

EBS Business School

**Study report:
Coping with COVID-19 –
Analysis of stressors,
coping and the role of
trait mindfulness**

Executive Summary



Research questions

- Did participants perceive more or less stress during the COVID-19 lockdown?
- Which changes in their everyday life did participants view as most stressful?
- How did they cope with them?
- Which dispositional resources predicted higher well-being?



Method

- 93 employees, alumnae and students at EBS participated in a multi-wave study over a period of two months including 13 measurement points in total.



Results & Insights

- Participants reported that they felt less stressed than before COVID-19.
- Changes related to family life were in particular stressful for mothers; fathers were more strongly than mothers concerned about their work and income.
- Engagement-related coping (e.g. reflecting on the situation) was positively, and disengagement coping (e.g. blaming others) was negatively related to well-being.
- Trait Mindfulness was positively related to engagement coping, appreciation of positive events and well-being.



Implications

- COVID-19 also brings opportunities (e.g. reinventing of how people work and study). Assessing, understanding and addressing the major stressors of employees and students may guide interventions to improve workplace functioning, learning experience and psychological health. Coping strategies that deal with the stressor or associated emotions are more effective, especially in the long run, than strategies that involve escape, denial, or withdrawal.
- Trainings and courses in mindfulness can help to reduce stress levels and increase well-being.

Content

- 1** Research question(s)
- 2** Research design
- 3** Sample & participants
- 4** Results
- 5** Implications

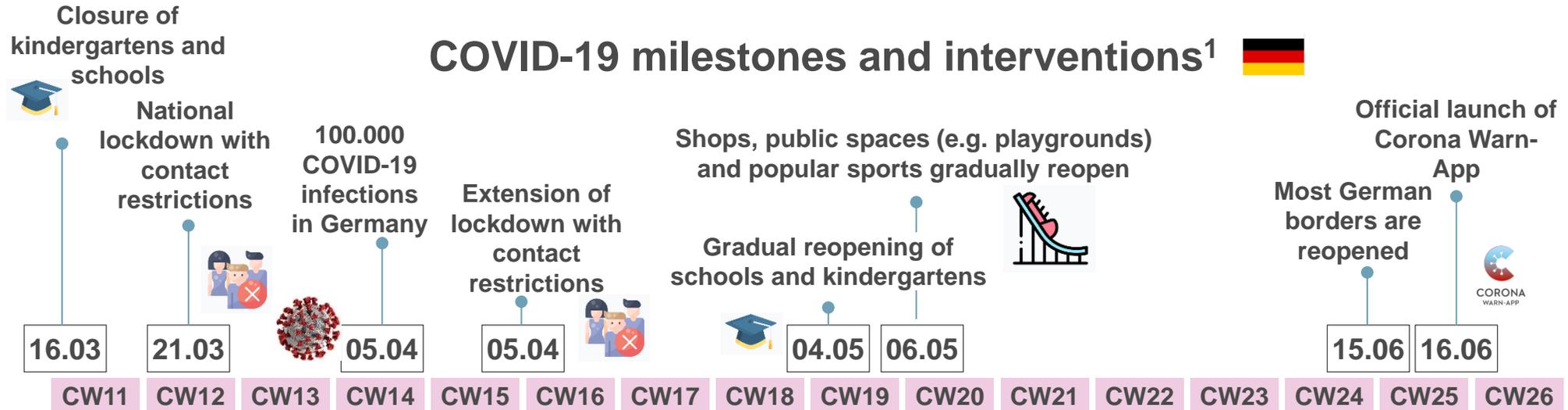
≡ Research question(s)

- 1 Stress perception**
How stressful did students, employees and alumnae perceive the time during the COVID-19 lockdown?
- 2 Stressors**
Which changes in daily life did participants view as most stressful?
- 3 Coping**
How did participants cope with these stressors?
- 4 (Trait) Mindfulness**
How is trait mindfulness associated with the coping strategies and well-being over time?

