



# Well-Being and the COVID-19 Pandemic

## A Community Psychology Systematic Review

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this systematic review is to analyze the COVID-19 pandemic's effects through the lens of community psychology. Our study applied PRISMA methodology, and it was carried out using the PsycInfo, PubMed, Embase, and EBSCO databases utilizing the keywords "connectedness," "resilience," "shared action," "social action," "trust," "individual well-being," and "social well-being." We selected 12 of 216 eligible publications based on the inclusion criteria. The results indicated that the role of trust in institutions and others is a protective factor for communities that experience crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, developing social actions promoted connections and social support and that, in the absence of in-person communication, online communication promoted connections and reduced psychological distress and isolation. Finally, the study revealed that some psychosocial factors stem from declines in people's well-being due to the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. Furthermore, our findings highlighted the role of technology as a positive communication tool for promoting connectedness and social support, as well as the social function of trust in institutions. Our results suggested that community interactions at the local and virtual levels should be viewed as positive actions to support institutions in detecting the most effective social intervention measures to stimulate individual and community well-being during the pandemic. These findings may serve as a guide for health policymakers in their efforts to face the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic supporting beneficial strategies for social planning and effective public policies. Finally, both the strengths and limitations of the research will be discussed in depth.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, community psychology, well-being, connectedness, shared actions

Many psychologists have studied the effects of emergencies on social life and collective responses. The seminal collective work of Van Bavel et al. (2020) summarises the contribution of behavioral science to the organization of COVID-19 pandemic responses. Jetten et al.'s (2020) research highlighted how the social identity approach helps us understand processes related to the pandemic and contributed remarkable insights to the public debate concerning this unexpected event. In the initial stages of the pandemic, these authors provided prompt scientific answers in questioning the role of behavioral science in responding to this unexpected plague. Moreover, Velázquez et al.'s (2017) contained in the APA Manual outlines the vision of the community psychology approach to collective emergencies, emphasizing the role of participation, connectedness, connectivity, and people pursuing social change. At the first signs of the dramatic implications of the pandemic on health and social well-being, Röhrle (2020) summarized some research suggestions regarding the pandemic's consequences and highlighted potential measures that could be used to address its adverse psychological, economic, and

financial effects. But what about research that specifically addresses the COVID-19 pandemic and its peculiar social impacts? Since the onset of the pandemic, the effects of COVID-19 have been studied from different psychological perspectives (Lazarus et al., 2020; OECD, 2020; Ruger, 2020), with most authors mainly focusing on studying its emotional and traumatizing effects, particularly negative emotions, such as anxiety, fear, and depression (AISTED, 2020). Many authors have also examined the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on personal dreams, family, work interactions (Esposito et al., 2021; Iorio et al., 2020; Tripi & Mattei, 2020), risk perceptions and attitudes, and individual coping strategies for dealing with risky events (Capone et al., 2020). However, most of the studies conducted to date have only addressed psychopathological dimensions among the general population and people affected by the pandemic (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Vindegaard & Benros, 2020; Zurlo et al., 2020).

Only a few researchers (Barni et al., 2020) have examined the COVID-19 pandemic's psychological effects on social interactions using a salutogenic approach

(Antonovsky, 1987) and examining the factors that contribute to promoting and maintaining physical and mental well-being, rather than those related to the disease itself (Polizzi et al., 2020; Stone, 2020). Few studies have emphasized a prosocial perspective of the COVID-19 social experience, which has generally made people more willing to help others (Vergin, 2020).

In line with these empowering approaches, we aimed to investigate proposals from the community psychology literature concerning the issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Community psychology is a branch of psychology focused on researching resources and actions that influence individual and social well-being, while taking into account the interactions between the individual and social dimensions (Amerio, 2013; Kagan et al., 2011) at the local and global levels. Community psychology derives its roots from Lewin (1951), who defined behavior as a function of the interactions among individuals and contexts, a finding that was further elaborated on by Orford (2008). In this vein, community psychology views individuals as not only existing in a specific context but understands their behavior to be a result of the interactions of people with their social contexts (Pichon-Rivière, 1971). Therefore, to understand people's thoughts and actions within society and society's reciprocal influences from a perspective based on contextual resources, community psychology focuses on specific factors connected to these interactions.

The first factor concerns one's sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), which encompasses elements that influence local conviviality in all forms, in addition to recognizing the specific role of influence and trust on positive expectations concerning the future and potential interactions.

