Impact of COVID 19 on youth

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It has been difficult to understand the extent of the impact of COVID pandemic in the different dimensions of human life and its extension. Firstly because of the unexpected nature of the health emergency and secondly because the states' priorities were focusing on responding to the installed health crisis and not focused on producing data to understand how people were experiencing it how it was affecting the lives of youngsters. The World Happiness Report (2021) draws our attention to the fact that studies conducted with adults in wealthy industrialized countries agree on its negative and significant consequences to human development and also on the fact that the pandemic reinforces pre-existing inequalities related with health taking into consideration the fact that younger age groups, women, ethnic minorities and people already facing mental health challenges before COVID-19 were the groups reporting more severe repercussions. In this chapter we'll focus on the impact of the pandemic in young people's lives, and we'll try to bring together data from available studies about consequences of COVID-19 on different spheres, namely, on a mental, social, and political dimensions and discuss on each level about the current situation, its causes, and outcomes.

Mental Health Impact

The Impact of the Pandemic on Young People`s Mental Health

The pandemic situation increased the risk of negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression and isolation among other psychological states having impact on the wellbeing of young people across Europe (Ranta & Mastrotheodoros, 2022). COVID-19 brought a lot of changes to young people's lives. Being an important development period to transitioning to adulthood, the changes introduced concerning young people environment such as the physical distancing, social deprivation, the lack of spaces to socialize and be together with peers had a severe impact on the brain and development (Orben, Tomova & Blakemore, 2020) and consequently on experienced well-being. Young people are one of the most affected groups by the pandemic, being part of the groups who reported more negative outcomes and more adverse experiences together with women, ethnic minorities and people suffering from health conditions before the outset of the pandemic. It was estimated that diagnosable mental health conditions affected about one in eight (13 per cent) children and adolescents aged 6–18 years, with around 50% of mental health conditions arising before the age of 14, and 75% by the mid-20s (Bruining et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021). Thus, young people were already reporting worse mental health compared with groups of adults, being 30% to 80% more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and isolation symptoms in comparison to older age groups, but also more able to identify these symptoms in their daily lives. In fact, data estimates that mental health issues could have doubled or more in young people between 15 and 24 years of age. Different aspects seem to have negatively contributed to their mental health status, especially the

disruptions to access to mental health services, the closure of schools and the labour market crisis greatly affecting young people (Kar et al., 2020; OECD, 2021).

Additionally, as mentioned before, disruptions to access mental health services; closure of schools and labour market crisis greatly affected the young people. The closure of school reduced the protective factors associated with being in an educational setting and the economic recession greatly affected the opportunities for jobs mostly taken by young people or students (seasonal, part-time) becoming more difficult to maintain or to find a job (OECD, 2021).

These changes were also felt in family dynamics and many households were left with reduced support from other relatives and friends while facing the need to rearrange routines, going into new working styles (working from home) and the closure of schools that demanded parents to work in the presence of their children while these were attending home school and demanding their support and supervision. Many families also became more worried about their finances due to the economic impacts of the pandemic, had more family conflicts and experienced tension more significantly (UNICEF, 2022). In fact, lower socio-economic status was found to be a risk factor for experiencing stress and depressive symptoms and higher socio-economic status was found to be a protective factor for externalized behaviours (Sharma et al, 2021). Moreover, challenges concerning housing conditions were faced by many families who experienced anxiety related with house harmony, overcrowding or lack of outside facilities Children and teenagers became more at risk because families and young people didn't have enough support from services designed to help them in these uncertain times and there was simultaneously a decrease of the help provided by the social networks such as neighbours and the community (NYA, 2020).

Even though the consequences of the pandemic period differ from person to person, the increase of negative outcomes associated with the pandemic period seems to be connected, among other factors, with the experience of health related-anxiety associated with Coronavirus (to be infected, to die, to infect others), the mental health outcomes that arouse together with the financial struggles and uncertainty, the obstacles that came from the new family arrangements that needed to be made because of the lockdown (working from home, home-schooling, housing conditions, etc.) and the mental health consequences that resulted from the movement restrictions and the closure of services that promoted leisure and fulfilling activities (such as sports, after school programmes, cultural spaces) (Banks et al., 2021).

The Psychological Impact of the Pandemic on Youth: Current and Future Consequences

