



Summary report: Covid-19 relationships survey

Dr Jacqui Gabb

Professor of Sociology and Intimacy

School of Social Sciences and Global Studies

The Open University

Jacqui.Gabb@open.ac.uk

Dr Catherine Aicken

Senior Research Fellow

School of Health Sciences

University of Brighton

Summary report: Covid-19 relationships survey

Contents

Summary report: Covid-19 relationships survey	1
Executive Summary	2
Background and methods	3
What happened to couple relationships, since Covid-19?	4
USA	4
UK	8
USA-UK comparison	12
Sources of advice with relationship issues	14
USA	14
UK	16
USA-UK comparison	18
Communication in relationships	19
USA	19
UK	23
USA-UK comparison	26
People in couple relationships' sources of help	28
USA	29
UK	31

Executive Summary

Paired and The Open University jointly conducted two online surveys, each of over 2000 adults, in the US and UK in late July/early August 2020. The data was weighted to be representative of the populations in each country, and focusing on people currently in a relationship (1516 people aged 18-75 from the US, and 1319 people aged 18 and older from the UK), the surveys asked about:

- Relationship quality since Covid-19 (i.e. March 2020), and what people did more of with their partners
- Sources of advice with relationship issues
- Communication in relationships
- Sources of help (for various problems)

What happened to couple relationships, since Covid-19?

Relationships were more likely to get better than to get worse. In both countries, people were more likely to tell us their relationship got better, than they were to tell us their relationship got worse. Americans (particularly US men – 44%), were especially likely to tell us their relationships had improved (compared with one third of US women and one quarter (one fourth) of UK men and women. Relationships got worse for around one-in-ten men and women in both countries.

It seems many people were able to take advantage of the changed situation – in ways that may have benefited their relationships. In both countries, large proportions of people talked with their partners more, spent more quality time together, were more likely to show they cared with thoughtful gestures, and gave each other more emotional support, during the first few months of Covid-19. In both countries, men were more likely than women to say they helped around the house more.

Parenting

In both countries, people with children living with them were more likely to tell us that their relationships got better, but also more likely to tell us that their relationships got worse, compared to people without children (whose relationships were more likely to have stayed ‘about the same’).

In both countries, people with children living with them are more likely to seek relationship advice than people without children.

Sources of advice with relationship issues

Around half of Americans, over half of UK women, and three-quarters of UK men, don’t seek advice from anyone regarding relationship issues. Among those who do seek advice, friends and family are the most common source. 11% of Americans and 4% of Brits seek advice from a therapist or counsellor.

Communication about relationship issues

Americans are more likely than Brits to say that they ‘always’ communicate about relationship issues with their partner, and less likely to say that they never have such issues (4%). British men (18%) were particularly likely to say that they never had relationship issues.

Sources of help

Our findings suggest high reliance on partners, and high proportions not seeking help, for the problems we asked about (relationship issues, sex-life issues, health/medical issues, mental health issues, and job/work issues).

Background and methods

We did two online surveys, in the USA and the UK, each with over 2000 participants, about 3 months into the Covid-19 pandemic (survey dates: end of July/beginning of August). We asked a series of questions to people who said they are currently in a relationship: 1516 people aged 18-75 from the US, and 1319 people aged 18 and older from the UK.

The US survey was run by Ipsos MORI and the UK survey was run by YouGov. The analyses below use weighted data to make the findings representative of the populations in each country, according to measures provided by the survey companies. All differences reported in the sub-sections reporting separate US and UK results are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Apparent differences between the US and UK are noted, as indicative evidence of possible differences between the two countries (but without testing the statistical significance of between-country differences due to issues with combining the datasets).

In each section of the report, findings from the US are given first, followed by findings from the UK, and then points of difference or similarity between the two countries. In each of these sub-sections, main 'headline' findings are given in bold, with some detail afterwards (see the full report for each country for extra details), and then under a heading 'Speculation' there is a broad discussion of possible reasons for what we found and implications.

Please see attached detailed reports for full analyses.

What happened to couple relationships, since Covid-19?

We asked people in relationships whether, on balance, their relationship with their partner had got better, got worse, or stayed about the same, since the Coronavirus pandemic started in the US/UK (i.e. since March 2020). (The survey was conducted end July/early August). We also asked them what they had been doing more of during this period.

USA

RELATIONSHIPS WERE MORE LIKELY TO GET BETTER THAN TO GET WORSE SINCE COVID-19 – ESPECIALLY FOR MEN

Since Covid-19, couple relationships were more likely to improve, than get worse. Men were more likely than women to say their relationship had improved.

Overall, just over half (52%) of people said their relationship stayed about the same. Over a third (38%) told us their relationship had improved, while close to one-in-ten said their relationship had gotten worse (9%).

There were differences between what men and women told us about their relationship quality over this time period. Fewer women than men said their relationship had improved (32% of women compared with 44% of men), 58% of women and 47% of men said their relationships had stayed about the same. There was no difference in the proportion (9%) of men and women who told us their relationship had gotten worse.

MAKING THE BEST OF IT

Over half of men and women told us they spent more quality time together than usual, and talked to each other more, in this period. Giving each other more space, more emotional support, doing more hobbies/activities together, and more sharing of parental/caring responsibilities, were also commonly reported.

When we asked people in relationships what they had been doing more of, half (51%) had been spending more quality time together, whilst 31% had been giving each other more space. About half (52%) had been talking to each other more, 4-in-10 (39%) had been giving each other more emotional support, and 32% did more hobbies/activities together, whilst 20% shared parental/caring responsibilities more.

Compared to women, men were more likely than women to tell us they had been being intimate more with their partner, showing they cared with thoughtful gestures more, helping around the house more, and doing 'relationship work' with their partners more.

Compared to women, a larger proportion of men reported being intimate more (28% of men, 23% of women), showing that they cared with thoughtful gestures more (35% of men, 27% of women) and helping more around the house more (50% of men, 39% of women) – as well as doing relationship exercises/therapy ('relationship work') with their partners more (13% of men, 5% of women).

People whose relationships had improved were more likely to report that they were talking to each other more, spending more quality time together, and helping more around the house, compared to usual. People whose relationships had gotten worse were much less likely to say they were doing more of these things than usual, and also much less likely to say they'd been being intimate more than usual.

Women and men who told us their relationships had got better were more likely to tell us that they and their partner had been:

- spending more quality time together,
- showing that they cared with thoughtful gestures more,
- being intimate more,
- talking to each other more,
- helping around the house more,
- doing hobbies or activities together more,
- giving each other emotional support more,
- doing relationship exercises/therapy together more.

People whose relationships had got better were less likely to respond that they had not being doing more of any of the activities we asked about (see full report for percentages).

There was a mixed picture with regard to giving each other space (more). Women whose relationships got better, got worse, or stayed the same were equally likely to report that they and their partner gave each other space more (at around 30%). Men whose relationships had got worse were more likely to report giving their partner space more (42%) compared to men whose relationships had got better (29%) or stayed the same (22%).

There was no statistically significant difference between the proportion of women reporting sharing parental/caring responsibilities more, by whether their relationships had improved, stayed the same, or got worse. However, while 13% of men whose relationships had stayed about the same reported sharing more parenting/caring, this proportion was higher among those whose relationships had got better (18%) and considerably higher among those whose relationships had got worse (28%).

FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE?

Younger peoples' relationships were more likely to have improved *and* more likely to have gotten worse. Older peoples' relationships were more likely to be unchanged in quality compared with younger people's relationships.

We compared people in different age groups (18-34, 35-54, 55-75 years). Half of women aged 18-34 (49%) and two-thirds of men aged 18-34 (69%) told us their relationships had improved; compared to 21% women and 30% men in the oldest age group (55-75) reporting this. The relationships of people in the oldest age group (55-75) were most likely to be stable in quality: 72% of women and 64% men aged 55-75 told us their relationships had stayed about the same. This compared with only 41% of women and 21% of men in the youngest (18-34) age group telling us this. One-in-ten men and women in the 18-34 and 35-54 age groups told us their relationship had gotten worse, whilst this applied to fewer people in the oldest age group (55-75 yrs: 7% women, 6% men).

It is possible that other factors that we know vary by age, could explain the differences (e.g. relationship duration, as younger people's relationships tend to be shorter than older people's; relationship type, i.e. married/living as married; or presence of children in the household).

Relationship quality was less likely to be unchanged in quality since Covid-19 among people with children, compared to people without children (this was true for men and women). The relationships of people with children were more likely to have got better, *and* more likely to have got worse.

We compared people with at least one child (aged 17 years or under) in their household, with those who had no children in their household. Among women and among men, there were differences between people with and without children. Among both genders, those without children in the household were more likely to say their relationship had stayed about the same (63% women and 56% men without children, compared with 51% women and 34% men with children). Relationships had improved for 29% women without children compared with 38% women with children; and 37% men without children and compared with 55% men with children. Relationships had got worse for 8% women and men without children and 12% women and men with children. It seems the effect of recent months on people living with children has been polarising, with more people with children experiencing an improvement in their relationship *and* more people experiencing a worsening relationship.

Relationship quality was more likely to be unchanged in quality since Covid-19 among women who were married or living as married, compared with women who were in relationships but not living as married. For men, relationship type did not seem to make a difference.

For women, married/living as married relationships seemed to be more stable in quality, compared to relationships where they were not living as married. 31% married/living as married women, compared with 41% women who were in a relationship but not living as married, reported that their relationship had improved. 60% married/living as married women, compared with 45% women who were in a relationship but not living as married, reported that their relationship had stayed about the same. 8% married/living as married women, compared with 15% women who were in a relationship but not living as married, reported that their relationship had worsened. Relationship type seemed to make little or no difference, in terms of whether men considered their relationships to have improved, stayed the same or worsened.

The shorter the relationship, the more likely it was to get better, or get to get worse, since Covid-19. Longer relationships were more likely to stay about the same.

People who had been in their relationships for shorter time periods (to date) were less likely to say their relationships had stayed about the same during March-July 2020, compared to people in relationships which were longer. For instance, 42% of women and 27% of men who had been in their relationship for less than 5 years told us their relationship stayed about the same, compared with 71% women and 64% of men who had been in their relationship for over 20 years.

It was a mixed picture for shorter relationships. People who had been in their relationships for less than 5 years were more likely to say their relationship had improved (44% women and 62% men said this) compared to people in longer relationships. However, people who had been in their relationship for less than 5 years were also more likely to say that their relationships had got worse (reported by 14% women and 11% men).

SPECULATION:

Despite the added stress of the Covid-19 situation on some US couple relationships, other couple relationships improved. Improvements could be because many people spent more quality time together with their partner, more time talking, more time helping around the house, and being intimate more. It's likely that these things helped their relationships, and they were much more commonly reported by people whose relationships improved, compared with those whose relationships had worsened. Whilst women seemed less likely to consider that their relationships

improved compared to men, men seemed more likely to perceive that they were doing more 'relationship work', showing they cared more, and helping around the house more.

In the following groups, Covid-19 has had a 'polarising' effect on relationship quality – i.e. more people experienced an improvement *and* more people experienced a worsening in relationship quality, in the following groups:

- younger people (aged 18-34 years), compared with older people (55-75 years)
- people with children (living with them), compared to people without children
- women who were not living as married, compared to married women or women living as married.

We also saw a greater polarising effect the shorter the relationship was.

It is possible that Covid-19 enabled parents to spend more time co-parenting, which could improve their relationship, whilst also putting other parents' relationships under more stress (for instance while working from home with children in the house, or whilst experiencing childcare problems). The changes and challenges that Covid-19 has placed on relationships could have been more likely to be 'make-or-break' for newer relationships: moving in together at short notice, or not being able to spend time together, can worsen a relationship or prompt people to make extra effort to make things work.

Longer and more committed relationships may be more stable in the face of major changes such as Covid-19 (and this could 'explain' the difference we saw by age, as younger people tend to have been in a relationship for a shorter time, and are less likely to be married/living together, compared with older people. People in the oldest age group we looked at (55-75) may also be less likely to have children in the household).

UK

RELATIONSHIPS WERE MORE LIKELY TO GET BETTER THAN TO GET WORSE DURING THE LOCKDOWN

Between March and the end of July, relationships were more likely to improve, than get worse.

About a quarter (26%) of people in relationships told us their relationship with their partner had improved between when the Covid-19 pandemic began in the UK in March, and the end of July (when we did our survey). For one-in-ten (11%), their relationship had got worse. Most people's relationships with their partners had stayed about the same (63%). These proportions were the same for women as for men.

MAKING THE BEST OF IT

Perhaps unsurprisingly, around half of people in relationships talked to each other more often than usual during this period. Giving each other additional emotional support, showing each other they cared by thoughtful gestures, and spend not just more time together, but more *quality* time together, were also common. Just 16% said they spent more time being intimate, and 4% did more 'relationship work' together than usual.

We asked people in relationships what they were doing more of, with their partner. Half (49%) were talking to each other more, and just under half were spending more quality time together (44%) and giving each other more emotional support (39%). 22% were showing that they cared with thoughtful gestures more, and 16% being intimate to a greater extent. 15% were sharing parental/caring responsibilities more. 4% were doing more relationship exercises or therapy ('relationship work') together.

Almost half of men (and over a third of women) reported helping more around the house.

45% of men and 36% of women reported helping more around the house. 34% women and 26% men reported doing more hobbies or activities together.

People whose relationships had improved were more likely to report that they were talking to each other more, spending more quality time together, giving each other more emotional support, and helping more around the house, compared to usual. People whose relationships had got worse were much less likely to say they were doing more of these things than usual, and also much less likely to say they'd been being intimate more than usual.

Women and men who told us their relationships had got better were more likely to tell us that they and their partner had been:

- spending more quality time together,
- showing that they cared with thoughtful gestures more,
- being intimate more,
- talking to each other more,
- helping around the house more,
- doing hobbies or activities together more,
- giving each other emotional support more,
- doing relationship exercises/therapy together more.

People whose relationships had got better were less likely to respond that they had not been doing more of any of the activities we listed (see detailed report for percentages).

There was a mixed picture with regard to giving each other space (more). Women whose relationships got better, got worse, or stayed the same were equally likely to report that they and their partner gave each other space more (at around 30%). Men whose relationships had got worse were more likely to report giving their partner space more (42%) compared to men whose relationships had got better (29%) or stayed the same (22%).

