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The experiences of COVID-19 related lockdown and social media usage among the youth in Vosloorus, Mfundo Park, Gauteng

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PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

The experiences of COVID-19 related lockdown and social media usage among the youth in Vosloorus, Mfundo Park, Gauteng.

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Master of Arts in Research Psychology by Dissertation.

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University of the Witwatersrand,
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), scientifically known as SARS-Co V-2, resulted in a disastrous impact globally which saw approximately six million fatalities worldwide (Cascella et al., 2022). It had the most catastrophic effect on the health care system since the influenza outbreak in the year 1918 globally (Cascella et al., 2022). The pandemic not only challenged the health care system, but it also had a remarkable effect on the social and economic and education system as well as mental health issues (Onyeaka et al., 2021). It further exposed the workforce to a risk of losing their livelihoods as well as revealing the fragility of the food system (World health organisation, 2020). The closure of borders, trade restrictions and quarantine measures challenged both domestic and international food supply which meant that the food security and nutrition of many people were put under threat (World Health Organisation, 2020). Closure of schools due to the lockdown had various impacts on young people in high school as well as university students (Onyeaka et al., 2021). In some African countries, young people experienced increased anxiety as there was a lot of uncertainty on how education will proceed post-lockdown seeing that there was a loss of family income, failure in national examinations and-/or repetition of the school year (Onyeaka et al., 2021). In South Africa, the government implemented strict lockdown measures to and remedy the spread of the virus which greatly affected the economy (Arndt et al., 2020). Many businesses were negatively affected which in turn drastically increased unemployment (Arndt et al., 2020). Low-skilled, less-educated workers were affected the most, their households were left more poor and more vulnerable (Arndt et al., 2020). The collapse in earnings for many South Africans resulted in the increase of food insecurity which also threatened their wellbeing (Arndt et al., 2020). Although the government tried to offer support to the most vulnerable households with social grants, the income inequalities that pervade the country's economy became prominent post implementation of the lockdown (Nwosu & Onyenubi, 2020).

The loss of income during the COVID-19 lockdown gave rise to issues of poor health and nutrition (Nwosu & Onyenubi, 2020). Nwosu and Onyemubi (2020) highlighted that a study was conducted in South Africa on the loss of income and ability to access healthcare and a nutritious diet showed that populations from disadvantaged communities bore a higher burden of poor health during the COVID-19 period when compared with data collected from the same study conducted in 2017.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about social distancing measures that saw abrupt changes to social interaction, educational setup, and employment, in addition to health, food security, and economic challenges. This caused young people to become more fearful and anxious about the future (Eden et al., 2020). According to Oben et al. (2020), social interaction is a fundamental requirement for human growth and development and is what leads to the creation of meaningful relationships between people. According to Karim et al. (2020), social networking has a crucial role in helping people safeguard their mental health. Karim et al. (2020), said that mental health is characterised by emotional well-being and the capacity to overcome obstacles in day-to-day life, work effectively, and positively influence those around oneself. Research has shown that social connection and interacting with others can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Conversely, a lack of social interaction might exacerbate mental health issues (Karim et al., 2020). According to a survey published by UNICEF South Africa, over 65% of adolescents and young adults in the country between the ages of 18 and 25 experience mental health issues and do not seek help (Majavu, 2022).

According to Fernandes et al. (2020), social deprivation has been linked to poor sleep quality as well as mental issues like stress, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. According to a Canadian study, stay-at-home orders caused young people between the ages of 18 and 25 to lose their access to extracurricular activities and athletics. This forced them to seek out non-traditional ways to cope with their pain and disappointment, which included abusing drugs (Ingoglia, 2020). African health organisations released a statement alerting populations there to the rising prevalence of drug and alcohol consumption on the continent following the COVID-19 epidemic (Givetash, 2022). Sun et al. (2020) claim that employment losses and school closures during lockdowns are related to the surge in young people's use of addictive substances.

Additionally, as stated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), young people have suffered greatly on a social and economic level (Barford et al., 2021). Pre-existing problems with teenage employment were made worse by the pandemic and enforced social distancing measures (Barford et al., 2021). Due to significant compromises to their mental health and employment prospects, young people have been dubbed the "COVID-19 or lockdown generation" (Barford et al., 2021). One of the COVID-19 measures that was required to lower the infection rate and flatten the curve, in addition to unemployment, was closing schools (Hoffman & Miller, 2020). Despite the fact that closing schools was necessary to stop the virus's spread, it had terrible effects on students who needed and received non-academic

support from schools, which negatively impacted their mental and physical health (Hoffman & Miller, 2020). Rotational attendance was instituted, resulting in numerous days off for certain grades and sporadic school closures caused numerous pupils to miss class and/or drop out (Fricker, 2021).

However, because of the COVID-19 lockdown's impacts on physical and psychological functioning, young people have been discovering strategies to lessen such consequences, including accessing social media (Fernandes et al., 2020). According to Fernandes et al. (2020), a Chinese study indicated that teenagers' greater use of social media was significantly associated with psychological adjustment. Given its many advantages, social media has undoubtedly become an indispensable component of many people's life (Karim et al., 2020). According to Fernandes et al. (2020), teenagers turned to social media as a coping mechanism for negative thoughts and melancholy feelings as well as for social isolation. Additionally, social media has made it easier for young people to fulfil their natural social urge to stay in touch with their friends, family, and classmates (Gammon, 2021). During the COVID-19 shutdown, social media quickly developed as a marketing tool for companies, particularly for young people trying to support themselves (Haider, 2022).

1.2. Rationale

The high frequency of young people experiencing severe emotional and psychological discomfort during the COVID-19 lockdown underscores the significance of our study. Increased psychological discomfort has been linked to significant lifetime risks of mental health problems, including substance addiction, anxiety, depression, and suicidality (Mthethwa, 2020). Young people's increased psychological suffering was greatly exacerbated by the prolonged social deprivation that followed the COVID-19 pandemic in an effort to stop the virus's spread (Cielo et al., 2021). The lockdown measures that were implemented hindered young people's ability to socialise, which is an essential component of human development that they need to establish relationships and bonds with others (Cauberghe et al., 2021). Due to the lockdown, which exposed them to stressful household functioning, domestic violence, and fear for their own or their immediate family's health, young people from underprivileged communities, such as townships, reported experiencing significant psychological distress (Theron et al., 2021). During the lockdown, the socioeconomic evils that still affect young people in the townships gained attention (Theron et al., 2021). Theron et al. (2021) expounded on the purposeful construction of South African townships during the apartheid era, which involved the mobilisation and coordination of racial segregation. This resulted in the

concentration of impoverished communities under resource-constrained schools with inadequately educated instructors. Taking this into account, COVID-19-related stressors increased the likelihood that young people from these regions will drop out of school, experience extreme poverty, low education, and remain unemployed (Haynes-Rolando, 2015 & Theron et al., 2021). Consequently, this study aims to investigate the real-life experiences of young people residing in impoverished townships and how they utilised social media, a popular medium for communication at the time, to adjust to their circumstances. Numerous studies have been conducted on the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on young people's mental health and how they utilise social media as a coping strategy (Cielo et al, 2021 & Longest & Kang, 2022). Nonetheless, minimal research has been done on the COVID-19 lockdown's impact on the mental health of young people in South African townships and how they use social media to counteract it. Thus, comprehending the experiences of these youth can help in developing potential remedies to help with mitigating the damage caused by the pandemic.

1.3. Aim and Objectives

1.3.1. Aim

To explore township youth's experiences of COVID-19 related lockdown and the use of social media as an adaptation tool from March 2020 to August 2020.

1.3.2. Specific objectives

1. To explore lived experiences of COVID-19 lock down.
2. To explore the use of social media as a mechanism to adapt

1.3.3. Research Questions

- The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on the lives of young people living in townships.
- How the pandemic shaped their lives and how they navigate the world?
- How the pandemic impacted the socio-economic status of townships?
- How the pandemic and lockdown changed and impacted their socialisation, education and economic status?
- How they navigated social media and how it became their source of solace as well as repercussions they faced through using it?

1.4. Definition of Key Concepts

COVID-19 - is a highly communicable viral disease that is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Cascella et al., 2023).

Lockdown - consists of public home confinement, workplace or hospital quarantine, social isolation, physical distancing and shutdown of public buildings and educational institutions in attempts to curb the spread of an infectious disease (Muehlschlegel et al., 2021).

Township - this is an underdeveloped urban living area that was initially allocated to non-white people, namely, African, Mixed race and Indians during the apartheid period (Manyaka-Boshielo, 2017). Townships generally lack adequate infrastructure and are a compilation of informal settlements that lack amenities for the vast majority (Manyaka-Boshielo, 2017).

Youth - in the South African context, these are individuals between the ages of 15 to 34 years old (Öhlmann, 2022).

