. Factor loadings are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor loadings from the exploratory factor analysis of the Family Social Capital (FSC) Scale

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
T1	0.82		
T2	0.81		
T3	0.78		
T4	0.79		
S1		0.86	
S2		0.65	
S3		0.78	
S4		0.78	
S5		0.79	
S6		0.88	
S7		0.82	
S8		0.85	
S9		0.66	
R1			0.88
R2			0.84
R3			0.82
R4			0.78

Note: Only factor loadings greater than .65 are presented. T = Trust; S = Support; R = Reciprocity

The constructs' internal consistency was confirmed, as the overall scale's reliability statistics were above the criterion threshold of 0.70 for both Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) was also found to exceed the cut-off point of 0.50 for all factors, demonstrating a satisfactory overall convergent validity of the construct.

Regarding the confirmatory factor analysis, the 17 items in the present sample supported the construct of three subscales with the relevant items. For the three-factor model, the absolute fit measures were $\chi 2 = 208.75$, $df = 97$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.02; and incremental appropriate measures were TLI = 0.99; CFI = 0.99. These results support the proposed dimensionality of FSC according to Hu & Bentler's (1999) cut-off criteria for fit indexes. All factor loadings ranged between 0.82 to 0.93 and were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), and their factor correlations ranged between 0.55 to 0.63. Finally, for the one-factor model, the absolute and incremental fit measures were: $\chi 2 = 348.66$, $df = 98$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.05; TLI = 0.90; CFI = 0.91, which showed that relatively the three-factor model was superior to the one-factor model.

Data Analysis

The proposed theoretical model (Fig. 1) was tested by structural equation modeling technique (SEM) using AMOS 28 (Arbuckle, 2011), a procedure used for analyzing models with latent constructs (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Structural

equation modeling (SEM) is a statistical procedure for testing non-direct causal-effect relationships. For testing the present model, although being criticized for its limitations in trying for inferences while using cross-sectional data, we use this technique, as several other authors also recommend being a well-suited tool for predicting associations between variable relationships with direct and indirect effects (Acock, 2013; Falissard, 2008). These models enable the simultaneous fit of several multiple linear regressions, and the variables present in the regressions may be either observable or latent and can also potentially improve the statistical estimation of associations between the variables by considering the measurement errors (Hair et al., 2014).

The data fit was confirmed using the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). CFI and TLI values of > 0.96 and an RMSEA value of < 0.02 represented an acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The substantive model included six latent constructs, two with single-item measures (couple relationship quality and economic hardship). Given that these constructs were relatively concrete, the factor loading was fixed at 1.0, and the measurement error was fixed at 0.0. Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 2 in the results section.

For testing the theoretical model, the latent-variable structural path analysis was conducted with maximum estimation (e.g., Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1995). The model included the following latent variables: economic pressure (with the two constructs: economic strain and financial stability perceptions), emotional and psychological distress (the two constructs of emotional state and psychological distress), disrupted parent-children interaction (with 22 items), and family social capital (with the three constructs: trust, support, and reciprocity).

Results

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of the variables under study.

Table 2. Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and correlations of all study variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Economic Hardship	0.44	0.49					
2. Economic Pressure	3.41	1.14	0.32**				
3. Emotional & Psych. distress	4.45	1.01	0.17**	0.35**			
4. Disrupt Parent-children inter.	4.27	0.71	0.10	0.10	0.11**		
5. FSC	3.42	0.62	−0.02	−0.03	−0.05	−0.10**	
6. Couple relationship quality	8.01	1.93	−0.04	−0.05	−0.27**	−0.35**	0.16**

Note: $N = 583$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

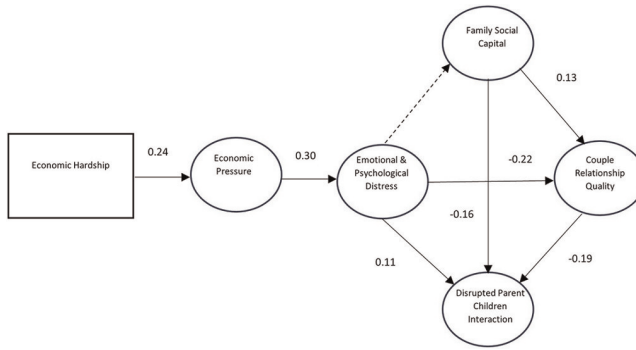
While testing the theoretical model, the measurement model showed an overall fit. The model fit indices showed satisfactory values: absolute appropriate measures: $\chi 2 = 56.99$; ($p < 0.01$); $\chi 2 / df = 6$; RMSEA = 0.05; incremental fit steps: TLI = 0.97; CFI = 0.98. The range of the standardized factor loadings for the indicators onto the latent constructs was between 0.65 and 0.90, and all values were $p < 0.05$.