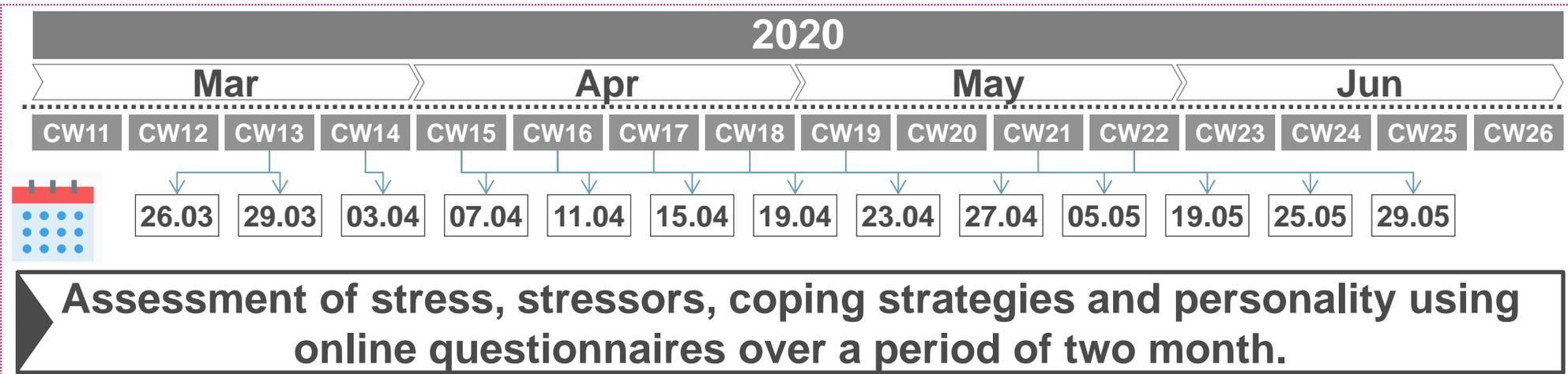
Research design

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COVID-19 milestones and interventions¹