We can only estimate the extent of the impact of COVID-19 on individuals, families, and communities. On the one hand because the pandemic hasn't finished and on the other hand because there are consequences that can only be roughly foreseen.
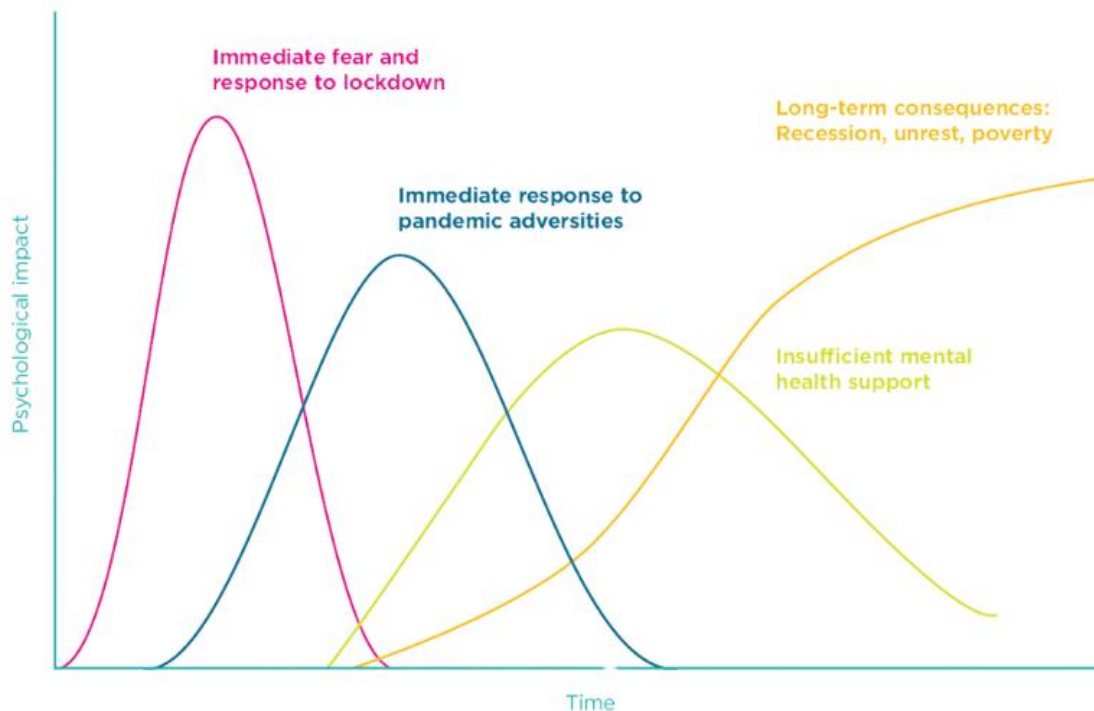
Figure: Time horizons of key mental health effects of the pandemic. World Happiness Report 2021. Pp.110

The figure above illustrates how different phases of the pandemic period influenced the psychological impact of COVID-19. The first phase and the second phase represent initial stage responses. The first curve is very related to the fear of the virus and the concerns about the governmental decisions to tackle the health crisis. The second is related to additional obstacles that appeared after the governmental decisions about matters such as economy, social and health areas and their direct or indirect impact on people's lives. The other two curves represent the effects resulting from the long-term experience of a health crisis that brought lack or insufficiency of adequate mental health services and the impacts of the recession and the increase of poverty and tiredness (Banks et al., 2021).

Studies from different countries (Italy, Germany, Australia, Canada) found an increase of youth symptoms reported during the first wave of pandemic and a decrease in perceived well-being. These studies point out that 64% of young people (18-34 years of age) are at risk of depression and that the lowest level of reported well-being was reached in the spring of 2021 (Brazienė & Petkovic, 2021). In a study from Young Minds (2020), 41% of young participants agreed that coronavirus had made their life much worse, 87% felt lonely or isolated in lockdown. Most of the concerns the participants expressed were related with anxiety about school, pressure about exams, adaptation to new routines, social distancing from getting or spreading the virus to someone, loneliness, or loss of friendship, decline of mental health or taking public transportation.

Systematic reviews covering more than 130000 children and adolescents across 22 countries, carried out to understand the immediate effects of the pandemic in mental health, underlined higher levels of depression, fear, anxiety, anger, irritability, negativity, conduct disorder, alcohol and substance use and sedentary behaviours in youngsters, compared with pre-pandemic rates.

These works point out the increase of depression symptoms, which includes sadness, loss of interest in activities, hopelessness, low energy, irritability, and guilt, especially among girls, and externalizing behavioral problems, which includes anger, negativity, irritability, which can be related with the increased alcohol and substance use and abuse, the last one, particularly among boys (Dumas et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2021; Tee et al., 2021). Also internalized emotions, common triggers for psychopathology, are easily overlooked, especially by busy and stressed family members and friends, which can silently reduce well-being and mental health (Jones et al., 2021).

Maia & Dias (2020), in a early study about the psychological impacts of lockdown in university students, revealed significantly higher levels of anxiety, depression and stress compared with those in erstwhile, Also other studies pointed out university students as a vulnerable population, but as an heterogeneous population, these vulnerabilities amplify regarding gender, ethnicity and family income, among others and can even trigger psychopathology, e.g., obsessive compulsive disorders, eating disorders, burnout, risk behaviours and suicidal thoughts (Iorio et al., 2021; Browning et al., 2021). Regarding the intersection between academic and economic impacts, university students seem to be particularly exposed to emotional instability, anxiety and depressive symptoms, also demotivation and hopelessness, frequently questioning their academic journey and first steps on a professional career that seems interrupted. These were some of the outcomes regarding the uncertainty of the tuition fees payment, especially working students who had been laid off, fired or dismissed, the swift change for online evaluations and the pressure to maintain grades, the data collection for thesis that were forcibly cancelled, as well as their internships, that jeopardizes graduation. Also displaced students, who had to return home, some of the times, from where they fled (e.g., domestic violence, homophobic, transphobic violence), increasing their risk exposure (Iorio et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Maia & Dias, 2020).

The impact of the pandemic in daily life can also be detected in especially irregular sleep and sedentarism, both associated with lower life quality and lower self-esteem, which can increase all the above (Sharma et al., 2021).