Direct and Indirect Effects

The results from the structural model to test hypotheses 1 to 4 and 6a, 6b showed that parents facing higher economic hardship were associated with having highly significant positive economic pressure ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$). Consequently, those parents who had higher economic pressure had a significant positive association with emotional and psychological distress ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$), thus confirming hypotheses 1 and 2. Furthermore, parents who presented higher emotional and psychological distress showed a negative association with couple relationship quality ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < 0.001$) and a significant positive association with disrupted parent-child interactions ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.001$), confirming hypotheses 3 and 4. Regarding the FSC variable, results showed that as perceiving higher FSC increases, the couple relationship quality also increases ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$) and decreases disruption in parent-child interactions ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$), thus confirming hypotheses H6a and H6b.

In order to test hypotheses five and 6c on the mediating effects, first, we checked Model 1 for parents' emotional and psychological distress on perceptions of disrupted parent-child interactions through couple relationship quality and then Model 2 for FSC on perceptions of disrupted parent-child interactions through couple relationship quality (direct effects only). In these models, no direct paths from the independent variables to the dependent variables were included. All fit indexes indicated a good fit: Model 1: $\chi 2$ (6) = 56.67, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.93, GFI = 0.90, 90% CI [0.038, 0.044], RMSEA = 0.01; Model 2: $\chi 2$ = 60.23, $\chi 2$ (9) = 68.11, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.92, 90% CI [0.028, 0.034], RMSEA = 0.04. We then checked Models 3 and 4 (mediating model), in which we added direct paths from parents' perceived emotional and psychological distress and FSC, respectively, to their perceptions of disrupted parent-child interactions. The fit indexes indicated a good fit as well: Model 3: $\chi 2$ (8) = 48.73, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.935, GFI = 0.901, 90% CI [0.037, 0.043], RMSEA = 0.040); Model 4: $\chi 2$ (12) = 54.93, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.96, GFI = 0.93, 90% CI [0.035, 0.041], RMSEA = 0.05). When the chi-squares of models 1 and 2 with models 3 and 4 were compared, their differences were found to be significant (model 1 and 3: $\Delta\chi 2 = 12.50$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p < .001$; model 2 and 4: $\Delta\chi 2 = 61.20$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < .001$), in favor of Model 2. This indicates that couple relationship quality intervenes in the relationship between parents' perceived emotional and psychological distress and parents' perceptions of FSC on perceptions of disrupted parent-child interactions. As Figure 2 shows, all paths were statistically significant except for perceived emotional and psychological distress to FSC.

Figure 2. Structured model



Note. This figure demonstrates the standardized estimated coefficients of the structural equation model. Only significant beta coefficients are reported: $*p < 0.05$, $p** < 0.001$. The dotted line denotes non-significant relationships.

Source: Authors.

Finally, the bootstrapping re-sampling technique was used to test the indirect effects and confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes; Shrout & Bolger, 2002) to verify the intervening role of couple relationship quality. Table 2 displays the bootstrap results of the direct and indirect effects. Parents' perceived emotional and psychological distress and FSC have a significant indirect impact on their perceptions of disrupted parent-child interactions through couple relationship quality, and the 95% CIs [0.02, 0.21]; CIs [0.02, 0.32] respectively exclude zero. The combined results indicate that couple relationship quality could serve as a pathway in the linkage between parents' perceived emotional and psychological distress and FSC with their perceptions of disrupted parent-child interactions, thus confirming hypotheses H5 & H6b on the mediating effects. In summary, results show that the better the FSC for a family, the fewer disruptions in parent-children interaction, overcoming emotional and psychological distress as perceptions of family resources grow positive.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although several researchers have found and mentioned the negative impact of exogenous crises on families, the knowledge about the internal family resources that parents may use to soften the spillover effects is limited. The current study contributes to the field by investigating the impact of FSC in the well-established FSM and the relationship with perceptions of couple relationship quality and disrupted parent-child interactions, in addition to validating the FSM to the Spanish population. To do that, our paper has taken the COVID-19 crisis as a case in which the disruption of the economy impacted many families. Although the

Table 3. Coefficients of the mediation model

Effect	*B*	*SE*	*P*
Total effect			
FSC → Disrupted parent-children interaction	−.655	.052	< .001
Emotional, psychological distress → Disrupted parent-children interaction	.038	.110	< .001
Direct effect			
FSC → Disrupted parent-children interaction	−.223	.105	< .001
Emotional, psychological distress → Disrupted parent-children interaction	.325	.083	< .001
Mediation path			
Emotional, and psychological distress →Couple relationship quality→ Disrupted parent-children interaction	−.287	.192	< .001
FSC → Couple relationship quality→ Disrupted parent-children interaction	−.434	.074	< .001

Note: FSC is Family Social Capital.

COVID-19 pandemic may have affected the variables studied in this model *per se*, the pandemic gives us an excellent crisis context to test and expand FSM, that is, a situation where all the different stressors might have co-occurred. Therefore, we have taken the pandemic as a context instead of an item that had a specific effect on the model and its variables.