The second factor, participation (Churchman et al., 2017), emphasizes the role of community-based interactions and practices by highlighting the importance of social connectedness and shared actions to maintain individual and collective well-being in times of physical distancing, as detailed by Van Bavel et al. (2020) and Velázquez et al. (2017). In particular, a sense of connectedness possesses a strong effect on people's well-being (Haslam et al., 2018), especially concerning first of all the family group to which one feels connected, recently specifically examined by Landmann and Rohmann (2021).

Finally, the third factor is empowerment, which englobes the value placed on strengths and resources for social change at the individual, organizational, and collective levels (Zimmerman, 2000):

“Empowerment is both a value orientation for working in the community and a theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over decisions

that affect one's life, organizational functioning, and the quality of community life.[...] The value orientation of empowerment suggests goals, aims, and strategies for implementing change. Empowerment theory provides principles and a framework for organizing our knowledge.” (p. 43).

In general, these factors emphasize the importance of promoting individual and community resilience based on social interactions, community connectedness as a tool to face adversity, and positive attitudes and actions toward social change (Wandersman & Florin, 2003). In overarching terms, community psychology could be described as focusing on “factors at the neighbourhood, community, and societal levels that support or impede healthy development, rather than on internal psychological processes or biological factors” (Kloos et al., 2012, p. 4).

Moreover, the discipline frames individual and social well-being from an ethical perspective. According to Martín-Baró, the reciprocal recognition of the Self and the Other in pursuing individual and other identities and freedoms is essential to obtaining personal and social well-being (Aron & Corne, 1994). Community psychology methods and strategies are mainly directed at promoting cooperation, coalition- and network-building, leadership education, organizational development, community profiling, and public awareness (Röhrle et al., 2020). In addition, community psychology highlights the interplay among individual, economic, cultural, and power themes while focusing on social justice (Di Martino et al., 2018) and ecological intervention measures (Di Napoli, Procentese, et al., 2019). When utilizing a community psychology approach, an essential preliminary task is gaining a personal understanding of existing social ties and social settings, as well as how they are perceived and symbolized from a constructivist perspective, while placing particular emphasis on questioning the individual meanings assigned to past, present, and future life circumstances (Procentese et al., 2020). Subsequently, the interface of this knowledge allows one to better understand multidimensional well-being scenarios based on individual, relational, contextual, community, and social factors (Prilleltensky, 2012).

Therefore, according to community psychology's main premises, we seek to examine people's COVID-19 experiences by investigating their collective emotions, feelings, and thoughts, as well as their individual and shared actions. Social psychology is focussed on the relationship between individual and social context (Hahn et al., 2010; Keyes, 1998); but in addition, the community psychology perspective takes into consideration collectivities beyond groups, their emancipatory values, goals, and interactive (empowerment oriented) framed in a multidimensional approach (Prilleltensky, 2012).

We analyzed the ways that people faced the epidemic and how they promoted different social organization constructions at the community level. Consequently, the results of this research should be of great interest to policymakers seeking to increase adequate public interventions, social support, and responsible citizenship in coping with the pandemic's impacts and effects.

## The Research

To define our semantic world, we guided our word selection utilizing the operationalization of community psychology keywords to understand the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on people's well-being and their future outlooks. After defining the query, we conducted a Boolean search, as subsequently described in further detail.

## Methods

We conducted a systematic literature review in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses guidelines (PRISMA; Liberati et al., 2009; Shamseer et al., 2015). Concerning ethical approval, this systematic review presents aggregate data from primary studies developed in Italy (Cerp, Ethics Board for Research in Psychology, University Federico II, March 15, prot. 10/2020) and maintains the same objectives as the original studies.

First, this study conducted Boolean research for the period spanning from January 1 to December 2020. We conducted our searches utilizing the PsycInfo, EBSCO, PubMed, and Embase databases in October 2020, which were subsequently updated in December 2020. The study's final search was completed on December 19, 2020. The keywords we used encompassed the basic concepts of community psychology, such as sense of community, empowerment, and individual and social well-being. Our Boolean research produced no results for these keywords combined with terms related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given this lack of results, the authors developed a top-down process (Gregory, 1990) to define an exploratory search question based on the discipline's main focuses according to the table of contents presented by the most significant community psychology manuals edited in the UK (Kagan et al., 2011), the US (Kloos et al., 2012), and Italy (Arcidiacono et al., 2021), in addition to being guided by the APA Handbook of Community Psychology (Bond et al., 2017). These words were further matched with codes that emerged in bottom-up studies of Italian community psychology scholars conducted during the first Italian COVID-19 lockdown between March 7 and May 4, 2020

(Di Napoli et al., 2021; Marzana et al., 2021; Migliorini et al., 2021).