However, data is sparse, considering the geographical, demographic, cultural, and economic ampleness. Still, the consequences of not addressing youth mental health conditions include the risk of suicide, which is currently a leading cause of mortality among boys and girls aged 15-19 years old, lower uptake of sexual and reproductive health interventions, and lower educational achievement, among others. Longer term impacts of neglecting youth mental health, range from lowering opportunities for girls and boys, reducing their chance to experience a positive and meaningful life as adults, to broader social consequences, including higher rates of unemployment, drug use and exposure to violence (UNICEF, 2022).

COVID 19 has expanded the inequalities presented before. The previous economic or social inequalities became more severe, affecting mostly vulnerable groups of young people such as the poor, marginalized, migrant, homeless and LGBTQIA+ (Lavizzari et al., 2020). The closing of schools seems to have contributed both to the significant disruption of the mental health

support being given to young people (OECD, 2021) but also increased the gap of inequalities related to education and gender roles (EIGE, 2021). Other studies suggest that children and adolescents reported perceived benefits from home confinement, such as spending time with family, and school closure, relief from academic stressors as bullies, which correlated positively with life satisfaction (Sharma et al., 2021). Nonetheless, youth mental health has been particularly vulnerable, deeply challenged in the last couple of years by the pandemic reality, with consequences that will endure long after it ends.

Strengthening Mental Health Support for Young People in the Aftermath of COVID-19

COVID 19 continues to cast a shadow over young people's lives and is now crucial to invest in understanding how help can be provided to young people to bounce back from the negative effects of the pandemic. Many young people resorted to youth centres support and to online hotlines asking for help being provided at distance (OECD, 2021).

The psychological services using telecommunication technologies exposed the concept of telepsychology. Although it had been existing for some time, social restrictions due to Covid-19 and an increasing digital literacy, catalysed the interest in it (Iorio et al, 2021). As in any professional context, telepsychology has its limitations and strengths. Regarding the first ones, the lack of in person contact can constrain the therapeutic alliance, which, in some cases, can challenge the patient to engage in the process due to the online set and accessing only partially to nonverbal behaviour. Other limitations relate to crisis intervention, that can be particularly challenging in online contexts, due to distance (e.g., suicidal thoughts, domestic violence). Also, information security, especially if the professional set is doubtful and raises questions as if some other person is listening (e.g., home office) and info exclusion, both by patient and/or by the psychologist as well as the quality of online conditions, can weaken positive outcomes (e.g., bad internet connection, lack of privacy) (Aboujaoude et al., 2015; APA, 2013).

On the other hand, telepsychology enables reaching more people, especially the ones more isolated, vulnerable or that in other ways would never access professional services. It also avoids travel, with time and money gains. Because individual protection equipment (e.g., masks) is not required, it can boost the interaction and balance the distance of the online context (Hipólito et al., 2020).

Despite the resources available targeting young people's mental health, there's a need to increase the mental health support provided in the social contexts that young people easily access, namely in education, work, and health settings. However, this requires the existence of policies encouraging young people to stay at school or to find a job/occupation (OECD, 2021).

Youth organizations are also advocating for a recovery plan that can meet the needs of young people regarding the mental health challenges they are facing. Young Minds (2020) highlights the importance of increasing and reinforcing the access of young people to mental health services, funding this support in schools, colleges and universities, a revision of policies in educational settings that can allow a transition period for young people struggling with trauma

and emotional distress, wellbeing campaigns targeting youth and governmental long term strategies that can empower communities to address inequalities and to prioritize early intervention.

Social Impact

The Covid-19 pandemic hit hard on all age groups throughout Europe, but as several studies from different European countries show, children and young people were the ones who suffered the most severe mental consequences, brought about by social distancing, confinement to home, deficits of remote schooling and home-schooling, but also by lack of psychological support of peers as well as institutions offering support to children and young people with pre-existing conditions.

Addressing the Impact on Vulnerable Youth during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Although it may appear that youths are less at risk for COVID-19 fatality, all youth, particularly those who are vulnerable, are experiencing abrupt terminations of employment, educational programs, and social and community services as a result of lockdown and social distancing measures under the intention of eliminating the spread of Covid-19 virus (Gabriel, et al., 2020; Osofsky, et al., 2020). Besides, the impact on youth surpasses social measures and home-schooling. A sudden change in their everyday lives has been created, while problems such as poverty, abuse, and neglect pre-existed, resulting in the stage of their rise during the pandemic. Consequently, the need for necessary support has been generated with no feasibility to be given (Osofsky, et al., 2020).

The Impact of COVID-19 on Youth: Challenges in Employment, Education, and Social Support

Even though the Covid-19 pandemic may not be the first pandemic or natural disaster in the world, studies show that the duration of previous natural and technological disasters could have been at least predicted. However, the Covid-19 pandemic's duration, and thereupon the recovery process of it, is far from the indicated (Osofsky, et al., 2020). As has been stated in the same study, an important difference in the recovery phase between natural and technological disasters and the Covid-19 pandemic is that people during the disasters could have helped in person, still, this is unable to occur during the Covid-19 pandemic. Up until now, after lockdown and strict restrictions, people used to remain aloof. Humanity became accustomed to being frightened to come into physical contact with other people and enjoy the company of others without fear of contracting Covid-19 virus.

Despite that lockdown and strict measures are far behind us now, still, we are far from the recovery phase as the pandemic has not finished yet and humanity on the current stage is trying to determine the effects that this pandemic created.

