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The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Adolescent Socialization in Slovakia

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Abstract

This thesis explores the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent socialisation in Slovakia. The thesis bases its literature on the vast scope of research on the COVID-19 pandemic by authors in fields of psychology, neurology, and public health. This research is based on qualitative method of scientific research using phenomenological approaches. Data is based on personal reflections of adolescents recounting their experiences during the pandemic. A different set of data is collected from using semi structured interviews based on an interview guide aiming to explore participants experience through reflection during the Covid pandemic, the study is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model helping to analyse the role of society in socialisation and the impact of covid restrictions on the various agents through which adolescents socialize. The study explored adolescents' socialization pre-pandemic, the pandemic restrictions in Slovakia and how these restrictions affected adolescents' daily life.

The findings of the study showed the impact of social isolation on adolescents in the larger societal context of adolescents in Slovakia. It reinstates the role and significance of all agents of socialisation in the development processes during adolescence, highlighting the struggles faced by adolescents in adolescents social, health, familial and educational, and peer relationships. Both data sets recorded significant reflections on mental health issues caused by the prolonged waves of the pandemic, with adolescents, with predisposed conditions, experiencing them more. The study reveals other factors significantly affecting how adolescents fared during the pandemic, being family situations individual resilience. Adolescents duly substituted their means of socialisation reporting heightened use of technology, although it could not sufficiently compensate for physical interactions with peers. Online learning proved to be difficult for participants of this study reporting difficulty in concentration, loss of school experiences and impersonal relationship experiences with teachers and classmates.

The thesis highlights the importance of interdisciplinary work in social work practice. It concludes with suggestions on how social workers could play roles to help adolescents with adjustments during future crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic through advocacy, education, and non-formal engagements.

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Author: Valentina Esi Afful

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 PROBLEM AREA

Pandemics are large-scale epidemics afflicting millions of people across multiple countries, sometimes spreading throughout the globe (WHO, 2010). Pandemics are not only an epidemiological problem but also a political, economic, technological, and socio-psychological problem (Neeraja, & Aditi, 2020). Some pandemics include the Bubonic Plague (1346-1353), attributed to *Yersinia Pestis*, which killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide; the HIV/AIDS (1981 to present), the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2013–2014 (Johnson & Mueller, 2002) or the outbreak of H1N1 (Swine Flu) in 2009 (Godwin et al, 2010).

In March 2020, The World Health Organization (WHO) announced the viral outbreak of the SARS COVID 19 pandemic, after declaring the situation as a global health emergency in January 2020 (Chappell, 2020). The ailment had an impact on the global economy unlike anything seen in nearly a century (Jackson et al, 2021). According to estimates, the virus slowed world economic growth in 2020, and its consequences are still being felt years later. On community and individual levels, the pandemic has equally imposed such high socioeconomic strains on institutions and individuals (Jackson et al, 2021). Public discourses are a repetition of the fact that dealing with the pandemic necessitates a great deal from all citizens (Leuzinger-Bohleber & Montigny, 2021). In many parts of the world, COVID-19 threatens to have a significant impact on people's daily lives as it has spawned a "new normal". In efforts to control the spread of infection, decrease the mortality rate and protect health systems, countries resorted to lockdowns and other physical restrictions such as social distancing (Haider et al. 2020), these measures had an impact not only on the pandemic process but also on an individual's psycho-social health. Specialists from several fields emphasized the immense consequences of the Corona pandemic on children and adolescents (Baumann, 2021). Although targeted at protecting individuals' health, the restrictions presented dire consequences on social aspects of life (Mustari, Rahman & Kar, 2021) as schools closed, social contacts limited, and out-of-home leisure time activities cancelled the primary socialisation channels for adolescents were restricted. In February 2021, a survey of the representative study on the COVID-19 psychic consequences (COPSY) study revealed that the quality of life and mental health of children during the pandemic worsened. Such mental health issues in children included depressive moods, psychosomatic difficulties, eating and sleeping abnormalities, behavioural issues, and long-term psychosocial concerns. Leuzinger-Bohleber & Montigny, (2021) recognizes that adolescents' predicament during the pandemic is made worse as they can merely cope with their age-specific developmental requirements without nonfamilial, and social interactions. Adolescence is a critical developmental period considering the intensity of its relation to biological and psychosocial changes in a child. There are many intense and complex interactions occurring during this

period of life which may represent specific vulnerabilities for adolescents (Barbot, 2012), especially in the wake of a global pandemic such as COVID-19. It is therefore evident that the pandemic impacted adolescents and their families in an exceptional way. It is in this light that the present study explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents' socialisation in Slovakia.

COVID-19 restrictions involved the imposition of lockdowns, the closure of schools indefinitely and social distancing (Han et al., 2020; Torijesen, 2021). These restrictions had a significant impact on the educational, physical, social, and mental well-being of adolescents (Wilke et al., 2021; Viner et al., 2020). The socialization of adolescents is imperative to the development of adolescents as societies have developed complex codes and organizational structures which new members must internalize and navigate through (Perez-Felkner, 2013). The degree to which adolescents learn to participate in these structures and become accepted in their societies is important to their future influencing their socialization functions such as identity development, behavioural outcomes, and alignment of ambitions (Perez-Felkner, 2013). Larsen, Helland & Holt (2021), noted that social isolation and school closure under COVID-19 challenged the connections between children and their friends. Literature confirms that friends play a significant role in the socialization process as they provide emotional support, in effect, children who did not receive such support due to social isolation during the pandemic, experienced heightened emotional expressions. Conversely, Larsen, Helland & Holt (2021) reported that children received more attention and support than usual from their parents as families spent more time together, a phenomenon equally as relevant to the socialization process. Although the time spent with family is highly recommended this confirms that the agents of socialization have independent roles which cannot be filled by another when absent. According to Sikali (2020), school closure prevented children and adolescents from socializing with each other, which negatively affected their ability to maintain social connections that could impact their personal growth and development. In a social context, Larivière-Bastien et al. (2022), reported that although children and adolescents could still connect with their peers virtually, they expressed a significant loss in terms of friendships which was primarily facilitated by the closure of schools, churches, playgrounds, and various public spaces which led to the loss of the needed diversity the agents of socialization provide (Mustari, Rahman & Kar, 2021).

There has been an increased need for researchers to understand these changes and provide appropriate recommendations to facilitate the socialization process in future crisis situations. While the focus of the COVID-19 pandemic's long-term effect on health has been extensively explored (Sikali, 2021), the impact of COVID-19 on socialization has been a less considered area. Therefore, there is the need to further explore the impact of COVID-19 on the socialization of adolescents. The restrictions pose a complete change to the

psychosocial environment needed to achieve the developmental milestones in adolescence (Fegert et al, 2020). As limited studies have explored the phenomenon this research seeks to contribute to the gap in the literature on the impact of pandemics on adolescent socialization in the context of Slovakia. Understanding the phenomenon is crucial in developing effective strategies to support adolescents in future pandemic situations.

1.1 RESEARCH AIM

This study aims to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent socialization in Slovakia.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To discover adolescent socialization processes in Slovakia before the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To understand the factors that disrupt adolescents socialization in Slovakia.
3. To ascertain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent socialization processes in Slovakia.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How did Slovak adolescents socialize before the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How did the restrictions disrupt adolescents socialization in Slovakia?
3. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact adolescent socialization processes in Slovakia?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

1.4.1 Policy

The study gives an insight into the need to consider adolescence as a critical developmental stage which informs policymakers and leaders to factor in the needs of the population in policy implementations, especially in crisis situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4.2 Practice

Information from this study provides a guide for social workers to understand the concerns of adolescents and to derive appropriate preventions and interventions to correct attitudes that may result from their experiences.

The findings give insight into the experiences of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic, educating workers on plausible causes of adolescent behaviors and serve as a pool of knowledge in the interdisciplinary practice of the social work profession by helping professionals understand preventive perspectives and not only focus on intervention measures.

1.4.3 Knowledge

The study is also contributing to the literature on the impact COVID-19 on child development as most research targets psychological, economic, or political implications, this research targets the impact of the COVID-19 and probable future pandemics on socialization.

This research will contribute to the enrichment of the social work theory which will give insight into adolescent socialization experiences during crisis situations.

For families, this paper may give clarity on their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.5.1 Adolescence

According to the World Health Organization as cited by Sawyer, et al, (2018): is the period of growth and development that occurs between childhood and adulthood. An adolescent is therefore anyone between the ages of 10 and 19 (Lansford & Banati, 2018).

1.5.2 Socialization

Socialization is a process by which individuals adapt to and internalize norms, values, customs, and behaviour of the shared social group they find themselves (DeLamater, 2013).

1.5.3 COVID-19

"SARS-CoV-2" severe acute respiratory syndrome is a highly contagious disease known as Coronavirus disease 2019. Due to the infectious nature of this disease the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 12, 2020, declared it a global pandemic (Ciotti, 2020)

1.5.4 Impact

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'impact' as the 'powerful effect that something has on somebody or something'.

CHAPTER TWO (2)

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Adolescence

The term adolescence derives from the Latin word "adolescere," which means "to ripen" or "to grow"; adolescence is primarily defined by the ages at which sexual characteristics begin to develop. As cited by Sawyer, et al., (2018), adolescence is defined by the World Health Organization as "the period of life between childhood and adulthood, spanning the ages of 10 to 19." Arguments that rose around the concept led to indicate that other scholars believe that this definition is too narrow and does not consider the context of many cultures. Hence, adolescence is defined by Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne, and Patton (2018) as a period of physical growth and social role transition. The authors argue that limiting the adolescent age range from 10 to 19 years does not correspond to current dynamics of adolescent development and instead propose the ages of 10–24 years because different cultures are more conversant with this wider range. Some correspondence by Kinghorn, et al. (2018) also shares the view that the adolescence age range of 10 to 19 years is restricting and proposes that late adolescence be defined by the ages of 20–24 years rather than 14–17 years. Evidently, the opposing worldviews on adolescent age bandings endorse the idea that adolescence should be considered primarily from a developmental standpoint while considering the differences in culture and environment that different individuals encounter (Hagell, Coleman & Brooks, 2015). The chronological perspective on adolescence informs frameworks for grouping adolescents into age groups with similar characteristics. These stages of adolescence are namely, early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence. These three stages are characterized by changes in physical growth and maturation, changes in psychological and social behaviour and the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics. One other interesting concept of adolescence is proposed by Jean Blackstone, a Harvard professor of education and development, who describes adolescence as a period of fluidity, exploration, and risk-taking that ends with the onset of adulthood (Blackstone, 1984). Scholars in recent times, according to Salmela-Aro (2011), are proposing a rather contentious stage called emerging adulthood, which is essentially a stage of self-identity, self-focus, and feelings-in-between.

From all these relevant perspectives expressed in literature, it is evident that adolescence is not a single event, but rather a period of transition during which a person is expected to assume adult roles such as self-help, responsibility, and recreation. Cohen (2021) stipulates that the adolescence period is characterised by an increased risk of early life stress due to the exponential level of changes taking place in the body and brain as well as influences from the environment. It is empirical that COVID-19 threatened adolescents' socialisation, subsequently affecting their physical, psychological, and social development.

2.2 The Socialisation Processes in Adolescence

Children and adolescents internalise social norms and adapt to social standards through interactions with their environment (Younis, 1982). Robert Merton, defined socialization as "the process by which individuals learn the culture of their society" (Merton, 2000). He emphasized how individuals acquire knowledge, beliefs, and values that are specific to their society, describing it as a continuous process occurring throughout life, with various agents of socialization, especially family, peers, schools, and media. Socialisation takes place in a series of circles (Perez-Felkner, 2008), with immediate contexts such as family being a major agent in primary socialisation (Putney & Bengston, 2002). This first context is termed the macrosystem by Bronfenbrenner. The relationship between children and adolescents and the microsystem: parents, siblings, teachers, and peers are bidirectional indicating that children could be influenced by these figures and the socialisation environment, and children could also influence and shape the beliefs of the agents. The theory posits that there is an interaction between the child's mesosystems which potentiates the socialisation processes. The interaction translates as the mesosystem which subsequently takes place in the ecosystem. The ecosystem is the component of an ecological system which incorporates social structures which indirectly influence the mesosystems and moderate the child's interaction with its microsystems.

To internalise the standards presented by their environment, adolescents engage in social learning processes. Bandura (1997) proposed the social learning theory which emphasises the importance of observation, modelling and imitation of the attitudes, behaviours, and emotional reactions of the socialisation process of adolescents (McLeod, 2016). Bandura among other theorists has proposed learning theories that explain how children and adolescents learn about their social environment. These empirical and theoretical works have established that adolescents and children learn and understand the social world through interaction with their environment and other social actors (Perez-Felkner, 2013).

The socialization process during adolescence involves learning how to navigate social situations, interpret social cues, and interact with peers effectively (Clausen, 1968). Adolescents who develop positive social skills and establish healthy social relationships are more likely to experience positive mental health outcomes, including higher self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and increased life satisfaction (Erikson, 1968). Interpersonal relationships play a critical role in adolescent socialization. Adolescents form relationships with peers who are similar to them in terms of age, gender, and interests, and these relationships often provide a context for exploring and developing their identities (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Adolescents also learn how to communicate their emotions, thoughts, and opinions through their interactions with peers. Positive peer relationships can provide a source of support, as well as opportunities

for social learning and skill development (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). However, negative peer relationships can also have detrimental effects on adolescent socialization, leading to feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and low self-esteem (Livingstone, 2008). The development of interpersonal relationships in adolescence is facilitated by interpersonal relationships.

2.3 Socialization

Socialization is a process by which individuals adapt and internalize norms, values, customs, and behaviours of the shared social group they find themselves (DeLamater, 2013). For adolescents, socialization is a major means of improving social functioning and effortful control during the developmental phase (Hofferth, Eiensberg & Reifer, 2011). According to Bugental & Grusec (2007), socialization represents the preparation of the young to manage the tasks of social life; a process that influences an individual's behaviour, values, and actions to align with what is socially acceptable. The process is lifelong; however, it is prominent during childhood and adolescence as it occurs during interactions between young people and their environments (Perez-Felkner, 2013) which is highly influenced by the agents of socialization, with the family being the most outstanding agent (Park et al., 2008). The ecological systems theory postulates that the socialization process is also supported by other agents, including peers, media, communities, schools, and religion.

2.4 Agents of Socialization

Agents of socialization refer to the various individuals, groups, and institutions that contribute to an individual's socialization process and shape their beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours (Clausen, 1968). These agents help individuals acquire the social skills and knowledge necessary for functioning in society. The universal outcome of socialization is to support individuals to internalize the norms of society and become fit members of that society. During adolescence, the socialization process becomes a crucial component of developmental task achievement and an untroubled transition into adulthood. Socialization is essentially a learning process for adolescents where they develop the values that are expected of members of their society while also developing themselves and their behaviours.

2.4.1 Family as an agent of socialization

The family is the foremost context of socialisation in every individual's life (Axpe, Rodriguez-Fernandez, Goni & Antonio-Agirre, 2019). Family is typically the first and most influential source of socialization for children (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parents or caregivers teach children about social norms, expectations, and values through direct instruction, modeling, and reinforcement (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). According to Srboljub (2014), the family is in the first hierarchy of social values and a fundamental social unit that is irreplaceable in the socialisation process. The family influences the socialisation process in a myriad of

mechanisms. The most significant mechanism is the positioning of the family as a context for child and adolescent development. Children and adolescents essentially inherit and emulate social habits from family members they interact with (Srboljub, 2014). Family presents a less formalised environment that facilitates and educates children and adolescents throughout their formative years (Ionut, 2011). As a miniature society, the family instils its values, moral beliefs, and a sense of belongingness in the lives of adolescents, a critical component and development of social habits, personality structure and foundational beliefs of the adolescent (Freeman & Showel, 1953). The family socialisation role, although much prominent in the early lives of humans, influences the entire life course, the impact is quite rippling and progresses into adulthood (Ionut, 2011).

2.4.2 Peers as Agents of Socialisation

Peers have been on the same level as parents when comparing the influence of social agents (Dostie-Goulet, 2009). As children transition to the adolescent stage, they become disengaged with their parents and tend to bond with their peers. L'Engle & Jackson (2008) argues that young people during adolescence tend to shift their orientation from parents to friends. A study by Arnon, Shamai & Illatov (2008), revealed that young adolescents spent less of their leisure time with institutionalised activities arranged by school and communities and parents instead had an increased yearning to spend time with friends. Peers become a crucial source of support when adolescents are internalising values, and affective ties while providing a sense of belonging and well-being particularly during adolescence when they form more independent identities and seek validation from their peers (Berndt, 2002). Peer groups can provide a sense of belonging, social support, and opportunities for social comparison and experimentation (Erikson, 1968). Studrod & Bru (2011), reported that lack of support from peers during adolescence socialisation could lead to dropout tendencies, alienation, and truancy at school. Peers could impact adolescents' relations with other prominent socialisation agents like parents and teachers. According to Millier-Slough & Dunsmore (2020), friendship has become an important avenue for emotional socialisation. Although family remains the leading social agent of adolescents (Arnon, Shamai & Ilatov, 2008), approval, admiration and respect from peers are significant to the navigation through the storming phase of adolescence. The peer group as described by Dostie-Goulet, (2009) is a vital mechanism for solving identity crises.