Social Media - it is a form of electronic connection and communication where users build communities to share ideas, information, social support and other content for entertainment, these sites include websites for social networking and microblogging (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Mental health implications of the COVID-19-related lockdown

Cennimo (2023), defined the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as a highly infectious illness known to be caused by the SARS-CoV-2, which was formerly called 2019-nCoV. The World Health Organisation (n.d) revealed that the coronaviruses belong to a family of viruses of Coronaviridae, which can infect both humans and animals. In humans, it can manifest mildly in the form of a common cold, whereas in others it can be more grievous, such as MERS – Middle East Respiratory Syndrome and SARS – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (World Health Organisation, n.d). It is known to cause parlous respiratory failure, which primarily spreads through getting in contact with saliva or discharge from the nose from an infected individual (Cielo et al., 2022). Signs and symptoms also include shortness of breath, fever, and cough (World Health Organisation, n.d). Further, symptoms vary from different people, there have been more severe cases where the infection leads to severe acute respiratory syndrome, pneumonia and in some cases fatality (World Health Organisation, n.d). The COVID-19 desecrated many countries' healthcare systems and economies resulting in the WHO declaring it a global pandemic as of March the 11th 2022 (Cascella et al., 2022). It claimed casualties of approximately six million globally earning the most calamitous global health crisis since the influenza epoch (Cascella et al., 2022). Recommendations by the WHO to remedy the spread of the virus included recurrent washing of hands with soap and water as well as sanitising them with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, covering the mouth and nose with a mask or a flexed elbow when coughing, immediately disposing tissue after sneezing or coughing and maintaining a social distance of about 1.5 metres with anyone (World Health Organisation, n.d).

The first traces of the virus were discovered in Wuhan, Hubei Province, in China around late December 2019, which quickly dispersed all over the world (Cascella et al., 2022). In South Africa, the first COVID-19 case was recorded on the 5th of March 2020, causing a lot of havoc on the economy, healthcare system, social relations, and people's mental health (Posel et al., 2021). The country was immediately put on a three-week strict lockdown, which meant that people were put on a national social isolation order, travelling restrictions, implementation of social distancing, closure of schools (Mbunge, 2020). The country suffered immensely economically as it faced immediate medium and long-term economic effects (Arndt et al.,2020). The fall of the economy highly compromised demand and supply countrywide (Arndt et al., 2020). This meant that trading locally and internationally was put to a halt. This resulted

in many businesses closing down thus amplifying the already vulnerable economic state of the country (Arndt et al.,2020). This posed a significant threat to human and economic costs well into the future (Arndt et al.,2020). South Africa had recorded about 1655 confirmed cases by April 5th which promptly had an impact on the health and mortality rate of the country's population (Arndt et al.,2020). The lack of information on the spread and control of the COVID-19 virus delayed South Africa's readiness to fight the spread of the virus therefore resulting in underrating its ferocity (Mbunge, 2020). Pillay et al. (2021) mentioned that the COVID-19 effects were far reaching in the healthcare system as well as in other public sectors.

A survey conducted in the United States on women of reproductive age reported that about 33% had delayed or cancelled visiting a healthcare facility for sexual and reproductive assistance as a result of the pandemic (Pillay et al., 2021). Walk-ins at healthcare facilities drastically decreased as people were avoiding in-person healthcare access because of fear of contracting and spreading the virus (Pillay et al., 2021). Similarly, a data review in South Africa found that for the first six months of 2020, which was during the first wave of the COVID-19 virus, this concurred with the strict lockdown levels 5 and 4, about 30% hike in institutional maternal mortality (Pillay et al., 2021). The use of contraceptives and termination of pregnancy dramatically plunged, however, in-facility deliveries and antenatal care attendance remained resolute from the year 2019 (Pillay et al., 2021). The disruption in the healthcare system during the inception of COVID-19 caused turmoil in the routine, functioning and delivery of services in the healthcare sector (Hofman & Madhi, 2020). This resulted in the intense reprogramming of care units to accommodate COVID-19 patients, while others suffered immensely and eventually closed, temporarily (Hofman & Madhi, 2020). The South African government decided to implement the most efficacious precautionary measure available at the time, that is social-behavioural protocols which involved handwashing, social distancing, as well as ensuring safety at workplaces and transportation (Hofman & Madhi, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic did not only cause a devastating effect on the economy and healthcare sector of the country, but also it meant living through disease-related and financial crises as well as psychological and mental upheavals (Cielo et al., 2021). The COVID-19 established new barriers for people who are already suffering from mental illness as well as substance use disorders (Panchal et al., 2021). According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) Health Tracking Poll taken in July 2020 discovered that many people were experiencing various specific negative effects on their mental welfare and health such as eating irregularities (32%), difficulty sleeping (36%), heightened alcohol consumption and substance use (12%)

and deteriorating chronic conditions (12%) resulting from the stress and worry caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Panchal et al., 2021). Panchal et al. (2021) further added that as the coronavirus held on, implemented public health measures introduced a lot of people to other conditions that further worsened their mental health such as job loss and isolation. Another poll found that adolescents were more likely to experience significant mental health repercussions during the pandemic (Drillinger et al., 2021). Drillinger et al. (2021) supported this by highlighting that has been a result of the isolation from peers, virtual learning, time off from essential social activities such as school performances, graduations, prom, and sports. The United States poll reported that approximately 46% of parents revealed that their adolescents had displayed signs and symptoms of new or aggravated mental health conditions since the introduction of the COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of social hiatus measures in March 2020 (Drillinger et al., 2021).

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (n.d.) added that about 46% of young people mentioned experiencing deep feelings of demotivation to do their usual activities and 36% expressed feeling no motivation to do their normal chores. The contained measures that came with the pandemic made young people more susceptible to developing increased loneliness (Loades et al., 2020). Loades et al. (2020) defined loneliness as a subjective emotional state associated with feelings of lacking social interaction as well as desiring some form of social contact. Although there is limited evidence of social interaction being synonymous with loneliness, during the radix of the COVID-19 pandemic, about one third of young people reported feeling intense feelings of loneliness (Loades et al., 2020). As well, almost half of those between the ages of 18-to-24 years old disclosed feeling lonely during lockdown. However, there are confirmed links between loneliness and mental health (Loades et al., 2020). Sampogna et al. (2021) even highlighted that loneliness poses as a crucial public health concern as it is connected to a world of mental and physical health illnesses such as anxiety and depressive disorders, suicidal ideation, stroke, cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, and fatality. In addition to loneliness, the closure of educational institutions has significantly taken a toll on young people's mental health (Chen & Lucock, 2022). Stress related to restrictions associated with the pandemic put young people at an increased risk of developing mental health challenges which may notably compromise their academic success, social interactions and/-or personal opportunities and future career (Chen & Lucock, 2022). The shift to online learning made engaging effectively with schoolwork very difficult leading

to increased concern and worry about long-term employment thus developing mental health disorders (Chen & Lucock, 2022).

2.1.1. COVID-19-related Anxiety and Depression

It is not surprising that COVID-19 has had an increasingly devastating incline on health costs, however, they were not limited to physical health but also had detrimental effects to mental and psychological welfare of individuals (Posel et al., 2021). A study in the United States found that about 4 in 10 people reported to have suffered from symptoms of depressive and/or anxiety disorders during pandemic (Panchal et al., 2021). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition depressive disorders are defined as persistent and disruptive mood dysregulation consisting of sadness, emptiness, or an irritable mood (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is usually accompanied by somatic and cognitive disparities which ultimately affect an individual's functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Anxiety disorders include feelings of intense fear and behavioural disturbances (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is associated with an anticipation of future threat (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The pandemic has deleterious mental health on the entire global population including young people (Cielo et al., 2021). Young people's mental health is among the growing concern in health crises since the emergence of COVID-19 globally (Porter et al., 2021). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) provided an account of feelings experienced by young people in the United States, during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, among the respondents, 15% reported feeling depressed and 27% experienced feelings of anxiety in the last seven days (UNICEF, 2020). The COVID-19 Mental Disorders Collaborators concluded that, across 2020, it was discovered that the effects of the pandemic have resulted in a 25.6% hike up in cases of anxiety as well as a 27.6% increase in depressive disorders worldwide (Daly & Robinson, 2022).

A study conducted by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicted that from June 2020 approximately one-third of adults were suffering from depression or anxiety (Giuntella et al., 2021). The study revealed that young adults had a significant increase in the prevalence of mental health throughout the past decade that is two times higher (Giuntella et al., 2021). It was further revealed that about 60% of young people between the ages of 18-to-24 years old were more likely to develop symptoms of depression and anxiety and some of them disclosed that they considered suicide in the month of May 2020

(Giuntella et al., 2021). At the time, depression had a 11% rise compared to that of 2019 (Giuntella et al., 2021). The social deprivation and isolation contributed to the grievous mental health decline among young people (Orben et al., 2020). Orben et al. (2020) went on to say that feeling highly disconnected to other people is mostly linked to intense and long-term ruinous consequences that affect physical and mental health. Orben et al. (2020) added that the social exclusion might have had a far-reaching effect on young people between the ages of 10-to-24 years old as this stage in their lives marks a pivotal period in their development. Adolescence is a stage in which young people are hypersensitive and overly responsive to social stimuli and the negative responses associated with it (Orben et al., 2020). This pandemic, unfortunately, struck at a rather critical time for many adolescents and young people across the world, as they were beginning to and others into well-established social connections (Orben et al., 2020). This presented lifelong effects that emerged post implementation of the COVID-19 prevention measures (Orben et al., 2020).

In South Africa, the pandemic magnified the already existing gap and/-or very little to no access to mental health care assistance (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021). Individuals struggled significantly as the country did not have plans in place to implement intervention policies to aid those affected (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021). A report published by the News24 publication revealed that South Africa has one of the worst ratings in mental health among the countries in the world (Msomi, 2022). During lockdown, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) reported that they were receiving more calls from people expressing feelings of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and worry (South African Depression and Anxiety Group, 2020). Afore the pandemic, South Africa had estimated about 17% of the population suffering from depression, anxiety and-/or substance use disorders (Rwafa-Ponela et al., 2022). During COVID-19, the depression, anxiety rates shot up to 33%, 29% were fearful and 45% had intense feelings of loneliness (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021). For young people the rates were estimated to 72% since the radix of COVID-19 (Mudiriza & De Lannoy, 2020). Some of these young people mentioned that some of their mental health challenges emanated from food insecurity, geographical exclusion, lack of education and poor health (Mudiriza & De Lannoy, 2020). The results of job and income losses along with social intermission, fear of contracting the virus, and the increased worrying about the future contributed to the heightened trigger of a range of mental health disorders such as, anxiety, depression as well as panic disorder (Mudiriza & De Lannoy, 2020). Unemployment leading to financial constraints was marked as

being the most ravaging events that caused mental health deterioration during the pandemic (Mudiriza & De Lannoy, 2020).