Moreover, in order to better finalize our research concerning community psychology constructs, we reconsidered the terms "sense of community" and "empowerment," expanding their definitions, meanings, and relative sub-dimensions. Therefore, a sense of community was replaced by connectedness and trust (Di Napoli, Dolce, et al., 2019), while empowerment and social participation were represented by shared and social action. Our decision is supported by the importance that Velázquez et al. (2017) assigned to connectedness in emergencies, by recent contributions on the sense of community and togetherness (Procentese & Gatti, 2021), and prosocial behavior in pandemics (Aresi et al., 2021) and by the findings of our research in Italy (Di Napoli et al., 2021; Marzana et al., 2021; Migliorini et al., 2021; Procentese et al., 2021), which was published in 2021. Finally, following the definition process, we conducted a systematic review using the keywords: trust, connectedness, resilience, shared action, social action, individual well-being, and social well-being (see Figure 1).

More specifically, we used the following search commands, encompassing "COVID-19," or "coronavirus," or "2019-ncov," or "sars-cov-2," or "cov-19," and "community," and "psychology," and "trust," or "connectedness," or "resilience," or "shared action," or "social action," or "action," or "social," or "well-being," or "individual well-being," or "social well-being."

We developed the following inclusion criteria to aid us in selecting references according to PRISMA guidelines. The first two criteria involved the region and language of publication, only including studies published in Europe, North America, or Australia and written in English. The third, fourth, and fifth criteria only considered studies that were published in peer-reviewed journals, studies that were limited to the context of COVID-19, and studies that were quantitative or qualitative in nature, respectively. Moreover, we did not specify any limitations on the type of studies included (i.e., cross-sectional, longitudinal, etc.).

Initially, our research identified 216 records, including 120 from PsycInfo, 76 from EBSCO, 11 from Embase, and 9 from PubMed. We then developed a data extract sheet that we used to progressively exclude and catalog the studies. After deleting duplicate studies ( $n = 32$ ), we reviewed 184 records for relevance by analyzing their respective titles and summaries. Of these 184 records, we subsequently excluded 130, particularly review papers, editorials, letters, conference abstracts, books, and opinion pieces, yielding a final count of 54 full texts to be analyzed.

Two independent reviewers extracted the data, whose work was subsequently verified by a third reviewer. Moreover, to ensure the reliability of the screening procedures,

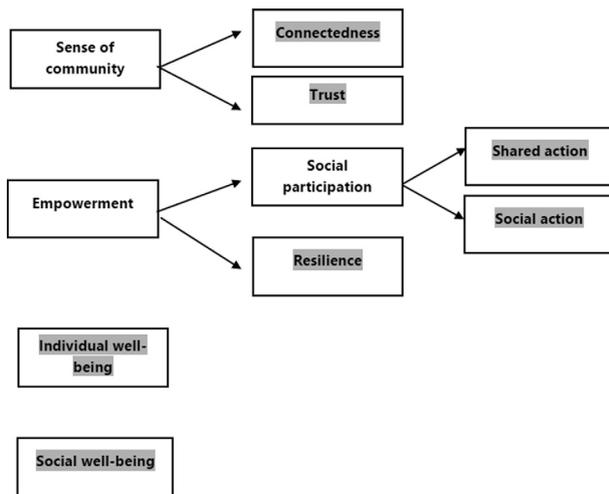


Figure 1. Keywords selection process.

five independent reviewers with a background in community psychology carried out three comparison sessions (Hall et al., 2016). Finally, they decided to eliminate another 39 articles that were not fundamentally related to the community psychology constructs, approaches, keywords, or contents inherent to our research. As a result, we solely selected studies that highlighted a connection among individual and contextual dimensions, as this approach intrinsically characterises community psychology.

Our analytical process utilized consensual procedures, signifying that any disagreements among the authors were resolved via discussions among the whole team and through a one-time consultation with two independent community psychology experts. To control bias-related risks and assess the degree of agreement among experts concerning including or excluding records, we calculated Cohen's  $\kappa$  index, which yielded a result of 0.83, indicating near-perfect agreement. Subsequently, we conducted a qualitative analysis of the 15 remaining studies, assessing the bias-related risks for each of them. We referred to two guidelines when performing these analyses. For cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, we used the Cochrane Collaboration's tool (Higgins et al., 2011), while we utilized the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklist (CASP, 2018) for studies involving qualitative data. These guideline criteria allowed us to classify studies according to their quality and, consequently, to eliminate three studies lacking elevated methodological quality. Furthermore, to ensure this selection's validity, we once again used Cohen's  $\kappa$  index, which provided a result of 1, indicating perfect agreement among the evaluators. Thus, following the conclusion of the screening process, we included 12 studies in our systematic review. Figure 2 displays the entire screening process using a flow diagram.