2.4.3 School and Teachers as Agents of Socialisation

Schools and teachers have a significant role to play in the socialisation of students (Zulfiya & Nafisa, 2018), particularly during adolescence when students spend a considerable amount of time with their peers and teachers (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Schools provide opportunities for socialization beyond the family and facilitate the development of social skills and relationships with peers (Brown & Larson, 2009). Schools provide an environment for knowledge seeking and it is mostly the first organiser of external social

relationships between children and their peers (Tasmajian, 2021). Schools have become a significant context for peer socialisation, and cognitive and motor skills development with teachers as major figures in guiding adolescents in understanding achievement and completing developmental tasks such as attaining a balance between conformity and rebellion (Tasmajian, 2021). Schools provide a much more formalised and institutionalised environment that presents the adolescents with life situations beyond what is experienced at home with teachers as new figures of authority instead of the adults in the adolescent's family (Ionut, 2011).

2.4.4 Religion as an Agent of Socialization

Religiosity is a major influencer of people's orientation toward morality and other values such as hard work, diligence, and right living. In the lives of adolescents, religion continues to play a role in identity information while being a prominent transmitter of core social values (Ogunola, 2018). McNamara Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry (2010) promulgates religion as a socialisation process significant in internalising beliefs and values that are in conformity mostly with the community and societal norms. As individuals engage in daily religious activities such as prayers and attending gatherings in a religious community, they acquire religious consciousness and formulate their individual religious judgement.

2.4.5 Culture as an Agent of Socialization

According to Clausen (1968), culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, and practices of a particular group or society, providing a framework for individuals to understand and interact with their social environment. The family is a primary agent of socialization that transmits cultural values and beliefs from one generation to the next. Parents may teach their children cultural traditions, such as religious practices, and social norms, such as politeness and respect for authority. Peers and the media also influence adolescents' cultural development by exposing them to different subcultures, trends, and social norms (Livingstone, 2008).

In addition, culture also shapes adolescents' identity development. As cited by Marcia, (1980), Erikson (1968) posited that individuals undergo a series of psychosocial stages throughout their lifespan, with each stage being characterized by a unique developmental task. During adolescence, the developmental task is identity formation, which involves exploring and developing a sense of self that is consistent with one's culture. Cultural identity refers to a sense of belonging to a particular cultural group and adopting its norms and values as part of one's self-concept. Therefore, culture provides a reference point for adolescents to develop a sense of identity and belongingness (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). Exposure to different cultural groups through peers and the media contribute to adolescents' cultural identity development.

2.4.6 Media as an Agent of Socialization

Media and technology have also emerged as significant agents of socialization, particularly in recent years with the widespread use of social media and the internet (Livingstone, 2008). Media can influence individuals' attitudes, values, and behaviours by providing role models, shaping cultural norms, and creating social pressure to conform to certain standards (Bandura, 2001). Adolescents use various forms of media, including television, social media, and video games, to connect and communicate with their peers. The media shapes adolescents' socialization by exposing them to different social norms, cultural practices, and lifestyles (Gross, 2004). Adolescents also use virtual spaces, such as online forums and video game platforms, to develop their identities, form relationships with peers, and explore different aspects of their personalities (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Virtual spaces provide opportunities for adolescents to engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds, which can broaden their perspectives and facilitate the development of empathy and social skills, and assisting adolescents develop their identities (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011; Genner, & Süß, 2017).

2.5 Impacts of Pandemics on Socialization

Salidino, Algeri & Auriemmo (2020) highlight the impact of pandemics on the social lives of populations- according to the researchers, pandemics are characterized by certain elements such as separation from loved ones, loss of freedom, uncertainty, and feelings of helplessness.

Evidently, most pandemic situations overlook the area of child development. For example, Barret et al. (2011) reported that influenza outbreaks in the United States were mitigated by drastic actions such as social distancing measures, the distribution of antiviral medications, and the closure of schools. Similarly, the outbreak of Asian flu in 1958 in Great Britain was combated with the closure of factories, offices, and schools (Jackson, 2009), and although these actions have been influential in the control of the further spread of infections, they are highly associated with social isolation which disrupt the socialization processes of adolescents (Li & Wang, 2020).

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic was controlled with more stringent measures (Pitlik, 2020). Health authorities in most countries instituted lockdown restrictions at first detection to contain the local spread of the disease. Subsequently, imposition of wearing face masks in public places and maintaining a social distance of at least two meters between individuals impeded the chances of adolescents socializing with peers, schoolmates, and teachers and to some extent family (Al-Balushi & Essa, 2020). Although there was the opportunity to complete school virtually and connect with peers on social media, the impositions also affected the routine of the adolescents and altered significantly and abruptly the environment in which they interacted previously. Work by Di Guinita et al., (2021) identified that the drastic change contributed to the

development of negative emotions, increased psychological and emotional issues, and an increased need for adjustment among adolescents. On a social level, Saldino, Algeri & Auriemma (2020), indicated that social distancing and the security measures implemented during the pandemic have affected the relationship among adolescents and their perception of empathy toward others. Thus, where empathy towards others could be portrayed through face-to-face interactions, the pandemic has reconfigured how adolescents demonstrated empathy through several means other than physical. Other elements which affected adolescents were the separation from loved ones, loss of freedom, uncertainty about the advancement of the disease, and the feeling of helplessness (Li & Wang, 2020). These aspects were considered by Weir, (2020) to have dramatic consequences such as the rise of suicides (Kawohl & Nordt, 2020) as suicidal behaviours and depression are often related to the feeling of anger associated with stressful conditions (Mamun and Griffiths, 2020). Similarly, Orgilés et al. (2020) in their survey administered during the pandemic, indicated children and young adults were particularly at risk of developing anxious symptoms. Findings suggested parents observed emotional and behavioural changes in their children during the quarantine as they exhibited symptoms related to difficulty concentrating (76.6%), boredom (52%), irritability (39%), restlessness (38.8%), nervousness (38%), sense of loneliness (31.3%), uneasiness (30.4%), and worries (30.1%). Implying that though there may be day-to-day interactions with peers via online platforms boredom and loneliness were inevitable.

The pandemic also hindered the ability of adolescents to establish and build meaningful relationships; building a new culture around how adolescents interact and communicate with others. Essentially, the togetherness and attachment an individual feels towards a group are important for their social development as Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1984) in his book on solidarity discusses that individuals can contribute meaningfully to society when they have a sense of belonging and feel connected to a group. This, therefore, implies that, in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, the chance of social solidarity was less.

2.6 Pandemic Period in Slovakia

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Slovak government declared a state of emergency on March 16, 2020, invoking Article 5 of Constitutional Law No. 227/2002 Coll. This law restricted the freedom of movement as a way prevent the spread of Coronavirus. The Slovak Republic's Central Crisis Staff and the Public Health Care Office advised limiting movement to only necessary activities such as commuting to work and obtaining essential items such as groceries, medicine, and caring for those in need. The Slovak Government mandated the use of face masks in public places. Additionally, social distancing measures were put in place, requiring people to maintain a distance of at least two meters from each other whether inside or outside. Parents were discouraged from allowing their children to stay with grandparents to minimize

the risk of spreading the infection. Special store hours were designated for seniors aged 65 and over, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., to minimize their risk of exposure to the virus. The government asked seniors to leave their homes only when necessary. Citizens were instructed to avoid social contacts, such as attending cultural, sports, or other mass events, and to avoid travelling or participating in educational or work-related activities that required leaving one's location. Citizens returning from abroad were required to stay in quarantine facilities specified by the Ministry of Interior for the period necessary for COVID-19 testing. Home isolation was mandatory for a period of 14 days, from beginning on March 13th, 2020. Stores were immediately closed, except for those providing essential goods and services such as gas stations and pharmacies. Water parks, ski resorts, and other amusement facilities were closed. Schools were shut down, and students were provided with resources for distance learning. This also applied to churches as the ministry encouraged religious congregations to utilize online resources. Temperature checks were mandated at the entrances of hospitals, factories, and public spaces. To maintain order and compliance, soldiers and police officers were deployed to ensure adherence to social distancing guidelines.

2.6.1 Lockdowns in Slovakia

Slovakia implemented several lockdowns as part of the restrictions to slow the spread of the Coronavirus. There have been four major and partial lockdowns since the onset of the pandemic to control the spread of the virus. The first lockdown in Slovakia began on March 16, 2020, and lasted until May 13, 2020. During this time, people were required to stay at home except for essential activities such as buying groceries, seeking medical care, or going to work if their job was deemed essential. Schools and non-essential businesses were closed, and public gatherings were banned. The second lockdown was in October starting from the 24th, which lasted until December 7, 2020. Like the first lockdown, people were required to stay at home except for essential activities. Additionally, a nationwide curfew was put in place from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. A third lockdown was implemented on December 21, 2020, and lasted until January 24, 2021, with same restrictions and a nationwide curfew from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. After the third lockdown, Slovakia entered a partial lockdown period from January 25, 2021, to February 7, 2021. In this lockdown schools were allowed to re-open, but non-essential businesses were still closed, and a nationwide curfew was in place from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m.

This data collates seven months of lockdown and changes to the social environments of adolescents; a period of significant changes in the social, emotional, and cognitive domains. As demonstrated in previous chapters, research has shown that social isolation can have a significant impact on adolescent socialization, leading to both short-term and long-term consequences such as a decrease in social skills development during adolescence. A study by Qualter et al., (2015) found that social isolation in early adolescence was associated with poorer social skills development over time. Similarly, Coplan et al. (2019) found that social

isolation was associated with a decrease in the development of social skills, particularly in the areas of empathy and perspective-taking, coherent with the viewpoint of Emile Durkheim. This means that social isolation can also impact adolescent socialization by affecting their ability to form and maintain social relationships. A systematic review by Rook et al. (2017) found that social isolation was associated with lower levels of social support, increased loneliness, and decreased overall social satisfaction. Orben, Tomova, & Blakemore, (2020) found that social isolation was associated with poorer peer relationships and lower levels of overall social competence. The negative impact of social isolation on adolescent socialization can have both short-term and long-term consequences. Short-term consequences include increased feelings of loneliness, decreased social support, and poorer mental health outcomes. Loades et al. (2020) found that social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with increased levels of depression and anxiety in adolescents. Lastly, Christiansen, et al., (2021) found that social isolation was associated with poorer physical health outcomes during adolescence, including increased risk for obesity and chronic disease. Some long-term consequences of social isolation during adolescence can include difficulty forming and maintaining relationships in adulthood, increased risk for mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety and decreased overall life satisfaction.

2.6.2 Impact of Isolation on Slovak Adolescents.

The Slovak government closed schools on March 16, 2020, and reopened them on May 20, 2020, with a phased return to in-person learning. However, schools were closed again in the fall of 2020 due to a surge in cases. As of March 2022, Slovak schools operate with a hybrid model of in-person and online learning. The switch to online learning has been challenging for many students in Slovakia, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have access to the necessary technology or a suitable learning environment (Pavlíková et al 2021). The disruption to education may have long-lasting impacts on young people's academic achievement and prospects. The pandemic also has a significant impact on the mental health of young people in Slovakia, as Jozefiakova et al. (2022) reports in a study between 13th April and 24th May, which found an increased prevalence of anxiety and depression among young people aged 14-24 years; suggesting that closure of schools and social distancing measures contributed to a sense of isolation and loneliness among young people, exacerbating existing mental health challenges, as the pandemic disrupted young people's social connections. Studies between November and December 2020 also found a significant reduction in social interactions among young people leading to the reduction in social connections which may have negative impacts on young people's social development and well-being. On the economic front, Svabova, et al., (2021) note that the pandemic has had a significant impact on employment rates, with young people facing challenges in finding work. This may have long-lasting impacts on young people's financial stability and contribute to anxiety and depression.

2.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework guiding the present study is Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, which is appropriate in the conception of adolescents' experiences in interacting with their immediate environment and wider socio-cultural context during the pandemic (Kutsar & Kurvet-Käosaar, 2021). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory developed a system framework in 1979 to describe a child's development in the context of interaction with his or her environment (Paquette & Ryan, 2011). Bronfenbrenner described this theoretical perspective as a new conception of a developing person that captures the evolving interaction between the person and his environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In using this theory, the study seeks to understand through phenomenology the experiences of adolescents relating to how the five layers of the ecological theory contributed to their development.

Bronfenbrenner proposed ecological systems theory which contextualised a child's ecology in terms of a set of concentric levels of the environment (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). The theory has been modified in multiple articles and books including the noteworthy revision in 2006 where Bronfenbrenner adopted the term bioecological system theory to accentuate the individual's biology as a major driver in the development process (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). In his paper "Toward an experimental ecology of human development" Bronfenbrenner proposed that children interacted in nested environmental structures each encompassing the other (Guy-Evans, 2020).

The first structure is denoted as the microsystem which involves the daily environment in which the child interacts (Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020). Bronfenbrenner described the microsystem as a pattern of interpersonal interactions and associated activities that the developing child experiences in a particular face-to-face context and with people with distinct characteristics, personalities, and belief systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). As the innermost circle, the microsystem encompasses each setting in which the child interacts with parents, friends, teachers, and other significant relations (Leonard, 2011). Paquette & Ryan, (2011) maintained that the microsystem is the child's immediate environment involving family, friends, school, neighbourhoods and in certain instances religious settings. According to its scholars, the bi-directional impact between the developing child and their environment is strongest and greatest at this level.

The mesosystem provides a layer of connection between the microsystems (Paquette & Ryan, 2011). Unambiguously, the mesosystem is a system of microsystems. Crawford (2020) describes the mesosystem as a "linkage between the different microsystems in a person's life". Ordinarily, cross relationships or interconnections are developed between the child's microsystem like parents-teachers, parents-friend, and friend-teachers. (Leonard, 2011; Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea, 2020). The mesosystem provides a context for the different socialisation factors in the lives of children and adolescents to interact with both

coinciding and opposing positions on facilitating development. For instance, the pandemic situation causes schools to shut down, parents were then tasked to ensure that students engaged in online education. In the mesosystem, the interaction and execution of tasks between these microsystems is a child's mesosystem. In this case, one can imagine what rules parents put in place to ensure a child is active in online classes, submits assignments and whatnot.

The exosystem is the third layer of structure in the ecological model; also providing a level of interconnectedness, the exosystem as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1977) as the linkage between the microsystem which involves the developing individual and the mesosystem which is a setting that excludes the developing individual. Navarro & Tudge (2022), highlighted that the linkage between the microsystem and mesosystem influences the microsystem in which the developing child or adolescent engages. There are two sides to this layer as the individual could have either direct or indirect control or contact with this layer. An example of the exosystem is the workplace of a parent (Ashiabi & O'neal, 2015) which the child does not directly interact. However, the way the parent interacts with this environment, for instance, working for long hours and experiencing high levels of stress, could impact the child-parent relationship and contribute to the dynamics of the specific microsystem. Panopoulos & Drossinou-Korea (2020) cited the competencies of teachers as a significant exosystem.

The macrosystem focuses on the culture and society and sets the milieu for the interaction between the rest of the systems (Newman & Newman, 2020). Such bodies as governments, culture, religion, and politics fall under this layer of the theory. The system encompasses the overarching values and beliefs that influence the child's development. According to Ashiabi & O'neal (2015), the macro system involves the cultural values of the society and captures the economic situations that facilitate development. Wells & Phalen (2018) affirmed that the macro system also includes a variety of broader influences such as policies and culture which impact the development of the child. Hosek, Harper, Lemos & Martinez (2008) agreed with the assertion indicating that the macrosystem consists of a larger societal structure that does not directly impact the life of the developing individual but the whole society. In this case, the COVID 19 pandemic affected the entire society. This birthed the action plan by governments to contain the spread of disease. These decisions which were in the best interest of society could have a level of impact on child development as they changed the dynamics of human interactions which is evidently crucial to the process.

Bronfenbrenner further developed his idea on the influence of time in the development process of a child. In 1986, he proposed the chronosystem. The chronosystem, now the final structure, considers the chronological changes that the developing person and his environment go through and how it impacts developmental outcomes (Eriksson, Ghazinour & Hammarström, 2018). Hosek, Harper, Lemos & Martinez

(2008) describes these transitions as either normative life events such as entering school, puberty and marriage or non-normative life events including death, divorce, and chronic illness, which directly affect the developing person or his environment. Eriksson, Ghazinour & Hammarström, (2018) suggest that the chronosystem encapsulates changes in relation to time with the working conditions of parents, and accompanying stress could impact the parent-child relationship.

Numerous research on child development utilized the ecological model (Tudge, Makrova, Hatfield & Kafnik, 2009; Guy-Evans, 2020). However, Tudge et al. (2017) assert that many researchers who in the past have based their work on the ecological model have done so inappropriately. Xia, Li & Tudge (2020) highlighted several reasons for the misuse of Bronfenbrenner's model. He argued that many researchers who utilized the biological model as the basis of their study had overlooked certain evolutionary modifications that the theory has undergone over the past three decades. Also, Xia, Li & Tudge (2020) noted Bronfenbrenner's limited work on operationalizing the theory and setting an example for how the theory could be incorporated into the methodological processes of research.