Other pandemic consequences experienced by young people included the closure of schools (Panchal et al., 2021). They lost some of the resources they accessed through school (Lee, 2020). Other schools offered peer support groups, mental health support and other face-to-face services that were taken away by the physical distancing measures and the transition to virtual support has been difficult for some young people (Lee, 2020). Further, schools offered pupils with coping mechanisms that helped in mitigating mental health issues (Lee, 2020). Considering the social isolation, economic strain, bereavement, and loss as well as the transition to virtual learning, learners expected to manage academic stress heightened anxiety and depression (Silbert & Mzozonyana, 2021). The closure of businesses left final year students more anxious and vulnerable especially with both financial and academic lives under threat (Lee, 2020).

In addition to contributing to the public health crisis, the radix of the COVID-19 pandemic flared-up unemployment which further exacerbated mental health challenges faced by individuals across the world (Wilson & Finch, 2021). Unemployment rates had drastically increased to about 14,7% by April 2020 (Yao & Wu, 2022). Studies have extensively documented the existing negative impact between unemployment and mental health (Yao & Wu, 2022). The social isolation protocols implemented as a restorative measure to limit the spread of the virus resulted in the closure of some businesses which made it impossible for these businesses to provide employment opportunities (Yao & Wu, 2022). This, however, notably decreased numerous families' available sources of support which also contributed to economic uncertainty thus the development of mental health disorders (Yao & Wu, 2022). Young people suffered the most compared with adults especially in lower income countries (Fleming, 2021). Youth employment dropped by 8.7% globally and for adults it was rated at 3.7% (Fleming, 2021). Extensive research has revealed that unemployment is a significant social determinant of health challenges (Wadvalla, 2021). They expressed that the process of seeking employment is disheartening in which it ends up escalating feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Wadvalla, 2021).

Currently, many young people in South Africa are struggling to find employment, in spite of the tireless efforts of searching for jobs (Mukwevho, 2021). Some went on to mention that being educated and holding a bachelor's degree or certificates does not do anything to remedy

the situation (Mukwevho, 2021). Further expressing that unemployment in South Africa is a pandemic on its own and a very depressing experience (Mukwevho, 2021). They felt that there seems to be no hope for a better tomorrow as those who seemed to have been lucky with being employed were getting retrenched in large numbers (Mukwevho, 2021). The stress associated with struggling to find employment whilst seeing their peers lose their jobs leads to the development of depression (Mukwevho, 2021). Despite the existing barriers to securing employment, young people persist with attempts of applying for a job with the hopes that they may someday get struck by luck and land employment (Mukwevho, 2021).

2.1.2. COVID-19 and suicide

The COVID-19 pandemic has notably increased perilous behaviours that lead to high risk of suicidal ideation, globally (Pathirathna et al., 2022). Suicide is primarily defined as a self-inflicted act to end one's life (Lev-Belz et al., 2020). There has been remarkable evidence expressing the degree of mental health downturn that has been triggered by self-isolation, quarantine, adjustments of daily routines and activities, and people's livelihoods affected by loss of employment (Pathirathna et al., 2022). These factors have amplified feelings of loneliness, depression, anxiety, difficulty falling asleep, hazardous alcohol and drug usage which may all consequentially lead to an increased urge to self-harm or suicidality (Pathirathna et al., 2022). The WHO reported that there are more than 800 000 fatalities from suicide every year worldwide and that number increased to 1.5 million by the year 2020 (Manzar et al., 2020). This means that every 40 seconds a suicide occurs and every 3 seconds an attempt is made (South African Depression and Anxiety Group, n.d). Further, about 80% of those suicides recorded came from low-and middle- income counties (Manzar et al., 2020). However, there is limited evidence accounting it to during or post COVID-19 which rapidly triggered the expansion of extensive research on the effects of the pandemic on suicide as well as suicide attempts (Pathirathna et al., 2022). A study conducted in Japan disclosed that some people attempted suicide as a fear response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Acharya et al., 2022). These findings expressed the heterogeneousness of the effects of the pandemic on suicide rates (Acharya et al., 2022).

Among young people the fear was heightened by the death of family and friends, self-isolation, and physical distancing, and/-or fear of contagion (Goto et al., 2022). Another Japanese study indicated that among the recorded suicide rates, it was found that some students attributed their suicide attempts and suicide ideation to stress that arose because of difficulty in keeping up

with their academics after being away from school for a long time. (Goto et al., 2022). Suicide among the youth became a huge call for concern as it was labelled the leading cause for fatalities during the pandemic, in Japan (Goto et al., 2022). Manzar et al (2020), added that suicide was named the second most leading cause for fatalities among young people. Research carried out in 2017 revealed that loneliness was an important predictor for suicide ideation (Chang et al., 2017). This was mostly prevalent among young people as the study further indicated that loneliness was attributed to greater depressive symptoms and suicidal behaviours (Chang et al., 2017). Chang et al. (2017) highlighted that young people who fall into depressive episodes and later suicide reported feeling socially disconnected and alone during a rather critical and stressful time in their lives. The radix of the COVID-19 exposed young people to increased feelings of loneliness, social exclusion and disconnection from their daily lives and activities which compromised their mental and physical health (Karim et al.,2020). Manzar et al. (2020) further revealed that according to findings from various studies, majority of suicide cases started happening a month after the implementation the COVID-19 lockdown protocols. This illustrates the severity of the problem and calls for immediate action within the public health sector to deploy preventative measures for possible future pandemics (Manzar et al., 2020).

2.1.3. COVID-19 and Stress

The present mental and public health crisis that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak has reportedly caused an alarming level of stress (Manchia et al., 2021). The American Psychiatric Association, (2013) defines stress as any type of change within the human body that may cause harm to one's emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. Abrams (2022) mentioned that there were high levels of stress, they struggled to manage stress and make major decisions as well as managing day-to-day tasks reported among millennials and Generation Zs when comparing them with other generations. This is a very critical time for young people as it is a prime time in their adulthood for making decisions that will shape their future, both in their social circles and career (Abrams, 2022). The elevated stress created by the uncertainty of the uncomfortable and life-threatening changes brought about by the pandemic (Abrams, 2022).

Duby (2022) stated that young people had suffered physical health implications of the increased stress such as behavioural changes including changing their exercise habits, avoiding social interaction, sleep changes, fatigue, headaches. Duby (2022) further revealed that in

South Africa, adolescents and young people growing up in households affected by unemployment, lacking income and a consistent supply of food are more likely to experience greater anxiety and stress when compared to young people from well off households. She also highlighted that young girls and/or women from disadvantaged communities are faced with additional challenges that affect their mental health even further, these include financial insecurity, lack of social support and vulnerabilities related to their gender (Duby, 2022). A survey and interviews conducted in the South African six districts with young women and adolescent girls revealed that COVID-19 restrictions worsened unemployment, poverty, and food insecurity, elevating mental health stressors for about 71,8% of young women (Duby, 2022). Although some of these young women showed signs of emotional resilience, however, some of the implications of the pandemic were irreparable (Duby,2022).

2.1.4. COVID-19 and Substance Abuse

In addition to the mental health and social welfare concerns precipitated by the COVID-19 virus, there have been reports on the potential exacerbation of substance use behaviours (Layman et al., 2022). Substance abuse involves dangerously consuming alcohol, prescription medicines and/-or other legal and illegal substances (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Drug use has been on the rise globally since the pandemic, the United States of America reported an estimated 93 000 drug overdose in 2020 (Chacon et al., 2021). Chacon et al. (2021), alluded that 4 in 10 Americans disclosed experiencing intense feelings of depression and anxiety throughout the pandemic. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) attributed the increased mental health challenges to elevated stress which consequentially led to substance misuse to try and curb those effects (Chacon et al., 2021). Chacon et al. (2021) further alluded that the stress from extreme social isolation resulted in people making unhealthy decisions such as drinking alcohol and taking drugs. A survey published in the International Journal of Drug Policy, also put forward that, individuals who were already using psychoactive drugs before the pandemic, reported experiencing negative effects that spiralled increased drug usage and fear of relapse or overdose (Kenney, 2021). About 47% of the participants interviewed for this survey disclosed that their substance usage increased during the COVID-19 lockdown (Kenney, 2021). The survey also submitted that about 38% of the participants were more susceptible to the risk of overdosing as a result of buying drugs in large quantities due to supply disruptions, and unknown origins which makes them even harder to get (Kenney, 2021). Further, the survey implied that 47% of individuals using syringes or other impedimenta stated that they relapsed or started sharing needles for the first time since the emergence of the

COVID-19 restrictions (Kenney, 2021). They further revealed that social isolation and spending time alone triggered the drug overuse and relapse in many individuals (Kenney, 2021). Juvonen et al. (2022), pointed out that young people have been affected the most when compared with older age groups. Layman et al. (2022), explained adolescent years as a fundamental part of development, a stage in which the establishment of future substance use patterns may possibly begin. The prevalence and mass use of substances during this period are strongly connected to the likelihood for heavy use and abuse of substances in adulthood (Layman et al., 2022). Kaggwa et al. (2022), added to this by mentioning that young people in adolescence are in a critical stage where their lives are marked by a spate of developmental changes which are highly influenced by nutrition, society, and culture. Kaggwa et al. (2022), continued to say that they go through various amass of neurodevelopmental changes such as grey matter volume reductions, increases to the white matter volume, cortical thinning, synaptic pruning, and reorganisation with limbic and cortical regions. These neurodevelopmental changes then contribute to various adolescent behaviours including heightened reward sensitivity, risk-taking behaviour, improvements in executive and cognition functions, novelty-seeking and wanting to spend more time with peers (Kaggwa et al., 2022). These behavioural traits, in turn, lead to an increased probability of actuating substance use (Kaggwa et al., 2022). Layman et al. (2022) further advanced that recent studies in the United States have documented an increase of substance misuse among vulnerable young people, those that live in disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, youth living in resource-limited and/or challenging home situations are more probable to suffer immense negative effects imposed on by environmental changes, thus turning to substance use to cope (Layman et al.,2022).

