Mental health and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic among Spanish residents: Do age and gender matter? An exploratory study

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INTRODUCTION

- Since the WHO designated the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic in March 2020, Spain is one of the top ten countries around the world with the highest number of infected people.

- The COVID-19 pandemic not only damages individuals´ physical but also psychological health, **increasing the probability of developing mental health problems.**

- The exposure of population to the substantial psychosocial stress that the COVID-19 represents seems to lead them to experience **especially among women, younger people and with lower resilience capacity** [1-7]:
    - **Lower feelings of life satisfaction** and
    - **Higher levels of state anxiety and death anxiety**.

  Despite their usefulness in intervention terms, data at this level on Spanish residents are still scarce.

OBJECTIVE

To explore
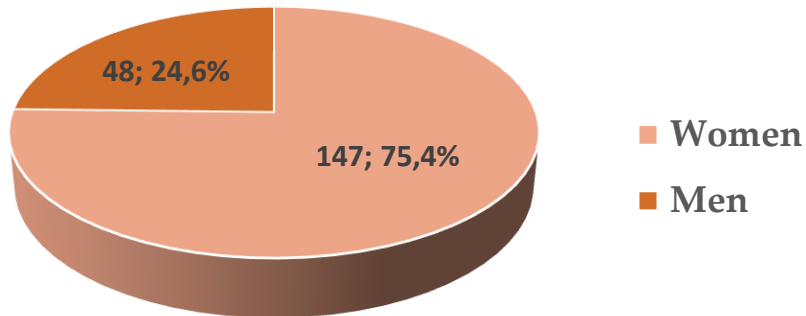the relations among age, gender, levels of resilience and mental health in Spanish adults

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Participants and procedure

195 Spanish residents
Mean age 27.97 years (SD = 12.56, range = 18–60)

Gender

48; 24,6%

147; 75,4%

■ Women

■ Men

Cross-sectional study
Conducted within three months from the state of alarm declared in Spain on March 14, 2020
Self report questionnaire

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Measures

Dependent variables, Spanish versions of [8-11]**:**

1. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). 5 items, 7-point scale (1 = Completely disagree to 7 = Completely agree). $\alpha = 0.86$.
2. State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). 8 items, 5-point scale (0 = Not at all to 4 = Almost always) to measure trait anxiety as well state anxiety. $\alpha = 0.71$ (for both measures).
3. The Death Obsession Scale (DOS), 4 items, 5-point Likert response format (1 = Not at all to 5 = Very much) to answer about death anxiety. $\alpha = 0.87$.
4. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RSIC), 10 items scored on a 5-point scale (0 = Not at all to 4 = Almost always). $\alpha = 0.91$.

Independent variables
AGE three categories:
Emerging adults (from 18 to 27 years old inclusive)
Early adults (from 28 to 44 years old inclusive) y
Middle adults (from 45 to 60 years old inclusive, group 3)
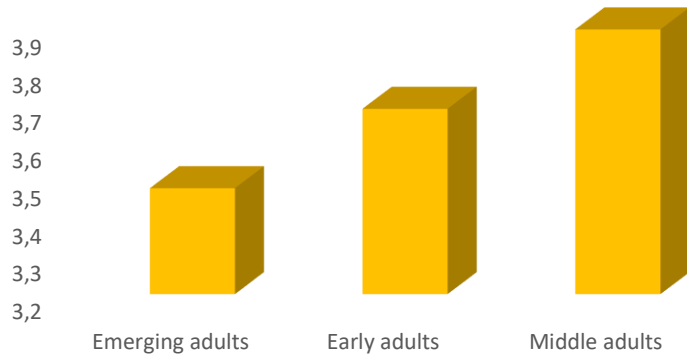**GENDER**: Men/Women

RESULTS

Descriptive: Socio-demographic characteristics by gender and age

		N	%
Gender	Women	147	75.4
	Men	48	24.6
Age Group	Emerging adults	142	72.8
	Early adults	15	7.7
	Middle adults	38	18.5

RESULTS

Kruskal-Wallis H test (Dunn-Bonferroni post hoc test)

Life satisfaction

$\chi 2 = 9.29;\ p \leq 0.01;\ \text{Post-hoc } 1<3$
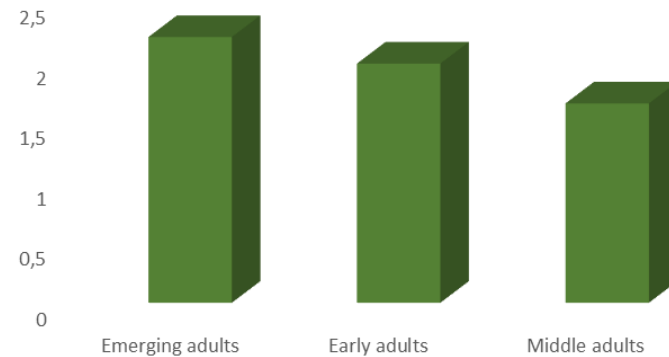
Trait anxiety
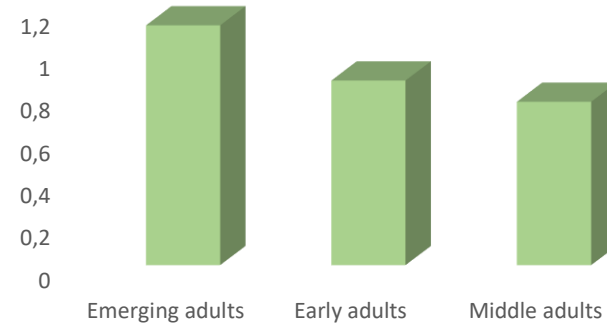
$\chi 2 = 10.45;\ p \leq 0.01;\ \text{Post-hoc } 1>3$