Based on a recent study examining the social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on students in Greece, they have encountered adverse effects on youth. Concerning young people, methods of social separation and lockdown appear to have generated challenges relating to their

socialization, and interactions with family. Hence, it appears to have had an impact on human communication, human relationships, and the quality of those (Diamanti & Nikolaou, 2021). As has been examined by (Courtney et al., 2020), Covid-19 distancing measures avoided the detection of anxiety disorders. Mental obstacles existed pre-Covid-19 pandemic, but since the beginning of the pandemic, mental and health well-being turned out to be crucial for humanity. Youth who were facing mood and anxiety disorders pre-pandemic, as well as the ones affected by the pandemic and need treatment, do not have access or full access to health services as they are considered 'nonessential' services. Furthermore, behaviours that would normally be considered red flags for emotional affliction, such as physical distance and reduced levels of activity, are encouraged as desirable and able to be adapted, which is ensuing a greater extent to the problem.

While the acknowledgement of the problem has been initiated, Gabriel et al., 2020, in their article are investigating leisure behaviour in youth and its importance during the Covid-19 pandemic. As has been stated, healthy growth is essential for the right development of mental health and social skills as well as in diminishing diseases in future life. In many instances, studies have shown that youth staying in social isolation with their parents while eliminating or even cancelling any possibility of socializing, there are risks of degradation of mental health. Authors of the study have introduced SOPS (support, opportunities, programs, and services) which has shown to be more likely to occur in preserving one's health in the future. Nevertheless, vulnerable youth groups who do not have access to SOPS appeared to be substantially impacted as they presented great impacts on their health and wellbeing. These marginalized populations required food, clothes, safe spaces, or employment, which could not be found during the early phases of the Covid-19 outbreak as well as up to this moment.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath show to have created emotional, material, and financial difficulties. In particular, research by (Power et al., 2020) has indicated that youth unemployment has substantial and long-term consequences on income and health that extend beyond the financial crisis period, as well as concerns of the present and future unstable employment. Besides, the daily media coverage of instances of patients in the hospital, as well as the daily growth in death rates in many nations around the world, generated unexpected emotional consequences, particularly in young people. Fear and the persistent stress of the disease have raised psychological pressure that has been causing depression in many people (Diamanti & Nikolaou, 2021). Without SOPS, disadvantaged youth have fewer structured leisure and recreation choices besides accessing the internet and social media platforms (Gabriel et al., 2020). Hence, that affects the psychological aspect of the youths.

Moreover, schools, public parks, community centres, and recreational youth programs, which are crucial to the physical, mental, and emotional health of youth, are encountering stresses on their capacity to deliver services. Many of these support systems are losing governmental subsidies because of closures, forcing them to suspend or fire employees who contribute as adult caregivers in the lives of disadvantaged youths. Once more, the health of youth is exposed to danger. Overall these findings are in accordance with findings reported by (Courtney et al., 2020; Power et al., 2020; Diamanti & Nikolaou, 2021; Lips 2021) when it comes to youth support and especially the vulnerable groups of youth. Regardless of the occurrences, the results of these

hardships are leading to jeopardy in youths' health on all levels (physical, mental, and emotional). As has been described, policies that exercise social control in this regard adversely affect vulnerable youth by placing them in social institutions such as youth justice or foster care, where their probability of enduring trauma increases considerably. These consequences may be amplified during pandemics such as COVID-19, which impose social distancing measures.

The Impact of Social Media on the Mental Health and Socialization of Youth during the COVID-19 Pandemic

With the rise of Social Media Platforms and their establishment in our everyday routines, their importance, and the effect in the lives of young people has dramatically increased, especially during the 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the health, safety, and daily lives of all individuals. Adolescents may be uniquely sensitive to this abrupt disruption in their lives due to the biological and psychological changes that occur during this developmental period. Social media has rapidly transformed the ways in which adolescents socialize and interact with one another, which has contributed to an ongoing debate about whether social media is helping or harming teens today. The role of social media and its impact on the mental health of children and young people and their socialization in the above-mentioned situation could also be considered from different angles.

While some studies conducted across Europe report the importance of internet use and digitalization in helping children and young people cope with the existing situation during the pandemic, others find that that the significant increase in time spent on social media platforms further influenced the traumatic experience of fear, anxiety, depression, and rarely even fear of conspiracy and control.

Since children and young people already spend a considerable amount of time on the internet, the confinement to home and long-distance schooling through the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic further increased the number of hours spent in front of a screen. The lack of non-virtual peer association and the need for validation and belonging, which are especially strong in the age group of young people, has sent most the European youth to spend additional hours on social media platforms, amongst which YouTube, Instagram, Tic Toc, Snapchat, Facebook, and WhatsApp appear to be the most frequently used.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media can be classified based on application. Thus, authors create more specific categories of social media and distinguish them as follows: collaboration projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds, all of them pre-existent to the pandemic.

But in addition to their advantage of connecting people, social media services also entail an addictive potential due to psychological mechanisms built in by developers to achieve strong user loyalty and high usage times. Since puberty is associated with both peaks in the desire to experience sensations, novelties, and rewards as well as limitations in the capability to exert cognitive control, adolescents are considered particularly at risk for the development of problematic social media use (PSMU). PSMU resembles pathological and at-risk addictive

behavioural patterns and is often accompanied by symptoms of mental disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and disordered eating. Affected adolescents show problems in their emotion regulation which is considered a core component of psychiatric diseases. Moreover, PSMU, as well as increased social media usage times in general are associated with academic performance deterioration in adolescents. Significant correlations between the frequency and duration of social media use and PSMU could be repeatedly shown.