Research design



Sample & participants

Sample & participants

No. of participants



N= 93

Age



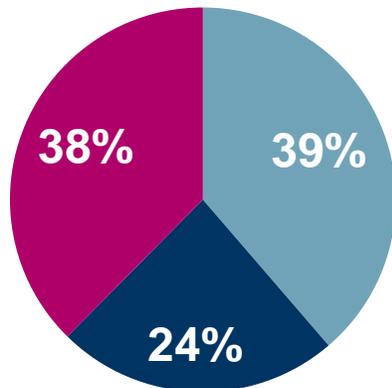
Ø 33.93
Range: [18; 65]
SD¹⁾:12.99

Participation in surveys



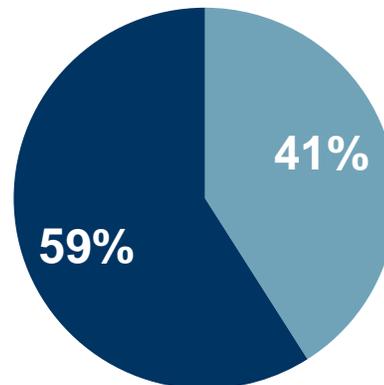
Mdn²⁾: 7
Ø 4.2
Range: [0;13]
SD:4.19

Role



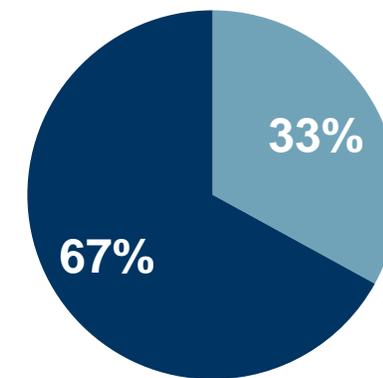
■ Students
■ Employees
■ Alumnae

Gender



■ Male
■ Female

Parental status

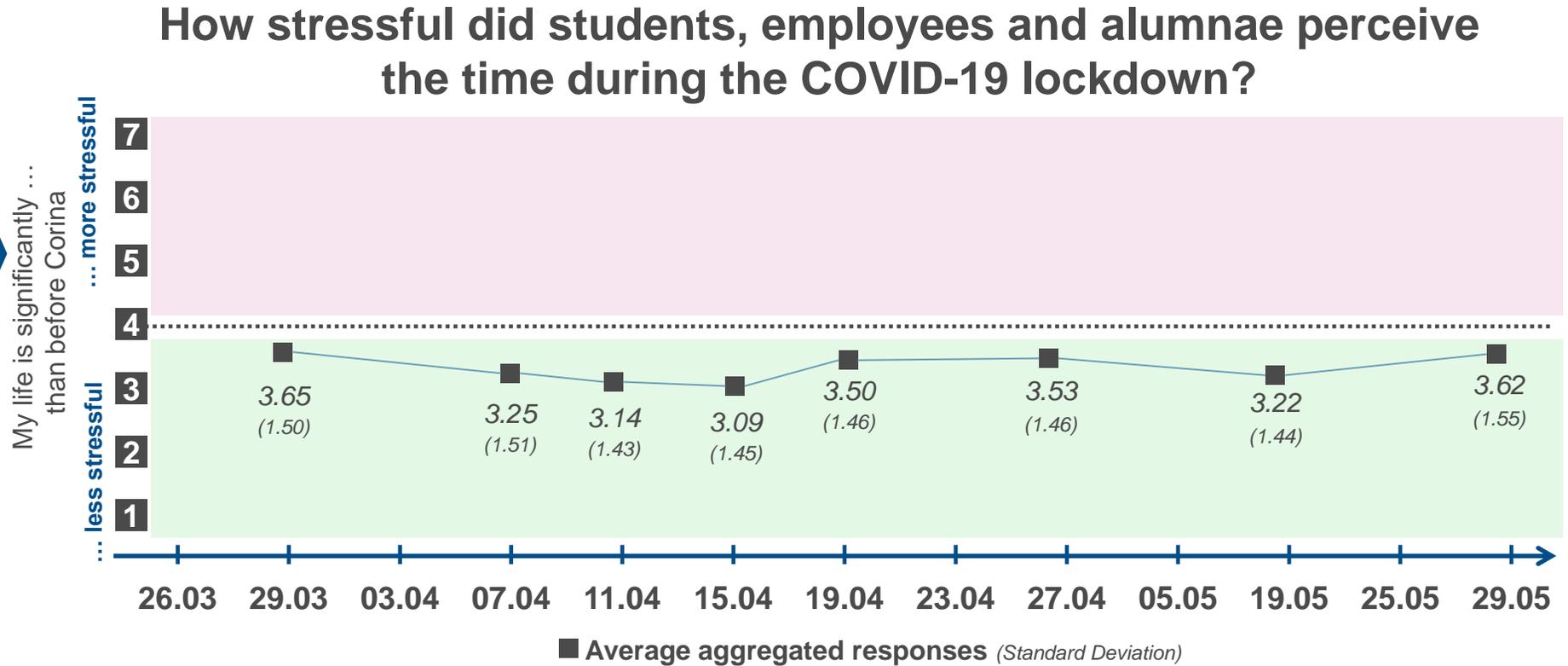


■ Children
■ No children

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Study results – stress perception

1 Stress perception



Study participants seemed to perceive less stress compared to the time before COVID-19. This was the case regardless of participants' role at EBS (e.g. students, employees) or gender.



“Everything is less hectic now”

“Reflect on the essentials, do things that are otherwise neglected”

“Having more motivation to do sports and live healthy.”



“Blue skies and fresh air while taking a morning walk every day”

“Having more time for hobbies and having more sleep.”

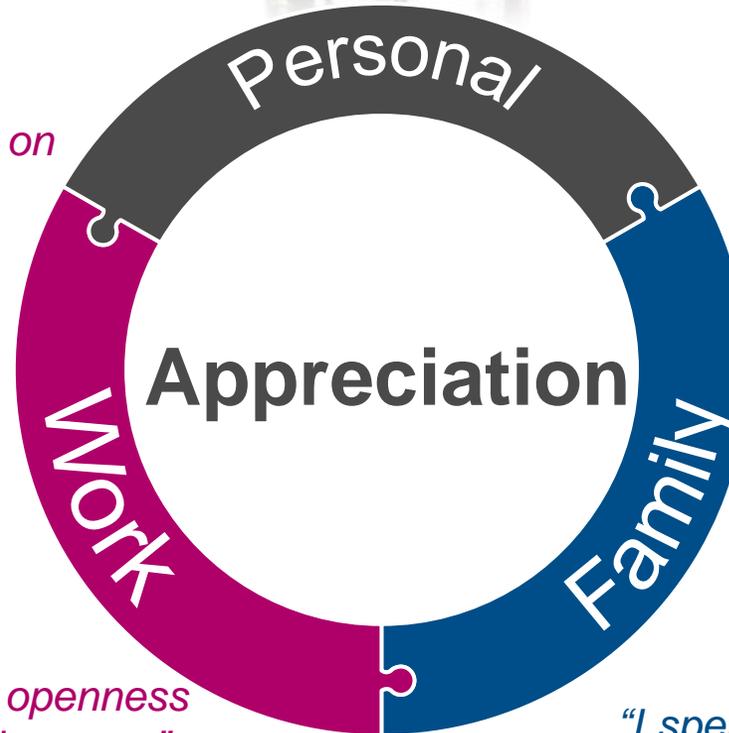
“That I don't have to travel as much and can spend more time on work that is important to me.”