There was no statistically significant difference between the proportion of women reporting sharing parental/caring responsibilities more, by whether their relationships had improved, stayed the same, or got worse. However, while 13% of men whose relationships had stayed about the same reported sharing more parenting/caring, this proportion was higher among those whose relationships had got better (18%) and considerably higher among those whose relationships had got worse (28%).

FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE?

Older women's (aged 55+) relationships were more likely to be unchanged in quality compared to those of younger women. Younger women's (18-34) relationships were more likely to improve or get worse. We didn't see this effect for men.

We compared people in different age groups (18-34, 35-54, 55+ years), by whether they said their relationship had got better, stayed about the same, or got worse. Among men there was no difference by age group. Whilst three-quarters (74%) of older women (aged 55+) told us their relationships had stayed about the same, this applied to less than half (47%) of women aged 18-34. Younger women's (aged 18-34) relationships seemed more likely to get a little or a lot better (35%) and also more likely to get a little or a lot worse (18%), compared to older women (among whom 20% said their relationship got better, and only 6% said it got worse).

So we could say women's relationships appeared to be more 'stable' in quality over the lockdown, with increasing age (although we haven't yet investigated if other factors that we know vary by age could explain the difference e.g. relationship duration, relationship type i.e. married/cohabiting, or not cohabiting, or presence of children in the household).

Women with children were more likely to report that their relationships got better or got worse, whilst the relationships of women without children were more likely to be unchanged in quality. There was no difference between men with and without children.

We compared people with at least one child in their household, with those who had no children in their household. We found this made a difference among women, but not among men. Women without children living with them were more likely than those living with a child/children to say their relationship had stayed the same (this was reported by 66% of women without children, compared with 53% of women living with a child/children). Compared to women living without children, a larger proportion of women living with a child/children told us their relationship had got better (32% compared with 25%) *but also* more likely to say their relationship had got worse (15% compared with 9%).

Surprisingly, women who were not cohabiting with their partners were more likely to say their relationships had improved, compared with cohabiting, married and civil partnered women – but they were also more likely to say their relationships had got worse. We didn't see this effect for

men – whether they were married/civil partnered, cohabiting, or not cohabiting didn't seem to make a difference to whether their relationship had improved, stayed the same, or got worse.

We compared different types of relationship. Married/civil partnered women were more likely to say their relationship had stayed the same (68%) compared with cohabiting women (56%) and women not living with their partners (36%). Women who were not cohabiting were more likely to tell us their relationship had got worse (23%, compared with married/civil partnered women: 10%), however, non-cohabiting women were also more likely to report that their relationship had got better (41%, compared with married/civil partnered women: 22%). There was no difference between men in marriages/civil partnerships, men cohabiting and men not cohabiting, in terms of what they told us about how their relationship had improved/stayed the same/not improved.

The shorter the relationship, the more likely it was to get better, or get to get worse, over the lockdown. Longer relationships were more likely to stay about the same.

People who had been in their relationships for shorter time periods (to date) were less likely to say their relationships had stayed about the same during March-July 2020, compared to people in relationships which were longer. For instance, 42% of women and 51% of men who had been in their relationship for less than 5 years told us their relationship stayed about the same, compared with 72% women and 69% of men who had been in their relationship for over 20 years.

It was a mixed picture for shorter relationships. People who had been in their relationships for less than 5 years were more likely to say their relationship had improved (37% women and 33% men said this) compared to people in longer relationships. However, people who had been in their relationship for less than 5 years were also more likely to say that their relationships had got worse (reported by 21% women and 17% men).

SPECULATION:

Despite the added stress of the Covid-19 situation and UK lockdown on some UK couple relationships, other couple relationships improved. Improvements could be because many people spent more quality time together, more time talking, more time helping around the house, more time giving each other emotional support and showing they cared with thoughtful gestures, and being intimate more: things that could help their relationships, and which were much more commonly reported by people whose relationships improved compared with those whose relationships had got worse. It could also have helped that men were particularly likely to report doing more to help around the house, compared to women

In the following groups, Covid-19 has had a 'polarising' effect on relationship quality – i.e. more people experienced an improvement *and* more people experienced a worsening in relationship quality, in the following groups:

- **younger women (aged 18-34 years), compared with women people (55-75 years)**
- **women with children (living with them), compared to women without children**
- **women who were not living together, compared to married/civil partnered or cohabiting women**

We also saw a greater polarising effect the shorter the relationship was (for men and women).

The UK lockdown enabled many parents to spend more time with their children. More co-parenting could improve relationships for women – who are usually the main carers of children

(and indeed older relatives); whilst also putting other women's relationships under more stress (for instance, when working from home whilst also home schooling and looking after children). The changes and challenges that Covid-19 has placed on relationships could have been more likely to be 'make-or-break' women's shorter relationships: moving in together at short notice due to the lockdown, or not seeing each other, can worsen a relationship or prompt people to make more effort to maintain it.

Longer relationships may be more stable in the face of major changes such as Covid-19 and the lockdown – but we need to investigate this in more depth, because we also know that couples in longer relationships tend to be more committed (and couples in longer relationships are more likely to be living together), are more likely to have children, and are more common with increasing age.

USA-UK comparison

What happened to couple relationships, since Covid-19? Did they get better, stay about the same, or get worse?

In both countries, more people said their relationships improved than said their relationships got worse. US men were particularly likely to experience an improvement: 44% US men said their relationships got better in the early months of Covid-19 (March-July), compared to 32% US women. Just 26% UK men and women said their relationships got better.

We found no gender difference in whether relationships had got better, stayed the same, or got worse, in the UK, but US men seemed to be doing much better than US women (32% US women and 44% US men said their relationships got better), or UK men and women. There seemed to be little difference between US and UK women.

Women aged 55+ in both countries were more likely to say their relationships stayed about the same, compared with younger women – whose relationships were more likely to get better and more likely to get worse. We saw the same pattern for UK men, but no difference by age among US men.

(The oldest age group in the US survey was 55-75, whereas it was 55+ in the UK survey. See previous sections for percentages).

In both countries, women with children living with them were more likely to say their relationships got worse and more likely to say their relationship improved, compared with women without children. We saw the same pattern for UK men, but no difference between US men with/without children.

(See previous sections for percentages)

In both countries, it seems that women living with their partner experienced less change to their relationship quality. Women not living with their partner were more likely to say their relationship improved, and more likely to say their relationship got worse, compared to women living with their partners. There was no difference in whether relationships improved, stayed the same. or got worse, for US or UK men.

(See previous sections for percentages)

In both countries, men and women in longer relationships were more likely to tell us their relationships had stayed about the same, while shorter relationships were more likely to improve or get worse.

(See previous sections for percentages)

What did people do more of, since Covid-19?

A quarter (26%) of US men and women spent more time being intimate during in this period, and 16% of Brits reported this.

23% US women and 28% US men told us they spent more time being intimate, and 16% UK men and women (no gender difference).

In both countries, men were more likely than women to tell us they helped around the house more than usual.

US: 37% women, 50% men; UK: 36% women, 45% men

25% of US men and women told us they shared childcare/caring responsibilities more, and 15% of UK men and women said this.

No gender differences were observed between US men and women, nor between UK men and women.

13% US men reported doing more relationship work with their partners than usual during this period – compared with 5% or fewer of: US women, UK men and UK women.

5% US women, and 4% of UK men and women (with no gender difference), reported this.