Despite these limitations, Brown, Biefeld and Elpers (2020) employed the theory in exploring the perpetuation and tolerance of sexual harassment of adolescent girls which was useful in identifying the proximal and distal context of adolescent girls which promoted the endorsement of sexualized gender stereotypes and the subsequent impact on the high rate of the perpetuation of sexual harassment. In understanding social support in postpartum adolescents Logdon, Hertwerk, Ziegle & Pinto-Foltz (2008) examined the ecological model as a framework and identified the macrosystem, microsystem, and mesosystem of support available to these adolescents and contributed to over 50% of the variance of depressive symptoms among them. Kutsar & Kurvet-Käosaar (2021) found the ecological model is appropriate for exploring young people's experiences regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families in Estonia. Researchers believed as a methodological framework Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model was crucial in understanding the interaction between children and their immediate environment and establishing children as social actors who were in the position to provide reliable information about their lives in the altered environment. In this study, the researcher adopts the bioecological theory as the framework for highlighting the role of social interaction in adolescent socialization while highlighting the role of socialization agents.

CHAPTER THREE (3)

RESEARCH METHOD

3.0 Introduction

This chapter details the research methods that were used for the study. Information on research design, study area, target and study population, sampling design, methods of data collection and data analysis are also provided. Finally, this chapter highlights the ethical considerations and measures used to ensure credibility of the study.

3.1 Research design

A qualitative research method, specifically a phenomenological approach was used in this study. According to Qutosh, (2018), phenomenology as a philosophy and a method of inquiry is not limited to an approach to knowing, it is rather an intellectual engagement in interpretations and meaning-making that is used to understand the lived world of human beings on a conscious level. Phenomenology is the study of the lived experiences of people and the meanings people make of their experiences. This approach, thus, helped in describing the experiences of the participants as expert knowers of their lived experiences (Creswell 2009; Creswell, 2014). Using this method, the researcher made some interpretations attempting to understand the experiences of the participants.

3.2 Data collection

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews which allowed the researcher to engage in real-time in-depth conversations with participants (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Semi-structured interviews also allowed the opportunity to build rapport with research participants and provide encouragement for meaningful reflection and sharing (Rubel & Okech, 2017). The researcher employed two methods of data collection in this study. The first method involved essay writing by adolescents about their experiences during the covid 19 pandemic. The second data collection method employed by the researcher was semi-structured interviews conducted with another set of participants using an interview guide. The researcher utilized well-structured questions in the interview guide (Van Manen, 1990) to be able to focus on the lived meaning of the pandemic period to adolescents in Ruzomberok. The interviews were recorded with consent from the participants and lasted for about 45- 90 minutes.

3.3 Study area

The research was conducted in Slovakia; a member of the European Union since 2004. Officially known as the Slovak Republic, the landlocked country is in Central Europe bordered by Poland to the north, Ukraine

to the east, Hungary to the south, Austria to the southwest, and the Czech Republic to the northwest. The country has a total area of about 49,000 square kilometres and a population of over 5.4 million people.

3.4 Study location

Ružomberok is a town in northern Slovakia known for its natural beauty and industrial heritage; a relatively small town approximating 27 000 inhabitants. About 3 hours' drive from the capital, Bratislava, Ruzomberok is located on the eastern foothills of the Veľká Fatra mountains and the north-western slopes of the Nízke Tatry Mts., and is enclosed by the southwestern slopes of the Chočské vrchy Mts.

3.5 Target population

The target population for this study was adolescents in Slovakia who experienced pandemic measures as adolescents.

3.5.1 Study population

The study population for this study were adolescents in Ruzomberok.

3.6 Sampling technique

This research will employ a non-probability sampling procedure, chosen due to the research objectives, and the time available. Intentional sampling is a technique that gives an avenue for the researcher to select the samples basing on the researcher's subjective judgment rather than random selection. This sampling method: synonymous with purposive sampling was specifically chosen as appropriate for this research as it selects participants with the aim of meeting specific criteria (Patton, 2002; Lauretto et al.,2012). This method is also recommended for explorative research or new studies and in situations where it could be difficult to use any other methods.

3.6.1 Sample size

The research involved 11 participants as the sample size for semi-structured interviews and 5 participants for essay submission totalling 16 participants.

3.7 Data Sources

Primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. The primary data was collected by the researcher through written essays of participants and a different set of participants who engaged in personal face-to-face semi-structured interview sessions. The interview questions were open-ended. Interviews were conducted at a time feasible for participants to share their experiences with no disturbances. The interviews

conducted lasted a minimum of 40 minutes to a maximum of 90 minutes. The researcher also subscribed to secondary sources of data. These secondary sources included journals, newspapers, government records, books, and websites. Secondary sources were meticulously selected and applied to the analysis and findings of the research work.

3.8 Data Analysis

IPA, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, was employed for this study. IPA is a qualitative research methodology used to explore how individuals make sense of their personal and social world (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Miller & Farmer, 2018). It involves analyzing in-depth interviews and or other forms of qualitative data such as diaries; in this case, essays, to identify themes and patterns in participants' experiences and interpretations. The approach emphasizes the importance of idiographic analysis, which means focusing on the unique experiences and perspectives of individual participants rather than generalizing findings to a larger population. Finlay (2011) noted that IPA questions often encourage reflection on the full experience of a phenomenon, including affective, cognitive, bodily, and behavioral components. IPA offers the chance to be imaginative and flexible in the design and execution of a research study while presenting the opportunity for the researcher to speak to the novice and the experienced.

Data collected were transcribed while essays received were translated from the Slovak language to English for the researchers understanding using DeepL translator. The stages of analysis were employed using Miller & Farmer, (2018) an extension of Smith and Osborn's (2008) stages of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

1. Reading and re-reading the data to immerse oneself in data: after listening and playing back recordings multiple times, transcription was done verbatim and trimmed to grasp the content of the conversation. Transcription was read multiple times to form an understanding of each transcript.
2. Developed emergent themes by focusing groups of repeated expressions. Transcripts were coded using Atlas.ti and emergent themes were developed and noted by observing narrations.
3. Search for relatedness throughout transcripts by merging similar codes and integrating them into broad themes. Codes were clustered and themes were developed.
4. Keeping an open mind to maintain individuality of participants.
5. Finding patterns across cases by identifying patterns of shared higher-order qualities and noting idiosyncratic instances. Themes were divided into primary themes and subthemes for proper comprehension.

6. Deepening the analysis by using metaphors and importing other theories as a lens. The researcher documented the findings in writing, illuminating themes and subthemes with data excerpts in a concise manner. Discussion was done in-between findings presentations.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The researcher took all necessary steps to ensure that all ethical issues involved in social work research were considered. Based on this, the following ethical considerations were followed:

1. The researcher introduced herself and sought the informed consent of all the research participants. This was done using verbal consent at the beginning of interview sessions. The consent guaranteed that their participation was voluntary and that could opt out at any point they so deemed necessary (Creswell, 2012)
2. The principle of confidentiality was considered as an important ethical issue in this research. The researcher made use of labels such as “*Participant 1, 2, 3*” to ensure anonymity. Participants were duly informed about the nature of the study and purpose of the study. Participants were required to give their verbal approval before the interview sessions commenced.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

4.0.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Eleven (11) adolescents partook in face-to-face semi-structured interviews based on a guide of general open-ended questions to satisfy the aim and objectives of the study. Participants' demographic information collected only pertained to their age to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria for the study. The age demographic of research participants ranges from 15 years to 20 years as of 24th February 2023. Participants of this study were chosen on a non-probability sampling technique; hence it was important to meet specific criteria such as the ability to sufficiently express themselves in English, be of adolescent age as defined in this study and lastly to voluntarily accept to participate in the study. In this regard, participants of the study were interviewed at the study location in Ruzomberok, Slovakia. 6 participants were interviewed at a primary school at the location while 5 others were interviewed in a student dormitory in Ruzomberok, Slovakia.

4.0.2 Essay Submission

Essay submission in this study was achieved by an open call for reflection submission on adolescents' subjective experiences during the Covid-19 from the Catholic University of Ruzomberok. Five essays turned in with no demographic information. However, confirmation from the administrative office confirms that the participants who submitted were first-year students and are predominantly between the ages of 17 and 18 years, which meets the criteria of selection of the researcher.

4.1 ANALYSIS OF TRANSCRIPTS

The findings of the study have been presented based on the objectives of the study which are: (1) to discover adolescent socialization processes before the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia; (2) to identify the conditions that disrupt adolescent socialization in Slovakia and (3) to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents' socialization processes in Slovakia.

4.2 Objective One (1)- Adolescents' Socialization Pre-Covid

The emerging themes focused on risk-taking and exploration in adolescence, adolescents' social life, and adolescents' interpersonal relationship development with family, peers and school and health.

4.2.1 Exploration and Risk-taking in Adolescence

Exploration was an evident element of pre-pandemic socialization. Adolescents recounted as they introduced themselves in the interview activities they undertook before the pandemic which indicates signs of active explorations in career decisions:

I used to go to the town near Ruzomberok... there I played basketball...I want to become a professional basketball player... I can play very well even though I am kinda short...it has been my biggest dream... I love it...

Participant 1

I wanted to be a writer when I grow up... but I may be an artist... art school or I'm not sure I already don't because my mom is like, no, no, no art school Please... No, she wants something else. And my dad too. So, I don't know, And I am supposed to go.

Participant 7

...because I don't know what I want to do, but I don't want to make art for a living Because it's not a stable Job, you know, I want something stable that will pay well, you know.

Participant 6

I wanted to be a doctor, but many kids want to be a doctor and I don't know what to do now. I don't know...my family wants that...I Want to be a writer... But I know I don't know how to write now.... I want to write about fantasy. I've written some pages but it's not good. I haven't thought of the adventure they want to put in the book.

Participant 2

Stanley Hall, the founder of adolescent science, conceptualized it as a process of physical and psychosocial "rebirth." (Curtis, 2015). Adolescent development necessitates a reciprocal reconfiguration of the person and the setting that influences cognition, emotion, behaviour, and relationships (Lerner & Castellino, 2002). In adolescence, contextual maturation poses multi-system difficulties that form the foundation of opportunity, risk, and resilience (Curtis, 2015). Although all adolescents probably do some exploration, studies have indicated a significant variation in how much adolescents explore. Exploration is considered a precursor of identity achievement and, thus, a healthy transition to adulthood. Exploration, which is a prerequisite of Identity Development in Adolescence is one of the most important tasks of adolescence; the ability to determine what kind of a person one is and what one will be like as an adult is one of the most important developmental tasks during adolescence. Erik H. According to Erikson (1959; 1968), a successful

identity quest throughout the second decade of life is a crucial prelude to a healthy future and fulfilling interpersonal relationships in later years. The construction of identity is seen as "one of the corner stones in ego development" and can be seen as "the red thread" throughout people's life (Erikson, 1982; Patterson, Sochting & Marcia, 1992, p. 9); as cited by Schmitt-Rodermund, & Vondracek, (1999). Scholars on Adolescent identity development have used the terms crisis and commitment to explain the process through which adolescents develop their identities (Klimstra., et al 2010). According to the findings of this study, adolescents rationalized their future occupations with some showing great certainty in various professions indicating "commitment" while others are in a dilemma indicating "crisis". Furthermore, contrary to a study which involved 283 adolescents in France, which indicated that the fear of disappointing parents was positively related to career exploration in boys while girls were generally anxious and neglectful of career exploration, these findings indicate that most participants who recounted future career as part of their introduction were girls. It is important to know however that the study was in relation to parental attachment and its effect on career exploration in adolescents. In adolescent identity development, choosing an occupation is one of the most important tasks (Schmitt-Rodermund, & Vondracek, 1999).

4.2.1.1 Risk Taking in Adolescence

Adolescents shared their experiences pre-pandemic highlighting risk-taking behaviours:

My friends and I were going to the forests. We liked swimming and walking in the rivers we had in the village. We liked to shout in our cherished dialect... we say banjo...and it's like You have the river and then you cross it. The river has water of about 1 1/2 metres... then you swim in it... this was village life.

Participant 3

When we [participant with friends] went to the woods, we were building our own houses and it was just children and nobody was old school because nobody would care...before, even at 8:00 AM early in the morning, we tell will arrange as a group that we meet at 8:00 AM tomorrow. We would say, bring food, bring water, bring axes and Chainsaw... We were 13/14 years old. I would wake up and take my chainsaw...Where are we going? To the woods...to build... we cut the trees and it was fun...

Participant 5

I remember we were drinking a lot, so we were 14/15. We bring the vodka, and we drink, you know, most of Slovakia, Like, somebody will tell you now, we don't drink till 18, I don't know about that... I know friends who drink since 13 and have smoked from 8 years old... So yeah, I had one friend...He's crazy...from eight he used to take and cut papers and he would put tea in It and then take it and Smoke it like it was the biggest fan ever. We were laughing about it till now because it's crazy.

Participant 5

Some participants, however, did not indicate active signs of risk-taking pre-pandemic.

I am very quiet always...or I used to be very quiet, now I make some changes. I didn't like the things before... So that's why I did a lot of changes... and I like now I am able to meet new people and do fun things... I think it's really nice I get to meet you or Rozina.

Participant 9

Risk-taking behaviours in adolescence are characterised by the ability to take chances with little or no attention to their outcome. The practise of engaging in risky activities is described as "deep play," a term Bentham coined in the 17th century to describe behaviour that, despite being mistakenly thought of by many as play, was immoral and should be controlled; that which had such high stakes that it made no sense to engage in (Leather, 2009). The findings of this study indicate that participants engage in risky behaviours as adolescents as part of the exploration. Sanders (2013) claims that adolescents' cognitive development can lead to abstract thinking, which can influence risk-taking behavior and a sense of invincibility. Furthermore, most authors describe adolescence as a time of curiosity and experimentation, hence the engagement in risk-taking activities such as drinking as confirmed by this study. Further, the findings report actions of drinking vodka at a young age as a cultural activity which is explained by the ecological theory of the impact social learning and experience have on adolescents. There are different levels of risk, some being fundamentally much more dangerous than others. Risky behaviour is typically exemplified by impulsive and harmful behaviours as well as thrill-seeking behaviours (Leather, 2009).

4.2.0 Interpersonal Relationships Before Covid 19 Pandemic

Interpersonal relationships in adolescence are characterized by significant changes as young people navigate their way through a variety of social contexts. Adolescents are typically engaged in relationships with peers, family members, romantic partners, and authority figures such as teachers and coaches.

4.2.1 Peer relationships

Peer relationships are particularly important for adolescents as they provide a source of social support, validation, and feedback. Participants of this study shared their experiences pre-pandemic with their peers.

So, most of my friends are from my Born village... So, we have known each other really from childhood.

We didn't like phones so we met regularly to go to the river or forest and so... and we liked to create jokes...because I and friends were like the group Big Group and we made the best friendships because we are all young...building like stupid houses from a cut-down tree...a big tree and then standing and

thinking to ourselves, this is going 5 metres high when we didn't even know whom we were going to get it that high... We figure it out and it was like we build our Connections.

Participant 5

Adolescents also indicated that they bonded through play

We used to play football a lot, I love football. I played with my friend when we had more physical, you know, eye-to-eye contact face to face.

Participant 11

Frequent meetings physical meetings

I love hanging out with my friends, my best friend Michelle...it was the best time until I left...

Participant 7

However, there was an objection by participants indicating that prior to covid 19, contacts with friends were much more through the Internet and social platforms:

before COVID, I also had this Internet connection even though I'm not the biggest fan of it... because I prefer to spend time in person.

Participant 8

Although the majority of participants' peer relationships appeared to be positive, there was a comment on how difficult peer relationship was in some settings.

... so, the other students didn't want to be with me when we were doing something in basketball. And because they didn't want to be with me. I felt like leftovers.

Participant 6

Throughout adolescence, peer networks provide a range of different purposes, including providing a transitory reference point for a developing sense of self. Adolescents develop moral judgment and values because of their identification with peers, and they begin to identify how they differ from their parents. Adolescents crave constant affirmation from others, as well as peer affiliation and approval. They are extremely committed to peer group beliefs, and their peers' ideas become the most significant in their lives, guiding the way they live (Ashok, 2018). As a result, negative attitudes from peers may evoke emotional surges in adolescents. In consistency with this point of view, participants had great contact with peer's pre-

pandemic. There were opportunities for recreation and essentially a sense of self. They had the opportunity to enjoy each other's company without fear and institutional restrictions.

The American Psychological Association posit that adolescent developmental changes influence each other and the adolescent in multiple overlapping ways. Thus, adolescence is characterized by turbulent changes in self and complex interactions with the environment. This shapes their personality and enables them to form relationships. On the other hand, it makes them vulnerable and often leads to conflicts and undesirable and socially unacceptable behaviour (Ashok, 2018). The theory underpinning this study posits that multiple layers of environment, such as micro, meso, and macro systems, influence the developmental trajectory of adolescents according to the ecological theory. The first has a direct impact on the adolescent's school, home, peer groups, and community. The interactions between diverse agents in the microsystem that influence the adolescent are referred to as the mesosystem. The macrosystem is the layer, which includes broader cultural attitudes and beliefs that influence adolescent development, such as governmental ideology and regulations (Lloyd 2002)

4.2.2 School before COVID-19

The second type of interpersonal relationship recounted by adolescents in this study is school, some reflections surrounding adolescents and schools before the pandemic in Slovakia were as follows: Before the covid pandemic participants had a busy schedule of academic and extracurricular activities.

