INTRODUCTION

- Impacts of the 2008 recession in America have shown that those with large declines in control experienced an increase in recession hardships and distress (Dew & Xiao, 2013).
- Behaviours that represent a higher sense of control (sound financial management) predict higher relationship happiness through the recession (Koltai & Stuckler, 2020).
- With little research on the effect of sense of control can have on relationship satisfaction following a major life event, we investigated the relationship between these two variables in the context of the 2008 recession.
- We hypothesized that for those in relationships, a higher sense of control during the 2008 recession will interact such that for those high on control and high on recession distress, they will report increased relationship satisfaction compared to those with low control and high distress.

METHODS

Data Collected

- Data used in this study was taken from the third wave (2013-2014) of the National Survey of Mid-life in the United States (MIDUS), a longitudinal study examining both physical and mental experiences in midlife, with waves conducted in 1995, 2002, 2013, and a refresher in 2011.
- This wave repeated baseline assessments through phone interviews and self-administered questionnaires with additional questions in areas such as experiences with economic recession.

Participants

- Those who were married or cohabitating at Wave 3 were included in analyses (n=2328).

Measures

- Impact of recession (Ryff et al., 2013-2014)
  o Participants were asked to respond to how they would describe having been impacted by the recession: 1=The recession has been a hardship and caused major changes, 2=The recession has been difficult but not caused any major changes, 3=The recession has not had much effect one way or the other, 4=Overall, the recession has been good for me, I am better off now.
- Relationship in trouble (12 months)
  o Participants were asked to respond to how many times they thought their relationship may be in trouble in the past year: 1=Never, 2=Once, 3=A few times, 4=Most of the time, 5=All of the time.
- Control over life in general at present
  o Participants were asked to rate the amount of control they believe to have had over their life recently: 1=A lot, 2=Some, 3=A little, 4=Not at all.

RESULTS

- Effects of the recession found to be significantly negatively correlated with trouble in relationship and sense of control.
- Level of control positively correlated with relationship trouble.
- The interaction between sense of control and impact of the recession was found to be significant (ß=.049, p<.05), such that at low levels of control and high recession impact, there is the highest level of relationship distress (ß=.077, p<.038), and at high levels of control and high recession impact, there is the highest level of relationship satisfaction (ß=.191, p<.001).

DISCUSSION

- Individuals negatively affected by the recession had higher levels of relationship trouble and lower levels of self-control. We also found a small but significant association between level of control over life and relationship satisfaction.
- In line with our hypothesis, the interaction we found between sense of control and relationship satisfaction is that for individuals who were highly impacted by the recession, those who were high on self-control had higher relationship satisfaction, and those who were low on self-control had lower relationship satisfaction.
- This may be the case because individuals with high self-control are able to lessen the negative consequences of the recession compared to individuals with low self-control, thus allowing them more financial and emotional freedom to attend to their relationship with their partner.
- Adds to knowledge that people with differing characteristics can respond in various ways under the same environmental context.
- Could have implications for treatment styles and approaches to therapy sessions.
- Future research can look at how other personal characteristics (ex. stress regulation, pride, mindfulness, etc.) may vary between individuals under the same environmental setting.