SPECULATION:

Context: From March to July 2020 (the period covered by our survey), many people stayed at home for much of the time (often home-working), and some were instructed to stay at home for medical reasons. For most of this time the UK was in lockdown, which eased towards the end of this period.

Covid-19 lockdowns, home-working (for many) and restrictions on movement, were undoubtedly stressful for some couple relationships, but many couples in both countries seem to have taken the opportunity to do things that strengthen their relationship: such as spending more quality time together and talking together more. And often, it seems to have worked!

Other research has shown us that women tend to do more housework, and take on more childcare/caring responsibilities than men, even when both people in a couple are working. Perhaps spending more time than usual at home gave (heterosexual) couples the chance to share out housework and childcare more equitably than they usually do – which could be great for relationship quality. However, when someone spends more time than usual caring for children and doing housework it *could* be because they lost their job, or because they don't have the help normally available to them (e.g. no daycare/childcare, no domestic help/cleaner). Either of these things could be challenging for a couple.

There are different social norms around counselling/therapy between the US and the UK – it's more common in the US. We asked people whether they were doing more relationship exercises and therapy with their partner (i.e. 'relationship work') compared to usual, and a minority in both countries said they were. We don't quite know why US men were so much more likely to say they were doing this compared to US women: perhaps there are gender differences in what people consider to be relationship work. The answer could lie in whether informal relationship work, like self-help, online or magazine quizzes, are considered to 'count' as relationship exercises: US men might be more likely to include these than US women.

Sources of advice with relationship issues

We asked people where they went for relationship advice. They could select multiple responses, or 'not applicable – I don't go to anyone for advice about relationship issues'.

USA

HONEY, WE NEED TO GET HELP...

Half of people in couple relationships don't seek advice about relationship issues.

Friends are the most commonly-used source of relationship advice, followed by family. Men are more likely than women to seek relationship advice online, from a GP/family practitioner, or from a religious leader, compared with women. One-in-ten people seek relationship advice from a therapist/counsellor

49% of men and women told us they don't go to anyone for advice with relationship issues, whilst 32% sought relationship advice from friends, 23% from family, and 11% from a therapist or counsellor (with no differences in these percentages between men and women). Women were less likely than men to seek relationship advice from the following sources: online (reported by 10% of women and 20% of men), from a GP or family practitioner (1% of women, 5% of men), from a religious leader (6% of women, 12% of men), or using a mobile app (2% of women, 8% of men).

Younger adults seek relationship advice much more than older people do

There was a stark difference in advice-seeking by age: 71% of men and women aged 55-75 told us they don't go to anyone for advice with relationship issues, compared with 28% of women and 20% of men aged 18-34. Compared with older people (aged 55-75), younger people (aged 18-34) were more likely to seek relationship advice from all sources that we asked about.

Parents seek relationship advice more than people without children; people who are not living as married seek relationship advice more than married people and those living as married; and seeking relationship advice was less common the longer the relationship

People with children (living with them) were more likely to seek advice with relationship issues, than people in relationships who were not living with children in the household (64% compared with 43%). 'Parents' were more likely draw upon all the sources of advice that we asked about, than 'non-parents'.

People who were married or living as married were more likely to tell us that they didn't go to anyone for advice with relationship issues (52%), compared with people in relationships who were not living as married (32%), and less likely to seek relationship advice from all the common sources (friends, family, internet). However, the relationship 'status' didn't make a difference to the likelihood of seeking relationship advice from a GP/family practitioner.

The longer the relationship, the less likely people were to seek relationship advice from any source (only 28% of people in relationships of 20 years or more did this, compared with 76% of people in relationships of less than 5 years). Seeking relationship advice from all the sources that we asked about, was more common in shorter than longer relationships (categories of relationship duration were: less than 5 years, 5-10yrs, 10-20 years and 20 years+).

SPECULATION:

With half of people not seeking relationship advice from anyone, it is unclear how these relationships will manage to overcome current adversities because is it implausible that half of all couples have no relationship issues at all, especially so in the current circumstances! Significant cultural stigma remains attached to help-seeking even in the US. It's therefore great that many men and women feel able to turn to their friends, family and counsellors/therapists for help. Men are more likely to seek advice online (which is often a discreet way of getting advice) and from doctors – we suspect this may be about sexual function issues. They are also more likely to seek advice from religious leaders.

Older people seek advice less than younger people. This could be because they're more experienced about relationship matters, or it could be a generational thing: perhaps it's more acceptable for young people nowadays to be more open about their problems. It could also be because older people tend to have been in couple relationships for longer. It seems people in more established and longer relationships seek relationship advice less – perhaps they experience fewer problems, perhaps they are better able to resolve these between each other, or perhaps they have learned to put up with some things. It's encouraging that parents seek relationship advice more than people without children do: it's important to keep relationships healthy when kids are involved.

UK

DARLING, WE NEED TO GET HELP...

Over half of women and three-quarters of men in couple relationships don't seek relationship advice from anyone

Among those that do seek relationship advice, friends and family, followed by the internet, are the most common sources (for women and for men). 4% of all men and women in couple relationships seek relationship advice from counsellors/ therapists.

Over half of women (56%) and almost three-quarters of men (73%) told us they don't go to anyone for advice with relationship issues. For both men and women, friends were the most common source of relationship advice (for 32% of women and 15% of men), followed by family members (for 18% of women and 10% of men). 10% of men and women looked online for advice, and 4% sought advice from a therapist or counsellor. Seeking advice from a GP/family practitioner, religious leader, or mobile app, were all rare (reported by less than 2% of people).

Younger adults seek relationship advice much more than older people do

People aged 55 and older were *much* more likely to tell us they don't go to anyone for relationship advice (for women: 75% of women aged 55+, 54% of women aged 35-54, 30% of women aged 18-34; for men: 87% of men aged 55+, 69% of men aged 35-54, 45% of men aged 18-34). Given this pattern, it's not surprising that seeking advice from friends, and family, were less common with increasing age (and seeking advice from the internet showed a very stronger gradient by age: e.g. among people aged 55+, 3% women and 1% of men did this, compared with 26% of women and 24% of men aged 18-34). However, among women there was no difference by age in the proportion who sought relationship advice from a therapist or counsellor (4%) (while this was less common among older men than younger men: 2% of men aged 55+, compared with 7% of men aged 18-34).

Parents seek relationship advice more than people without children

Seeking relationship advice from any source was more common among women living with children in their households (40%), compared to those without (53%), and this difference seemed to be accounted for by women with children being more likely than those without, to seek advice from friends and family. There was no such difference among men.

Married (including civil partnered) people seek relationship advice less than cohabiting people, while people who are in relationships but not cohabiting are the most likely to seek relationship advice. But across all types of relationships, a similar, small proportion use therapists/counsellors.

Married people and those in civil partnerships were more likely to tell us they don't go to anyone for relationship advice (among married/civil partnered people this was reported by 64% of women, and 78% of men), compared with cohabiting people (44% of women, 67% of men in cohabiting relationships), or those in relationships but not cohabiting (28% of women, 49% of men in non-cohabiting relationships). Women and men in non-cohabiting relationships were more likely to seek relationship advice from the following sources: internet, friends, and family – compared with women and men who were cohabiting with their partner, whilst married/civil partnered women and men were the least likely to seek relationship advice from these sources. Across all relationship types (married/civil partnered, cohabiting, non-cohabiting), similar but small proportions sought relationship advice from therapists or counsellors (4%).