## Results

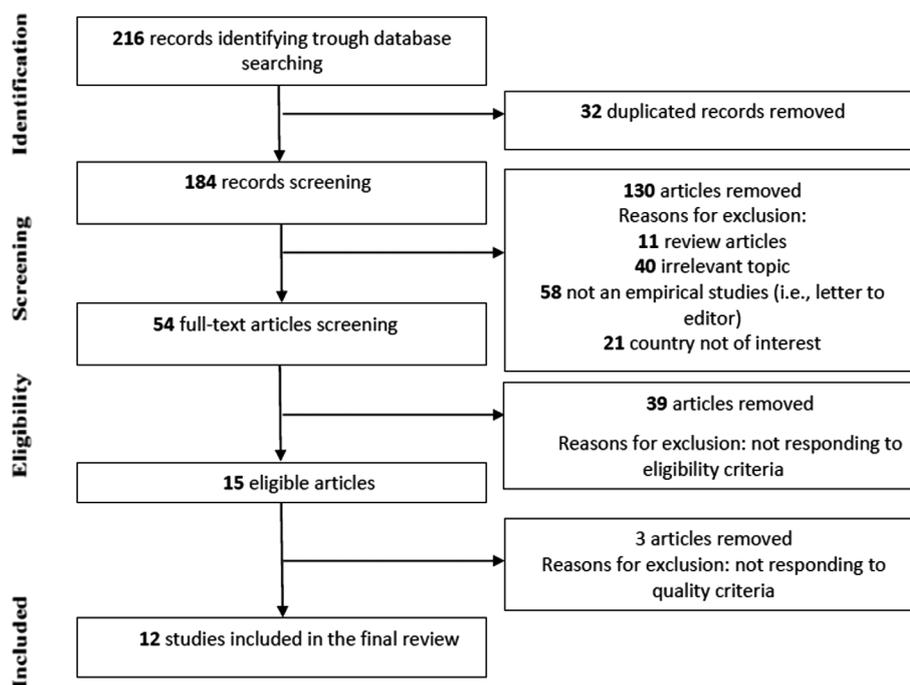
The records inclusion and exclusion procedure described above led to selecting 12 research articles, as portrayed in the Electronic Supplementary Material, ESM 1. For each article, the table reports several significant values of the statistical effects, while the text concentrates on the most central results.

Regarding geographical location, half of the studies were carried out in Italy (Barni et al., 2020; Falcone et al., 2020; Gabbiadini et al., 2020; Paolini et al., 2020; Rolandi et al., 2020; Ruggieri et al., 2020), while the other six were conducted in various Western countries, encompassing one study from Switzerland (Macdonald & Hülür, 2020), one from Austria (Nitschke et al., 2020), one from the UK (Politi et al., 2020), one from New Zealand (Sibley et al., 2020), and one from the US (Syropoulos & Markowitz, 2020), as well as another study involving participants from various Northern European countries, Canada, and the US (Van Houwelingen-Snippe et al., 2020).

Concerning the studies' respective research designs, seven studies were cross-sectional (Barni et al., 2020; Falcone et al., 2020; Gabbiadini et al., 2020; Nitschke et al., 2020; Paolini et al., 2020; Politi et al., 2020; Sibley et al., 2020), four were longitudinal (Macdonald & Hülür, 2020; Rolandi et al., 2020; Ruggieri et al., 2020; Syropoulos & Markowitz, 2020), and one used mixed method (Van Houwelingen-Snippe et al., 2020), utilising both quantitative techniques and analysing qualitative data. None of the selected studies were fully qualitative.

Furthermore, given the particular conditions of isolation imposed by the lockdown, all the studies collected the data with tools that allow only remote contacts. For almost all the studies, online surveys were used, while in one case (Rolandi et al., 2020), telephone surveys were conducted.