... before covid came, I have got many activities like dance and other art classes, and I got about 3 activities like some classes many times a week. it was busy...

Participant 2

Other participants described the school time pre-pandemic as stressful:

before COVID, I was like attending high school, which was really tough on me, so I mostly was just focusing on that. It was stressful. And I didn't have much time for everything else... That's why I kind of like, say that it was pretty similar to the time when COVID was bad...

Participant 8

And we could not sleep long hours... like we didn't wake up at 8 we woke up really really early to go to school.

Participant 2

However, participants indicated that even though school was busy and stressful before the covid 19

pandemic it was a much-preferred medium of learning and teacher-student relationship experience.

When I go to school face to face, I liked it because I accepted more information and listened more, and it helps me to understand some things...

Participant 10

Notwithstanding the positivity, adolescents shared experiences with tutors that were contrary to this opinion:

...I just hate the people there I hate the training [basketball] because they wanted more from me and I had just joined and... they didn't let me in the better group since I was born in 2008 you know And so I must be in another group But it was hard, you know, to catch up with them because they were training for two years or more You cannot catch up with that in months And they wanted me to catch up I just couldn't, you know...

Participant 6

Before the covid 19 pandemic, findings indicated that participants had busy schedules filled with school and extracurricular activities, thereby spending most time in the classroom with students and teachers. This is consistent with the opinions of Boyd, 2014 who indicated that adolescents spend a large amount of time with their classmates, both in and out of school, and digitally. Bell (2016) suggests that school is an important environment in adolescents' lives as they not only get to interact outside the home but are able to develop and practice social thinking skills which help in comprehending others, and relationships, and understanding social structure or laws. As a result of their heightened socio-cognitive capabilities, adolescents improve their ability to discern the appropriateness of others' feelings and change their behaviour to reflect this (Dumontheil, Apperly, & Blakemore, 2010) thereby creating a more comprehensive concept of social group membership, and their social networks. In schools, classmates and peer networks provide a range of different purposes, including providing a transitory reference point for a developing sense of self. Adolescents develop moral judgment and values because of their identification with peers, and they begin to identify how they differ from authority figures. Also, adolescents crave constant affirmation from others, as well as peer affiliation and approval. They are extremely committed to peer group beliefs, and their peers' ideas become the most significant in their lives, guiding the way they live (Ashok, 2018). Evidently, the findings of this study show that when participants were not their best selves in achieving their goals in settings of extracurricular activities, they felt out of place.

4.2.3 Family relationships before the covid pandemic

Family serves as the primary source of socialization. In this study, adolescents shared some experiences in their families during the pandemic:

Everyone was busy...with my older brother, I have adopted brother older brother before COVID we didn't see each other. Like sometimes once a year because I was always away or working in Czehia

Participant 5

Equally as important are the relationships adolescents have with individual family members. Participants mentioned their relationships with their father saying.

Me and my dad we didn't have the strongest connection you know, so it was mostly my mom... as for mom we are okay...

Participant 5

On a positive front, adolescents shared experiences of how their families bonded.

I did really like to go on bicycle runs with my dad and sometimes with Pete (friend) too And I like to go to the city because me and my dad and my family, I like to go into the city not totally in the night..., but we were going on walks in the city sometimes...

...my family used to go to other countries and things like that... so before the pandemic, we used to travel a lot, so we would go to Croatia, and it was perfect there every year.

Participant 4

Psychologists have tended to emphasize socialization within the parent-child relationship, with particular attention on mother-child (Perez-Felkner, 2013) similar to the findings of this study, participants showed better relations with mothers and strained relationships with dads before the covid pandemi. Further, the findings in this study also highlight that family travelling is an integral part of bonding with families of participants this is confirmed by a review by Durko, & Petrick, (2013) reveals that there are deeper advantages to travel for individuals, families, and relationships. An exhaustive examination of the literature produced the finding that couples, families, and adults can all benefit from travel. According to several studies, less time was set aside for family time, which is probably due to rising work obligations and shifting family dynamics. These studies also demonstrated how using the limited family time to travel could help couples communicate better, lower the risk of divorce, fortify ties across generations, and boost both adults' and children's senses of well-being through relaxation and an opportunity to escape from the mundane,

which is also evident as participants indicate that relationships with some significant others like siblings were non-existent.

4.2.4 Social life before COVID-19

Another part of adolescents' interpersonal relationships mentioned in interviews was their social life outside the home, school, or friend groups. The social life of participants of this study varied greatly before the covid pandemic. Some participants enjoyed their cities and the ability to move about freely without restrictions while others utilized their options to decide how to engage. Adolescents' social life is evidently flexible before the pandemic and ranged between site seeing, spending time with friends, exploring nature and having the choice to not engage; some of which have been elaborated on in previous discussions above and in chapter three.

Adolescents shared:

like to meet new people... We could also go to parties and drive around the city in some car or so with my friends who came around.

Participant 3

I liked to go to the cinema with my friends... we used to go often and watch new movies...

Participant 10

Adolescents however considered themselves introverted before the covid-19 pandemic.

Yeah, before, the covid I was friends with everyone... I mean I had my friend group... but I would say I was more introverted. Because I was not so communicative person with everyone

Participant 5

I was more introverted. So, I just like didn't go out as much as I would do it now. But like during COVID, we were forbidden to go out. Like it was pretty similar Just like a regular day at home.

Participant 9

Apart from being introverted, adolescents considered the period before covid as normal and did not specially plan or allocate time for socialising.

I didn't use to make time to meet people...it was just normal because I will see them when I liked.

Participant 10

During adolescents' comments on their interactions, some made mention of important values developed.

I Don't like living in a city It's big and there was everybody is selfish. Yeah, there were, like, only these big old materialistic things and they all had phones. And who got the best clothes? And in a village, it was like 8 PM football at the field. Yeah, we came, and we play...my town is near Prešov...

Participant 5

adolescents also passed comments that suggested preference of certain things and places saying:

And I don't like Ruzomberok... Ruzomberok is small and dirty... I used to go to a town nearby called Baska Bystrisa. It's nice there and I have my friends from basketball there too.

Participant 2

4.3 Objective Two (2)- Identifying Factors That Disrupt Adolescent Socialization In Slovakia.

This objective sought to understand the pandemic situation in Slovakia, the restrictions and how they may have contributed to changes in adolescents' socialization patterns. Themes emerging on this objective include:

4.3.0 Adolescents' reflection on the pandemic in Slovakia

Adolescents reflected on the pandemic time. There was almost unilateral consideration that covid was very far and could not possibly affect Slovakia and that even if it did affect Slovakia:

Everybody in Slovakia started saying, oh, in China there is a new virus?... cause I was like, I won't get here You Know that was the first thing I thought and when it just came, I thought about it I was just normal sickness, you know, and people in Slovakia Right they take it as just cold or something like that It's not taking that seriously. As before, you know it was all in the news like after half a year I remember everybody was this on it.

Participant 5

Adolescents largely considered the covid as a conspiracy based on public information sharing.

Well, I'm a realistic person, to be honest. And first, I didn't believe it. I didn't believe it...but it was I knew it was changed and transferred by a human being so they can reach some kind of economic purpose. I always find something in between those small hints that are hidden behind the lines that normal human beings can see. I'm trying to find them, looking at all the economics as China skyrocketed as well as Japan as well as the United States....

Participant 3

Based on popular media influence, a participant mentions:

Did you know that Simpsons predicted the covid?... and there was how they were shipping the tank and there was the virus and it got sent. I saw that TikTok, you know because I spend most of my time there...

Participant 6

4.3.1 Feelings about the covid in Slovakia

Adolescents reflected on their feelings; they had a sense of fear about the covid pandemic. However, this was at different levels and for varying reasons:

I think I was scared about it, but only just short. Then I just let it go... I'm scared, that my grandparents will be ill Just thinking about them and my family. Because my grandmother has got problems with her health

Participant 11

When the covid came here we had the lockdown, I was so scared it will stay that way forever and we cannot come back to normal life. This was what I cared about the most.

Participant 10

Adolescents who had gotten infected had a vivid and enthralling account of their experience.

the COVID first time was really horrible. I lost my I lost my appetite. I felt really bad. I lost in one week, like 5 kilogrammes.... Literally, I wasn't hungry. I didn't have an appetite and I just was feeling like throwing up when I got the food because I just my stomach was messy. And I had a fever... For example, cucumber tastes so different Like it still tastes different. It's so weird...

Participant 6

On the other hand, some participants who never caught the virus spoke with pride saying:

my mom and my sister were both sick and I was staying with them for two weeks. We were in the same room, everything and when we were taking our tests Mum and sister did have COVID, but I didn't. But I had the signals. Yeah, I had everything, but no...

Participant 7

Media was a recurring theme in adolescents' reflection on the covid 19 situation in Slovakia.

and the media portrayed a lot of, you know content Yeah, about COVID and I saw a video, about Italy, how people were dying in Italy, for example... but I think some, for example, social media, there wasn't Truly information... some information wasn't true about how many people are in hospital or, when someone Died They write that on COVID-19, but it wasn't So yeah But I was so scared when I see so that on it in Italy Or other countries it was serious...

Participant 10

A participant shared his thoughts on the reason he perceived people to be scared during covid 19.

I think. People were scared because people are scared of death, you know, and they didn't know if they live or not, I think that's the most reason why people are scared because everybody is most likely to be scared of death and there is a small percentage that isn't... I guess it's that point... I was also really scared. I mean from the news and the way things stopped at a standstill; it was very shocking.

Participant 6

Most adolescents were worried for others during the pandemic. Mostly for people who were older.

I was so scared because I live lived with older people and I was so scared about them... But also, about me. And yeah, my family and I caught it too, and it was hard, but We all survive...

Participant 10

to be honest, I wasn't. Like panicking, comparing like that I was just scared about my parents because they're older. So, I was scared about their health because we were told it had really bad symptoms in older persons.

Participant 9

Another participant shed light on the family situation at the time.

I'm scared too because my dad had cancer this year and he will not be at work... for my mom, it's a very hard time...in our family too...

Participant 1

Other participants explained the shock they witnessed from the pandemic on others:

a lot of changes for everyone like children and adults, the shock... the middle-aged people and the ones like my parents and the other ones in the village. They were shocked by it like they couldn't know what to do. Their possibilities were downed to, three or four things. I can't imagine how is it with a smaller child

or let's say a family which has kids who are under the age of 10. But for me, I got to the point where I realised that as it came, it will go... So, I was just waiting for the end.

Participant 5

4.3.2 Pandemic restrictions in Slovakia

The pandemic situation in Slovakia was managed with some rules for citizens to adhere to. Participants shared the restriction in Slovakia.

The shops were open only for elderly people, which are above 60 years old until 11:00 o'clock ...they were security guards who were checking about this. They were no small shops open, no sports goods, no clothes, no food, no restaurants. No delivery, only pick-up places. Pick up places only, like through a window and you cannot come in contact with the person.

Participant 3

...they made stupid laws about like, after 9:00 pm you shouldn't go out or you will be fined. You can't go to visit your grandma and everything... The malls were closed, the shops were closed, and they were open until 11:00 o'clock only for elderly people... they name it like something like social bubbles yes... you should only meet your close family...if you are with, your partner and you have a child, you shouldn't go to visit your parents or his parents.

Participant 5

You needed to be in quarantine if you were somewhere in another country or anywhere and you would come, then you need to be a week at home or close. You couldn't go anywhere.

Participant 11

...we could go to nature, but no, very long, far away off from our houses and we must wear a mask on our faces schools were closed. We couldn't go to school, and we must have online lessons.

Participant 5

When they released the rules a little because they thought everything was okay...we must test ourselves... For school, we had to be tested and then we get negative and then we get to go to school. We did this about one day a week, every week. The testing was the one done in the nose... I hate that school gives us this, the antigen test we must do the test before school. I didn't like it.

Participant 6

The findings in this study about the Slovak provisions put in place to control the spread of the coronavirus pandemic are consistent with the provisions gathered by the researcher from documents in the literature review of this thesis (Chapter 3). In addition to the restrictions discovered in the chapter adolescents added regular testing for school-going children which was done once every week to ensure that students were negative.

4.3.3 Adolescents' opinions on Restrictions

Adolescents also share which restriction bothered them most:

Staying home all the time, after that, that was the worst thing even though I wanted to go outside and we wanted to play basketball because I'm a basketball player; everybody was just typing around. Are you vaccinated or have you been tested? Is anybody in contact with the infected? Once and one time, we went to play. Like, let's say, as nobody knew black in the gymnasium. And we went there, and they called the cops on us like, how is it possible? Like we are playing basketball, and everything is shut down and closed and we had to shut it down and we had to go home, and we were happy that we didn't get tickets for it...

Participant 3

A participant spoke about the pollution masks create:

Masks are good for nature because when you have got two masks or masks all day and everything, leave, everything goes to rubbish and then. A lot and lots of rubbish for the earth, you know, and people don't really dispose it of well, so it's it may be somewhere and it's really not good for the environment.

...I didn't also like to wear the mask because with that I could not see in my glasses.

Participant 2

It has to be those restrictions like everything since the morning shopping and respirators like you were sweating under it, you couldn't breathe normally like it was hard and always like after that I was having a lot of pimples.... And even I had had to shave, and it was irritating... definitely the most, the most horrible.

Participant 5

I really disliked the mask... were just based on the mask we had to wear every day because when you do and have sensitive skin and then you get breakouts.

Participant 1

Media was also spoken about as one of the things that bothered adolescents the most.

The headlines were full of numbers that how many people died... how many children died... social media was telling us Yeah, Italy, yesterday 100 people died and yeah, it was so bothering me because I was so scared...I wish COVID will end.

Participant 10

But in other families, like my mum's friend, for them, three members of the family had died from the covid and all covid is like everybody says covid. Yeah, they were old. And all they do for covid is rise up the numbers but yeah, it's mostly because covid dropped down your immunity and every other disease you have starts spreading...

Participant 5

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on people's lives all around the world. Most public health responses in many other nations including Slovakia were cautious and adult-centric, with the roles and perspectives of children on the pandemic being less examined. Instead, young people have been positioned differently as either "resilient," able to "bounce back" from the pandemic easily and without any issues.

This objective is considered important by the researcher as it probes into the thoughts of adolescents to reflect on their experiences as adolescents are perceived to be cognitively and emotionally inclined to have opinions on various matters. Agreeably, the covid pandemic was highly unprecedented to all nations evoking strict regulations which prove to limit adolescent activities and normal routines, these changes were shocking as discussed in the introduction of this paper and disruptive. The findings of this study indicate that all the active suggestions of the World health organization to manage the covid situation in nations were adhered to by the Slovak authority. Participants indicated the institution of lockdowns, the use of respirators, meeting protocols, travel banns, and closure of schools, various shopping centres and recreational centres. The seeming impact of these measures will be elaborated on the next themes however, the effects of COVID-19 on children's present and future life in terms of their socioemotional and mental health, education, and future employment possibilities are beginning to emerge, and as such, understanding children's thought processes on the management of the covid pandemic is critical (Thompson, Spencer, & Curtis, 2021). Some reflections at the beginning of the pandemic were fuelled by various conspiracy theories gathered from the media and public discourses. Generally, participants were confident in how far the situation was from their country, Slovakia until the reality hit. Participants indicated that after the first contact, the restrictions were rolled in the "everything stopped". The gradual increase of new cases and

strict restrictions fueled an atmosphere of fear and anxiety as described by participants. However, interesting findings indicated that the knowledge of the pandemic received by adolescents was fake and untrue. Results from this study are coherent with studies that indicated that early community responses to the pandemic influenced how serious adolescents perceived the pandemic to be and the extent to which adolescents modified their behaviours by wearing masks, maintaining physical distancing, and following other public health guidelines (Park & Oh, 2021). However, participants highlighted that the fear experienced during the heights of the covid pandemic was related to their worry for their grandparents who were old and were at risk of serious infections.

In terms of adolescent infection during the pandemic, some participants shared their experiences, whilst most of the participants spoke proudly about how they were not infected by the virus even though they lived with persons who were positive, others indicated that their symptoms ranged from low to mild characterized by a loss of appetite and changes in food taste to headaches. Untrue to various studies stated that the COVID-19 diagnosis or close contact with an infected person, low social support, and negative coping has been found to relate to higher levels of depression and anxiety (Qi et al., 2020), adolescents who were infected do not experience anxiety in this regard. Further, consistent with the findings of Thompson, Spencer, & Curtis, (2021) participants were knowledgeable about the COVID-19 pandemic, its transmission, the risks, and related public health harm reduction strategies as well as the benefit it had for their grandparents as they feared to lose them to the “deadly” disease.

4.3.4 Adolescents’ Perspectives on covid management in Slovakia

Covid management was critical in order to contain the spread of covid in Slovakia. Adolescents made a lot of comments on this topic which indicated:

Then they may like this restriction, like if you are running in the morning like somebody is exercising you can run in a field without the respirators, but in the city, you have to put it on so everybody would go to the back of the city and then you will see like. 100 people with no mask because they wanted everybody wanted to have no respirators, like how?... this was bad decisions that they made.

Participant 5

Yeah, they change it after like 3 months. They change it again and again it. Was like they couldn't like, stop it...