Seeking relationship advice is less common the longer the relationship

The longer the relationship, the less likely people were to seek relationship advice from any source (only 20% of people in relationships of 20 years or more did this, compared with 64% of people in relationships of less than 5 years). Seeking relationship advice online, from friends or from family, were all more common in shorter than longer relationships, whilst there was no difference in the (small) proportion of people who sought advice from a therapist or counsellor, across different duration relationships (categories of relationship duration were: less than 5 years, 5-10yrs, 10-20 years and 20 years+).

SPECULATION

With such a high proportion of people – and especially men – not seeking relationship advice from anyone, we need to get help! (We just don't believe that most couples have no relationship issues at all!). It's fine to seek advice to support and improve your relationship, and it's great that many men and women feel able to turn to their friends, family and the internet for help. Use of professional counsellor/therapists is quite low, at 4%.

Older people seek advice less than younger people. This could be because they're more experienced about relationship matters, or it could be a generational thing: perhaps it's more acceptable for young people nowadays to be more open about their problems. It could also be because older people tend to have been in couple relationships for longer. It seems people in more established and longer relationships seek relationship advice less – perhaps they experience fewer problems, perhaps they are better able to resolve these between each other, or perhaps they have learned to put up with some things. It's encouraging that parents seek relationship advice more than people without children do: it's important to keep relationships healthy when kids are involved.

USA-UK comparison

STIFF UPPER LIP? BRITISH MEN COULD BENEFIT FROM GETTING HELP WITH THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

Whilst half of Americans didn't seek advice with relationship issues, this applied to an even higher proportion of people in the UK, especially men (73%). Among those who did seek relationship advice, friends and family members were the most common sources of advice in both countries.

US men were particularly likely to look online for relationship advice (20%), while 10% of UK men and women (and a similar proportion of US women: 11%) did this.

US men and women were almost three times as likely to use counsellors/therapists (at 11%) compared to UK men and women (4%). Americans also made greater use of GPs/family practitioners, religious leaders and mobile apps for relationship advice, compared to Brits (for whom most relationship advice-seeking was through friends, family or online – 4% from counsellors/therapists and less than 2% from other sources).

In both countries, we saw similar patterns in that seeking relationship advice was

- more common among younger people
- more common among people with children (living with them)
- less common when married/living together
- less common in longer relationships

(See previous sections for percentages).

SPECULATION:

Our survey supports the common observation that Americans may be more open than Brits (and particularly British men) regarding emotional and intimate matters, and more likely to seek relationship therapy. While many Americans *and* many Brits would benefit from seeking help and support with relationship issues, Americans seemed to draw upon a wider range of sources of relationship advice, including seeking professional help.

Communication in relationships

We asked people about how they communicated about relationship issues with their partner, how satisfied they were with this, and what was the most difficult topic to bring up for discussion with their partner.

USA

KEEP TALKING!

More than two-thirds of men and women always or often discuss their relationship issues with their partner.

We asked men and women in relationships how often they discussed relationship issues with their partner. 37% told us they always did this, 32% did so often, 20% sometimes and 6% rarely or never. 4% reported never having relationship issues. There were no differences between men and women.

There were differences by age group, with a slightly tendency towards less communication with their partner about relationship issues among those in the 35-54 age group, compared with younger or older people.

There was not much difference between people with and without children, in terms of how often they talked about relationship issues with their partner; there was no difference between people who were married/living as married, and those in a relationship but not living as married in this respect; and no differences by relationship duration.

RELATIONSHIP COMMUNICATION'S WORKING BETTER FOR MEN THAN FOR WOMEN

Men reported greater satisfaction with how they and their partner communicate about relationship issues, compared to women.

More men (42%) than women (31%) told us they were very satisfied with how they and their partner communicate about relationship issues. Similar proportions of men and women (44% men, 46% women) were fairly satisfied, while fewer men (10%) than women (17%) were unsatisfied (*combined responses: Not very satisfied, not at all satisfied*). (As above, around 4% reported never having relationship issues).

When asked how satisfied they were with communicating about relationship issues with their partner, older people (aged 55+) were more likely to say that they had had no such issues, compared with younger people.

There were no differences in satisfaction by whether or not children were present in the household, or by relationship type or duration.

TOUGH TOPICS: SEX, MONEY, MENTAL HEALTH AND IN-LAWS

What's the one hardest topic to bring up for discussion with your partner? The most common response (one-fourth of people) was 'nothing'! This was more commonly reported by older people than younger people. Sex and money were the next most common answers – followed by mental health and family/in-laws. However, whilst money was a big issue across all age groups, sex was a less common answer for 18-34-year-olds than those aged 35-75.

We asked people what topic was hardest to bring up for discussion with their partner (they could select one answer only). One fourth of participants responded 'nothing'. For 18% men and 15% women, sex was the most difficult topic to bring up for discussion, followed by money/finances (for 14% men and 15% women), mental health (for 7% men, 8% women), and family/in-laws (for 7% of men and 7% of women). Smaller proportions identified other topics as the hardest to discuss, including children/parenting, and personal beliefs (e.g. political, religious, etc.).

'Nothing' was a much more common response among 55-75-year olds (41% women, 39% men responded this way) compared with 35-54-year olds (26% women, 20% men), or 18-34-year-olds (13% women, 16% men). For 35-54 and 55-75 year old women and men, sex and money were the next most common responses. For 18-34-year-old women, money and mental health were the most common responses, whilst for 18-34-year-old men, it was money and socialising.

People without children (living in their household) were more likely to respond 'nothing' (30% women, 29% men – compared to 20% women and 17% men with children). Sex was more commonly the hardest topic for people without children (16% women, 19% men), compared to those with children (13% women, 16% men). For women with children, money was more commonly the hardest topic than for women with no children (19% of women with children, 15% of women without children) – but presence of children seemed to make little/no difference for men.

Married/living as married women were more likely than women not living as married with their partners, to respond that 'nothing' was hard(est) to bring up for discussion (28% compared with 18%). Relationship status seemed to make no difference for men (25% said this). Married/living as married people were more likely to tell us that sex was the most difficult topic to bring up for discussion, compared with those not living as married (women: married/living as married: 16%, not living as married 10%; men: married/living as married 17%, not living as married: 12%). Relationship status didn't make a difference to how commonly 'money' was chosen as the most difficult topic. However, twice as many women who were not living as married (15%) chose 'mental health' as the most difficult topic to bring up, compared with married/living as married women (7%).

People in longer relationships were more likely to respond 'nothing' (e.g. 15% of those in relationships of up to 5 years said this, compared with 36% of those in relationships of 20+ years). Mental health was the most difficult for 13% of those in relationships of up to 5 years, declining to 5% of those in relationships of 20+years.

WHEN IT COMES TO TALKING RELATIONSHIP ISSUES, FACE-TO-FACE CHATS STILL RULE

Face-to-face conversations were by far the most common way of communicating about relationship issues. SMS/messaging (e.g. Whatsapp) was the next most common, reported by less than one fourth of people, while phone calls and video calls were less common. More men than women told us they communicated via another person – a professional (e.g. counsellor), or friend or family member.