State anxiety
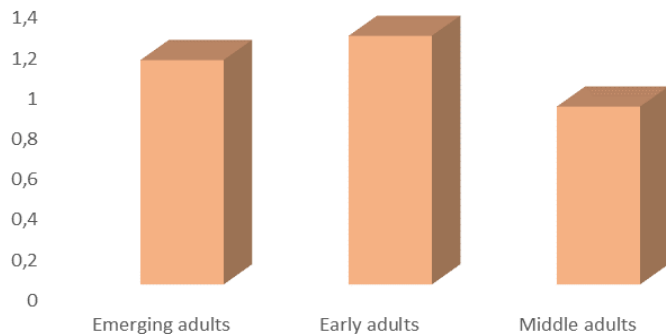
$\chi 2 = 6.96;\ p \leq 0.05;\ \text{Post-hoc } 1>3$

Death anxiety

$\chi 2 = 12.14;\ p \leq 0.01;\ \text{Post-hoc } 1>3$

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RESULTS
Mann-Whitney U test

Death anxiety
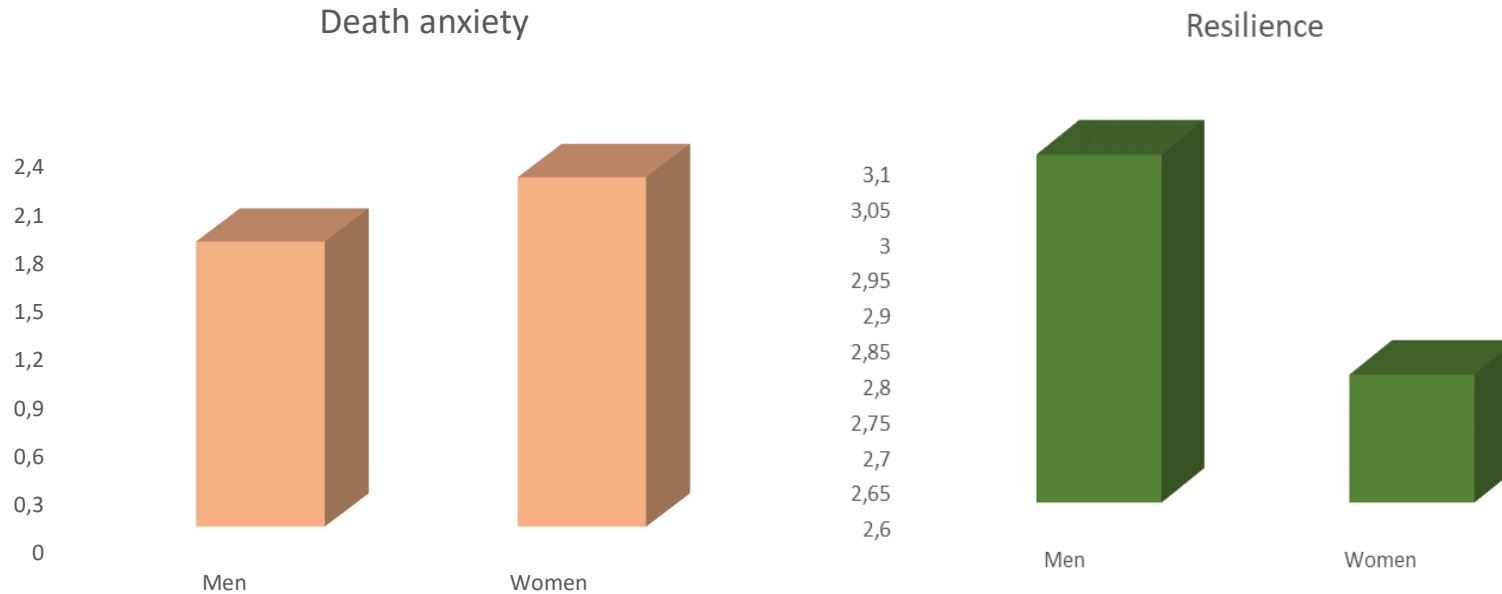
Resilience

U= 4469.50; p ≤ 0.01

U= 2926.0; p ≤ 0.01

Comparing within each age group between men and women the Mann-Whitney U test showed:

- Death anxiety were greater for the youngest women (M = 2.26; *p* ≤ 0.05).

- Emerging (M = 2.75; *p* < 0.01) and early adult women (M = *p* ≤ 0.05) were less resilient.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- **Younger adults** (emerging) **experienced higher levels** of **anxiety** (both trait and state) and **death anxiety**, as well as **lower life satisfaction**.

- **Death anxiety was greater for women** than for men, as well as females, especially the **youngest ones**, were **low resilient** than men.

- In line with previous evidence [2-7], the findings obtained offer support for the consideration that the mental health of women and **young people** has been **more affected** during COVID-19 pandemic.

- In this sense, that **truly relevant personal resource that constitutes resilience** becomes even **more key** if possible. **Strengthening** this important protective factor of mental health **seems crucial** in the case of **younger women**.

- Despite this **study is not without limitations** (e. g. its cross-sectional nature, non-proportional representation of participants in each gender and age group), the **results obtained are of value** for the design and development of **interventions** at this level.

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