With substance use being identified as a consequential concern within the public health sector, it is said about 50% substance use initiation cases have reportedly occurred during adolescence (Kaggwa et al., 2022). In South Africa, substance abuse has been heaped up by the COVID-19 pandemic adding to the ongoing generational battle that has been passed on for decades (Juvonen et al., 2022). It was among the many countries worldwide that are currently battling to manage the increased substance abuse caused by mental health challenges faced by its citizens. Juvonen et al. (2022) stated that before the pandemic, mental health was the biggest contributor to the public health crisis. Consequentially, since the emergence of the pandemic, the environment has encouraged the exacerbation of poor mental health determinants which are highly linked to heavy substance misuse. According to the World Health Organization (WHO)’s latest research data, South Africa is ranked as having the third highest alcohol

consuming population in Africa following Namibia and Eswatini (Bartlett et al., 2023). The International Society of Substance Use Professionals added to this by reporting that South Africans were demanding alcohol even during the national lockdown (Bartlett et al., 2023). Therefore, this report displayed the magnitude of the problem faced by the country if no appropriate action is taken. Giftings et al. (2022), said that, for adolescents, disruption of daily activities during the national social recession such as school closures, family tension, victimisation and lack of support gave rise to irresponsible coping mechanisms like, solitary substance misuse. This type of substance use among adolescents has accumulated noteworthy attention as it is linked to heavy and recurrent consumption and potential risk of developing alcohol use disorder (Dumas et al., 2022). Similarly, young people highly prioritise peer connections they may be likely to maintain social substance use (Dumas et al., 2022). They rate popularity highly and they would typically engage in risky behaviours such as substance use to retain and relay the status of cool, fun and mature to their peers (Dumas et al., 2022).

2.2. COVID-19, economy and unemployment

In reference to the World Bank (2020), it is no surprise that the economy plunged into recession globally post onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The alarming spread of the virus has led to millions of people getting infected and fatalities, which further resulted in governments of countries imposing strict trammels to remedy the spread of the virus (World Bank, 2020). This, then, meant that movement was put to a halt thus significantly affecting the economy (World Bank, 2020). The Global Economic Prospects published in June 2020 broke down the immediate and near-future as well as long-term impact of the pandemic (World Bank, 2020). They predicted a 5.2% decline in worldwide GDP in 2020 when using market exchange rate weights, making it the deepest global recession in decades (World Bank, 2020). The stringent movement measures disrupted the supply chain of products nationally and internationally, therefore affecting many businesses (Shang et al., 2021). Cash flow in the market had run extremely low, affecting revenue growth, workers losing their sources of income as businesses and industries closed (Shang et al., 2021). Zippel and Sherman (2021) added that the widespread economic fallout was especially prevalent among the black community as it further exposed the harsh reality of the long-standing inequalities. These inequalities include employment, education, housing, and health care of which were exacerbated by the pandemic (Zippel & Sherman, 2021). The loss of employment meant that a lot of people struggled to afford basic needs such as adequate food and rent (Zippel & Sherman, 2021). Young people were not spared in the rise of job losses when the pandemic hit. According to the International

Labour Organization (ILO) (2020), young people within the ages of 15-to-24 years old are three times more vulnerable to the risk of unemployment (International Labour Organization, 2020). The term "unemployment" refers to the number of people who are actively looking for work and available to take up work, but are unable to find any jobs (Amadeo, 2022). Research revealed that one in six young people between the ages of 18-to-29 years old, that is approximately 17.4% reportedly stopped working amid the COVID-19 crisis (International Labour Organization, 2020).

As well, South Africa was no exception when recounting the effects of the pandemic on unemployment. Research estimated that about 2.2 and 2.8 million people lost their jobs between February and April 2020 following the implementation of the lockdown measures that led to the nosedive of the economy (Posel et al., 2021). Alvarez-Iglesias et al. (2021) said that one third of those people are young people who are either not employed, educated or even trained (NEET). The pandemic heightened the existing social inequalities for young people living in this country, noting that as it stands, it has been registered with the highest inequalities in the world and has an estimated 20% of its population living in severe poverty (Alvarez-Iglesias et al., 2021). Survey data on unemployment suggested that commonly pregnable groups have been excessively negatively affected by the lockdown, these include, black Africans, youth, women, and those less educated (Alvarez-Iglesias et al., 2021). Mudiriza and De Lannoy (2020) noted that more than 7 million, that is 42% young people ranging between the ages of 18-to-35 were living in income poverty and roughly 10 million of these young people within the same age group are NEET. In a consequential manner, income poverty impacts on food security which on that account impacts health, further compromising young people's transitions from adolescence to adulthood (Mudiriza & De Lannoy, 2020).

2.3. COVID-19 and education

School closures prompted by the COVID-19 lockdown have heightened inequality with emerging evidence from some countries in Europe (Donnelly & Patrinos., 2021). Transitioning to virtual learning abruptly increased learning losses which fully unveiled the inequality (Donnelly & Patrinos., 2021). About 45 high-income countries in Central Asia and Europe region had to close down all their schools, disrupting 185 million students' lives (Donnelly & Patrinos., 2021). Countries like Ukraine which are listed as middle-and-lower-income countries had more torturous outcomes due to their very little or no technological ability and majority of the people there living below the poverty line (Donnelly & Patrinos., 2021).

Donnelly and Patrinos (2021) affirmed that these learning losses may very well translate into much more severe long-term challenges. These challenges may include decreased test scores which resulted from missing lessons and/or extended learning deprivation, linked to future decline in accessing higher education, acquiring employment or lower labour market participation therefore decreased future earnings (Donnelly & Patrinos., 2021).

In South Africa, the second quarter of 2020 exposed about 13 million students with inadequate education (Alvarez-Iglesias et al., 2021). The radix of COVID-19 lockdown highlighted the broken and unequal education system in this country and how learners from the poorest communities were completely cut off from education during extended school closure (Mohamed, 2021). With only 10% of households consisting of internet connection and the government still underdelivering on adequate running water, sanitation and overcrowding in underprivileged schools (Mohamed, 2021). Mohamed (2021) said that an experience of quality education in South Africa is highly dependent on how financially stable you are, where you are born as well as the colour of your skin. Considering the degree of how broken and unequal the system has become, remote learning precipitated by the pandemic has become impossible for learners from disadvantaged communities (Mohamed, 2021). The unbearableness of virtual learning and rotational attendance which resulted learners missing 54% of learning time, reportedly led to about 400 000 to 500 000 students dropping out of school (Fricker, 2021). This was said to be prevalent among students living in informal urban and rural settings, where the effects of poverty are fundamentally high (Fricker, 2021). A General Household Survey was employed to track pupil attendance a year post COVID-19, analysis from that survey revealed that approximately 1 million students had not returned to school by April/May 2021 (Mohohlwane, 2021). Being out of school is detrimental to young people's mental health status, it not only exposes them to learning loss, also to the risk of violence and abuse, reduced social development skills and for some loss of essential meals (Fricker, 2021). As previously mentioned, these skills are required when these young people are transitioning into working lives and their absence may lead to young people, mostly women, taking on childcare responsibilities thus affecting the search or finding appropriate employment (Fricker, 2021).

Even though the significance of contact learning is undeniably irreplaceable and is the cornerstone of every learning institution, it provides real-time learning with resources as well as providing prompt feedback to students (Mpungose, 2020). However, the COVID-19 has fast-tracked the transition to the digital world, the current discourse and technological

revolution requiring the use of online learning (Mpungose, 2020). It has made learning and accessing course content material much easier and more efficient for learners (Mpungose, 2020). Online learning allows both the learner and educator to hold lessons at different times and locations using several forms of material thus allowing learner and educator to save on travelling costs to the learning site (Mpungose, 2020). Furthermore, information is readily available, anytime, anywhere with access to software and hardware resources in spite of the challenges the pandemic has put forward (Mpungose, 2020).

2.4. Social Media usage during COVID-19- related lockdown

The introduction of the COVID-19 pandemic came with a lot of uncertainties which included many changes on daily functionalities, namely, transition to remote work and school, reduced mobility, and face masks (Karhu et al., 2021). These changes and transitions came with a set of new challenges that further complicated one's everyday life (Karhu et al., 2021). A study conducted in nine European countries revealed that since the COVID-19 lockdown, screen time has increased to 65% (Karhu et al., 2021). This is mostly present within the digital communication sector such as, social media usage, text messaging, video, and voice calls (Karhu et al., 2021). Digital communication has since become an omnipresent part of our daily lives, even more pronounced now since the pandemic has fostered social distancing. During the lockdown, social interactions moved strictly to digital platforms (Karhu et al., 2021). Pandya and Lodha (2021) added that with social connection a critical part of human development, for the reason of enhancing one's mental well-being, the pandemic accelerated the use of digital technology, to retain socio-emotional connectedness. The digital world has shaped how people use their technological devices, the time spent on virtual social connectedness and/-or avoiding social relations (Pandya & Lodha, 2021).