Participant 2

They were starting to make some prohibitions like you can go outside for a walk if you are not within a group of five people and they are people you know... and then been already tested... they were slowly

starting to relieve the rules that were like really strict and the people couldn't get used to them... the first release was a big mistake because everybody thought it was over... there was a big silence before a storm and the number of infections infected skyrocketed. Again, like huge and the hospitals couldn't handle it everybody was upset.

Participant 3

Adolescents shared their opinion regarding the fact that there was little expert opinion on handling the covid situation in Slovakia.

Should have waited and talked about decisions more precisely and like consult with real experience People who worked with infectious or with crisis and with infectious diseases like this doctor, that died...he told them in the beginning that it will Be like This, this, this there will be second and a third wave. And they just like what? they take him off his post as the main hygienic and give it to someone... we had to immunise ourselves when we don't have masks because we are meeting every day with diseases and spores and everything, and we build our immunity... that is why it did not stop for two years. We didn't have immunity...

Participant 5

other opinions suggested that the management was highly political:

... the government could have behaved better and helped people. And even handled the situation in a better way than concentrating on politics.

Participant 10

Another participant shared about an innovation which he considered inaccurate and a sign of poor management.

... they made even some kind of app I think that wasn't really good... they checked with your cell phone like the SIM card of your location, if you aren't at a location you are living at and you won't show your face to the camera, they will find you and everything. Yeah, that even didn't work very well because. Nobody just wanted to install it and what Can you do? Nothing...

Participant 5

4.3.4.1 Perspectives on the Necessity of COVID-19 Restrictions

Participants further shared their opinions on what could have been better and if the covid restrictions in Slovakia were necessary. Interestingly, many participants objected to the necessity of restrictions for varying reasons.

But people were smart and they made it up and everything because people want to travel, you can stop them and me to I know a friend who has like, who works and Bratislava and his family in my village, which is like one part of Slovakia to another like another so you have to travel to the whole of Slovakia... what you can do with it because he's living officially in Bratislava. Yeah, but he has family there...

Participant 5

Another concern was that the restrictions were for too long:

I think that a lot of these restrictions were, uh, for too long time, and it wasn't that necessary because everyone was, using masks and things like that. And I think that. It should be like, uh, not as strict as it were. And I think the most problem was panic and that everyone was like a specialist.

Participant 8

Some participants considered the restrictions very useful for varying reasons.

I think this kind of helps us It protects us from other people and covid.

Participant 10

sometimes it was good because, uh, some people have very bad breath, so it was that was a good help, I think.

Participant 1

On the contrary one participant considered the restrictions as lenient

I was like, oh, they they're too light for the situation, especially when we had, like, a big wave of new cases...

Participant 8

Steinberg, (2014) defined adolescence as a developmental stage that spans the transition from childhood to adulthood and is defined by biological, cognitive, psychological, and social changes that occur throughout this time. Curtis, (2014) divides adolescents' social thinking into comprehending others, and relationships, and understanding social structure or laws. Adolescents have a better understanding of

societal ideas like rights and freedoms and are more prone to articulate feelings about their entitlement to them. According to Darling, Cumsille, and Martinex (2008), adolescents develop a more complicated understanding of their relationships with authority, which may lead them to question authority figures' actions. Consistent with these claims in adolescent development, participants of this study shared their opinions on the relevance and necessity of the pandemic and the restrictions that came thereafter, essentially these opinions evaluated the work of authority figures from the perspective of adolescents. Responses were varied and showed a sense of criticality in examining things they considered appropriate by leaders and things that were not done in managing the covid situation in Slovakia. Furthermore, adolescents were disappointed in how politics were involved in tackling the pandemic situation leading adolescents to recognize a sense of inconsistency in the regulations as they were constantly modified. In consistency with the opinions of participants, Thalpwila, (2021) posit in the study of the role of global powers in combating covid-19 indicated that in the early phases of the Covid-19 pandemic, Western countries did not provide appropriate support. They referred to the fatal illness as the 'Chinese Virus,' and treated it as a minor irritation. Furthermore, avoidable gatherings contributed to the virus's recurring outbreaks, which moved from country to country. Finally, it must be recognised that the global cooperation required to battle the Covid-19 pandemic was severely impeded by the politicisation of the programmes designed for this reason during the pandemic's first year. Aside from this, adolescents also indicated that individual people ignored the restriction; therefore, while some considered the relevance of the regulations imposed by authorities, others disagreed.

4.4.0 Objective Three: To Identify The Impact Of The Covid Pandemic On Adolescent Socialization

4.4.1 Impact On Interpersonal Relationships

Adolescents made narratives of their families from which the researcher could draw information on their socialization practices in their families. Some subthemes that emerged were relationships with parent, relationships with siblings, relationships with significant others, economic situation of family, family bonding practices during the pandemic, family loss, family situation.

4.4.1 Impact on Adolescents' Families

During the pandemic the restrictions forced families to stay home. Participants shared interesting experiences with family.

During the covid, me and my family are going to nature. In covid times very often... and it was great. Now I haven't got time...

Participant 11

We do a lot of sleepovers together, so we were just like 3 of me, my sister and Tanya, so I really enjoyed this. Yeah, it's very funny, you know... one time we pranked our brothers with orange juice and salt, and they weren't very happy, but we liked it...

Participant 2

And I think the best was my time with my family when I was at home and we're trying to, you know, spice some spicing time and things like that I think it was cooking and making desserts and things like that, making like movie night with candles and things like that.

Participant 9

In covid, sometimes I and my dad bake a pizza for my family on some evenings, me and my family play some games, table games. It was good because it was funny.

Participant 1

A participant shared that the situation was very normal for her family indicating that parents went to their regular jobs:

Normally going to their work because both of my parents are police and they had to go to work the same way. They only had to wear masks, and I didn't like it because I was scared of them. How can they be outside when everyone is inside, but it was their job...

Participant 7

My dad was cop, so he was almost always somewhere because somebody just was walking and you couldn't do that so he needed to go there...so, he will come home late at night...I was a bit sad because I didn't spend so much time with my family. It's a lot more fun than being alone in my room...if they have time, there will spend it with me and my brother but if they don't, I will have to help them with the thing so they can have more time with us.

Participant 4

Adolescents also got closer with parents as they shared, they were able to better communicate with parents...

My parents they're happy when I'm at home and I think it helped me to connect deeper in a relationship with them. And I think they understand me better than before and I'm like, more open to them now ...because I was at home, so all the time I was with them, and during my bad times, I think it was also

helpful that I needed help and I also tried to then talk with them about it.

Participant 9

Family situation was relevant to the researchers' findings there were many comments in relation to individual parents as some participants with divorced parent had a different dynamic:

... my mom and I have a better connexion with the pandemic because in the evening I was at home the whole week so in the evening we could make coffee and watch some mostly horror... and during this, we talked like every time, it was like, oh, more conversation into the detail.

Participant 5

Me and mom got really good you know; we became very close... because when I went to her, we were alone, and it was very nice.

Participant 6

However, some relationships were not as positive.

...with dad it just went really bad. I guess I hated the interactions with him at that time He was really frustrated with my brother and the bad energy came to me. It was horrible and I went to my mom's places to have better situation he was giving really a lot of attention to my brother. And it I was like; I didn't exist Almost. You know, he didn't talk to me. He didn't know if I had eaten something or not And He was, since he was frustrated with my brother and angry, he always just moved the bad mood on me, and on his GF, it was really like a hard time then.

Participant 6

4.4.1.1 Impact on Extended family Relations

My grandmother bakes very well, and she sent me some recipes and I sent her a photo of what I baked... It's a nice way of keeping her company... having communication with her.

Participant 2

A participant shared she was unable to visit her comfort place, where her grandma and aunts lived.

Since she's quite old and we didn't want her to be sick and I really loved the place and my grandma's you know it was my Comfort place. I had my aunts there 2 of my aunts were there and one of them was like my idol. You know, my favourite person? When he said something, I did, but I felt so terrible and bad... I just missed that voice, you know.

Participant 6

4.4.1.2 Economic Impact on Families

Little change but not bad... my aunt [caretaker] had to be more careful...she didn't tell me, but I saw this.

Participant 10

A participant shared that the economic situation got very good saying:

my dad because he started doing this place where you can get a testing and he did all over Slovakia.

Yeah, and it did make a lot of money. You know, he could get me new, his iPad and this So I think it affected him in a good way,

however,

...my mom since they are divorced, you know... So, it affected my mom a little, I guess. She didn't work as much. But I think it was fine.

Participant 6

4.4.1.3 Impact on Sibling Relationships

Participants generally had good relations with their siblings... however some indicated they could hardly contain themselves in the same house after a while.

I spend a lot of time with my sister. We are very close, but my brother is always at the computer. So, like I start to talk to him, and he was like no go back to your room and so I leave him.

Participant 1

Sometimes we have good relations but sometimes he just... I don't have door in my room and sometimes he just plays some game on mobile and gives the sounds the maximum sounds and its little bit annoying, little bit more...

Participant 4

We can't stand sometimes [older sister] with each other, but. It's good. We do a lot of things together. Like playing table games. Video games talking, helping each other, everything.

Participant 11

My little brother.... So I built Connections with him and I get to teach him a lot of things because children are always like... Oh, why is the sky Blue and why we live on a planet and what the space and the sort of little things and how does the water evaporate and everything and you get to teach him things and he kind

of sees that he has a big mature brother and he could show you something and he can like always ask

Participant 5

With my brother, it's like I am his mother when distance school ends... he only comes to me for food... Sometimes we play games together and it was good. I like it, but sometimes we are like I will kick you if you say something to me.

Participant 2

4.4.1.4 Loss of Relations

One participant experienced loss of family member

I would spend more time with my cousin and family. Because he died Because of COVID So I didn't know that he had covid. They just Called me and said yeah, Tommy is dead because of covid So yeah, I will spend more time with him.

Participant 10

Due to the lockdown, school lessons were held online; hence, contact with teachers and peers was limited to online communication. Furthermore, many parents worked from home, and families established new routines as parents and their children spent significant time at home while also being occupied with their tasks (Waghmare et al, 2023). This study identified that some participants were extremely fond of family members outside their nuclear family like grandparents, aunts, and cousins whom they could not get in touch with because of the restrictions and the fear of transmission to grandparents especially as they were considered more vulnerable to the virus. However, studies indicate family relationships during the pandemic improved during the lockdown (Graell et al 2020). During the initial wave of the pandemic, studies on family situations revealed that a positive home environment could mitigate the negative effects of the lockdown and help adolescents cope with unanticipated changes. In the absence of exchanges with friends and the larger community, most families supported activities such as table conversation, board games, and outdoor activities (Kutsar & Kurvet-Käosaar, 2021). Consistent with this study, participants enjoyed the opportunity to bond with their families as parents were primarily working from home. However, other participants indicated that due to the nature of their parents' jobs, they didn't have as much time and that the family situation during the pandemic. Most participants referred to the "submarine effect" which indicated that in the subsequent or prolonged waves of the pandemic, living in proximity increased boredom and strain in family relationships, this is consistent with the studies conducted in Estonia and Lithuania with a sample of adolescents (Kutsar & Kurvet-Käosaar, 2021; Waghmare et. Al, 2023). Studies by Shah et. Al (2020) and Frazer& Fite, (2015) posits that positive parent-child communication was related with

constant parent-child interactions; indicating parents praised their children more and devoted more time to them during the lockdown which is evident in the findings of this study. Understandably, the study further indicates that constantly being in the faces of family members 24/7, resulted in tensions and arguments and occasional conflicts with siblings. Also, changes might have introduced and strengthened exposure to new underexplored communication obligations to both parents and adolescent, disagreement and strain in parent-adolescent relationships does not inevitably lead the loss of connection; many adolescents and their parents report getting along during their teenage years (Laursen & Collins, 2009). Further, the findings of this study showed that family dynamics and situations were crucial to how adolescents coped mentally and emotionally, participants from divorced parents shared varying levels of strain in relationships. Notwithstanding the challenges, some children felt safe, relaxed, and happy when with their families (Idoiaga et. al 2021) consistent with this finding, adolescents in Slovakia showed contentment with their lives while reflecting their subjective assessment of how they were adapted to the “new normal”. Participants of this study shared narratives of their families being economically stable and others experiencing even better conditions. Lastly, the loss of family to the virus was evident in this study leading to a significant change in participants’ view of life and approaches to relationships with family.

4.4.2 IMPACT OF COVID ON FRIENDSHIPS

4.4.2.1 Bonding

Some of my friendships even get stronger and when we met, we spend the better time and we listened each other more and better So yeah, it was interesting ...

Participant 9

4.4.2.2 Going out/meeting

Some participants who had friends near them made it a point to meet when the restrictions in Slovakia were not as severe.

I remember. When the rules weren't that strict and we could go, for example, I used to like to take a car with my friend and just park somewhere with a nice view and eat food and that was great. This was like. The best time to spend our time with my friends and we were eating, listening, to music and. Watching like nature.

Participant 9

However, during the lockdown participants were unable to meet their friends physically.

I wasn't seeing my friends so often... I wasn't with the friends I wanted to be with... I wanted to go out

with my friends During the holidays And I couldn't because we have been locked down.

Participant 4

Others tried to meet, and they shared their experience with the police patrolling.

within the city I remember some people went out, they went out. And they were trying to hide so nobody could see them and even somebody called the police, and they were taken like they were fined yeah, because they just wanted to meet each other.

Participant 5

4.4.2.3 Impact on Friendship Dynamics

Participants indicated that their friends changed a lot during the pandemic, describing them as fake and others as toxic.

it was like I was kind of sad to be honest because we changed a lot and after the covid, we, everybody thought we will do the same things, but Somebody wouldn't go out. They don't want this...They are at work.... It's like kind of weird and we tried, but like, everyone has different schedules, and it didn't work out yet...because my friend was like he was kind of weird... Like he's good, and everything. But then he started like Saying this to someone else and this to someone else and it really changed, and he didn't want me to come to him and everything.

Participant 5

Now I don't meet the people that they meet before covid like people from dance, but even they don't mean too much to me like when I was younger, because they are just like fake friends. Because they were not good for me yeah...I changed too I think, it's good I didn't even see them overall

Participant 2

Michelle totally stopped to talk to me... I've never met someone from my classroom from the different school... the first school I haven't seen anyone from that first school I've never seen for like years...I don't know why but my best friend started to be very toxic, and I was like She was very aggressive to me. She started to curse a lot. And I was like, why are you saying that? When we were just kids? I felt better when she blocked me No socials and stuff. I was already sad at the start like, why would she block me? What did I do but then I realise that she was a toxic one. So, I was like, OK, whatever. She deserved it...

Participant 7

Some participants had no interactions with their friends:

it was just now that my mom approved that I download messenger, only like a year ago, Is the first time I can chat with my friends. I didn't even call anyone or text someone... it was for Me a little bit hard Because I didn't have my best friends with me...Only in online class...the ones that I stayed in contact with and that I can say are my classmates here from school.

Participant 4

The covid time was a time some participants made new friends:

At that moment like I knew my current best friend, but we weren't like big friends... then we, like, started getting to know each other even bit more... since we could only meet like two times in a year because he is in Bratislava, and I am here he's working and studying but We can talk about like we seen each other yesterday and nothing happened... The experience told me a lot because you can look at it like When somebody wants to meet you or call you and everything, they'll find a way. Yeah. So, I kind of filtered like my circle of friends.

Participant 5

Before covid, I was not good friends with one of my classmates. But after the covid, when I came back to school, we started talking and now we are good friends...

Participant 7

4.4.2.4 Loss of Friendships

Participants lost friends for various reasons. A participant who changed schools during the time shared

My best friend stopped talking with me...she was in the other school I left...and I didn't know anyone from here... but when I left, she literally ignored me. She didn't even know She literally acted like she did not even know me, and we were talking. But I am fine with that. I've got different friends now...

Participant 7

I also had lots of friends then, I feel sometimes like it all vanished... before covid starts, we have good basketball team in Ruzomberok, but the team stopped Because we were very small team and then we lost good friends and then when covid ended we were very few and our coach just left... we had to say goodbye.

Participant 7

Adolescents rely largely on their peer relationships for emotional support and social growth, which contributed to the challenges they had during the COVID pandemic (Ellis and Zarbatany 2017; Magson

et al., 2021). The term "disorders of adolescence" has previously been used to describe internalizing disorders related to such sensitivity in children between the ages of 13 and 19 years (Rapee et al. 2019), who form the majority the study participants.

Although parents are generally considered to be the primary source of socialization, adolescents spend a significant amount of time with peers, and friends increasingly replace parents as the main source of interaction and influence in their lives (Magson et al., 2021). The loss of peer relationships due to rejection, bullying, or loneliness has been linked to mental health issues such as sadness, rage, fear, tension, and anxiety (Orben et al. 2020; Octavius et al. 2020). Unintentionally, pandemic limitations that resulted in physical separation ended social interaction; evidently, participants of this study recollected spending more time with their friends as discussed above and confirmed in the above findings that the lack of interaction with friends was a great bother.

Adolescents' peer connections underwent a significant shift prior to the COVID, which was exacerbated by their inability to meet regularly, in line with the claims of Somerville, (2013). The COVID period was a significant source of conflict, rejection, and interpersonal stress (Magson et al., 2021), as evidenced by the participants' reflections on delicate situations in friendships, including betrayal, toxic friendships, neglect from friends, and breakups in friendships and relationships. Participants' answers to the question of what bothered them the most included not being able to see their friends, losing loved ones, the constant changes in society, and feeling alone. These responses were consistent with predictions made by (Magson et al., 2021), who reported that the most upsetting circumstances for adolescents were not being able to see their friends and having family members fall ill. However, they expressed little anxiety about developing COVID-19, getting sick, or passing away from it.