In regard to sample size, all of the studies considered involved a fairly elevated number of participants, ranging from a minimum of 75 (Macdonald & Hülür, 2020) to a maximum of 4,260 people (Falcone et al., 2020). Although large samples are collected in many cases, it is necessary to consider that they cannot always be considered well representative. In fact, only a few studies underline that their samples are representative with respect to specific variables, such as gender and age (Nitschke et al., 2020), ethnicity and territory (Sibley et al., 2020), and household income, subjective socio-economic status, and group-based relative deprivation (Politi et al., 2020). Furthermore, only in some cases, power analyzes were conducted to verify the sample size adequate for the purposes of the research (Gabbiadini et al., 2020; Rolandi et al., 2020; Syropoulos & Markowitz, 2020). Many researchers instead report some limitations in this regard. In these cases, the representativeness of the sample is undermined by factors such as



**Figure 2.** Flow diagram of the screening process.

convenience sampling (Falcone et al., 2020; Paolini et al., 2020; Ruggieri et al., 2020); or the use of online tools that do not allow participation of those who do not use network devices (Barni et al., 2020; Macdonald & Hülür, 2020) and that influence the perceptions of the participants (Van Houwelingen-Snippe et al., 2020); or finally the data collection restricted to a limited geographical area (such as the single region of a country; Gabbiadini et al., 2020).

Concerning the timeframe of the studies under analysis, all conducted data collection between March and June 2020 using longitudinal designs (Macdonald & Hülür, 2020; Rolandi et al., 2020) or comparison groups (Sibley et al., 2020). In addition, they also utilized data collected before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important to highlight that no articles found using the keywords “trust” and “social actions” remained at the end of the selection process. However, both of these concepts are covered within articles found through other keywords. Our analysis of the 12 articles under consideration found the following results concerning the themes and relationships among the constructs addressed in the studies, which are explained in further detail in the subsequent sections.

## Connectedness

The analyzed studies expanded upon how community connections can be guaranteed and protected in the context of

a pandemic characterized by social isolation and distancing as conditioned by the restrictions that countries adopted to reduce COVID-19 infections.

The study of Gabbiadini et al. (2020) investigated the role of new technologies in reducing feelings of loneliness and improving people’s sense of belongingness to their communities. High effect sizes were achieved in this research.

In this regard, online technologies were the most prevalent means of communication with family and friends among the studies’ respondents. They also frequently cited the importance of ensuring services to help the elderly improve their technological skills. In particular, Rolandi et al. (2020) found that elderly people experiencing stress, anxiety, and worry due to COVID-19, when trained for Social Networking Sites (SNSs) use, improved usage of the social network, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, with moderately strong effect sizes. This increase, in turn, reduced the sense of being left out.

Van Houwelingen-Snippe et al. (2020) also showed that observing videos and images of natural environments was a helpful way to enhance connectedness with own community and reduce feelings of isolation experienced during the pandemic. The authors found that post-exposure connectedness scores were significantly higher than pre-exposure scores. High effect sizes were also achieved in this research. These results are in line with previous research that has shown how living in an area with easy access to green

spaces in a territorial context increases perceptions of social support, connection, and social well-being.

## Resilience

Politi et al. (2020) highlighted the concept of prosociality, which is understood as a type of social resilience that facilitates the preservation of both individual and social well-being. The authors proposed an integrative model that uses individual values, ideological orientations, and fundamental political values to predict prosociality during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the model's most interesting findings is that self-transcendence is a key factor in predicting prosociality, as it emphasizes concern for others' welfare and interests with high effect sizes. In the proposed model (Politi et al., 2020), self-transcendence (benevolence and universalism) is portrayed as a crucial factor that motivates people to work toward collective well-being, prosperity, and serenity. Furthermore, self-transcendence is positively correlated with favorable attitudes concerning the implementation of prosocial actions, such as petitions and donations.

## Shared Actions

Online social comparison orientation (SCO) refers to "the tendency to compare one's opinions and abilities with those of others for self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954)" (pp. 1-2); it allows people to share emotions, like as fear and uncertainty, consequently reducing the negative impacts of lockdown and self-isolation, such as anxiety, loneliness, and stress (Ruggieri et al., 2020). The most frequent concerns involved pandemic-related risks, COVID-19 symptoms, and precautionary behaviors. Worrying about how to continue daily life while minimizing transmission risks was another prominent concern. Furthermore, many expressed doubts about healthcare systems' responsiveness, as well as concerns about the pandemic's financial, social, and psychological impacts. Regarding the weight of the results of this article, the RMSEAs of the models (reported in ESM 1) show that medium-high values of effect sizes are obtained.

Syropoulos and Markowitz (2020) analyzed preferences for prioritizing saving people's lives over the economy during COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, in addition to the consumption of COVID-19-related information and adherence to public health recommendations to prevent the spread of the pandemic as expressions of collective action. In particular, they experimented with a model to explore how gratitude is a form of both justice and motivation guided by intentions to positively impact other people's lives, revealing a potential strategy to encourage behaviors

designed to prevent the spread of the pandemic. Also, in this study, high effect sizes were achieved.