We asked participants to tell us how they communicate about relationship issues with their partner – allowing them to select multiple responses, as applicable. Most participants told us they communicated about relationship issues through face-to-face conversations (82% men, 86% women). Next most common for discussing relationship issues was messaging (text message/SMS, or messaging services such as iMessage, Whatsapp, etc.), reported by 25% men and 21% women; followed by phone calls (17% men, 13% women), and video calls (e.g. FaceTime, Skype, etc. – 14%

men, 5% women). 6% communicated about relationship issues by means of letters or written notes. More men than women used another person to communicate about relationship issues: a professional (e.g. counsellor) – 6% men, 2% women; or an intermediary such as a friend or family member (9% men, 1% women). Less than 1% responded none of these methods. Very few people told us they didn't communicate with their partner about issues that arise, but women were more likely than men to say this (2% women, less than 1% men); whilst 4% said they had not faced an issues in their relationship.

SPECULATION:

It's great that so many women and men are able to discuss their relationship issues with their partner, but some feel they cannot. But it's not only important that we communicate – the quality of communication is important too. With women less likely than men to be satisfied with how they and their partner communicate about relationship issues, there's a mismatch here!

Communication needs to meet both partners' needs. Older people (aged 55-75) were more satisfied with how they and their partner communicate about relationship issues, but relationship duration and presence of children didn't make a difference. So there may be generational differences in expectations about couple communication.

The majority of people (three out of four) have issues that they find particularly hard to bring up for discussion with their partner. It didn't surprise us that sex and money were often the most difficult to bring up – these are sensitive and challenging issues. The next most common answers were mental health, and family/in-laws. With couples being an important source of emotional support for each other, they should be enabled to help each other through difficult times. Couples (and families) often need to give and receive support from their wider/extended families, but things aren't always easy, for instance when there are differences of opinion, behavior, customs or values, between your own and your partner's family. Accepting some of the differences, and seeing the wider family network as a shared resource for a couple or family, could help.

As people get older, they're less likely to find it hard to bring up an issue for discussion with their partner. This could be because of increasing familiarity (older people have often been in their relationship for longer) and the longer people have been together, the less likely they may be to worry that raising an issue could lead to a bad or unpredictable outcome – or break-up. It could also be because as people get older they may be more confident and self-assured about raising issues that are important to them.

It's a cause for concern that people with children are less likely to be able to raise challenging issues with their partner. In part this could be because of the lack of privacy in a household where children are present. It could also be because people with children put up with more unresolved issues or communication problems 'for the sake of the children', although this could be harmful in the longer term. The financial strain of having children may be extra difficult for women, who may be managing family expenses while earning less: as women with children were more likely than those without to find money the most challenging issue to raise. But it's not all bad, when you're parenting – people with children were less likely to say that sex was the hardest issue to raise.

UK

Over half of women and men report always or often talking about relationship issues with their partner – but more men than women (and more older than younger people; and more people without children than people with children) told us they have never have relationship issues.

We asked women and men how often, if at all, they discussed relationship issues with their partners. We found a significant difference – largely due to women (11%) being less likely than men (19%) to tell us they had never have relationship issues with their partner.

Younger people (aged 18-34) were more likely to tell us they always or often talk about relationship issues (62%) compared with older people (55+; 49%) – but this difference may be because younger people were less likely to tell us they never have such issues (9% 18-34-year olds said this compared with 21% of those aged 55+).

For women, whether they had children in the household or not, didn't change how often they communicated with their partner about relationship issues. Men with children were slightly less likely to communicate with their partner about relationship issues than those without children (men with children: 47% always/often communicated; men without children: 52% always/often communicated); men with children were also less likely to say they never had such issues (13% of men with children said this, compared to 21% of men without children).

Relationship type (married/civil partnership, cohabiting, not cohabiting) did not make a difference to how often people reported talking with their partners about relationship issues.

Over two-thirds of women and men were (very/fairly) satisfied with how they and their partner communicate about relationship issues.

28% of men and women reported being very satisfied with how they and their partner communicate about relationship issues, and around 40% were fairly satisfied. 17% women and 14% men told us they were not satisfied (*not very satisfied, not at all satisfied – responses were combined*), and (as with the analysis above – previous paragraph) more men (19%) than women (11%) told us they had never had relationship issues, and more older than younger people.

For women and men, satisfaction with communication with their partner about relationship issues was higher among those without children (for those without children: 30% women and 32% men very satisfied, compared with those with children: 22% women and 22% men very satisfied – but the difference could be partly because people without children are less likely to report that they haven't faced any issues.

Relationship type (married/civil partnership, cohabiting, not cohabiting) did not make a difference to how satisfied people were with communicating with their partners about relationship issues.

What's the one hardest topic to bring up for discussion with your partner? (This was difficult to answer, with a common response being 'don't know'.) Sex, money, and mental health (in that order), were the most common topics chosen.

It seems it's difficult to identify one single thing that's hardest to bring up for discussion with a partner: 19% women and 24% men responded 'don't know' to this question. 19% of women and 21% men told us that sex was the most difficult to discuss, followed by money/finances (for 13%

women, 9% men), and mental health (for 9% women, 8% men). For smaller proportions of men and women, topics including work, family/in-laws, children/parenting, and physical health, were the hardest to talk about.

Sex was the most difficult topic to raise among all age groups (most commonly chosen as the most difficult topic), but with increasing age, fewer people said money was the most difficult topic to discuss.

Whether people were married, cohabiting or not living together, didn't seem to affect which issues were most difficult to raise for discussion.

Sex remains a difficult issue to bring up for discussion in long and shorter relationships. However, people in relationships of over a decade were more likely to find it the hardest issue of all to bring up for discussion with their partner (23% of people in relationships of 10-20 years; 21% of people in relationships of over 20 years, said this – compared with 15% and 13% of those in relationships of under 5yrs and 5-10 years, respectively). (We need to remember that people in longer relationships are also more likely to be older). Conversely, people in relationships of over a decade were less likely to say that money was the hardest topic to bring up for discussion (10%, 8% of those in relationships of 10-20 and 20+ years said this, compared with 13%, 19% of those in relationships of under 5 and 5-10 years' duration).

Face-to-face conversations are by far most common way of communicating about relationship issues.

We asked participants to tell us how they communicate about relationship issues with their partner – allowing them to select multiple responses, as applicable. Most participants communicated about relationship issues by face-to-face conversations (more women, 79%, than men, 70%, reported this). Next most common was by messaging (i.e. text message or messaging services such as iMessage, Whatsapp, etc.), reported by 16% women and 12% men. Just 6% of men and women would communicate about these issues by phone call, 3% by means of a letter or written note, 2% by video call (e.g. FaceTime, Skype, etc.). Less than 1% would communicate about relationship issues via a professional (e.g. relationship counsellor), and less than 1% by using an intermediary such as a friend or family member. As above (see previous paragraph), 18% men and 11% women reported not having issues and so didn't respond to this question, and a further 1% said they never communicated with their partner when an issue arose.

SPECULATION:

Whilst it's good news that around half of people are always or often able to communicate with their partner about relationship issues (and even more are satisfied with how they communicate about these issues), a sizeable minority don't feel able to do this. More men than women tell us they don't have relationship issues, which suggest that in some couples, men may be unaware of issues that bother their partner, or perhaps their partners feel unable to initiate a discussion.