4.4.3 IMPACT ON SCHOOL

4.4.3.1 Changes In Education During Covid-19

Participants described the period as being overwhelming. They described the period as one of the longest school years, also the easiest and the hardest. Participants shared their experiences saying:

...and also, school We had online classes, we have to stay home and Every plan we had just disappeared... we were home very long and then we go back...then...we were at school... and then the covid stopped and then we were at school again. It was day-to-day and it was very like, oh, I'm going to school. Yeah. We're happy to go back to school. And then it was like a big holiday and in summer in June last year School It's like you can go to school if you want, but you don't have to go to school if you don't want...and many people want to go to school.

Participant 5

I didn't really want to go to school, actually But yeah I know I wanted but I didn't because I wanted good grades, but I don't want to see anyone from there actually we stayed home for a long time and Even when it was opened, it was still kind of restricted and everybody was being very careful We had to wear masks, face mask It was crazy I think it was too much.

Participant 7_

A participant said the experience was overwhelming.

my like regular classes started to be online, but we had a break from classes from the 12th of March... there was a long break between classes. And then the teacher's professor started to like, contact us and like they gave us a lot of work to do to pass this semester and to make everything like somehow go... it was really overwhelming because everyone like put was putting a lot of work on us... I felt like I was only sleeping and sitting at my desk, and that was my whole Day... it was It was horrible.

Participant 8

Adolescents in their last semester of studies experienced stress due to anxiety of completing their studies.

we have something here in Slovakia...we the student get stressed...so we have it which is called maturita and maturita is something which is like a school leaving exam on your 4th grade. Before university that got cancelled as well. And got to a point that they're going, to sum up, all your grades from one to four and going to make a final exam and final marks, which you're going to get from all these four years of study... So, you don't have to take the test and go to school to spread the virus even more...

Participant 3

A participant shares his experience as a final-year student in secondary school during the covid pandemic:

... I had 15 days before the graduation I'm happy I have free. I can finally sleep, and 1st day was like I learn like half an hour, second day it was like 2 hours and the third day I woke up and I was like. OK, it's time to learn and I was able to learn about 8/9 hours a day so it was for me... Good, because it was Like I realise if I want something to do I can do it and At that time, I think I finally realised I can learn and I can go to college because in college you have, like this explosive learning because in two months you have to know everything. So, I thought to myself, if I can do it now, I can do it. In a college.

Participant 5

Contrary to the positive experience of some participants, one who was in school in the Czech Republic at the time shared her experience.

it was difficult because I realised, I didn't really like it [program] So I didn't really study and I was really bad at it, to be honest. I really was horrible student, but then When I realised that I could do that even something else or anything I really like tried to change it in my like study routine and things like that...

Participant 9

A participant indicated the whole situation was a shock and he and his classmates were not prepared for such a huge and long vacation he also said most adolescents were largely unprepared and did not have laptops for school:

Half of our friends had Mobile phones... No computers... I didn't have one too, because I was always travelling and everything, so I don't need it because in the weekend I go out with friends during the week school...

Participant 5

A participant enjoyed a good amount of flexibility even in the seeming difficulty of online studies:

the online school changed everything very much because I used to eat while my teacher was teaching since I don't have a camera on my laptop... Like maybe when it was covid time we were waking up like from 8:00 am to 9:00 PM. And now I wake up at 5 am. That's very different.... During covid, I have to go out of my bed in the mornings whenever I want, yeah. I can learn in bed, eat in bed, and now we go to school, and we have to be Early, very early.

Participant 2

4.4.3.2 School Achievement during Pandemic

Academic achievement is important as a marker of positive adjustment during adolescence but also because academic achievement sets the stage for future educational and occupational opportunities. Adolescents generally showed positive achievements in their studies; sharing that the ability to find answers to tests with little effort while on online sites like Google was very helpful:

the easy part was the online teaching, you know. You could cheat. You know, it was easy to cheat.... We have one teacher. Her name is Masaki, you know. And she always like When we are doing a test, you need to put the camera. So I was like, I can still cheat, you know I have a phone So I told her I don't have a notebook or PC and I can only on a phone so she could see only this part of my since I like I have like this phone you know and on phone, you can just swipe you know it will pause the test actually and you can go

on Google and just search for the question and then

*...On the other day, when she was telling us the grades she was Like even if **name***could get could get a good grade How's that possible? You couldn't, and I was like I didn't even look in the book I just looked in Google Even the pictures you know in history class we have tested, and she was like giving the picture You know there was put up a picture I just did copy the picture, put it in the Google and it will say what is it.*

Participant 6

A participant received support from family during distance education.

my mom sometimes helps me and I'm very surprised about that because My mum is very loyal and it's like I don't want to look at the information.

Participant 2

A participant shared that they have very little knowledge to account for great grades:

...You know, it was I like my teacher says now that it's like you should know that from 6th grade. And I'm like when we were in 6th grade, I was cheating. I didn't even like look at the book and I had zero idea what we were doing. I didn't pay attention...In the class.

Participant 7

Contrary to having an easy way out of school activities, some adolescents had anxiety about examinations and tests during distance education.

we [class]were a bit more worried about the exams, but on the other side they were more fragile to us, and they let us pass.

Participant 4

I was studying a lot more because I thought that if we came right back into the school there, they would give us a lot of tests and they will test us with anything.

Participant 11

4.4.3.3 Understanding School Content During Pandemic

In this study participants shared some experiences indicating difficulty in understanding the content of teachers and following classes while staying at home

I can say It was good for the teachers. I could say it that way because they can manage A whole semester of work within 3 and 1/2 hour Zoom calls and they were done, but it was worse for us because we didn't have contact with the teacher with the material. We couldn't practise...

Participant 3

School changed and I was not used to it. Sometimes I didn't understand teacher and my friend were also home. It was not the same as I know every day. My younger brother always wants us to play you know...I didn't like that ...Sometimes I just sleep. Even though I had online class I can feel sleepy and not hear anything teacher said.

Participant 2

Contrary to the difficulties, participants generally recorded good grades in school and others got better at some courses:

I got better Marks and I Understand math. Before COVID, I didn't ...So yeah, it helps me.

Participant 10

4.4.3.4 Student-Teacher Relationship During the Pandemic

Participants in the study also shared their experiences with their teachers during covid. There were varying experiences in the student-teacher dynamic.

Me, I want to better interact with Teachers... ask questions if you want... online like most of them didn't even use online education, they just send the materials... OK. What can we do?

Participant 3

I like to communicate on a level ...some mutual respect... doesn't have to be 50-50 because they are teachers, they are always the authority. But I like that they're even teachers. Form some kind of respect for the students, and they can imagine that they were once students....

Participant 5

it comes to my teachers, they were really nice, they were really helpful, and they weren't hard on us as well. So they were, of course, everyone was in the same situation... we had the same struggles we were able to understand each other better.

Participant 8

Some participants shared that teachers were more kind to them during the pandemic however some

teachers had different approaches to relating with students.

I think they were kind...there are teachers they didn't care. They were like even for the [COVID] situation they weren't like, really empathic and things like that. But there were also teachers that were the opposite. They even called me like what's going on and things like that. And they try to help us or talk with us. So, I think I found every kind of teacher...

Participant 9

Some participants shared great experiences with their basketball coach.

when we have the training, our trainer tells us that have to run, with me and my family or with Mishka and are going to run to the village. It was good and we sent photos of How we ran to trainer.

Participant 2

4.4.3.5 Learning During Pandemic

Adolescents shared their experiences related to difficulty in learning during the pandemic. Their motivation to study on their own was very low due to the lack of pressure.

I was studying hard because, in online school, it was hard to learn... I tried to learn by myself and with the Internet

Participant 11.

School bothered me the most Very hard to learn. Online, it's different. I like face-to-face learning.

Participant 4

Because you don't have like the pressure you have in school that you have to learn it because you will come to school the next morning and you write the test and if you don't know it

Participant 5

Adolescents wanted the opportunity to learn as they waited for the school system to adjust to the new routine of online learning.

...So, I kind of go back to studying and I felt a bit better because, you know, I could, like, hear my professors and like, be in touch with my classmates and we didn't have that much work on Us.

Participant 10

Online studying tool was a great initiative to keep schools in session during the covid pandemic and help instructors to stay in touch with students and sustain their educational progress (UNESCO, 2020). However, it must be acknowledged that most students were not fully equipped to use such technologies, leaving them with a variety of difficulties (Crawford et al., 2020), this is consistent with this study as students did not have personal computers or laptops prior to the pandemic. The educational system was not ready for the introduction of distance learning (Barnova et al. 2020; Mikuskova & Veresova, 2020)., which had an impact on the situation evident in the methods of online education as discovered by the study such as sending assignments by mails, or the level of engagement portrayed. As evident in the participants' experiences, in terms of understanding school content, studies by (Sintema, 2020) shown that pupils who are weak in learning have challenges, whereas naturally driven learners are generally unaffected in their learning because they require less supervision and assistance. Contrary to this opinion, participants of this study largely had low motivation to study. Participants, however, did share experiences of improvement in their studies when they dedicated more time. Relating with teachers and classmates during online education proved to be difficult in this study, as suggested in a study which shows students found it difficult only communicating digitally leading to an inability to share ideas and knowledge (Alomyan, 2021). Students however reported good grades in their achievements on schoolwork contrary to the speculations that levels of academic performance of the students is likely to decline for the classes held for both year-end examinations and internal examinations due to reduced contact hours for learners and lack of consultation with teachers when facing difficulties in learning or understanding (Elmer & Stadtfeld, 2020). Consistent with a study in Estonia, students capitalized on online and parental support to complete school tasks like exams and tests, as it become more mechanical and most reported to be stressed and unfocused. They admitted that they often cheated to get great grades by collaborating with other friends or simply checking answers using Google. Most participants in this study described distance learning to be extremely difficult during the pandemic as opposed to the study of Kutsar, & Kurvet-Käosaar, (2021). However, adolescents showed great excitement during the initial stages of the pandemic where they considered distance learning to be a temporary situation as they hoped to return to face-to-face learning in the shortest time. This study showed a growing weariness in adolescents during the pandemic as the restrictions prolonged and the conditions of the pandemic fluctuated.

4.4.4 The Impact of The Pandemic on Social Life

The social life of adolescents is very crucial to their socialization process. Adolescents shared how their usual routines were affected by the pandemic situation in Slovakia.

We[[family] were going on walks in the city sometimes... and when the covid came We have never been from that time...we don't go anymore because my dad or mom is scared that we would catch covid or something...

Participant 4

the simplest thing that you can just sit inside a car and just go somewhere, and you don't have to worry about if you could stop so you don't have to explain where you are going or where are you doing because everything that time had to have a purpose.

Participant 3

A participant who had just relocated to a different neighbourhood shared how she lost social contact:

during COVID we just moved into the House, and we were new there, but my brother made friends very early and we've got a real neighbour and he's very good friends with them, but I haven't got many friends. In the village And I think doing the covid I did not socialize with them, because they just love football, and I don't like football and my brother is more sociable than me and he's always with friends and I don't know how he does it, but I haven't got any friends there.

Participant 2

Participants also shared how there were no more events saying:

I had to say I missed cinemas, I missed concerts. That's what I really missed... I think this winter I went for concert, and it was crowded. I was excited that finally music and people were, singing... that was what I missed.

Participant 9

even parties like village parties, everything, so everything stopped... and it changed a lot. That even parties and everything like everything stopped and everybody is used to being home, in bed and watching Netflix and everything and they won't go out...

Participant 5

4.4.4.1 Engagement In Extra Curricula Activities

Extracurricular activities outside school are a big part of the lives of adolescents. Participants shared how these activities changed and eventually stopped during and after the Covid pandemic:

before covid came, I have got many activities like dance and other art classes, and I got about 3 activities...

Participant 2

we wanted to play basketball because I'm a basketball player, and everybody was just typing around. Are you vaccinated or have you been tested? Is anybody in contact with the infected?

Participant 3.

A participant indicated that inexistent social life during the pandemic posed a threat to how they related to their friend's:

...I didn't even know how to talk to my friends because we didn't see each other for really long and I didn't know what to ask them. Like, how was your day when you were there? Like what was that... I tried to keep contact over the phone... sometimes not, because sometimes they don't. Even pick it up. Sometimes I did, sometimes I didn't. Sometimes they didn't ... Sometimes you just ask how are you?

Participant 7

On the contrary however, a participant shared how she engaged in extracurricular activities with her basketball coach during the pandemic.

I was going to my basketball training during the covid...so I don't know if it's something changed. I used to send videos on messenger on how I was training to my trainer. My mom will be recording me... then you didn't know how to act in the video [laugh] Yeah.

Participant 1

4.4.4.2 Changes in Temperament/ Behavioural Changes

Adolescents indicated how the covid situation and isolation changed them intertwined with other experiences with friends.

I've become more introverted. That's it. Probably, yeah. Because it's easier to because I didn't talk to my friends when. To get home, I was home and stuff. I was just talking for my parents and sister.

Participant 11

I was a different person before because I was more open to anybody, like almost everybody but after covid, I started realising like words are weapons and someone is going to use them against you at one time. And because of that friend whom I should say betrayed me. Yeah. And he told secrets, and he started saying stuff about me to other friends I realise that should be more careful with what I say to whom I say...

Participant 5

I become introverted really. I remember we had time to travel to turkey and I was in the room for like 3 days because I was feeling really sick, and my mother was angry that I'm supposed to go to the beach and do stuff before we leave. But yeah, it was very hard. And I didn't really have friends... we travel with Slovakian families, But I didn't really Want to talk to them I don't know why... and there was a girl my age, but I didn't like her. Well, I try to speak to her, but I don't know She seemed off...but I'll try to speak with her, we will go to Croatia this year.

Participant 7

On the contrary, some participants who indicated signs of introversion before the pandemic became more excited and outgoing:

And right now, I want to be like bigger settings, you know, so. So maybe that thing changed for me. It's like... right now I'm trying to put myself in different situations...

I was more introverted. So, I just like didn't go out as much as I would do it now.

Participant 2

I started to be more extroverted and just wanted to spend some more, more time with people than I used to...

Participant 10

I want to go out every day.

Participant 11

I think I'm more interested in doing other social stuff like I kind of mentioned because I still wanted to have this university experience. I just like trying to experience more at my university. I tried to be a buddy for exchange students... So, it was actually a good activity for me because I could practise my English... I started to be more active and with my friends, I started to like to go out more and like enjoy culture as well.

Participant 8

...I started socializing more I guess I realized you don't want to interact always with Mom, brother that you don't like, and you want new people. You know that gives you Energy because you can get energy from just vibing with some friends...

Participant 6

Others share they became more sensitive to social relations:

when I was finally in school, I always wanted to go home as soon as possible because I just become more Sensitive. Even I saw my friends talking to someone else. And I just came to them, and they asked them something to just ignore me. And I was like. Like, do they hate me? Maybe, don't know what to talk to me and stuff so it was hard for me.

Participant 7

4.4.4.3 Self-development and evaluation

The whole world can change because It wasn't in our country [alone] or something, but it was the whole world who felt it, and like through social media, like modern communication methods And now it's like everybody can say what they want and they can express it so you'll feel it a bit more that this isn't only happening to you, but is even happening to others.

Participant 6

Some adolescents considered the situation as a call for humanity to appreciate other people.

I think COVID-19 has It has to be because we need it, we need it People need it. Also, me, but also other people started to appreciate their families. Their lives, for example, and their friends and their time, because we don't know when we die So I think we needed to realise that then we must start to appreciate our lives.

Participant 10

Participants also shared the ability to explore new hobbies while obeying restrictions.

I enjoyed it. Yeah, I was Baking, and I know I was making so much time because I don't know ...what to do and then I'm making lots of baking. I used to bake cookies or cupcakes Sometimes We baked Oreo cakes It was very good.

Participant 2

But I think about it that I will start on the guitar because I don't learn classic songs and things. But mainly Czechoslovakian Rap and I know how to play them on the guitar So I thought that I will do some videos in which I would learn somebody how to play those songs. ...I was almost the whole day playing on the guitar ...and I used to build Lego and I really like cars, so I started, I started building real cars.

The best car that I ever built I have it still on my shelf It's Honda NSX...

Participant 4

with my drawing skill. I think it helped me a lot because I started focusing on doing the faces, the proportions, and the anatomy. And it helped me quite well.

Participant 6

I try to do a lot of things that I didn't do before. So, it was like, really colourful, I think.