Research carried out in Switzerland mentioned that the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on young people's general welfare has been linked to drastic increases in screen media usage (Werling et al., 2021). (Werling et al., 2021). The study emphasised that due to the reduced physical interaction measures, school closures, young people have experienced increased boredom, irritability, anxiety, depression, and suicidality (Werling et al., 2021). For this reason, they have used social media platforms as an escapism from these negative effects (Werling et al., 2021). Escapism is explained as a form evading an uncomfortable reality that may potentially inflict distress on an individual. South African young people had also jumped on this trend of daily use of social media applications such as *Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter*

and *Facebook* (Hlongwane, 2021). Majid et al. (2020) defines social media as the use of collective online communication platforms as a means of sharing information and other forms of expressions with other individuals through virtual networks. It is known to be built on online based applications that pass on the ideology and technology of the web used to connect people beyond any imaginable boundaries (Majid et al., 2020). Hlongwane (2021) unveiled that young people in South Africa engaged in what was known as passive and active social media use. Passive social media was defined as when an individual is just browsing through their newsfeed and content posted by other people (Hlongwane, 2021). On the contrary, active social media usage refers to online behaviour that foster direct responses among users, these may include, sending messages, liking, and commenting, and sharing personal content with users (Hlongwane, 2021). When analysing the effects of both these forms, it was discovered that they have adverse mental health implications. Thorisdott et al. (2019) confirmed that emanating evidence has indicated that passive social media activity has been linked to significantly higher depressive symptoms when compared to active social media activity. This may account to the fact that active use is associated with an improved self-esteem and greater sense of self which positively reflects on one's thoughts, opinions, and self-concept (Thorisdott et al., 2019). In contrast, passive use involves overly exposing lives as well other people's personal perspectives thus requiring diminished personal input and effort (Thorisdott et al., 2019). Consequently, this is considered perilous to one's psychological and emotional well-being as it facilitates upward social comparison with other online users, which affects one's life satisfaction and compromises their self-esteem (Thorisdott et al., 2019).

Although social media may provide a valuable coping tool during the pandemic as a social connection method, it has harmful risks attached to it such as psychological distress and addictive behaviours (Werling et al.,2021). The World Health Organization and UNICEF has marked it as a serious concern. A cross-national online survey conducted in the United Kingdom, Norway, Australia, and the United States reported that increased social media usage was associated with elevated emotional distress (Thygesen et al., 2021). Some studies have argued that the increase in emotional distress has been due to false reports or misinformation overload around the virus (Thygesen et al., 2021). A study from China expressed that spending an average of 2 hours or more daily on social media is enough to spark mental health decline, especially depression and anxiety (Thygesen et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to note that as much as the use of social media alleviate some stress because of its allowance for social

contact at the same time adhering to the physical distancing protocols, the deleterious effects that cause worry and panic are as synonymously important (Thygesen et al., 2021).

2.5. COVID-19 and Social Interaction

According to Sulthana and Vasantha (2021), the fear of possible infection, social deprivation and mobility restrictions led people to finding alternatives to making connections, that is social media. Social media provided people with a platform to interact and connect with family and friends, entertainment, and a safe escape from the disarray the world has been subjected to. (Sulthana & Vasantha, 2021). The rise in social media usage was noted to be about 10.5% by July 2020 when compared to July 2019 (Sulthana & Vasantha, 2021). Furthermore, social media ranked the second highest used digital platform (Sulthana & Vasantha, 2021). Research conducted in the United States during lockdown in the year 2020, measured participants' momentary mood and stress using a smartphone app five times a day for seven days (Forbes et al, 2021). This study required that they indicate if they engaged in any social interaction since the last day of entry and mention whether it was physical or virtual. The results revealed that even one social interaction event since the last day of entry improved participants' mood, they experienced calmness and were energetic (Forbes et al., 2021). When comparing these results to days with no interaction, participants reported only experiencing momentary stress (Forbes et al., 2021). This, therefore, supports the aforestated that social interaction during the COVID-19 lockdown was found to be beneficial to one's mental well-being. Worth mentioning, before the pandemic, some studies found consistent positive evidence between well-being and the quantity of face-to-face interactions whether with close others or less-close others (Sun et al., 2022). It was heavily linked to self-health report, happiness, improved mood, greater life satisfaction and positive effect (Sun et al., 2022). With that said, during the COVID-19 lockdown, face-to-face interactions within households were unconstrained whereas that of less-close others, such as colleagues or acquaintances dramatically reduced (Sun et al.,2022). However, it is unclear if face-to-face interaction with close ones and excluding that of less-close others still yields the same results considering the fact that it has drastically changed since the pandemic (Sun et al., 2022).

Another study conducted in the United States found that social media support during the lockdown also helped young people fight feelings of loneliness through helping them maintain peer relationships (Sundler et al., 2023). Over 90% of young people in the United States have active online presence (Ogata et al., 2020). It was found that what mattered the most among

young people was the quality of screen time not the quantity of time spent on social media (Sundler et al., 2023). Peers play a vital role in the lives of young people, at any stage, however, they are considered more crucial for adolescence therefore the need to maintain connection to them (Sundler et al., 2023). Zhang et al. (2021) also shared that social networks have the power to influence one's mental health by equipping one with stress coping mechanisms. Furthermore, social media provides one with access to shared health information and support to help individuals reflect on oneself mental welfare (Zhang et al., 2021). Young adults confirmed that social media reduces individual stress by alleviating feelings of uncertainty and suicidality through sharing mutually supportive information (Zhang et al., 2021). Social media communication, like texting, was proven to be more beneficial for self-esteem as it is associated with an inflated sense of self-disclosure (Forbes et al., 2021). Similarly, with the pandemic disrupting in-contact education, it brought about the resurgence of online learning full-time (Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022). Online presence for young people for educational purposes increased from 4 hours and 47 minutes to 7 hours and 5 minutes on average (Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022).

Since the pandemic has forced young people to adapt to homebound conditions which have accelerated and amplified the reliance on social media for young people (Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022). It is important to note the possible psychological implications attached to that. Scholars found that mental health disorders were likely to develop by the age of 14 years old for young people engaging in heavy media usage, which mostly included depression and anxiety (Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022). Some young people revealed that they experienced more feelings of sadness and less sleep following spending a considerable amount of time online (Ogata et al.,2020). And for the youth living in the townships, the effects were more severe as their social interaction was completely suspended. This was especially difficult because they are heavily reliant on physical interaction due to the fact that they come from disadvantaged communities that lack resources like, internet connection, mobile data, computers, laptops and/-or even smartphones to access the online world. Cauberghe et al. (2021), added that the situation worsened when the government extended the social distancing protocols, further causing devastating effects on their psychological as well as physical health.

2.6. Entrepreneurship through the Social Media Lens during COVID-19 related lockdown

The massive and unexpected life twists, along with the cataclysmic effects to social interaction, the public health sector, education, and the economy brought about by COVID-19, amplified

technology advancement so much that we continued to preserve communication, study, and work (Crawford, 2021). The way the pandemic has fuelled up digital entrepreneurship globally, many businesses were forced to migrate to the online world in order to survive (Modgil et al., 2022). Verily, the sustainability of many businesses currently depends strongly on their digital proficiency (Modgil et al., 2022). The primitive foundations of the online world and high-tech organizations have been lurking in the world wide web shadows and running the online traffic from the workplace to household networks increased for a considerable amount of time (Sweney, 2020). The pandemic proved to us that online consumption can change abruptly, even overnight (Sweney, 2020). Vodafone, a telecommunications company in Europe, disclosed that there was a 50% increase in the online traffic (Sweney, 20201). With the pandemic quickly advancing the shift to greater automation, businesses easily embraced labour and bots required by digital technology (Modgil et al., 2022). They are purposely seeking to grasp technologies, tools and platforms associated with the digital ecosystem so they could maintain uninterrupted operations during lockdown crises (Modgil et al., 2022).

The pandemic has also strengthened social media marketing in a powerful way for businesses of all sizes to reach prospects and clientele (Khanom, 2023). More individuals are becoming their own bosses since the radix of social media marketing (Wright et al., 2010). The rapid expansion of social media has allowed individuals to access an enormous phenomenon in information flow (Majid et al., 2020). Potential clients will view, read, and share product information with other potential customers and if they are more interested in the product, social media allows them not to save the product for further viewing for details later. The attraction of clientele has made social media the gateway to the online store. Majid et al. (2020). When a client decides on purchasing a product, they have an option to use e-commerce, otherwise known as electronic commerce. It is described as a tool within the digital network that allows consumers to purchase products via credit or debit payment (Majid et al., 2020). This whole process elaborates the significance of social media in facilitating ways of connecting service providers or business owners to consumers (Majid et al., 2020). Social media also introduces the idea of dropship agents, explained as systems within the digital business world that enable people to start up business entities on low capital with smaller risks and there is no hassle of unsold stock (Majid et al., 2020).