## Individual and Social Well-Being

The studies analyzed by our research assessed factors that facilitated well-being during the pandemic, particularly the structural and functional features of social relationships, which were of significant importance. Using a four-week-long online survey performed during the first COVID-19 lockdown, Macdonald and Hülür (2020) aimed to examine the lockdown's effects on older adults' well-being and feelings of loneliness. They detected lower loneliness levels among older adults who were able to maintain more extensive social networks before and during the pandemic, which helped them avoid living alone and provided them with social support. As for the effect sizes, this article has medium-high levels. However, it should be noted that the authors considered only the individual level, without dwelling on social well-being, and this means that this study has only a partial community psychology approach.

Moreover, Nitschke et al. (2020) pointed out that social connections have been associated with lower levels of perceived stress during COVID-19 lockdowns, as well as reduced general and specific concerns about COVID-19. However, in this study, low to medium effect sizes were achieved.

A cross-sectional study conducted in Italy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic showed that different levels of social identification (i.e., Italian, European, or humankind) proved to be mediators between trust in social and political actors and individual well-being, interpersonal happiness, and distress. For example, identifying as Italian had a positive effect on both individual well-being and reduced distress, while identifying with humankind as a whole demonstrated positive effects on interpersonal well-being. However, identifying as European had no effects on any form of well-being (Paolini et al., 2020). Despite these findings, it is important to note that the study's authors did not specify whether their results obtained among an Italian sample could also be adapted for use among participants from other nationalities. In addition, also with regard to the effect sizes, low levels were reached.

Increased trust in institutions is particularly attributed to citizens' awareness that trustworthy institutions are tools for achieving common goals (Falcone et al., 2020). Within an emotional framework, their primary role is to assist individuals and groups in understanding, reducing, and managing uncertainty. These assumptions lead us to understand that risk perceptions are reduced by enhanced trust in someone, like politicians, and the police, or something else, like science (Sibley et al., 2020).

When viewed from Antonosky's salutogenic approach, Barni et al. (2020) found that low levels of psychological well-being are associated with greater fears of contagion during a pandemic. This was found to be true even among individuals with overall worldviews characterized by an elevated sense of coherence and confidence that their own external or internal resources would be adequate to face stressful events. This data should be interpreted taking into account the time period when the research was conducted, which corresponded to the peak of the pandemic in Italy. In the context of a health emergency, fear assumes a protective function because it induces adherence to restrictive measures and combats the virus's spread (Barni et al., 2020). As a result, the authors concluded that it is necessary to combine promoting understanding one's experiences with the ability to cope with emotional reactions resulting from the fear surrounding an emergency context. However, these results should be considered in light of the fact that low effect sizes were achieved in the study.

## Discussion

This systematic review analyzed the effects of COVID-19-related social experiences on the interplay between individuals and their communities, primarily focusing on the Italian context. The texts under study examined questions surrounding trust, social connectedness, and shared actions and were intended to operationalize the Italian COVID-19 experience during the pandemic. They found differing levels of a general sense of community and empowerment, emphasizing the fertile implications of these constructs in overcoming many of the adverse effects of the pandemic. Furthermore, Paolini et al. (2020) explored the interrelation between trust and well-being, two central constructs considered in our review. Their study highlighted that even during a pandemic, the correlation between institutional trust and well-being is essential, corroborating earlier and widely demonstrated findings in the literature (Portela et al., 2013).

In the 12 studies reviewed during the course of our research, four significant considerations emerged. The first consideration concerned the role of trust in institutions and others as a protective factor for communities that experience crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The second finding was in relation to the importance of developing actions to foster connections and social support. The third discovery was in regard to the importance of measures to increase online communication in the absence of offline interaction, implying the inherent importance of promoting technological and social media use among the elderly. Finally, we found that the analyzed research highlighted

the psychosocial factors (such as trust, connectedness, sense of community, etc.) that contrasted the declines in people's well-being due to the pandemic and resulting lockdowns.

In accordance with the community psychology literature, our results highlight the importance of connectedness, social support, and shared goals in adverse circumstances (Kloos et al., 2012; Procentese & Gatti, 2019; Procentese et al., 2019, 2020). In most recent research, framed in the social identity approach (Landmann & Rohmann, 2021), connectedness is detected as a mediating factor, as a feeling of being connected to others that has positive effects on coping with the crisis.