When we asked women and men what was the most difficult topic to bring up for discussion with their partner, the most common answer was sex, followed by money. This didn't surprise us – these are sensitive and challenging topics to talk about. The next most common answer was

mental health. With couples being an important source of emotional support for each other, they should be enabled to help each other through difficult times.

USA-UK comparison

AMERICANS TALK MORE WITH THEIR PARTNERS ABOUT RELATIONSHIP ISSUES THAN BRITS DO RELATIONSHIP ISSUES? WHAT RELATIONSHIP ISSUES?

British men are more likely than British women, and far more likely than Americans, to claim they never have relationship issues with their partner

Compared to UK women and men in couple relationships, US women and men in couple relationships were more likely to say they 'always' talk about relationship issue with their partner (37% US; 30% UK). There were no gender difference in the US sample, but in the UK sample there was a gender difference – largely due to many more men (18%) than women (11%) telling us they've never had relationship issues with their partner. (4% of US men and women tell us they've never had relationship issues with their partner). 6% of US men and women, 8% of UK women, and 10% of UK men rarely or never talk about relationship issues with their partner.

Americans were more likely to say they were satisfied with how they communicate about relationship issues with their partners – but this could be because more British didn't have relationship issues, apparently (and so didn't rate their satisfaction with relationship communication about these issues).

In both countries, younger people were more likely to communicate with their partners about relationship issues, more likely to be satisfied with communication about these issues, and less likely to tell us they had no such relationship issues, compared with older people. (See previous section for percentages). In both countries, people without children (i.e. no children in the household) were more likely to communicate with their partners about relationship issues, more likely to be satisfied with communication about these issues, and less likely to tell us they had no such relationship issues, compared with people living with children in their households. (See previous section for percentages). *[Please be cautious about reporting these findings because higher proportions selecting 'not applicable - no relationship issues' could contribute to lower proportions reporting that they communicate about relationship issues, and that they are satisfied with this.]*

In both countries, relationship status* seemed to make no difference to the likelihood of discussing relationship issues with a partner, or how satisfied people were with this communication.

*(*In the US analysis the categories were: Married/living as married, or in a relationship but not living as married; in the UK analysis the categories were: Married/in a civil partnership, or cohabiting, or in a relationship but not cohabiting).*

Americans use a wider range of communication methods to talk with their partners about relationship issues – but face-to-face conversations are the mode of choice in both countries, especially for women

86% of US women and 82% of US men communicate about relationship issues with their partner via face-to-face conversations, compared with 79% of women and 70% of men.

In both countries, men were more likely than women to choose non-face-to-face methods for communicating about relationship issues

Non-face-to-face methods were more popular among Americans, and among men. For instance, phone calls were used by 13% US women, 17% US men, and just 6% of UK women and men; text-messaging (SMS) or messaging (e.g. Whatsapp) by 21% of US women, 25% of US men, 16% of UK women and 12% of UK men; and video-calls (e.g. facetime, skype) by 5% of US women, 14% of US men, and 2% of UK women and men.

American men are more likely to communicate about relationship issues through another person

2% of US women, 6% of US men and less than 1% of UK women and men communicate about relationship issues via a therapist/counsellor. 1% of US women 9% of US men and less than 1% of UK women and men communicate about relationship issues via an intermediary such as a friend or family member.

(It is difficult to compare findings about the most difficult topic to bring up for discussion with a partner, due to differences between the response options available in the US and UK surveys.)

SPECULATION:

It could be that British couple relationships are more harmonious – but this doesn't explain why more men than women claim never to have had relationship issues. Perhaps it's more likely that there are cultural differences - and in the UK, gendered differences - in how likely people are to recognise that they have a problem in their relationship, and then to talk about it with their partner.

People in couple relationships' sources of help

Participants were asked:

“Which of the following, if any, would you be MOST likely to turn to for help with each of the following problems?”

- ‘issues in my relationship’
- ‘issues with my sex life’
- ‘health/medical issue’
- ‘mental health’
- ‘job/work issues’

Participants selected one response, for each of the five different problems, from the following list:

- Partner
- Friend
- Mum
- Dad
- Other family member
- Professional help (e.g. doctor, family physician, therapist, etc.)
- Internet forum or help site
- Internet/google search (excluding forums or help sites)
- Books/magazines
- Mobile app
- None of these
 - *This could mean they don’t turn to anyone at all for support with the specified problem, or that they would be most likely to turn to a different source of support*
- Don’t know
- Prefer not to say
- Do not have this problem*
 - *This response was available to US survey participants, but was not available in the UK survey.*

No between-country comparison is provided due to differences in the available responses.

USA

SOMEONE TO RELY ON

Overview:

Our partners are the people we're most likely to turn to when we have relationship issues, work issues or problems with our sex lives.

For support with relationship issues, sex-life issues, or job/work issues, the most common response was 'partner' for men and women, and there were gender differences (see below).

We're most likely to turn to professionals for support for physical and mental health issues, but partners come a close second.

For health/medical and mental health issues, the most common response was that they would seek professional help, but 'partner' was the next most common answer (and there were no differences between men and women's responses).

Relationship issues: After our partners, friends are the main source of help we'd turn to for relationship issues, especially for women

After 'partner' (the response chosen by 36% of women and 31% of men), women and men would be next most likely to turn to friend(s), with women (15%) being more likely than men (11%) to answer this way. 11% of women and 12% of men would be most likely to turn to a family member, and 5% of women and 4% of men would be most likely to turn to a professional. (Other sources were chosen by less than 5% of people). 12% of women and men told us they 'do not have these problems'.

Sex life issues: We're most likely to turn to our partners for help with sex-life problems, but many people may not seek help with this issue.

31% of women and 30% of men would be most likely to turn to their partner for help (the most common response). The next most common response was 'None of these' (13% of women, 11% of men). 7% would be most likely to seek professional help and 6% would be most likely to turn to a friend. 2% of women and 6% of men would be most likely to turn to a family member. 5% of women and men would be most likely to search online; and 1% of women and 3% of men would be most likely to use online forums or help sites. (Other sources were chosen by less than 5% of people). 6% of women and 5% of men said they didn't know, whilst 20% of women and 15% of men 'do not have these problems'.

Health/medical issue: We're most likely to seek help from professionals for health and medical issues, but we would next rely on our partners.

While 32% would be most likely to turn to professionals for health/medical issues, 20% would be most likely to turn to their partner. 7% would be most likely to search online and 11% would be most likely to turn to a family member (with other help sources chosen by less than 5% of people). 8% 'do not have these problems', and 6% responded 'none of these'.

Mental health: We're most likely to seek help from professionals for mental health issues, but partners come a very close second.

22% would be most likely to turn to a professional for help with mental health issues, closely followed by 19% who were most likely to turn to their partner. 8% would be most likely to turn to a family member, 6% would be most likely to turn to a friend. 5% would be most likely to search online and 3% would be most likely to use community forums/help sites. 17% 'do not have these problems', 4% responded 'don't know' and 7% responded 'none of these'.

Job/work issues: We're most likely to turn to our partners for help with job/work issues – about twice as likely as we are to turn to either friends or family members for help with this.

25% of women and 23% of men would be most likely to turn to their partner regarding job/work issues, and 10% of women and 12% of men would be most likely to turn to a friend. 12% women and 13% men would be most likely to turn to a family member. 5% of men and women would be most likely to search online, and 2% of women and 4% of men would be most likely to turn to online forums or help sites (other sources of support were chosen by less than 5% of people). 23% of women and 16% of men 'do not have these problems'; 5% of women and 4% of men responded 'don't know'.