Our results support H1 & H2, that is, parents facing higher economic hardship experience more significant economic pressure, and in turn, parents going through economic pressure endure more elevated levels of emotional and psychological distress. This aligns with previous research using FSM, which argued that economic difficulties create difficulties in their quotidian (see, e.g., Conger et al., 2002; Neppl et al., 2016). Concerning H3 & H4, parents experiencing higher levels of emotional and psychological distress perceive lower couple relationship quality and endure greater disrupted parent-children interaction. The results on the mediating effects supporting H5 suggest that parents experiencing higher levels of emotional and psychological distress and perceiving lower couple relationship quality also perceive more disrupted parent-children interaction. Indeed, prior research pointed out that parental psychological distress affects parent-children interaction (i.e., poor management of children, a reduction of quality of time spent with them), (see, e.g., Martin et al., 2019), as well as couple relationship satisfaction (O'Neal et al., 2015). Likewise, previous studies argued that interparental conflict influences parent-children interaction negatively (see, e.g., Masarik & Conger et al., 2017). Therefore, our findings align with the FSM theory and bring a new empirical validation to the model by taking the case of Spain during the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, our results support H6a and

H6b; that is, parents in families with high FSC do not experience deterioration in the quality of their relationship and perceive lower levels of disrupted parent-children's relationships. As for the results on mediating effects supporting H6b & H6c, findings suggest that if the family members encounter incrementing FSC, it will also strongly influence the couple relationship quality, which in turn can have a detrimental effect on disrupted parent-children's relationships. Results showed no significant direct association of emotional psychological distress on FSC, which means that emotional pain associated with economic hardships does not significantly affect family members' love. In summary, parents of families with high FSC, although affected by economic hardships and distress, do not experience deterioration of their inner relationships, breaking the correlation predicted by the FSM.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, our study demonstrates the positive effects of FSC within the families. At the same time, in the literature the importance of the concept of FSC has been mainly related to forming civic social capital and showing its beneficial effects in extra-familial areas such as education, associationism, work and society (Ballarino & Bernardi, 2001; Donati & Colozzi, 2006; Sanchez-Ruiz et al. 2019; Carrà & Moscatelli, 2019). Second, even though previous studies have already denoted protective factors of the family stress process, mainly personal resources (i.e., self-control or optimism) (Cui & Hong, 2021; Taylor et al., 2012) and social resources (i.e., neighbourhood support) (Krishnakumar et al., 2014), our study shows an internal family resource that families may deploy and work on in order to steady the family in critical times. Hence, by adding the concept of FSC to the FSM, we demonstrate that families possess an important internal power that family members may utilize to confront crises.

Understanding how FSC and the quality of the couple's relationship can mitigate the negative effects of stressful situations on families holds significant practical implications. The findings of this study provide guidelines for supporting families throughout crises and contribute to the development of effective intervention strategies to preserve family stability in difficult times. We are referring to a type of social intervention that operates within relationships. This is exemplified by the ODG framework: Relational Observation (O), Relational Diagnosis (D), and Relational Guidance (G), (See Donati, 2009).

Families with robust FSC participate more in the community individually or as a family. These behaviors and actions collectively foster the development of secondary social capital. In essence, throughout the pandemic, families possessing robust FSC not only fared well themselves but also uplifted others' well-being (Cavallotti et al., 2022). Indeed, previous research shows how FSC can benefit other aspects beyond the couple's relationship quality and parent-child interaction. According to Gächter et al., (2011), FSC can enhance work-life balance and reduce stress. In a similar vein, Leung et al., (2020) suggested that FSC promotes life-satisfaction and individual well-being. Hence, FSC has different effects on health (Alvarez et al., 2017). Fostering FSC is an urgent task. FSC is generated by

acting on two fronts. Within the same families through an education in virtues. For instance, parents should be encouraged to both suggest and actively endorse their children's engagement in voluntary activities. At a public level, we should advocate rethinking Spanish social policies from a genuinely family-friendly perspective. This is particularly pertinent because the genesis of the FSC lies within the family unit itself (see Cavallotti, 2016).

Finally, although the proposed model has demonstrated significant findings, it has some limitations. Since the study is cross-sectional and structural equation modeling is limited to concluding inferences of cause-and-effect relationship to such data, the analyses do not consider the final step and other relationships of the FSM which is the impact that disrupted parenting has on children's development and behavior (see, e.g., Masarik et al., 2017; Conger & Conger, 2010; Barnett, 2008). In that sense, future research could engage in a longitudinal study to better understand the impact of FSC on the development of children. Also, despite this article's focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, there are no measures of pandemic impact (such as sickness, bereavement, or disruption to childcare or school) in the present study which needs to be focused on in future research works. These may work as important stressors within the family and may help to contribute to the classical FSM.

This finding leads to the conclusion that it is of great importance to invest in the quality of family relationships, the real strength of the family, which is more powerful than economic means. Moreover, families with high FSC are also a resource for society, since social virtues such as trust, cooperation, and reciprocity are learned in the family experience and put into practice in the arena of life.

Note

1. Our translation from the Italian "La famiglia sospesa."

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