“Possibility of home office; stable job environment”



“Home office means freedom. Commuting to and from work is waste of time and bad for the environment.”

“Spirit and openness among colleagues.”



“Having more time to spend with my family and my girlfriend than before the crisis.”

“The closeness to my partner.”

“Lunch breaks with my husband”

“Being available for my wife and son”



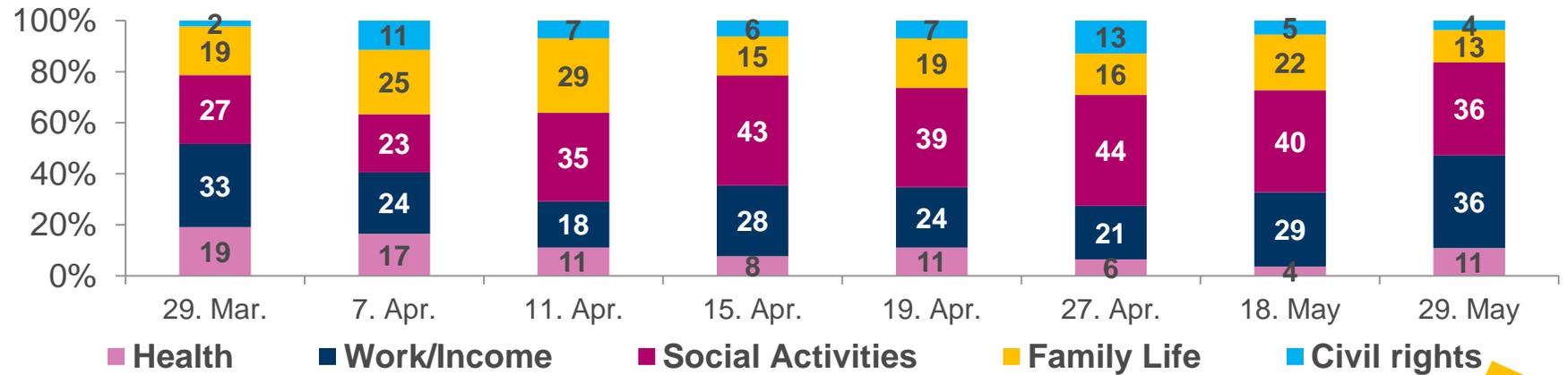
“I spent more time with my children.”

Amongst all challenges associated with COVID-19, several participants also appreciated numerous aspects of their personal, family and work-life.

Study results – Types of stressors for total sample

2 Stressors

What changes in daily life did participants view as most stressful?



Example items

Disagreement ← | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | N/A | → Agreement

- 1 ... I am afraid I might lose my current job.
- 2 ... I am worried because I currently earn less money.
- 3 ... I am concerned about my long-term professional future.

Example items

Disagreement ← | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | N/A | → Agreement