In the community psychology perspective, considering the severe disease burden posed by social distancing and isolation measures seeking to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the data of this systematic review emphasize the importance of creating social interaction opportunities that facilitate "being apart, together." Moreover, social actions were analyzed to evaluate their effectiveness in reducing the adverse effects of mandatory lockdowns and their relevance in creating opportunities for social interaction both online and offline.

The community psychology approach is devoted to depicting potential resources and intervention strategies to contrast the psychological effects of the pandemic, such as the COVID-19-related stressors defined by Brooks et al. (2020), encompassing long-lasting quarantines, infection fears, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies, inadequate information, financial loss, and stigma. In order to counteract the pandemic's negative impacts, community psychology seeks to provide beneficial strategies for social planning and effective public policies. In this regard, our findings demonstrate that coming together in the face of the pandemic and creating online and in-person social events (that maintain safe physical distancing) are both tools for individual resilience and crucial methods with strategic implications to overcome pandemic-related social diseases and support the most vulnerable groups.

## Strengths and Limitations

Our literature review presents several limitations. First, the studies included were conducted in high-income countries, limiting the generalisability of their findings in the middle- and low-income countries. Second, restricting our searches to five databases and studies published solely in English could have excluded other relevant papers. Nevertheless, our research was able to reduce these biases by utilizing a systematic approach and including two independent reviewers, as well as applying the research team's experience in the search, screening, and extraction phases of our study.

Another limitation of our review concerns its focus on the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on psychological determinants, given that we did not consider general governance-focused studies nor strictly social studies. As a result, examining a broader array of studies should be a goal for future research in order to expound upon the eventual general implicit implications of community psychology epistemology. Thus, beginning with a preliminary search of community psychology keywords while simultaneously introducing an array of words expressing significant related concepts and issues could increase the research's ability to aid researchers in comprehensively understanding the data collected.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that some of community psychology's main constructs, such as a sense of community and empowerment, were not directly addressed by the examined studies. This finding is indicative of the discipline's need to investigate the effects of the far-reaching COVID-19 pandemic on individuals and communities.

Finally, we performed our research by collecting articles published throughout 2020. Therefore, they focus on reactions to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts while lacking content regarding the impacts of later pandemic peaks and the related lockdowns that occurred across Europe at the end of 2020. As a result, the absence of research that specifically investigated these constructs is probably due to purely temporal reasons. Thus, we recommend that future research replicate the present systematic review or conduct a meta-analysis to see if the research gaps highlighted by our study have been addressed.

Furthermore, we solely analyzed articles written in English, thus inherently limiting the linguistic inclusiveness of our research. In addition, our research was solely focused on studies concerning European or Western countries, neglecting wider global pandemic experiences. However, despite the aforementioned limitations, our literature review is the first to use a systematic approach to specifically analyze community psychology-focused perspectives specifically related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Van Bavel et al. (2020) and Jetten et al. (2020) did not offer systematic literature reviews and did not analyze the specific effects and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although they addressed issues pertinent to community psychology, such as social isolation, connectedness, solidarity, groups, and discrimination, these topics nevertheless remain within the context of social psychology, outlining the effects of social roles and social identities. Furthermore, networks and isolation are not described as collective feelings from a shared participatory perspective, and they are not specifically related to COVID-19, as more recently described (Landmann, & Rohmann, 2021). Indeed, community psychology is especially focused on proactive issues in a collective dimension.

## Conclusion

The studies examined suggest that social and collective resources play a central role in coexisting with the universal difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, much of the related community psychology literature focuses on investigating the strengths and potential resources to promote individual and collective well-being. Nevertheless, ecological approaches are still lacking in the literature, and empowerment measures to contrast the pandemic have still not been explored in-depth.

In this regard, community psychology responds to new challenges for promoting collective resources, such as social interaction and connectedness. These resources represent strengths in mitigating the pandemic's negative effects and are inherently related to trust in one's local community. Simultaneously, it is important to note that their effectiveness often depends on the mediating role attributed to governments. Although the emergency context presented by the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted people's personal and community lives, community psychology can provide pragmatic and innovative interventions and strategies (requiring continuous evaluation) in order to combat COVID-19's negative impacts (Carley et al., 2020). As a result, we specifically summarise an array of issues and interventions at differing ecological levels from a community psychology perspective.

At the institutional level, it is essential that public entities create and maintain trusting relationships with their citizens while promoting awareness of opportunities and resources that can address feelings of resignation and helplessness that can arise in crisis contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Arcidiacono et al., 2022). In addition, the potential presented by virtual networks as communication and interaction tools to contrast the pandemic's negative effects is a specific novelty that should be taken into consideration, and that could enhance values of collective responsibility.