SPECULATION:

It may be good news that people are most likely to turn to their partner for help with relationship issues – it's great if couples can sort out their problems between themselves. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the relationship issues, they may also need to draw on other sources of support as well.

With three-in-ten being most likely to turn to their partner for help with sex-life issues, many people clearly feel able to talk openly about sex. What's more concerning is that 13% of women and 11% of men would not seek help with their sex-life from any of the wide range of sources we listed. Sex-life issues can be quite diverse, for instance: problems with sexual function (arousal problems, premature ejaculation, trouble maintaining an erection, vaginal dryness), not enjoying sex, or wanting more or less sex than your partner does. Help and support is out there for all of these issues.

Helping a partner with a problem can be rewarding and can be a way of showing that we love and care for them, but it can also be draining. Although partners may be happy to help, it's important for a healthy couple relationship to ensure that both people are supported, and, if possible, that the person with the problem can draw on other sources of help.

Healthy couple relationships are critical for wellbeing and should be supported. When relationships break down, this key source of support can be lost, and this would leave one-fifth of people without their main source of help for health/medical issues, one-fifth of people without their main source of help for mental health issues, and nearly one-fourth of people without their main source of support for work problems.

UK

SOMEONE TO RELY ON

Overview:

For help with relationship issues and sex life issues, women and men are most likely to turn to their partner – but many women and men would not seek help at all for these issues.

Professionals are the most common source of help for health/medical issues among women and men, and for mental health issues among women – with partners coming second. Men are most likely to turn to their partners for help with mental health issues, and next most likely to turn to a professional.

We found strong evidence differences in how men and women responded regarding each of the five problems.

For issues with their relationship, and issues with their sex life, the most common response was 'partner' (if they sought support at all). However, for these problems, many men and women responded that they wouldn't turn to any of the diverse sources we listed (selecting 'none of these'). For both of these issues, women were more likely to seek support from friends, and men were more likely to respond 'don't know'. For job/work issues, men and women most commonly selected 'partner', but again, 'none of these' was a common response.

For health/medical issues, the largest proportion of women and men would turn to a professional, but a partner came a close second. For mental health, women most commonly would turn to a professional, followed by their partner – but for men it was the other way around: they would be most likely to seek help from their partner, and the next most common response was 'professionals'.

***Relationship issues:* Three-in-ten women and men are most likely to turn to their partners for relationship help, but almost a quarter of people would not seek support from any of the large range of sources listed.**

For relationship issues, 28% of women and 31% of men would be most likely to turn to their partner – the most common response. 23% of women and 25% of men responded 'none of these'. Women (19%) were twice as likely as men (9%) to say they would be most likely to turn to a friend, and much less likely to respond 'don't know' (5% of women and 12% of men responded this way). Around 9% of people would be most likely to turn to a family member (mum, dad or another family member - responses combined), which was a little more common for women than for men. 6% would be most likely to turn to the internet (forums, help sites or internet searches).

***Sex life issues:* Three-in-ten women and men are most likely to turn to their partner for support with sex-life problems, but another three-in-ten would not seek help from any of the large range of sources listed. Men were more likely than women to respond that they didn't know where they would seek help.**

30% of women and 27% of men would be most likely to turn to their partner for support with issues with their sex life – and similar proportions responded 'none of these' (31% of women, 28% of men). Women were half as likely to respond 'don't know' (7% of women, 14% of men), but more likely to say they would be most likely to turn to a friend (7% of women, 5% of men). Being most likely to turn

to a family member for support regarding sex life issues was rare (less than 2%). 5% women and 6% men would be most likely to turn to professionals (doctor, counsellor). Turning mainly to the internet was reported by one-in-ten people (online forums/help sites: 3% of women, 4% of men; internet searches: 7% of women, 7% of men).

Health/medical issue: Four-in-ten women and a third of men would be most likely to seek professional help if they had a health/medical issue, whereas just over a fifth of men and women would turn to their partner. Men were more likely than women to say they don't know where they would seek help, or that they would not seek help from any of the large range of sources listed.

40% of women and 34% of men would be most likely to turn to professionals for help with health/medical issues, while 22% of women and men would be most likely to turn to their partner. Women were less likely to respond 'none of these' (10% of women, 14% of men) or 'don't know' (3% of women, 7% of men). Searching online was the most likely source of help for 7% of women and men, and less commonly, internet forums and help sites (2% women and men) and mobile apps (1%). While fewer than 1% men and women would be most likely to turn to their dad, 6% of women and 2% of men would be most likely to turn to their mum (and 2%, another family member).

Mental health: Men are most likely to seek help from their partner for mental health issues, and although women are most likely to turn to professionals, partners come a close second. Women are more likely to turn to friends or family, whilst men are more likely to say that they would not seek help from any of the large range of sources listed

For mental health issues, 27% of women and 21% of men would be most likely to seek help from a professional, while 23% of women and 27% of men would be most likely to turn to their partners. Fewer women (16%) than men (21%) responded 'none of these', and more women than men would be most likely to turn to a friend (7% of women, 3% of men) or family member (8% of women, 3% of men). 8% would be most likely to turn to the internet (searched online or sought help from internet help sites/forums); 2% would be most likely to turn to books/magazines.

Job/work issues: Four-in-ten women and three-in-ten men would be most likely to turn to their partner for help

38% of women and 31% of men would be most likely to turn to their partner, and 24% of women and 27% of men responded 'none of these'. One-in-ten would be most likely to turn to a friend (10% of women, 9% of men). One-in-ten women (10%) and 4% of men would be most likely to turn to a family member. 7% would be most likely to turn to the internet (searching online or seeking help from internet help sites/forums), whilst 6% of women and 10% of men responded 'don't know'.

SPECULATION:

Differences in men and women's help-seeking suggest that men are less likely to seek help, for a range of problems. This has implications for men's wellbeing, and the health of their relationships.

It may be good news that people are most likely to turn to their partner for help with relationship issues – it's great if couples can sort out their problems between themselves. We hope that, depending on the nature and seriousness of the relationship issues, they are able to draw on other sources of support as well.

With three-in-ten being most likely to turn to their partner for help with sex-life issues, many people clearly feel able to talk openly about sex. What's more concerning is the three-in-ten men and women who would not seek help with their sex-life from any of the wide range of sources we listed. Sex-life issues can be quite diverse, for instance: problems with sexual function (arousal problems, premature ejaculation, trouble maintaining an erection, vaginal dryness), not enjoying sex, or wanting more or less sex than your partner does. Help and support is out there for all of these issues.

Helping a partner with a problem can be rewarding and can be a way of showing that we love and care for them, but it can also be draining. Although partners may be happy to help, it's important for a healthy couple relationship to ensure that both people are supported, and, if possible, that the person with the problem can draw on other sources of help.

Healthy couple relationships are critical for wellbeing and should be supported. When relationships break down, this key source of support can be lost, and this would leave four-in-ten women and a third of men, over a quarter of women and a fifth of men without their main source of help for health/medical issues, almost a quarter of women and over a quarter of men without their main source of help for mental health issues, and four-in-ten women and three-in-ten men without their main source of support for work problems.