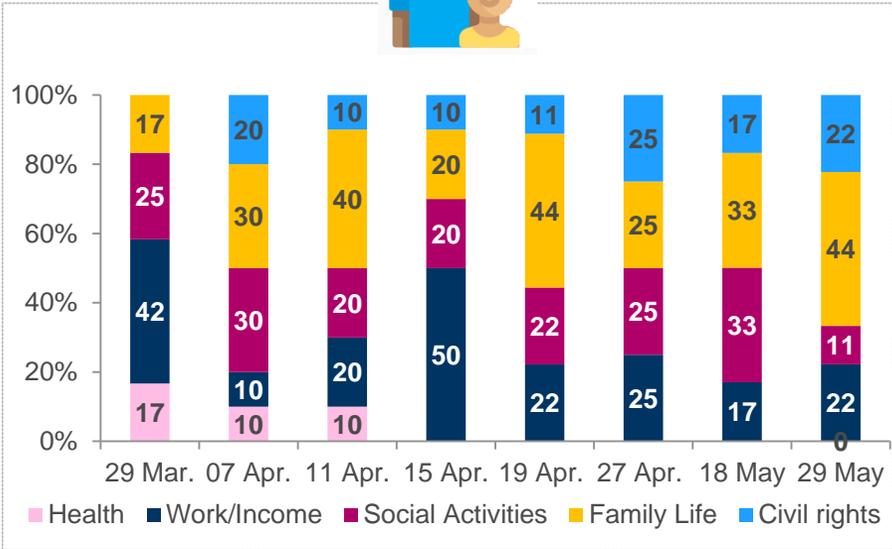
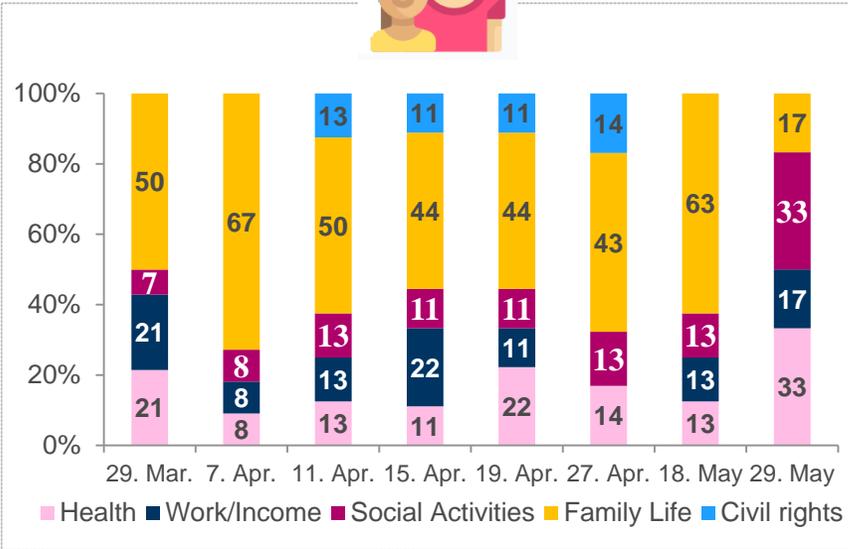
- 1 ... I have more conflicts with my spouse than before Corona.
- 2 ... I have more conflicts with my child(ren) than before Corona.

Health-related concerns played a major role immediately after the lockdown but decreased over time. Stress due family responsibilities initially increased but began to decrease in mid-April, whereas concerns about work and social activities increased in importance.

Study results – Types of stressors based on parenthood

2 Stressors

What changes in daily life did participants view as most stressful?



Considering parenthood and gender, changes related to family life were in particular stressful for mothers. Fathers, on the other hand, were more strongly than mothers concerned about their work and income.

≡ Coping – Concept and operationalization

Coping

“...thoughts and behaviors that people use to manage the internal and external demands of situations that are appraised as stressful”¹

Engagement Coping



deal with stressor or associated emotions



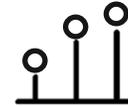
Problem-solving

(e.g. planning and organizing home-school for children)



Seeking support

(e.g. advice from colleagues regarding digital tools)



Cognitive restructuring

(e.g. finding potential benefits such as less commuting time due to home office)



Emotion regulation

(e.g. relaxation by spending time in nature)

Disengagement Coping



escape stressor or associated emotions



Distraction

(e.g. avoid specific thoughts associated COVID-19)



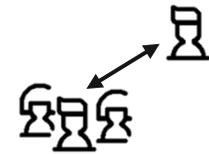
Denial

(e.g. deny the existence of the virus)



Blaming

(e.g. blame self or others for the situation)