The online presence on social media has promoted the existence of the dropship phenomenon and has made things easier for young people to tap into the entrepreneurship world (Majid et

al.,2020). Young people are the future and successors of every country thus making youth entrepreneurship the overall advancement of society (Singh, 2020). Entrepreneurship is referred to as an innovative way of creating new business by collecting venue and labour in order to generate economic wealth and growth (Hayes, 2023). It is a fundamental tool in the development of sustainable economies as a result of the innovation and creativity of young people (Hayes, 2023). Therefore, social media provides young people with an opportunity to connect in a personal and meaningful way with clients, similarly, allowing them to respond hastily to consumer-related issues, passing compliments and sharing information about the company (Hayes, 2023). India's absolute population consists of 54% of young people under the age of 25 years old, it has claimed its position as one of the Youngest Countries worldwide (Hayes, 2023). They have noted and utilised the benefits of bearing no advertising and marketing costs using Social Media Marketing.

2.7. Significance of Social Interaction

Humans are inherently relational beings, they thrive in social interactions and in communal settings (Sikali, 2020). Social interaction is a fundamental human requirement, equal in value to nutrition and sleep (Sikali, 2020). Manusov (2011), explained social interaction as an involvement in verbal or nonverbal frequent communication between individuals in a variety of real-life contexts, such as, family, friends, colleagues, and organisations. Social relationships are complex, provide individuals with fulfilment, a sense of connection, support, purpose and ultimately better health and longevity (Manusov, 2011). Individuals with healthful relationships with their family members, friends, colleagues and/or community members are said to be generally happier and experience reduced health problems (Torrönen, 2021). Having connections with significant others or people in general has been associated with relieving destructive levels of chronic stress (Torrönen, 2021). Research has also found that practising the act of caring for another evokes the release of dopamine, a stress-reducing hormone for both the giver and the one on the receiving end (Güvendir & Hardacre, 2022). Cohut (2018), proclaimed that the human species has survived for so many centuries because of social interaction. Person-to-person interactions trigger areas of our nervous system that release an amalgam of neurotransmitters assigned to the regulation of our response to stress and anxiety (Cohut, 2018). The alloy of neurotransmitters acts as a vaccine that protects an individual currently and well off in the future (Cohut, 2018). Physical touch like giving someone a high-five or shaking hands is sufficient to release oxytocin, which boosts one's level of trust, lowering the levels of cortisol therefore subsequently lowering one's stress levels (Cohut,

2018). New research found in the United Kingdom found that human interaction is highly beneficial to a cancer survival patient (Sandoiu, 2017). The National Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) in association with the University of Oxford discovered that interacting or generally being in the company of former cancer patients who have undergone chemotherapy and have completed it in at least 5 years have positive effects on a cancer patient (Sandoiu, 2017). Social support plays a key role in the survival of these patients.

Adolescence presents a very critical period for social interaction among young people. It encapsulates significant psychological and biological changes. Peer interaction is profoundly intrinsic among young people, it is marked by acceptance, approval and/-or rejection (Orben et al, 2020). Peer engagement is significant in helping the youth develop a complete sense of social self-identity while establishing strong affiliations with peer mates (Orben et al.,2020). Peer interaction provides them with a sense of solidarity which promotes their development into fully independent adults (Anttila et al.,2017). It was found that the happiness of an adolescent can be predictable by the number of their close friends and the amount of emotional support they provide (Anttila et al.,2017). Social relationships play a crucial role in young people's general health factors. Poor social relationships can be deleterious on physical and mental health which may lead to delinquent behaviours, irresponsible alcohol and substance abuse and risk of possible death (Anttila et al.,2017). Throughout adolescence, the physiology of the social brain along with many regions within the human cortex are constantly going through developments (Orben et al.,2020). Multiple longitudinal MRI studies have revealed that on all parts of the cortex, the volume of grey matter, especially that consisting of synapses and cell bodies, reduces from as early as late childhood through to mid-twenties (Orben et al.,2020). In comparison, the volume of white matter, which is mostly made from myelinated axons, continuously increases (Orben et al.,2020). Orben et al. (2020) said that the interpretation of these macrostructural biological changes is attributed to neurodevelopmental mechanisms at microstructural level that are partly linked to environmental stimuli that represent neuroplasticity developmental systems. The importance of neuroplasticity in early development is known to continue into adolescence. Environmental stimuli, in this case peer interaction is vital to young peoples' overall existence.

2.7.1. Adolescents, peer relations and mental issues

Adolescents are classified at a high risk of developing mental health challenges. Reports found that about 75% of adults are or have suffered from a mental health condition, onset was noted

before the age of 24 years old (Orben et al.,2020). Factors aligned to the development of these affective conditions were connected to poor peer relationships, peer rejection, bullying and loneliness (Orben et al.,2020). Young people affected by mental health disorders are usually withdrawn from associating in social situations, however, they still yearn for connections with people as well as reassurance of their well-being (Anttila et al.,2017). The implementation of lockdown as a protection measure from the COVID-19 virus, including school closures, home bound conditions and not getting to see their peers has curtailed young peoples' contact with the outside world (Cooper et al.,2021). The consequences of that have been heavily associated with young peoples' mental health deterioration. This steep reduction to socialisation has affected young peoples' emotional stability (Volkin, 2020). Social interaction and emotional development and stability are intertwined, more so for young people. Compromising that has led to psychological distress and loneliness (Cooper et al., 2021). This comes after empirical evidence from many countries across the globe indicating the connection between loneliness and increased distress on young people since the COVID-19 pandemic (Cooper et al.,2021). However, loneliness may be subjective, it was imperative to measure it from self-report from certain age groups and noting the pandemic context for credible results (Cooper et al.2021).

The incomparable psychological and physiological disintegration experienced by young people due to the pandemic has led to them looking for alternative ways of sustaining themselves. They explored the use of social media to try and preserve some of the connections they still had with family, peers, and colleagues (Seabrook et al., 2016). Furthermore, social media became a powerful income tool for young people. It introduced them to the benefits of Social Media Marketing that allowed them to reach far and wide for prospective business opportunities. As promising as the online world seemed to young people, it came with adverse comorbid psychological challenges that compromised their physical and mental health. In some instances, it unfortunately proved to be fatal.

2.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the theoretical framework suitable for this study, through presenting a picture of how the COVID-19 related lockdown impacted on youth socialisation. It discussed how isolation comprised their overall development and social interaction. This chapter also presents arguments from the literature review on the mental health implications of the COVID-19 related lockdown on young people. It presents global and local findings of the psychological effects of the lockdown. It also discusses how social media impacted on their

lives in terms of facilitating social interaction, income generation and supporting their academic lives.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Research methodology is referred to as a systematic way of solving a research problem by collecting data using varied research approaches, techniques, sampling methods, analysing the gathered data, and drawing conclusions to the proposed research study (Sarantakos, 2005). The research will adopt a constructivism paradigm which Adom et al. (2016) defined it as an approach that people generally use to form their own knowledge and understanding of the world through experiences they have as well as reflecting on those experiences. It is simply means that the majority of the time what people learn and know comes from experience (Adom et al., 2016). This paradigm is suited for this study as the participants are relaying events of the COVID-19 lockdown through experience and created meaning of it through that experience. Further, this paradigm is mostly appropriate for qualitative research studies which is the approach that this study will be exploring. It provides motivation for how and why the proposed research methods will be applied to the study. Thus, this chapter will outline the methodology used for this research, namely, the qualitative research approach and narrative design. Participants, sample, and sampling techniques applied as well as the recruitment of the participants will be discussed. Furthermore, data collection methods, tools including questions for interviews will be discussed in this chapter. Finally, it outlines the trustworthiness and ethical considerations that were upheld in this research.

3.2. Research approach.

This study employed the qualitative research approach, which, in reference to Teherani et al. (2015), is known as a market research inquiry into social phenomena by obtaining data via observing, open-ended and conversational communication. It is direct, accessible, and easy to understand (Teherani et al., 2015). It mainly focuses on individuals or groups of people who have different perspectives on psychological and social reality (Hancock et al., 2009). Additionally, it studies behaviour in natural settings, by interpreting the “why” rather than the “what” of the social phenomena through relying on direct experiences of individuals as meaning-making agents in their daily lives. It seeks to respond to questions such as, why people behave in the way they do, perspectives and attitudes formed post experiences, how and why culture and practices have contributed to people’s lives the way they have, and how those events have impacted their lives (Hancock et al., 2009). This approach is best suited for this study as it has provided accounts of young people living in townships, their opinions, reasons, inducements of perspectives and motivations of experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown. It

has also allowed the study to provide a perspective of the mental health experiences associated with the lockdown. Further, they used social media in attempts to remedy the effects of the pandemic, connect with family and peers, as well as using it to sustain themselves by creating means of income generation.

3.3. Research Design

According to Akhtar (2016), a research design is a structure, plan, strategy and/-or examination of a proposed research project. It is considered a "glue" or "a blueprint" that supports all elements of a proposed study (Akhtar, 2016). It is made up of a series of conditions for the gathering and analyses of data in a way that focuses on combining relevance to the research purpose with economy and procedure. Furthermore, the research design assists the researcher in answering the research question (s) effectively.

