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Singaporean Families' Response to COVID-19 and Family Resilience

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Background

The COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe and affected families on an unprecedented scale. Families with varying resources and constraints show different levels of susceptibility and response to the pandemic. It is critical to understand how families as a unit can weather the storm of COVID-19 by pooling individual and collective resources to buffer the challenges and hopefully build resilience to this acute global crisis. This is the first study based on a national sample to examine Singaporean families' economic and relational responses to the pandemic. Resilience studies on individuals' mental health and family functioning have traditionally emphasized internal resilience enablers (e.g., individuals' biological or psychological factors, family-level factors) with less attention to external protective and risk factors such as those at the community level (Ungar & Theron, 2020). We adopted a social-ecological perspective to examine the economic and relational impact of pandemic on families and identified risk and protective factors of family resilience from the individual, family, and community/societal levels.

Data and Method

The data were drawn from a nationally representative longitudinal study - the Singapore Longitudinal EARly Development Study (SG-LEADS), collected before (2018-2019) and during (2021) the COVID-19 pandemic (Yeung & Chen, 2024). The findings were based on responses from 2,818 households across all regions in Singapore.

We examine how the economic circumstances and family relations change after the pandemic hit. Risk and protective factors of family experience and resilience were collected during the pandemic at multiple levels, including individual characteristics (e.g., mother's self-efficacy), family circumstances (e.g., family SES, quality of family time, mother's work-life conflict, father's involvement in childcare and household chores),

community/neighborhood environment and government-level assistance. Pre-pandemic individual and family characteristics were included as covariates.

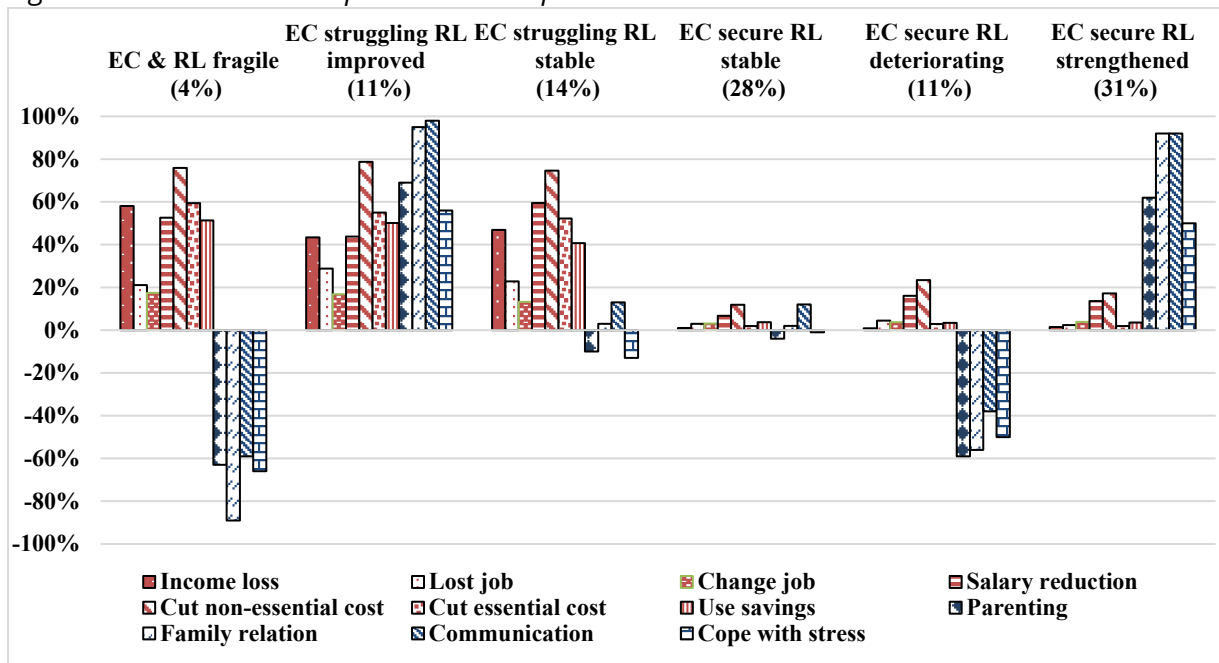
Latent class analysis (LCA) was conducted to identify clusters of families experiencing different economic and relational impact. The multinomial logistic regression was employed to examine the predictive power of the individual-level, family-level, and community-level factors on which type of impact a family experienced

Results

Six groups of family experiences are identified depending on their resources and circumstances. A majority of families showed considerable resilience with 31% of families were “economically secure and relationally strengthened,” having improved family relationships. 28% were “economically secure and relationally stable,” maintaining their pre-pandemic economic situation and family dynamics. 11% were “economically struggling but relationally improved,” achieving a significant relational boost despite financial difficulties. 14% were “economically struggling but relationally stable,” enduring economic challenges but preserving family relationships.

However, two groups of families faced considerable challenges. 11% of families were “economically secure but relationally deteriorating,” where family relations deteriorated despite financial stability. A small proportion (4%) of the families were “economically and relationally fragile,” grappling with both financial hardship and deteriorating family relationships.

Figure 1. Class Membership with Item Response Probabilities.



Note. EC represents “economically”, and RL is short for “relationally”.

In sum, most Singaporean families withstand the COVID-19 pandemic with high resilience, successfully bouncing back from adversity, with some even achieving positive adaptations and growth from the experience. Their experiences are shaped by a combination of economic, psychological, and social factors, underscoring the importance of mobilising multiple forms of resources at times of adversity. At the individual level, personal psychological characteristics such as self-efficacy, may foster a positive adaptation and growth of the family relations during the pandemic. At the family level, low work-life conflict, effective couple cooperation, and high quality of family time are crucial for maintaining or strengthening family relations. At the community level, living in a safe and cohesive neighborhood preserves and enhances family well-being when families face environmental stresses such as the global pandemic. Additionally, external resources such as government support helps alleviate the economic hardships and disruptions, particularly for economically disadvantaged families.

Policy Recommendations

- Enhance parents' self-efficacy through parenting training to boost their confidence in managing challenges.
- Encourage couple cooperation to share childcare and housework and spend quality family time to strengthen family bonds.
- Expand childcare support and promote family-friendly work policies like flexible hours and remote work to ease childcare burdens.
- Promote neighborhood safety and cohesion with better infrastructure and community programs to foster mutual support and reduce stress.
- Enhance public and private sectors' assistance to targeted financial and emotional support for disadvantaged families.

For details about this original research, see Chen & Yeung (2024), "[COVID-19 experiences and family resilience: A latent class analysis](#)" the *Journal of Marriage and Family*. For information about the SG-LEADS, see study website <https://sg-leads.org/>.

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References

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