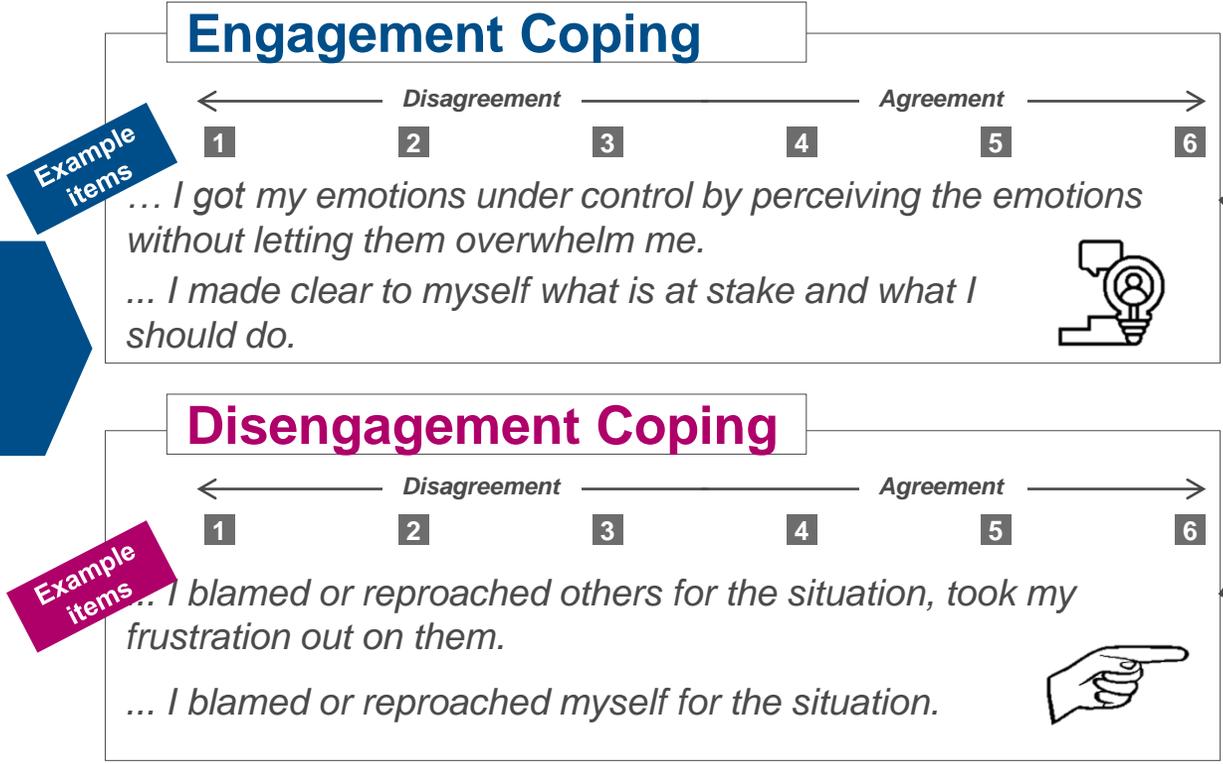
Withdrawal

(e.g. isolating oneself)

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Study results – Stress coping strategies and effects on well-being

3 Coping



Well-Being

How do you feel today?

discontent ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ content

unwell ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ well

Engagement-related coping – e.g. reflecting on the situation – was positively related to mental well-being while disengagement coping – e.g. blaming oneself or others – was negatively related to well-being.

≡ (Trait) mindfulness – Concept and operationalization

Mindfulness

State of open, present-moment and non-judgmental awareness¹



There are differences between people how often and how intensely they are aware of present moment experiences in an open and non-judgmental way. Those who are more often and more strongly so, achieve higher scores in trait mindfulness.