Concerning the community level, it is important to promote technology's uses as an effective connection tool, such as opportunities to enhance communication technology literacy among the elderly. In a pandemic context, it is also fundamental to create opportunities for emotional connection at the community level that overcome the lack of face-to-face contact and act as a contrast to loneliness, isolation, fear, and depression. Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance to promote social responsibility and behaviors to protect individual and community well-being during the pandemic. Communities should also work to support all forms of collective solidarity by creating spaces for sharing and connecting among volunteers. Finally, it is important to create effective communication channels within organizations and at the community level that are capable of using divergent means of communication

(i.e., counseling, blogs, etc.) to reach diverse audiences of all ages and life backgrounds.

Finally, we suggest identifying measures to counter the salient effects of the pandemic on psychological well-being at the individual level by promoting actions to contrast fear, anxiety, and depression, while enhancing individual flexibility.

The aforementioned findings may serve as a guide for health policymakers in their efforts to face the pandemic's effects and prevent isolation and loneliness. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic could significantly impact healthcare services, especially community interventions. Organizations responsible for health and social management should consider interventions to prevent and reduce pandemic-related risks at the psychological level.

The literature focused on investigating strengths, and potential resources primarily refer to well-being, while research concentrated on ecological approaches and empowerment measures to contrast the pandemic has still not been explored in-depth. Conversely, the importance of connectedness, emotional sharing, reciprocal communication, and time perspectives have been clearly emphasized (Di Napoli et al., 2021; Migliorini et al., 2021; Procentese et al., 2021). Moreover, there is significant evidence that the adherence to public health measures, such as social distancing guidelines, is primarily due to elevated levels of social and community trust and the high value assigned to people's reciprocal interactions.

Some community psychology scholars (Campbell et al., 2020; Walker, 2020) have introduced the dimension of pandemic-related social change; however, the evidence-based literature has underreported issues concerning future social scientific literature. As a result, we suggest that later research focus more on future and social changes and innovations while considering the pandemic's effects on how people organize their lives and time and recognizing relationships and reciprocity as social values. We would also encourage researchers to conduct future studies in this vein, deepening the interplay of community psychology issues with social identity, identification, social justice, and environmental issues change.

Concerning the present article, our research provides an innovative approach by specifically examining the social problems that arose during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic through a community psychology lens rather than in the context of an overarching emergency intervention domain (i.e., earthquakes, plagues, environmental disasters, etc.). However, encountering specific articles that utilized a community psychology perspective and were published in 2020 proved to be a challenge; thus, we would suggest conducting similar research involving articles published in 2021 and onward. From a methodological point of view, this review mainly focused on studies that

used quantitative or mixed method designs. However, as of 2021, studies using more precise and in-depth qualitative analyses have begun to be published (Di Napoli et al., 2021; Marzana et al., 2021; Migliorini et al., 2021; Procentese et al., 2021).

The community psychology approach is used in participatory action research all over the world (Velázquez et al., 2017), and its perspectives are directed to detect potential strengths and resources. Therefore, its approach can be especially useful for recovery committees and international organizations dealing with pandemic prevention and intervention policies. Nevertheless, even in some professional circles, community psychology is not fully understood, and many policymakers struggle to recognize its basic principles (theories, methods, techniques, etc.) and how it can be used to implement beneficial practices.

Finally, we would like to highlight a paradigmatic and significant story related to connectedness as a crisis-related resource. Following the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1944, a small village on the mountain's slopes was destroyed by volcanic lava. Rather than abandoning the village, its citizens adopted a collaborative approach to this natural disaster and reconstructed a new modern village. The village mayor believed in the importance of shared social actions and, together with the village residents, overcame the eruption's destruction through unanimous and innovative activities regarding the everyday use of private and public goods. He used to say, "only together, we will sing again" (Capasso, 1994, p. 128). In his words, we must take advantage of the rare and context-specific feelings of unity, generosity, and solidarity that frequently arise in times of tragedy and utilize them as a turning point for reconstruction. These words from the past are the final lesson that the community psychology approach suggests to citizens, politicians, and professionals to overcome the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still far from being eradicated.

## Electronic Supplementary Materials

The electronic supplementary material is available with the online version of the article at <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000468>

**ESM 1.** Characteristics of the included references

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- References marked with asterisks were included as part of the systematic review.
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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

### Publication Ethics

The study protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Naples Federico II.

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