The Complex Relationship between Social Media Usage and Youth Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Early studies reveal a preponderance of worries about the psychological and social repercussions of the pandemic response, particularly on young people. According to a recent UK analysis, 83% of young people with mental health difficulties said COVID-19 had a negative influence on their mental health, with specific worries about loss of social interaction and scheduled activities. In this study, young individuals with a variety of mental health issues, including 'obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety disorders, and anorexia nervosa', particularly said that the crisis had exacerbated their already existing symptoms. Also, one in every four young people who had previously accessed mental health services before the pandemic said that they no longer had access because of the crisis. This is an important finding in the understanding of the extended level of difficulties in young people's health during Covid-19 and especially in the ones with pre-existing difficulties (Power et al., 2020). It is by now generally accepted that the Covid-19 pandemic affected humanity's mental health at a greater level than the mortality rates worldwide. On the other hand, there is evidence by (Diamanti & Nikolaou, 2021), that relies on the measurement of the indicators of social separation and isolation at home. According to that, 73% of youth saw the measures as beneficial for the decrease of the COVID-19 pandemic, while 27% of the sample regarded the measure as negative. It remains unclear to which degree this review is attributed to the health and wellbeing of the youth or is referring solely to the spreading of the virus without acknowledging other health effects that may be implied.

Furthermore, studies have indicated in Ireland that 51% of young people between the ages of 15–and 24 among those who are available for work and not enrolled in school are unemployed. This is particularly important when investigating the mental health effects that have been induced due to unemployment rates that are linked with the Covid-19 pandemic. Results of this analysis indicate 2.5 times the adult unemployment rate and nearly 2.5 times the highest unemployment rate in the same age group during the most recent economic downturn (Power et al., 2020). Comparing the statistics shared by Eurostat between the third quarter of 2020 and 2019 proclaims the decrease in the employment rate of young people in all nations. The largest reductions in the share of employed individuals aged 15-29 in Lithuania, Portugal, Ireland, and Spain exceeded 5%. Hungary, Finland, France, Austria, and Romania, on the other hand, saw decreases of less than 2%. Moreover, 16 out of 27 EU Member States did not demonstrate a full recovery in the third quarter of 2021, as the employment rate among youth individuals remained lower than the percentage recorded in the third quarter of 2019. Portugal, Bulgaria, Latvia,

Czechia, and Poland had the greatest declines; all at least minus 3% in 2021 compared to 2019. On the contrary, Ireland, France, and Slovenia had the greatest gains in the percentage of employed individuals aged 15-29 in the third quarter of 2021 compared to the pre-COVID condition; at least 2% in 2021 compared to 2019 (Ec.europa.eu. 2022).

Taking into account findings related with the use of social media during the pandemic, the research conducted by (Hudimova et al., 2021) in the beginning of 2021 shows that during the global COVID-19 pandemic, young web users gave preference for passive social media use rather than for communication. The obtained results showed an expansion in the time spent via social media by young web users.

It was found that the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by the participants' experience of negative emotions and fears of the unknown and substantiated that increasing immersion of young web users in social media was a kind of strategy to escape from bad thoughts and that that uncontrolled use of social media caused sleep disorders during isolation. The study proved that young people spend almost all day online due to the obsessive pattern of social media involvement and/or procrastination, which often provoked withdrawal syndrome upon the attempt to distract from them. The lack of controlled time spent on social media during self-isolation provoked an exacerbation of anxiety, apathy, depressed mood, and a sense of isolation from social reality.

The obtained results provide evidence that the causal relations of passive social media use provoke an exacerbation of feelings of alienation, disrupt the healthy rhythm of sleep, and psychological state of young web-users during the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Hudimova et al., 2021).

Several other studies were conducted with the aim to assess emotional-behavioural symptoms, binge eating, problematic social media usage, and attachment representations of adolescents during the pandemic, comparing them with similar samples in pre-pandemic youth, as well as to investigate the potential connection between problematic social media usage and insecure attachment as risk factors for more psychopathological symptoms.

A study of Italian adolescents aged 12-17 (Muzi et al., 2021) shows that the adolescents were confined at home for 3 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed them to feelings of fear, uncertainty, and loneliness that may have increased their vulnerability to emotional-behavioural symptoms (e.g., anxiety) and binge-eating attitudes. Potential risk factors for these psychopathological symptoms are problematic social media usage and attachment insecurity. In the same study, problematic social media usage was related to more binge eating and emotional-behavioural problems, predicting 5.4% of both delinquent and attention problems. Attachment disorganization predicted 16.5% of internalizing problems, somatic complaints, and social and identity-related problems. Confinement did not increase adolescents' internalizing symptoms -i.e., vulnerability to mood disorders of an anxious-depressive type, which even decreased. However, teenagers may have expressed their discomfort through other problems and symptoms of social media disorder. Further studies should explore the role of adolescents'

problematic social media usage and attachment insecurity as risk factors for additional psychopathological symptoms (Muzi et al., 2021).

But not all research on the topic has provided alarming results. The study carried out in the Slovak Republic (Tkacova et al., 2021) confirms that during the pandemic, the use of social media by the young respondents contributed significantly to their well-being. This is the case when social media was used by high school students as a tool in promoting personal interests, motivation, communication and interpersonal connectivity, preferred forms of online education, and online games.