Previous research findings for trait mindfulness²



Mental health 



Life satisfaction 



Emotion regulation 



Perceived life stress 



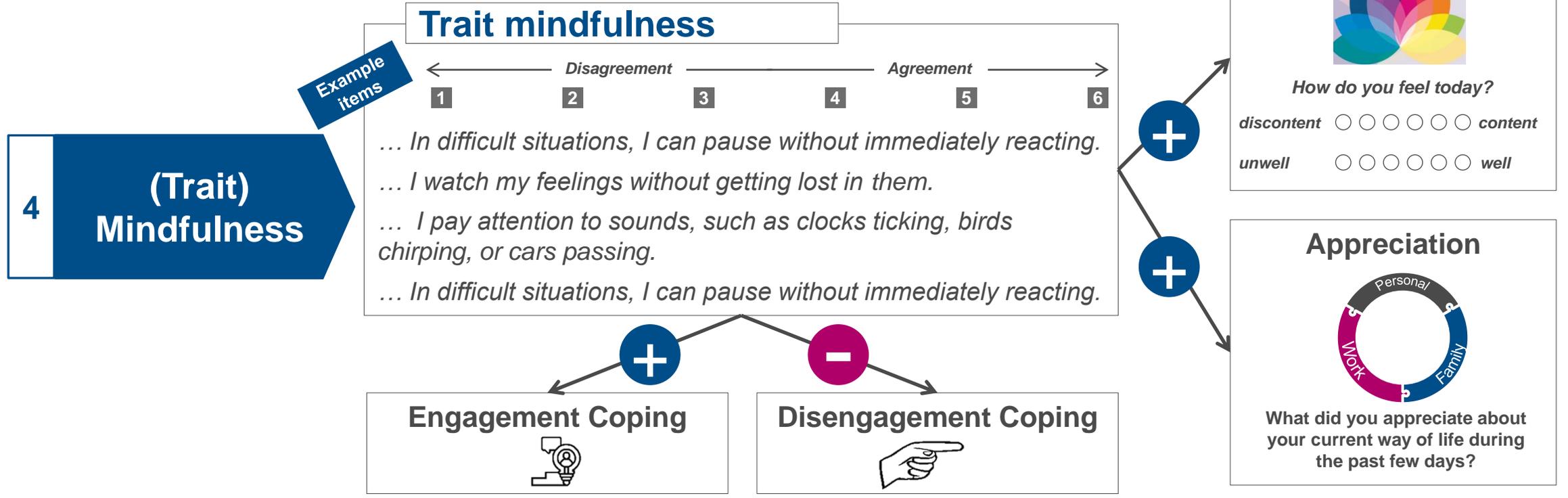
Depression 



Anxiety 

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Study results – Effects of trait mindfulness on coping, appreciation and well-being



Trait mindfulness (i.e. awareness of the present moment and orientation towards experience in a non-judgmental way) was positively related to appreciation (i.e. seeing positive aspects in daily life during the pandemic) as well as to mental well-being.

Implications



Analyze & Implement

1

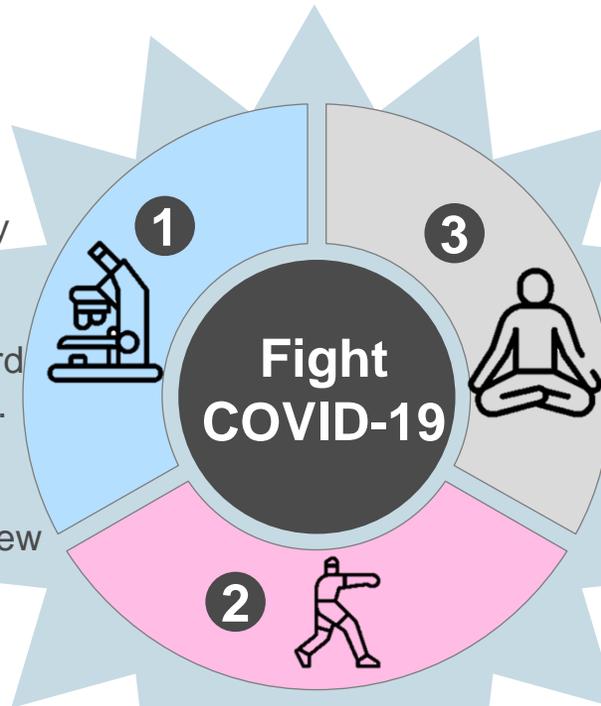
Organisations and universities can benefit from a better understanding of individuals' stressors and challenges, especially during the pandemic, as they vary according to age, gender and parental status. COVID-19 brings - besides challenges and hardships - also opportunities, especially with regard to the redesign of working- and studying conditions. Aspects such as virtual meetings or online exams have been made possible. Organisations and universities should be encouraged to consolidate new working practices and guidelines.



Engage & Don't Escape

2

People use different strategies and reactions to cope with the internal and external demands of situations that are perceived as stressful. Dealing with the stressors, e.g. by problem solving, seeking help or regulating emotions, is - especially in the long run a better strategy for mental and physical health than mental escape, denial or withdrawal.



Breathe & Be

3

Even during a pandemic, there may be aspects of life that one can still appreciate. Mindfulness trainings are beneficial to reduce stress, to increase mental well-being and to focus on the present moment. Daily practices of a few minutes show positive effects on psychological health.

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