The research design used for this study is the narrative research design, which is known to be used in a qualitative research methodology inquiry (Wolgemuth & Agosto, 2019). It sought to draw out and interpret people's life experiences to understand their societies, culture, and overall way of life (Wolgemuth & Agosto, 2019). By its properties, it was named the "essence" of people-oriented sciences as it gives meaning to people's lived experiences of the world (Wolgemuth & Agosto, 2019). It tells a story of significant experiences of the teller's real world. For this research, the narrative design provided young people in the townships with an opportunity to tell their stories relating to their experience of the lockdown, without judgement or opposing commentary from the investigator. This research design ensures that people's voices are not lost in translation (Ntinda, 2019). It is embedded in the belief that exploration of meaning in participants' experiences provides a clear picture of their reality (Ntinda, 2019). By exploring young people's experiences of the COVID-19 related lockdown, the research will be able to paint a picture of the psychological effect the pandemic had on their lives, how the lack of resources affected their education, and chances to find employment. Further, how the digital world became their only escape from the perilous effects of the pandemic by offering them an opportunity to socialise and generate income for themselves. Moreover, this research has specifically focused on the lived narrative design, which documented participants' experiences through storytelling events that have occurred, and the way participants experienced them (Ntinda, 2019). Storytelling in this case, relates to township youth lived COVID-19 related

lockdown experiences and coping mechanisms employed to try and combat negative effects as well as their usage of social media to try and maintain normalcy.

3.4. Sampling Strategy

Showkat and Parveen (2017), explained sampling as a method of determining a representative portion of the population known as a sample. It makes the research conducted more accurate, economical as well as determining transferability of the findings from the study (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). This research took on a non-probability sampling technique, defined as a non-randomised method of drawing out a sample from the population. It mainly worked on the researcher's judgement, that is, respondents were selected based on convenience (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). This study used the purposive sampling method when selecting participants. Sharma (2017) explained it as a subjective, judgemental, and selective sampling method that relies on the researcher's judgement when it comes to the units, these may be, organisations or cases, people, events, or pieces of data, that are required by the study. The researcher preselects their sample based on his or her own acumen (Sarantakos, 2012). For the purpose of this research, the researcher purposely selected individuals between the ages of 18 to 25 years old, both male and female equally. The age group for participants required for this study were preselected by the investigator because they deemed it appropriate for the study. In addition, the study employed the snowball sampling technique, also known as a chain-referral sampling method. It is mainly defined as a selection method applied when participants are difficult to locate or access (Naderifar et al., 2017). The method relies on referral from acquaintances who may be interested in participating in the research. In order to obtain respondents who have similar characteristics with the initial responder, the researcher used people who typically have a greater number of social connections (Etikan, 2016). This strategy is appropriate for the study since it has given the researcher the opportunity to ask participants who could know potential participants who share the same characteristics as the initial participants for help. In this case, individuals may pass on the information on the pamphlets about the study among themselves and peers they may know or may be interested in the study. These characteristics include other young people who reside in the Mfundo Park community and the Vosloorus township. When asked during interviews, these individuals discussed their experiences with the COVID-19 lockdown, including how it affected their social lives, mental health, and financial and academic standing. The interviews also aimed to find out how the youth of Vosloorus used social media whether it helped them stay in touch with each other, reduce feelings of loneliness

that might otherwise result in depression, or use it for entrepreneurship to make money and stay on top of their academics by keeping up with their teachers and schoolwork.

3.5. Study Setting

The study interviewed seven participants from the Mfundo Park area from the Vosloorus community in Johannesburg, Gauteng province, South Africa. Vosloorus has a population size of approximately 163 216 with surface area of 32.10km squared (BusinessTech, 2016). During the early 1800s, gold and coal had just been discovered in the Boksburg area which saw many black, Asian and coloured migrant workers from different parts of South Africa and internationally flooding the area in hopes of finding employment (Khumalo, 2016). The surplus in labour was well received by the mining bosses, however, they did not have land to accommodate these people, so they decided to appeal to the government for a piece of land on the west of Boksburg CBD (Khumalo, 2016). At the time, the residential area was called "eJulewe" which was translated to "jewellery or "place of wealth", however, by 1911 the Julewe's name was changed to Stirtonville in honour of their then local municipality superintendent (Khumalo, 2016). Stirtonville was growing into this vibrant harmonious community such that it produced highly rated local and national professional black golfers which led to the authorities monitoring unknown visitors into the settlement (Khumalo, 2016). Residents of the settlement were issued with residential permits and non-residents were required to obtain a temporary day-pass from the superintendent's office but even so, it was not enough to keep people out. This then led to the relocation of all black people to a new township on the border of Germiston and Boksburg, named Vosloorus (Khumalo, 2016).

This area has been found to have one of the highest unemployment and poverty rates dating before the COVID-19 (Modiba, 2021). BusinessTech (2016) mentioned that about half of the country's urban population lives in townships and informal settlements, 38% of which are within working-age and about 60% completely unemployed. It was also noted that people living in townships live in dormitory style structures that were placed far away from economic city centers in attempts to carry out segregation plans (BusinessTech, 2016).

3.6. Recruitment Procedure

Participants recruited for this study utilised their ability to seek help from posters and pamphlets distributed by the researcher explaining the study as well as the participants required by the study. The posters and pamphlets contained details of the potential participants' age groups. The researcher also recruited participants who had received word from peers about this

study through the information on the posters that was spread throughout the community of Mfundo Park. After then, a schedule for interviews was created for those who had expressed interest in taking part in the research, and the interviews started.

The young people from the Vosloorus township in Mfundo Park, Gauteng, were the participants in this study. The age range of the participants was 18 to 25 years old. Since that demographic is the focus of the research, young Black people made up the majority of the sample. It looked into how the COVID-19 lockdown affected the lives of young people who experienced it, how they coped with the difficult circumstances, and how they changed their lives. Seven people make up the sample, which is suitable for the kind of study being done. This research may not be broadly applicable, as the great majority of South African youth residing in other townships will not be included in the sample. Consequently, the study's findings do not accommodate generalisation.

Table 3.6.1. Participants Profile

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status & Gender	Education Level	Occupation
Sibongile	19	Single Female	Completed Matric	Unemployed
Grace	25	Single Female	Studying Diploma in Mechatronics at Ekurhuleni West College in Germiston (EWC)	Student
Banele	20	Single Female	Studying Education at University of the Witwatersrand	Student

Mduduzi	22	Single Male	Completed Advanced Diploma in Marketing at Durban University of Technology (DUT)	Employed as a Waiter
James	19	Single Male	Completed Matric	Unemployed
Mary	25	Single Female	Completed Degree in Education at University of Johannesburg	Unemployed
Michael	21	Single Male	Completed Honours Degree in Politics at University of Pretoria (UP)	Unemployed

3.7. Data Collection

Data for this study was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews, which consists of a dialogue between the researcher and participant (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). This exchange is mainly guided by a pliable interview guide and followed up by probing questions and comments (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The questions were non-standardized; they covered the themes included in the study, they were not asked in a specific order or phrasing (George, 2022). These types of interviews allowed the interviewer to ask open-ended questions which permit flexibility (George, 2022). Through this, the researcher or interviewer can note patterns, while allowing for comparison between participants (George, 2022). The researcher was able to investigate participant ideas, opinions, and sentiments regarding their experiences during the COVID-19 epidemic using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Key questions were included in an interview schedule to help keep things organised during the interviewing process. This helped the study collect as much data as possible while also addressing all pertinent goals and objectives. The interviews took place over the course of 60 minutes on

average, and in order to prevent prejudice and take into consideration all the information that was stated and not mentioned, the conversations were recorded and transcribed. Face-to-face interviews took place at the participants' respective dwellings, as decided upon by the participants and the researcher. Three languages were used for the interviews: Siswati, IsiZulu, and English.

3.8. Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Smith and Osborn (2007) recounted it as the in-depth investigation of people's lives to make sense of their social and personal world. IPA simply provides meaning to research participants' reality; this includes experiences and/or events that occurred in individuals' lives (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Smith and Osborn (2015) said that IPA comprises three fundamental theoretical foundations. The phenomenology aspect of the data analysis method is said to be a philosophical approach which is set to produce an interpretation of people's lived experiences in its own terms as opposed to ones that are set by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA also recognizes this is a story-telling interpretative task as humans are known to be sense-making creatures, thus, the researcher's sole aim is to understand the participant trying to understand what is happening to them (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Furthermore, IPA is idiographic in its commitment to producing a thorough detailed experience of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The IPA data analysis depicts pain really well, the elusive, involving complex psycho-somatic interactions that are most difficult to express (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This allows the participant to freely express themselves fully on their experiences. In this research, the purpose of IPA was to depict young people's living in the Vosloorus township experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown in their own words. It further outlined their uses of social media to try and remedy the possible negative effects of the lockdown as well as the positives that provided them with opportunities, such as maintaining connections with peers and family and keeping track of their academics. These experiences include difficult and painful recounts for the participants thus the significance of using IPA. Greening (2019) mentioned that the analysis is completed in four distinct steps. The first step is essentially reading and rereading transcribed scripts to be grounded in the participants' responses (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Therefore, for this research, the investigator listened to the audio recordings and transcribed texts to be acquainted with the participants' responses. Smith and Osborn (2008) emphasised the significance of this step as it provides enlightenment in

bringing about understanding of different perspectives of the content. Different themes from the participants will be noted in this step (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The second step involves noting links and connections among the identified themes that surfaced in each transcript and kindred themes were grouped together (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Themes identified in the participants' responses that bear similar themes were clustered in groups which made it easier for the researcher to outline them in the study. The third step, the researcher then provided a synopsis of these identified and clustered themes (Smith & Osborn, 2008). And in the fourth and final step of this analysis, an anecdotal description of the participants' experiences was outlined (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In this step, the researcher provided a detailed lens of the young people's reality, of their experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown in a township context, the negatives, and positives of that experience. And it shaped their uses of the digital world in creating opportunities for themselves to remedy financial, educational, and social effects they experienced.