Another positive role of social media use during the Covid-19 isolation period was identified by as the ability to expand the circle of communication with users from around the world, to be at the center of events and current trends, to create interesting creative content, and to participate in interesting discussions (Hudimova et al., 2021).

Nurturing Resilience and Building Positive Connections amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Attempts are currently being made to understand the nature of the many consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Courtney et al. (2020), suggests possible ways to begin overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic effects on humanity. A plethora of new internet resources for children, youth, and families have recently emerged, recognizing that they now require direct access to techniques and information which they would previously have obtained from a health care professional. This study also reports that as youth spend plenty of time at home with their parents during the Covid-19 lockdown, parents are the ones responsible and more adequate to notice any health-related difficulties that concern their children. Encapsulating the exact words of the authors:

'Caregivers can exemplify the philosophy "when there is a crisis, we encourage each other and work together to solve problems," as opposed to "when there is a crisis, we fall apart." This modelling will help build resilience in young people' (Courtney et al., 2020).

A more systematic and theoretical analysis is required for acknowledging how mental health difficulties of the youth will increase, and thus empowerment and confidence will flourish to fight unemployment rates and health conditions. The report of Power et al., 2020, indicates that the development of digital platforms is especially crucial for youths since they are digital natives who search on the internet first for information on their mental health. Through video games, emerging platforms provide partially directed adaptations of established therapies (such as cognitive behavioural therapy). Alternatives to established therapies that are scalable, effective, and youth-friendly are available. Emerging internet services are democratizing access to new and specialized therapies, such as those used to treat depression and psychosis in young people. Research efforts are primarily in connection with mental health and the consequences (e.g., fear, depression, or isolation) that this situation has caused in society and in the lives of specific

individuals, especially children and young people. The fact remains that in conditions of isolation, lifestyle changes are necessary. The increase in the use of social media during the pandemic brings rather intense and unstoppable changes and habits that have an impact on an individual and their well-being, some of them bearing positive and some of them quite negative effects on young people in general.

Last but not least, It is important to go through what *(Diamanti & Nikolaou, 2021)* examined. It is critical to consider updating and improving communication and the development of social contacts through various engaging activities that will build human and friendly relationships. An individual should be encouraged by positive thinking, keeping their focus away from negative news media and staying away from social fears that make human relations more distant. Likewise, feelings of self-control and protection should create new communication networks that do not rely solely on digital media. Social activities with youth involvement and live communication must be developed immediately so that the conditions created by the pandemic do not cement and disturb man's distinctive social nature.

Political Impact

"Young people are among the groups who are disproportionately affected by the current pandemic in both the short and long term (ILO 2021, OECD 2021a). Job opportunities for young people remain heavily affected by the COVID-19 crisis, and new labour market entrants account for a large share of the rise in joblessness among young people. Work-based learning opportunities and apprenticeships have been hard hit. Young people are also reporting significant financial pressures. For working students, the lack of temporary job opportunities may cause challenges for financing of education and living costs. The mental health of many young people is also being severely affected and the COVID-19 crisis has shed light on the importance of ensuring safe, accessible and affordable homes for young people, especially for those no longer living with their parents (OECD, 2021b).

As the impact of the pandemic on young people's work opportunities, income, educational outcomes and mental health are interconnected and are likely to worsen over time, particularly for disadvantaged youth, the European Youth Forum (2021) calls for a youth-inclusive recovery, "crucial for a group that has still not fully recovered from the 2008 financial and economic crisis" (Moxon et al., 2021, p. 4)

The parts above come from a study by the EU on youth in Europe: Effects of Covid-19 on their economic and social situation finished in 09/2021. As you could already read before, youth is one of the groups that has been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Another important element of this text is the last sentence referring to an earlier crisis from which young people haven't fully recovered yet.

One of the benefits of crises is that they make us think about the current conditions and causes of the crises. Each time they give us the opportunity to choose in another direction, another approach. To be able to do this, we need a better understanding of the system that causes the crises and the way we deal with them. Therefore, we need to get deeper into the topic of politics.

<u>What do we mean and what do we understand about political?</u>

Politics (from Greek: *Πολιτικά, politiká*, 'affairs of the cities') is the set of activities that are associated with making decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations between individuals, such as the distribution of resources or status (<u>https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics</u>)

While reading this definition there are two things that are important here:
- Set of activities associated with making decisions in groups.
- Other forms of power relations between individuals

This is different from the interpretation we often give to politics since in the most common understanding we are focusing on the last part of the definition, and not on the first part which also refers to our work with our youngsters.

What we are mostly referring to is party politics where the different parties within your country decide upon what happens depending on who won the previous elections. We refer to this as democratic, but is it democratic? Do we really take part in the decision taking in our country, state or city/village?
 Here we already see the influence of power relations.
 "Every relationship of domination, of exploitation, of oppression is by definition violent, whether or not the violence is expressed by drastic means."
Paulo Freire, 'Pedagogy Of The Oppressed'

It is important to see that there is an imbalance here. Decisions on a political level are mostly made without consulting the people that are being influenced by the decisions. This happens within governments, but also in, for example schools. In how many schools are the school rules made in dialogue with the student? And what about the rules that apply in your youth organization for the youth coming to your youth center?
In a study by the <u>OECD of 2021</u> on youth and covid-19: Response, recovery and resilience we see what youth needs to trust or distrust policymakers.