Participant 9

The impact of covid-19 on adolescents' social life cannot be overstated. Moving from a vibrant life to a silent restricted life confused adolescents in this study. Experiencing social isolation, interruption of routines, and uncertainty in their social ties because of the closure of schools and the cancellation of social events (Imanzi, 2022). The termination of extracurricular activities like basketball, arts, and dance harmed hobbies that could not take place online and its associated loss of opportunities to socialize with people as consistent with the findings of Kutsar, & Kurvet-Käosaar, (2021). Maintaining a variety of social ties and relationships as well as taking part in social and community activities are prerequisites for social participation and engagement (Del Bono et al. 2007). Visiting and communicating with family and friends, being a part of religious communities are few of the ways (Ammar et al. 2020). Smatana et al. (2006) demonstrated how social interaction helps adolescents develop greater levels of self-efficacy and self-control. The results of Ammar et al. (2020) show that the Covid-19 quarantine had a particularly negative impact on adolescents' social participation in activities such as visiting families, going out for entertainment or meals with friends or neighbors, attending parties or coffee shops, and engaging in gym and exercise activities this is consistent with this study as adolescents had little to no motivation to relating to another young person on a family vacation. This situation also seems to pose a significant amount of stress on parents as they may not fully understand such behaviors. Similarly, the pandemic has had a big impact on young people's social lives. Adolescents' capacity to interact with friends and participate in customary social activities, such as attending school or extracurricular activities, has been restricted by social distancing policies like the closure of community centres, youth clubs, and other social gathering places and stay-at-

home orders (Serge et al., 2021), consistent with this study, adolescents who engage in basketball, arts and dance activities had centers closed. Interestingly, some adolescents recounted exciting experiences of using digital means to engage their basketball coach through video recordings which posed as a great way to keep adolescents active while improving family bonding.

Adolescents continually reorganize their life as they move through developmental phases and adapt to their surroundings (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2020). In efforts to adapt, participants of this study have shown study changes in temperaments with previous introverts turning to extroverts and vice versa, while others portrayed extreme sensitivity to social interaction with friends consistent with Imanzi, 2022 who state that the lack of consistent socializing with peers, rendered adolescents to recline in the development of social skills, emotional control, and sense of self. Furthermore, as participants were severely constrained during the covid pandemic in Slovakia, and they were unable to interact with classmates or friends. Nevertheless, several of them recounted how their hobbies helped them cope. According to Ling (2020), home leisure sports products were selling well during the pandemic, people paid more attention to leisure sports, and leisure sports became one of the most important lifestyles of ordinary people. It reminded people of the value of fitness, entertainment, and social interaction in their lives. This is in addition to engagements and home play sessions with family and online platforms like YouTube. Participants generally channelled the time positively gaining competencies in previous hobbies like art. These are all positive coping strategies employed by participants when asked “how they whiled away time during the lockdown period”. In consistence with Ogueji Okoloba, & Demoko Ceccaldi, (2021) when people are faced with stressful circumstances or uncertainties, cognitive acceptance, social support, compassion, exercise, avoiding threatening thoughts, and positive thinking can all be effective positive coping methods.

4.4.5 Impact of Covid on Adolescents’ Health

4.4.5.1 Mental health

Adolescents also reflected on their health during the covid pandemic. Some comments on the state of their perceived mental health are as follows:

... starting was easy because I was happy, we were not going to school but when he when he's doing like a long time it became very difficult and stressful for me. Three months, a long time, and I was very bored at home. I started eating very much.

Participant 1

when covid started It was my dream it will end school like I will have huge, huge holidays. Then it started so it was good for the first, like two months. But then I started to get bored. I didn't know how long it was

going to be then, first, they told us it would be 2 weeks We was happy that we had holidays, we came but when it comes, it was like 1 month, two months, three months As I didn't know when it ends.

Participant 2

I was hopeless and I didn't, and I wasn't able to talk really much with my friend.

Participant 11

it was just very hard and confusing at first. It just was only me.

Participant 4

I was mostly alone at home, so it was like. Maybe like one month. It was like I was kind of depressed. Like I can say like I can't say like I had a real depression because real depression is something else. Yeah. But it was kind of depressing for me Like, I'm not seeing anyone like, everybody's home. You realise, like how many friends you really got because yeah, somebody wouldn't write to you and something like this.

Participant 5

Before pandemic I will I used to be happy and smiling, but after I heard about it, I was scared that Someone of somebody of my family could die or Yeah So, I used to be scared. A lot of time and I wasn't smiling, I was I couldn't do they do the same Daily things I tell before covid because Sometimes I just Sit on my bed and be Staring at the wall Yeah... and I eat more I just Go for walk It helps to clear my head So yeah, I think Food and walks It helped me I think I loved food more In covid ...

Participant 10

A reflection indicated that the situation was a trigger for pre-existing situations.

To be honest, I realised that I wasn't happy with myself, and my life and it wasn't because of the covid, but I think thanks to covid, I realised that you know, so the things that happened to me because I had depression and things like that. And I think thanks to Corona, I realised that that had problems before Corona and. When I knew. That I had these problems. I tried to then work on it and that's why I am like now. I'm happy because I knew that I had problems and I tried to and I'm still trying to work on it. I was sad, but I think it was just because it was a trigger. It was already there. I think that I had problems, but I think after corner It was a trigger, ...when I was home, I was like. I didn't try to find the help because I thought it was OK and it go away after some time, but after a couple months and things like that I knew someone who. Who could help me, a therapist, and I contact her, and it was, the best way because not because I couldn't go through it myself, but it was much quicker and healthier way too.

Participant 9

4.4.5.2 Physical Health

Adolescents also shared how they managed their physical health.

I think the most interesting was that people start to care about themselves and I think it's good because like my dad is not caring about himself so much and when covid started, everyone just cares about themselves. People focused on their health, and it is good.

Participant 2

my mom was also wanting me to go to the sport and do something because, you know, go out. It makes me go just be in my room and do nothing. So, she wanted something like these sports, and she ordered me obstetrician Trainer She called but they were just doing some exercises to help my back and legs... I had to do some exercises the next day when I will be home. But I always forget what the exercises so Yeah, like every week I was supposed to go to the therapist.

Participant 7

...exercising; I try to, like, do a lot of things that I didn't do before I started jogging and things like that. And it was helpful. And it was a big change.

Participant 9

The psychological effects of the pandemic in older children and adolescents are that of anxiety, depression, fear of death, and fear of loss of loved ones like those faced by adults Vyjayanthi, Banerjee, & Rao (2020). In the world, 10–20% of teenagers experience mental health issues (Jones et al., 2021) and susceptibility to the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have an impact on this figure (WHO, 2020). The pandemic had an impact on day-to-day living, according to (Kutsar & Kurvet-Käosaar, 2021). Studies in child psychiatry, psychology, and public health conducted in various regions of the world have indicated that the pandemic raised child susceptibility and jeopardized mental health, which decreased subjective well-being (Fegert et al., 2020; Gadermann et al., 2021). In a comprehensive review paper, Chaturvedi and Pasipanodya (2021) identify disturbances to a child's social and academic life as the primary determinants of that child's vulnerability. Other researchers link COVID-19-related stressors, such as high levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, to perceptions of parental stress within families, creating new issues in parenting that affected kids' capacity to deal with the pandemic (Octavius et al. 2020; Kutsar & Kurvet-Käosaar, 2021). Similar to this, a study by Jones et al. (2021) discovered that the pandemic contributed to greater rates of anxiety, sadness, and stress among adolescents from various backgrounds. The researchers found that for this age group, the unpredictability of the circumstance, social isolation, and disturbance of daily routines were particularly difficult.

Comparable findings were made by Loades et al. (2020), who discovered that the pandemic significantly increased emotional and behavioral issues as well as decreased wellbeing among adolescents in the UK. As a result, physical activity was a good and stronger predictor of improved mental health and well-being outcomes (Wright et al. 2021; Marconcin et al. 2022) in consistence with this claim, participants of this study who improved physical health by daily exercising and walks in the forest recounted positive implications on mental health. In addition, Fernandes et al.'s research from 2021 report an increase in internet use and gaming addiction, both of which have a negative impact on young people's psychosocial wellbeing; amidst dealing with developmental issues. This study however observed the use of technology as a coping mechanism to distract participants. Most participants when asked how they whiled away time indicated the use of various technological platforms like tik Tok, fortnight, as well as video calls to stay in touch with friends and family as well as socialize with ne people or improve on their English language.

In a study focused on youth, retrospective reports of mental health symptoms three months prior to the pandemic were compared to those three weeks into the pandemic among 622 Canadian adolescents and young adults (Hawke et al. 2020). Participants perceived reductions in their mental health across the period, particularly in depression or low mood and anxiety. Another study also found high levels of depression and anxiety in Chinese adolescents during the peak of the pandemic, although lower levels were reported among males and youth that regularly engaged in exercise (Chen et al. 2020). These standpoints are evident in this study however, being scared was evident in the early stages as being stressed and distressed were evident as the situation prolonged. Even more importantly, family situation played a significant role in adolescents' perception of their mental health as participants from families where parents were divorced indicated they were often burnt out in one house and needed to recharge in the other parents. Generally, the mental health status of participants in this study seems to be a result of a combination of problems related to restriction, family dynamics and interpersonal relationships which is considered a regular experience in adolescent lives. In distinctness however, participants with pre-existing mental health conditions recounted their situation was triggered and as such needed professional assistance. Furthermore, given the rapid shift to home-based online learning, a rise in stress may also be anticipated as adolescents worry about both their own and their loved ones' safety during the pandemic and their academic performance (Hasking et al., 2021). Additionally, limiting face-to-face interactions with peers may have raised worries about preserving strong social ties at a time when such relationships are essential for healthy growth and mental wellbeing (Janssens et al., 2021). Teenagers may have felt lonely because of the pandemic due to the imposed physical distance (Ellis et al., 2020; Loades et al., 2020), evidently, participants of this study showed signs of increasing weariness as the pandemic progressed.

4.5 ANALYSIS OF ESSAYS

Essays presented by participants were detailed summaries on their lives during the pandemic. Adolescents recorded varying experiences during the pandemic. Areas covered initial response to the situation, covid situation in Slovakia, and its impact on personal, social, and religious situation and well as their health and the lessons learnt. their summarized experiences touched on objectives 2 and 3 of this study.

4.5.1 Reflection on COVID-19 Situation

Findings from the essays illustrate that participants considered the virus to be far from Slovakia. It can be inferred from essays that adolescents were panicked:

March 2020. That's when it all started. The first reports of a new virus, called Covid 19, which has emerged in China. There were suspicions that this virus had emerged among people who had eaten infected bats. Initially, while there were only confirmed cases in China, we were not in any way worried or concerned about it, we were just scratching our heads as to what bizarre things some people were capable of consuming.

Essay 4

A period of isolation and fear of infection began. Panic reigned in Slovakia, everything was closing down and the country looked like it was after the extinction of mankind. Although some young people tended to make light of it, older people were already more cautious and mostly had a great respect for the disease, and were afraid of what was to come, because they knew they were among the most at risk.

Essay 3

4.5.1.1 Initial reaction to the Pandemic

Adolescents expressed excitement in the initial phase of the pandemic situation. Participants indicated that the pronouncement of school closures around Slovakia was initially exciting as they assumed the situation was meant to last only for a short while:

I didn't pay much attention to it, not because I didn't care, but at the time I believed, hoped, that it didn't and wouldn't affect us because it was happening far away. After all, China is not a neighbouring country and Wu-Chan is several 1000 kilometers away from us. However, as time went on, I realised how naive I had been. When the first cases were reported in Slovakia in February, I didn't care; we were registering the number of infected and victims from every side.

Essay 2

I was in my second year of high school at the time. When they first closed our school, I'm not going to lie, I was very happy.

Essay 5

4.5.1.2 Covid-19 Situation in Slovakia

Participants recounted the restrictions, imposed by the government. The experiences of adolescent during the pandemic regarding restrictions was described, as chaotic, adolescents also expressed their opinions on the management of covid restrictions by authorities. Like the findings of Kutsar & Kurvet-Käosaar, 2021, findings of this study indicated that adolescents were attentive and critical to the Slovak governments policy implementations regarding the pandemic particularly to rules of travel bans, isolation and mask wearing. However, they also understood the need for them. Further, opinions of adolescents indicated the politicization of covid restrictions by authorities like the results of Kutsar & Kurvet-Käosaar, (2021). In this study however adolescents considered the various information on media platforms as inappropriate:

First weeks were chaotic...had to stay at home in isolation; the borders were closed. People couldn't travel across the border or return home from abroad.

Essay 2

The rule of wearing a mask in public places, disinfecting hands before entering any shop, etc. was introduced.

Essay 5

A participant also reflected on the relevance of restrictions, imposed, elaborating on their feelings regarding Slovakia one participant indicated that the situation was poorly handled in relation to help persons who lost their lives were buried.

For me personally, the arrangements for the funerals of the victims were very sad.

Essay 2

Adolescence shared that they recognize that Covid restrictions divided the society:

Society was divided into two camps, those who agreed with all the measures and regulations and those who began to rebel because they saw it as an interference with their personal freedom. Every day I

registered various misinformation on social networks, and at times I felt that the world had gone mad.

Essay 2

4.5.2 Impact on Interpersonal Relationships

Essays of participants showed a significant impact on their interpersonal relationships. The forced withdrawal of people and families from important societal institutions like employment and school because of social isolation and quarantine laws disturbed daily life (Zhang et al., 2020), having significant impact on every citizen's life. Adolescence has been described as a turbulent time even in "normal" times and as such, families with adolescent children may have been particularly affected by the restrictive measures (Brown et al., 2020). Essays compared previous family situation with the new realities faced which suggested that some families were busy and as a result little time was spent together prior to the pandemic:

it also gave me a lot of time with family and friends, which I appreciate immensely. Before Covid-19 I wasn't much home because of school, the same thing for my sister and my parents were busy working.

Essay 2

I was forced" to spend more time with my family, which I now see as very positive because we all kind of stopped the daily merry-go-round at that time. We were happy to be at home.

Essay 5

4.5.2 Loss of family

Essays written referenced the experience of loss in the lives of adolescents. Salidino, Algeri & Auriemmo (2020) highlight that pandemics are characterized by certain elements such as separation from loved ones, loss of lives and freedoms, uncertainty, and feelings of helplessness.

Many people carry a hole in their hearts after the loss of loved ones, some are among the lucky ones and may not have experienced such a feeling. I suppose if we asked people and they had the chance to go back in time, they would take that chance and wipe this virus off the face of the earth. I would do it myself. ...I was unable to visit my grandfather in the nursing home, whom I had not seen for several months; unfortunately, he had become one of the victims of COVID-19.

Essay 4

Adolescents also shared the importance of religion to their families, evidently, McNamara Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry (2010) promulgates religion as a significant socialisation process significant in internalising beliefs and values that are in conformity mostly with the community and societal norms, this process was hindered by the pandemic as findings indicate that adolescents and their families had to follow mass using virtual spaces.

As we are a strongly religious family, for a long time we could not accept that it was impossible to go to church and we could only watch Mass on TV or via the internet.

Essay 3

Consistent with finding of semi-structured interviews, participants were worried for family and loved ones. This is contrary to the assertions of Saldino, Algeri & Auriemma (2020), who indicated that the pandemic affected adolescents' perception of empathy toward others:

Earlier in the year, our whole family got covid19. I realized that we really needed to be careful. I was really worried about my mum and my grandmother at the time as they weren't well.

Essay 5

4.5.3 Distance education

The physical restrictions impeded the chances of adolescents socializing with peers, schoolmates, and teachers (Al-Balushi & Essa, 2020). Although there was the opportunity to complete their academic year virtually and connect with peers on social media, the routine of the adolescents altered significantly. Work by Di Guinita et al., (2021) identified that the drastic change contributed to the development of negative emotions, increased psychological and emotional issues, and an increased need for adjustment among adolescents. In addition to these claims' participants found it difficult to adjust to the change and complained about the number of hours behind the computer. Other participants claim the situation affected their motivation to learn since it appeared to be easier to "cheat" in consistent with studies of (Lauristin et al., 2020) conducted in spring 2020 children were likely to be severely disadvantaged by distance learning:

I remember after spring break we got an email on Edupage on Monday morning that we were not supposed to come to school for the next two weeks because of the pandemic. We students were glad to have a longer day off. We didn't have classes because no one was prepared to teach online. It wasn't until a few days later that we received emails telling us how we were going to function for the rest of the school year and the next two years. Sitting at a computer for 7 hours a day. Some teachers demanded that we have our cameras and microphones on all the time, some only required us to do it when they were testing us. The whole thing was so impersonal. Some pupils only spoke up when they were called upon but live at

school, they had no problem speaking up at any time. I personally felt left out, unneeded, alone. We have no memories from two years of school of goofing around during breaks, planned trips or just ordinary days with classmates. And we don't even remember the curriculum in any special way.

Essay 4

My brother and I as students started taking online classes, we missed the social contact with our classmates and teachers very much.

Essay 2

I started to miss the contact with teachers or classmates.... I didn't see some of my classmates again for many months until arrangements had relaxed a little and we could go back to school... I knew I had big gaps in my subjects. However, not always my own fault, not because I wasn't joining classes and stuff, but teachers are human too, some of them packed it in after a while and we didn't even have classes.

Essay 5.

The pandemic affected students the most, in the sense that we went from 'evening to morning' to an online teaching system.

Essay 4

4.5.4 Loss of Experiences

Adolescence is a period of memorable milestones, however, the restrictions imposed which include isolation, contact restrictions, wearing of protective gear, and economic shutdown impose a complete change to the psychosocial environment needed to achieve the developmental milestones in adolescence (Fegert et al, 2020), evidently, the essays indicate adolescents' eagerness to experience age related milestones while in school. However, the restrictions of the pandemic cancelled out these opportunities for graduation and prom:

When graduation came around, I was as excited as anyone for prom and all the things associated with it.