Clear and open data	Lack of reliable information
Transparent and effective communication	Partisan decisions and late action
Quick, decisive and evidence-based decisions	Lack of support to most vulnerable
Focus on citizens and most vulnerable	Insufficient capacities and coordination
Collaboration across institutions and with CSOs	Risk to the integrity of public institutions

Notes: "CSOs" refers to civil society organisations. The elements highlighted in the figure summarise answers of survey respondents to an open question asking them to motivate the change in trust in government that they reported.
Figure: Public governance drives changes in trust, OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), 2020

This brings us to the impact of capitalism, the system we are living in, where the focus is on profit and prosperity. Hereby we see an increasing focus on efficiency from an economic point of view. Decisions made should be profitable and cost-efficient. This approach was used first for factories, but we already use this language within our clinics, elderly houses, and schools. So, what about wellbeing?

During the covid period we noticed that there was a hard pull on the handbrake few months in the epidemic. There was panic about this unknown situation that could not be controlled as we were used to. Everything got closed, besides the most needed organizations. Even planes stayed on the ground. Imagine!

After a while we got back to the paradigm of the importance of our economy. We need cash flow, and people need to continue working to be able to make this profit. This had an impact on the contact we could have with people around us. We faced restrictions we didn't always understand, and therefore agreed upon.
We were unable to meet with more than 2 or 3 (or 4) people for a long time. We faced social distance in its literal and physical form. Getting together with friends, taking part in live activities, coming together to organize something, … Got a lot more difficult.
It didn't take long before wellbeing got on the foreground, for the first time in a long period! The question now is: 'how can we keep it here?'
"The trust of the people in the leaders reflects the confidence of the leaders in the people."
Paulo Freire, 'Pedagogy Of The Oppressed'

So, let's talk some more about leadership and its power dynamics!

Leadership
Leadership refers to the traits, qualities and behaviours of a leader; leaders were traditionally thought to be "born with qualities" and divided between task-oriented or people-oriented leaders (Horner, 1997). As of today, leadership is considered as something more flexible and complex, such as Davis (2003) view of the leader as someone who defines a new direction, being

creative and solving problems. A study on leadership says that the strongest factor making someone see themselves as a leader tends to be holding a position of power unless they are already high in the *hierarchy* (Eddy & VanDerLInden, 2006). The study adds that while this is true for both men and women, women are less likely to hold positions of power and their view of leadership tends to be more cooperative-based than that of men.

Today, the most commonly used model of leadership is the full range leadership model as expressed by Bass and Avolio (1994). It defines three types of leaders, transformative, transactional, and passive avoidant. The transformation has a motivational effect, it stimulates the followers and considers them personally. The transaction gives positive and negative feedback in exchange of attitude or work performance. The passive/avoidant kind of leader acts as if he did not care about what happened to the followers or to the project. There are plenty of studies showing which kind of leadership influences the project and the followers, the results are complex, except for one that repeats itself, the passive/avoidant leader has the worst effect on its followers and project.

Power dynamics

The first categorization of authority in sociology was that of Weber (1994). He distinguished three types of authority. *Traditional authority* is derived from the society's long held beliefs, it's either inherited or religious based, for example a chieftain, shaman, king, or priest. *Charismatic authority* refers to that of an individual that holds the qualities regarded as highly valuable by the members of their society, some great examples are Ghandi, Martin Luther King or Tito. *Rational-legal authority* is based on a set of laws or a constitution, the leaders are designed to apply the laws and power may be transferred; this is the kind of authority that democracies hold.

Weber understood the world as a struggle of wills, and power was the ability of one person to exercise its will over others. There have been many other definitions of power over time (put some). In general, and we forget about this, there are different forms of power.

- We have power over which is the most common approach to power in the world at this moment. This type of power is built on force, coercion, domination, and control, and motivates largely through fear. This form of power is built on a belief that power is a finite resource that can be held by individuals, and that some people have power and some people do not.
- We have power with which puts dialogue central. Power within is shared power that grows out of collaboration and relationships. It is built on respect, mutual support, shared power, solidarity, influence, empowerment, and collaborative decision making.
- We have power to: Power to refers to the "productive or generative potential of power and the new possibilities or actions that can be created without using relationships of domination. It is the power to make a difference, to create something new, or to achieve goals.

- We have power from within: Power within is related to a person's "sense of self-worth and self-knowledge; it includes an ability to recognize individual differences while respecting others". Power within involves people having a sense of their own capacity and self-worth. Power within allows people to recognize their "power to" and "power with" and believe they can make a difference.

This dimension of power over is also something we find back in our approach towards nature. For some reason we have the idea that we should keep nature under control. That we, who cause climate change, can keep on controlling earth and what earth needs depending on the needs of our economies and their growth. This thought derives from the idea that there is a hierarchy on earth, where humans are on top of the pyramid. Even though trees for example have already lived for more than 300.000.000 years on this planet, the modern human being has been here for 300.000 years. The idea of hierarchy is a clear example of power over (Wohlleben, 2019).

What we need towards nature is a shift in the power dynamics from power over, to power with.