I was very sorry when we had to cancel it at the last minute. We started preparing for graduation.

Suddenly we found out that we didn't know a lot of things. We had hoped to bypass that too and get our matriculation "for free" like the two years before us... I was already a third grader. I was looking forward to that year. Our schedule finally consisted of just the subjects we chose. But thanks to the pandemics, we had most of the year online.

Essay 5

I actually missed out on the best last year of student life in high school. Although I was really looking

forward to the prom, I can thank the pandemic for the fact that I won't have anything to remember or brag about pictures from its years later, because the prom was banned due to the measures.

Essay 3

4.5.5 Social Life

Similar to the findings of this studies is that of Magson et al., 2021, which suggested that the inability to participate in their normal extra-curricular activities such as sports, dance, music lessons or attend social events and have access to public places was high on adolescents' lists of concerns. Participants could not engage the wider socio-cultural environment with the covid restrictions in place.

I really started to miss the theatre, which I used to go to once a month. I missed not being able to just go for coffee with my girlfriends. I started to realize that I missed social contact in general. I didn't know what to do with my free time... it took away my freedom and my social contacts.

Essay 5

the number of infected people increased, restaurants closed, people stopped socialising, and social life came to a complete standstill.

Essay 2

I realized that I missed my former life very much. I began to miss the regular routine, the train journeys, the visits to my grandparents.

Essay 3

4.5.6 Mental Health

According to several viewpoint, adolescent irritability, stress, and loneliness, may be signs of future mental health issues (Hasking et al., 2021; Loades et al., 2020). Similarly, work by Di Guinita et al., (2021) identified that pandemic change contributed to the development of negative emotions, increased psychological and emotional issues, and an increased need for adjustment among adolescents. Essays recorded signs of irritability and stress because of the prolonged isolation experienced by participants.

How is it that this virus has only just appeared? What are the symptoms of this disease? What complications does this virus cause? How to fight it effectively? But we did not have clear answers to these questions... I often asked: "Will things ever go back to the way they were?"

Essay 4

In October in 2020, when I had my first full-body test, I was very worried that I would be positive... I endured the first few months very badly mentally, sometimes the "submarine sickness" came over me. I was nervous about the whole situation, everything bothered me.

Essay 2

began to be afraid to leave the house.

Essay 3

the "impossibility" of experiencing pains, joys, and worries with people outside the religious community was difficult for me.

Essay 1

4.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

The theoretical framework guiding the study is Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, which is appropriate in the conception of adolescents' experiences in interacting with their immediate environment and wider socio-cultural context during the pandemic (Kutsar & Kurvet-Kaosaar, 2021). In 1979, the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner created a framework to describe how adolescents develop through interaction with their environment (Paquette & Ryan, 2011). This theoretical viewpoint, according to Bronfenbrenner, is a new notion of a developing person that captures the changing relationship between the individual and his environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Utilizing this theory, the research aims to comprehend, through phenomenology, how adolescents' experiences with the five ecological theory layers affected their development. In his paper "Toward an experimental ecology of human development" Bronfenbrenner proposed that children interacted in nested environmental structures each encompassing the other as cited by (Guy-Evans, 2020). It is clear from this study's analysis of adolescent experiences that all developmental stages actively support one another, creating different possibilities for growth and exploration.

Bronfenbrenner described the microsystem as a pattern of interpersonal interactions and associated activities that the developing child experiences in a particular face-to-face context; as the innermost circle, the microsystem encompasses each setting in which the child interacts with parents, friends, teachers, and other significant relations (Leonard, 2011). Findings indicate adolescent connections with their families, schools, and peers are extremely important. Relationships with parents were highly reflected on by participants. The interactions between these microsystems lead to the mesosystem, which then reignites interactions between microsystems. However, during the pandemic, schools were largely replaced by online contact and friendships, and some participants lost touch with peers and important relationships. Although

adolescents are said to be in a stage of "storm and stress", findings of this study show that the presence of the restrictions outlined in objective two heightened this regard. Because they were all confined in the home for a long time, there was a lack of regulation to the time adolescents spent with their parents. As a result, adolescents lacked the relationships they supplemented from friends, teachers, and classmates, as well as the general experiences they were used to outside of their homes and parents.

The mesosystem unambiguously provides an environment for the various socialisation components in the lives of children and adolescents to interact with both congruent and competing views on aiding growth (Paquette & Ryan, 2011). The third tenet, defined by Bronfenbrenner is the linkage between the microsystem which involves the developing individual and the mesosystem which is a setting that excludes the developing individual. Findings of this study found that some parents of some adolescents were constantly busy because of their profession which contributed to anxious symptoms in adolescents. Also, remarks on the vulnerability of older persons affected adolescents as they worried about grandparents and loved ones. Furthermore, the ability of teachers to properly moderate online sessions which were found to be difficult in this study highlights the difficulty in this tenet of adolescent socialization according to the ecological theory.

Without a doubt, the government's regulations, and prohibitions to adequately contain the pandemic were key impediments leading to isolation. The pandemic triggered major economic and political circumstances that impacted the lives of adolescents. Instead of regular interaction, the culture of socialization has been altered, potentially leading to a shift in how adolescents perceive the world. Changes in participants' worldviews were favourable in this study because adolescents focused on their interactions with loved ones and attempted to enhance them given the fatality of life and how quickly their environment may change owing to policy initiatives in unprecedented conditions. Further, religious activities were reported to have evolved to virtual spaces, a participant recounted how it saddened her as she could not attend regular religious meetings physically. This is re-echoed by Wells & Phalen (2018) who affirmed that the macrosystem also includes a variety of broader influences such as policies and culture which impact the development of the child by having an impact on the broader society through changes in the dynamics of human interactions.

Bronfenbrenner further developed his idea on the influence of time in the development process of a child. Hosek, Harper, Lemos & Martinez (2008) describes these transitions as either normative or non-normative such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which directly affected adolescents and their environment. The pandemic crisis has altered the socialization processes of adolescents; findings imply that many teenage interpersonal

processes have now been virtualized. Furthermore, the pandemic situation has resulted in different technological innovations that enable human connections without face-to-face meetings. Secondly, there are numerous platforms for entertainment and meeting new people, including Fortnite, which adolescents identified as one of the platforms used during the covid pandemic.

The ecological theory gives significant importance to the interrelatedness of experiences during the pandemic for adolescents. However, it fails to identify the adolescents' personal motivations, interests, and resilience. Adolescents in this study took some personal measures to better comprehend the pandemic and devise various ways to stay healthy, such as exercising and seeking expert aid in crisis situations. Adolescents also displayed emotional control and overall behaviour throughout a stressful moment, while attending school, submitting assignments, and supporting in the growth of younger siblings.

Despite these limitations, several researchers have utilized the theory in exploring phenomena in connection with child development. Kutsar & Kurvet-Käosaar (2021) found the ecological model appropriate for exploring young people's experiences in Estonia. Researchers believe as a methodological framework Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model is crucial in understanding the interaction between children and their immediate environment and establishing children as social actors who were in the position to provide reliable information about their lives in the altered environment. In this study, the researcher adopts the bioecological theory as the framework for highlighting the role of social interaction in adolescent socialization. It helps to analyse the role of socialization agents as well as the impact COVID-19 had on adolescents' socialization processes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore the impact of COVID-19 On adolescence socialization with precedence to adolescence being labelled by developmental theorists as a period of "storm and stress" (Casey et al. 2010) and isolation, which was the primary restrictive measure in containing the pandemic affected significant changes to adolescent socialization. Literature was reviewed shedding light on previous studies which indicated that adolescents experienced mental and psychological problems resulting from the restrictions imposed to manage the pandemic.

The study relied on a phenomenological approach to of qualitative studies which enabled the researchers to better explore the experiences of individual participants using essays written by adolescents and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The sampling method was intentional sampling as participants chosen based on their ability to communicate satisfactorily in English and we're voluntarily interested to contribute to the study the sample size was 11 participants between the ages of 15 to 20. Transcribe data was coded

and clustered into various recurring themes and sub themes. Both methods of data collection were analysed separately using interpretive phenomenological analysis, (IPA). The researcher believes that although both data collection methods revealed the experiences of others, the semi-structured interviews obtained more in-depth understanding of participants as there is an opportunity for probing during conversation. Essays submitted focused on the systemic impact of the pandemic with reflection tilting towards the role of government family units and school, with little concentration on interpersonal relationships.

The ecological theory underpinned study to explain how the adolescent environment affect their socialization, especially in times of crisis. In summary, the study found that participants were partly shocked and unbothered about the pandemic in the initial stages. It also showed that participants had a good understanding of the social situation and the need for restrictions. The study also indicate that adolescents considered their experiences before the pandemic to be “normal” implying that the opposite was so during the pandemic. Per findings, the pandemic proved to have impact on adolescent’s socialisation in terms of their education, their friendships, their families, and social experiences.

Generally, family relationships were good; adolescents reported great experiences with their families while in isolation. In terms of friendships, adolescents lost friends during the pandemic due to the lack of face-to-face connection, although some participants recounted their ability to connect with friends through various social media platforms and technology. Experiences with distance education proved to be a dominant part of this study proving to be difficult for most participants of this study including the loss of important school milestones such as prom and graduation. School was primarily online, and adolescents had difficulty concentrating on their studies due to limited contact with teachers and classmates. They however received empathy from teachers while most enjoyed the flexibility that came with online studies as well as support from significant others. Adolescents reported to miss their social environment and their ability to have “freedom”. Proving to be resilient, participants reported that although their experiences may have been difficult, they were able to overcome the situation through coping strategies such as communication with loved ones, exercising, engaging various media platforms, and walking in nature.

Although not all studies indicate negative changes in mental health in young people due to the pandemic Waghmare et. al, (2023) Participants reported to have experienced depressive moods at the progression of the pandemic with participants with difficult family situations experiencing them more as well as participants with pre-existing stress symptoms. Findings established that Slovak adolescents experienced fear and anxiety for other members of society like the elderly rather than themselves. Experiences before the pandemic included exploring their environment, travelling, spending time with family, have an active

social life and bonding with friends. School was however considered stressful before the crisis coupled with many extracurricular activities. Findings indicate that the experience of COVID for participants was characterised by immediate restrictions such as distance learning, the use of respirators, travel bans, and social isolation which participants considered unnecessary for reasons such as poor adherence and the politicization by authorities. The study established that there are many other issues that affected how adolescents socialised during the pandemic namely family situation, adolescence motivation, and individual resilience.

5.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

It is important to recognize what social workers can do with adolescent clients with issues resulting from their experiences during the pandemic as well as preventive measures in future crisis situations. For social work practice, the ecological approach offers a comprehensive theoretical base that social practitioners can draw upon for effective social treatment. With this approach, the critical concepts interacting with the client's situation are acknowledged. In the case of dysfunctional adolescents, this approach can be a useful treatment strategy for improving the social functioning of the client recognizing that the client's situation is not a result of weakness, but one of many interrelated factors as developed by Bronfenbrenner in his ecological theory. In evidence to the findings of this study, adolescents were tasked to meet their milestones in a restricted social environment which ideally does not support the achievements of these goals. One of the pioneers of the social work profession, Mary Richmond, realized the role that the environment plays in the social functioning of human beings. The early 1970s was when social work theorists began stressing the importance of the person-in-environment perspective, the works Germain contributed to the groundwork for a new way of viewing social work practice, giving light to the ecological perspective (Pardeck, 1988), emphasized the importance of the adaptive balance between organism and environment, referred to as "goodness-of-fit". In this light, if there is a "misfit", in this case, a developmental deficit between the client system and the environment, social treatment should be aimed at correcting this condition by taking into consideration all possible factors. The ecological approach to social work provides strategies that allow the social worker to move from a micro-level intervention to a macro level of social treatment. This perspective does not only help the social worker impact clients through policy and planning but also through psychotherapy and other micro-level approaches. This approach also recognizes that human problems are derived from a complex interplay of psychological, social, economic, political, and physical forces. This highlights the importance of the environmental condition and the adolescents' condition by giving workers the opportunity to look at problems from a system perspective rather than an individual level.

The findings of this study shed light on interdisciplinary work in social work practice. According to Labath, & Ondrušková (2019) social work in Slovakia has moved from eclecticism to integration, which is a transition from multidisciplinary to interdisciplinary approaches where theories were extracted, from psychological, counseling and psychotherapy, and re-socialization without making deeper into connections and interactions. For holistic development in adolescence, social workers need to apply the model of interdisciplinary work in theory. The interaction among different theoretical sources has the potential to create new quality of knowledge which captures the fundamental goal of integration into discipline. The need for interdisciplinary work establishes the role of social workers in such instances as the COVID-19 pandemic in the provision of essential mental health support to adolescents who experienced increased anxiety, stress, and feelings of isolation due to the pandemic by offering counseling services, online therapy, and resources to help young people cope with their emotions and mental well-being in terms of digitalization, social workers could utilize virtual platforms and technology to connect with adolescents and provide remote support through the organization of online support groups, virtual workshops, and educational resources to help adolescents navigate the challenges they faced during the pandemic. This would have allowed for continued engagement and interaction while adhering to social distancing measures and better understanding of their experiences. Also, through collaboration with educational institutions, the academic challenges faced by adolescents could be managed by providing resources, guidance, and support to help adolescents adapt to remote learning environments and overcome barriers. Furthermore, through advocacy, access to technology and internet connectivity for underprivileged adolescents could have been managed efficiently. Most importantly, social workers could have played a critical role in disseminating accurate information about COVID-19 to adolescents and their families helping to address misconceptions, providing guidance on preventive measures, and promoting healthy behaviors to ensure the well-being of adolescents while paying close attention to adolescents from difficult families assisting them to navigate communication to improve cohesion and safety.

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APPENDIX 1

Informed consent

The following is a presentation of how I will use the data collected in the interview.

To ensure that projects meet the ethical requirements for good research I promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Interviewees in the project will be given information about the purpose of the project.
- Interviewees have the right to decide whether they will participate in the project, even after the interview has been concluded.
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorized person can view or access it.

The interview will be recorded as this makes it easier for me to document what is said during the interview and helps me in the continuing work with the project. In my analysis, some data may be changed so that no interviewee will be recognized. After finishing the project, the data will be destroyed. The data I collect will only be used in this project.

You have the right to decline answering any questions or terminate the interview without giving an explanation.

You are welcome to contact me or my supervisor in case you have any questions (e-mail addresses below).

Student name & e-mail

Valentina Esi Afful

affulvalentina@gmail.com

Supervisor name & e-mail

Professor Daniel Markovic

APPENDIX 2

Interview Guide

General: 2020 came with a unique twist of events for all of us, subsequently, these twists trickled down all the years that have come after it, especially 2021. Tell me about what the year 2020 was like for you. And 2021...?

Do you recall within which period COVID was active? When was this?

What was your highlight about this period?

THEME	OBJECTIVE	QUESTION	PROBING
	To discover adolescent socialization processes before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovakia.	• Could you share with me any event or milestone you looked forward to experiencing as a child? • For most people, the covid 19 pandemic was their first-ever experience with global pandemic situations, at the time, what were your	• What did this milestone mean to you? • Did you have that experience? how? • How did that make you feel?

		thoughts about the pandemic? How did these thoughts affect your daily life?	- Prob: Looking back, have these thoughts changed? - What would you have done differently? - In what ways did covid impact your life?
	To understand factors that disrupt the socialization processes of Slovak adolescent	- Could you share with me some things you loved to do before the pandemic? - Could you do the same things during and after the pandemic? - How has it changed during or after	

		the pandemic? (In turns) • Could you share with me some of the restrictions that were imposed here in Slovakia? • What did you think about these measures? • How did the restrictions imposed by the government change your routines? • What were these life-changing moments?	• Prob: How did the changes make you feel? • Prob: Could you try to recall what was your understanding at the time (in 2020)? • How did these measures affect you? Mentally, educationally, socially, economically... • Distance and face to face wich do you pre • In your opinion what do you suggest could have been done differently?
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	To identify the impacts of the pandemic on adolescent socialization in Slovakia.	• What was the most interesting during the pandemic? Why? • What did you enjoy most during the pandemic? Why? • What was the biggest change for you to experience in the COVID era? • If you had the opportunity to change something during the pandemic, what would it be? • There was so much free time for all of us during the covid pandemic, how did you	

		while away time? • What bothered you the most? Why? • What did you miss most?	
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AFTER PANDEMIC

Comparing previous years to the covid years what do you think has impacted your life most?

Are there any significant changes in your life comparing the Covid period and now? How are these changes?

Appendix 3

Plagiarism Declaration

I, Valentina Esi Afful, hereby declare that my Master thesis titled “The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Adolescents Socialization in Slovakia” is the result of my own work and carried out for the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master ‘s degree in Social Work with Children and Youth under the guidance and supervision of Professor Daniel Markovic of the Catholic University of Ruzomberok Slovakia. I confirm that the work contained herein is my own, except where explicitly stated otherwise; this text:

- Has not been submitted to any other Institute/University/College
- Contains proper references and citations for other scholarly work
- Has listed all citations in a list of references.

I am aware that violation of this code of conduct is regarded as an attempt to plagiarize and will result in a failing grade in the programme.

Date: 28/05/2023

Signature: 

Name: VALENTINA ESI AFFUL



APPENDIX 4

ATLAS.TI DEMO