It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation."
Paulo Freire, 'Pedagogy Of The Oppressed'

Civic Engagement
Using power as the main paradigm on power automatically results in people being oppressed, most of the time unknowingly. It is said that being selfish is a major trait of human nature but to what extent can we take this claim to be an absolute truth? And why is this so widely taken as a rule of thumb?

You see, although it is undeniable that selfishness is an integral piece of the puzzle that makes human survival possible this claim seems to disregard a much bigger portion of the human instinct, the need for social interaction.
This must be taken into consideration when speaking of politics. As mentioned, beforehand communication and interaction is an important part if not the most important part of political action. This brings us to our current topic, civic engagement.

What do we mean by civic engagement?
Civic engagement is a combined effort with the intent of making a difference in the civic life of one's community. It revolves around the development of knowledge, skills, values and motivations necessary to achieve said difference (Erlich,2000).

Civic engagement can be achieved through actions such as voting, volunteering or service learning, to name a few. In recent years many studies have proved that civic actions akin to the

ones listed above not only improve the political scene of the location they were performed at but also provide benefits to the people that participate in them. **This is especially true for children, teenagers, and young adults.** A study made in 2002 by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation provided high school and middle school students with a plethora of activities related to civic engagement and concluded that the students who participated revealed positive changes in the following areas (Hair, Michelsen & Zaff, 2002):

● Improved achievements on academic tests
● Lower dropout and suspension rates and improved engagement with school
● Increased attention to the news
● Increased likelihood of performing community service-related activities

Similarly a study on child participation in the EU political and democratic life written in April of 2021 by members of the European Commission stated that not only is children participation shown to cause notable positive change on the children themselves but also on policy- making and the political scene overall ("Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life",2021).

How are our bodies of government endorsing and supporting civic action with the intent of facilitating access to our younger generations?

The endorsement of youth civic engagement

In recent years an ever-growing effort to include children and young adults in the political sphere has sprouted across multiple nations. In 2021 for example, 27 out of the 28 countries of the European Union had implemented youth councils into their governmental structure. Additionally, children's and youth parliaments constitute a common permanent structure in 15 of these countries and at the EU level (European Youth Parliament). Other forms of mechanisms designed towards youth civic participation include public organizations and civil bodies ("Study on child participation in EU political and democratic life",2021).

According to the data gathered from the study listed above the organizational structure and responsibilities of these councils are not consistent among the different countries and even at a national level many of these organizations have overlapping responsibilities. However, when it comes to the activities provided for members, they are not so different. From debates to forums to workshops and even civic oriented projects there are a multitude of opportunities being offered that certainly display the amount of effort put into the inclusion of younger generations in politics. So, what steps can we take to make this effort even better?

In the study, when inquired about the main difficulties they faced when attempting to be more politically active, the participants, all children between the ages of 7 to 19 and from various backgrounds, ethnicities, and genders, pointed out 3 major topics:

Local vs Global civic action

Overall, participants were generally more invested and positive about local structures than those at a national or international level. When confronted with this information participants said that in local action, they felt more seen and were more invested because it was easier to relate to events and themes they witness in their own lives.

Lack of follow up on child originated recommendations/ projects
"We have no way to control the people responsible for decision-making. There are structures for participation, but reaching the institutions depends solely on the will of the people responsible."

The comment above originated from one of the participants when inquired about the lack of follow up and feedback on projects the children worked on while they were a part of the study and it displays the feeling of being ignored and not heard that occurs when there is little or no structural support oriented towards the follow through of potential new ideas and projects provided by the participants.

Distrust of figures in power
In accordance with the previous topic many of the participants reveal a significant amount of distrust towards people in power and towards decisions they struggle to understand. This phenomenon can be traced to lack of clear and transparent communication between both parties.

All these subjects seem to follow a trend that leads back to communication, integration, inclusion, and the ability to make a connection with the younger generations.

It is then of no surprise that the current worldwide pandemic has resurged and emphasized many of these problems in youth civic action.

The impact of Covid in Youth Civic Engagement and the Lessons we can take from it
The current pandemic has dominated the world with feelings of fear, isolation and distrust in the systems put in place by our leaders. With it many of the issues around the involvement of our young in the political world were brought to the forefront.

With many of the prominent activities related to civic action being restricted or not feasible at all combined with the long-lasting trauma effects that this worldwide event had on the

populace, the political scene has suffered a considerable amount of damage. However, there are plenty of lessons we can take from this whole situation.

With in – person interaction being put on a hold the world has relied on more digital means to communicate. Social media and online interaction were already major players in the socio – political scene for the younger generations, however with the emergence of Covid-19 and the accompanying restrictions they became essential and were proven to be, when properly used as a resource, the most reliable way to bring awareness, provide information and form connections with the younger generation.

We were also given a good example of how to act on global problems. This is because the main dilemma when talking of global civic action is that it usually approaches topics that can easily be identified as urgent matters that concern all of us but that are also extremely complex and hard to act upon individually. Because of this many people are not able to understand the situation or feel discouraged to act on it, leading to less engagement in general. However, in seeing the general positive response to the restrictions applied towards the pandemic resulting from a sense of togetherness and relatability it is safe to say that we should strive to approach these global issues with a local perspective procuring to find meaningful connections between the problems at hand and the local problems of the targeted audience.

Several perfect examples on how to apply these lessons can already be found in social movements such as the "Fridays for future" movement from Barcelona, the "Black Lives Matter" movement and the many environmental efforts that have only grown more relevant in these last few years.

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