3.9. Trustworthiness

For research to be legitimately understood by the public, other scholars, researchers, practitioners and policy makers, trustworthiness should be upheld (Guba, 1981). It is a way that researchers use to prompt their readers and themselves that the findings from their research are worthy of dignitary attention (Nowell et al., 2017). Trustworthiness is tied to the believability of the researchers' findings, for instance, this is when the research has finished designing, carrying out, analysing, and formulating a report on the research to illustrate its credibility (Nowell et al., 2017). Validity of the study is required to confirm the outcomes of the data are accurate and grounded (Nowell et al., 2017). Leung (2015) addresses these questions by affirming that validity in a qualitative setting is the result of honest and truthful findings originating from meticulous selection and application of procedures. By way of explanation, this is a systematic approach of ensuring that research produces its intended outcome through careful selection and correct application of procedures.

3.9.1. Credibility

To achieve trustworthiness, four aspects need to be considered, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). Credibility mainly upheld through honesty (Connelly, 2016). It is connected to the reliance that can be linked to the accuracy of the findings and the level of agreement between the researcher and her participants (Connelly, 2016). In this study, credibility was established by recording the raw data through

an audio recording device and noting down the researcher's observations. The recordings were then converted into transcripts which were used for the analysis. The researcher recorded the information from the participants without altering it. Credibility was enhanced through the process of triangulation, which compel the researcher to dissociate from any personal biases that may emanate from the use of a single methodology (Gunawan, 2015). Triangulation is deduced as the writing of extensive notes, highly reasoned consensus, and audit trail as the most used strategies in qualitative research to ensure credibility. The researcher held consistent meetings with her supervisors who are experts in research studies. They assisted the researcher avoid any prejudices she might have brought into the investigation. Colleagues who reviewed this research report also provided candid comments. Permitting outsiders, including scholars and co-workers, to evaluate your work enhances the validity of your research, claims Shenton (2004). This is because they are detached from the paper, which enables them to analyse it objectively.

3.9.2. Transferability

Gravetter and Forzano (2016), explained that transferability of a study as the generalizability of the research's findings to the vast population. Openness, corroboration, member checking, and clear descriptions of data collection and analysis methodologies were implemented for the purpose of transferability. Openness is one of the most crucial principles practised in this study. Through this principle, the researcher facilitated a relaxing and free environment for the young people who participated in this study. The researcher carefully and clearly distributed relevant information and consent forms to the young people. This allowed the participants to develop trust with their interviewer thus providing valid and reliable information. Furthermore, openness is a prerequisite of any ethical research study conducted. Member checking with individuals was upheld consistently post interviews where the researcher summarised her notes she formulated throughout the interview and checked with the participant for accuracy. Moreover, the researcher shared her notes with the participants and allowed them to analyse, critic and provide their input on them.

3.9.3. Confirmability

Confirmability of a study is tied to objectivity, neutrality and/-or the degree to which the results are consistent and can be repeated (Connelly, 2016). This mostly means that the researcher keeps an audit trail of methodological and analysis memos (Connelly, 2016). This means that throughout this study, the researcher kept detailed notes of all decisions and analysis made.

These notes were reviewed by the researcher's supervisor, co-supervisor and colleague and discussed with the researcher. This aided in eliminating any biases from only one person's perspective and judgement on the study.

3.9.4. Dependability

Dependability is viewed as the stability of the findings from the data overtime under the same conditions (Connelly, 2016). In other words, the results of the study remain the same when the study is repeated on a different day and maintain the same context. For this study, to ensure dependability, procedures carried out in this study will be outlined in detail which will permit the replication of this study in the future. Further, the researcher sought an external audit protocol by seeking counsel from an individual who is not part of the research group to provide their input on the work that has been done. This was to check if the researcher has replicated the work that has already been done by other researchers. The researcher's supervisor provided clarity where the researcher did not understand the study.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

Throughout any research study that involves human subjects, it is imperative that ethical considerations are upheld for their protection (Mohd Arifin, 2018). Sanjari et al. (2014), mentioned the interaction between researcher and participants could be challenging ethically, as researchers tap into participants' personal lives at various stages of the study. Essentially, in a qualitative research study, ethics have an important meaning due to the in-depth nature of the study procedure (Mohd Arifin, 2018). When conducting face-to-face interviews with a vulnerable group it may potentially cause distress on participants as they try to express their feelings during interviews (Mohd Arifin, 2018). Furthermore, researchers should always guide against causing physical, social, or emotional harm to participants. Thus, it is crucial that ethical guidelines are formulated to steer the study (Sanjari et al., 2014). The Human non-Medical Research Ethics Committee at the University of Witwatersrand was consulted and ethical consent was obtained for this study. The purpose of this committee is to make sure that researchers respect the rights and human dignity of all participants in academic and research activities (Wits Research Integrity Policy, 2021). Furthermore, fundamental ethical principles including voluntary involvement, confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent through the use of a consent form were followed.

3.10.1. Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

According to Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), informed consent requires that participants taking part in a qualitative study, be fully informed about the contents of the research. This includes, what will be asked of them, how the data collected will be used as well as consequences they could possibly face, if any, from participating in the study (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). In essence, informed consent is a statement that explicates the nature of the study, the purpose of the study and the research-participant relationship (Sarantakos, 2005). Voluntary participation means that all participants engaged in this study without coercion (Bhandari, 2021). The aims and objectives of this study were clearly explained to participants, and of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were repeatedly reminded and informed of their rights to review the initial agreement with the researcher.

3.10.2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity refer to adhering to the preservation of participants' identities in the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the findings from the research (Mohd Arifin, 2018). For this research, identities of the participants are solely known to the researcher, no third party will have any access to the participants' personal data. Additionally, their responses to interviews will not be linked to them in any way, the researcher has used pseudonyms instead of their real names. Furthermore, to ensure confidentiality, the participants' audio recordings and transcripts are stored in a password protected laptop.

3.11. Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the research approach (qualitative), the narrative research design adopted by the study. The study also provided a blueprint for the sampling techniques, study setting and participant descriptions. Further, this chapter discusses the data collection method and data analysis technique. In addition, methods to ensure trustworthiness and rigour are described as well as ethical considerations are covered in this chapter. The next chapter will discuss findings from the data collected and discussion through integrating literature.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a critical discussion of the empirical data that was obtained from IPA data analysis gathered from young black people living in the Vosloorus township. The findings

are presented according to three main themes and the sub-themes that emerged from the raw data collected as part of this study. Moreover, participants' feelings and perceptions are presented through the raw data verbatim collected during the interviews and integrated with the literature. Furthermore, each section will present an overview of what will be discussed and conclude with a succinct discussion of the major findings. Moreover, pseudonyms have been used in the study to protect the identity of the participants.

The qualitative nature of this study requires an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences and motivations. Thus, this chapter consists of combined findings and discussion sections aimed at responding to the following objectives: 1) to explore lived experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown of young people living in Vosloorus, and 2) to explore their social media usage during the lockdown. This enables a steady and continuous flow of the presentation of the report while providing a clear link to the subsisting literature, as well as contextualising the researcher's motivations for the reader. The analysis was mainly a result of the existing repercussions of the COVID-19-related lockdown, level 5, that occurred between March 2020 and August 2020

The first theme, perceptions of the COVID-19 virus, seeks to explain the participants' perceptions and understanding of the virus. This theme speaks to their initial thought of the virus and understanding of how it led to a pandemic that required the implementation of a lockdown. Further, it seeks to depict the spread of negative and positive information through social media in times of distress and its impact on these young people's lives.

The second theme, experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown, explores the participants' experiences through various categories which were not established as intense contributors to the overall impact on their mental health. This theme directly speaks to the research question around their experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown in their personal lives, which include loss of family members and friendships, education, and employment. This theme discusses how the pandemic death knell in the mental health and low-quality education young people living in townships are subjected to daily. Further, it addresses the heightened challenges of youth unemployment lingering in townships. Similarly, it also culminates in the benefits of the lockdown in bringing their families closer and strengthening their bonds.

The third theme, Social Media usage during the COVID-19 lockdown, discusses the participants' overall social media usage during the lockdown. This theme talks to the way the participants used social media; this may include educational purposes, entertainment, and

research about the virus. It provides insights into how the pandemic facilitated a full transition to the online world and how that may have impacted their overall mental capacity. The spread of propaganda about the virus and lockdown spread through social media, leaving most of these young people distraught and hopeless. However, social media was also seen to encourage communal social interaction relations that provided support and comfort during those difficult times.

The purpose of this study is not to generalise on all youth township experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown, but rather to paint a picture on youth experiences of the pandemic from the Vosloorus township. This will allow the reader to draw out interrelatedness between the findings and previous studies.

4.2. Theme 1: Perceptions of the COVID-19 virus

This section explores misconceptions and unpacks participants' different perceptions about the virus, what they may have known to be the cause of the virus and what contracting the virus meant to them. These experiences depict the confusion and hopelessness the radix of the virus may have had on the participants. It is also how the attempt to understand the meaning of the pandemic became detrimental to their mental stability to the point of assuming the world was possibly ending. These experiences are discussed below.

The whole world had been sitting on its tentacles, watching the population of Wuhan, China, perishing before their eyes. No one believed that this pandemic would eventually hit the shores of Africa, let alone South Africa. Two participants stated that their first thought when the lockdown was announced they believed it was a way for the government to deflect and shift the focus from the ongoing mishandling of state funds in and within the government and ruling party. The following quotes from participants are presented:

> *"But at first, I thought like maybe they because of the corruption by South Africa and stuff. It's just like, it's a way of dealing with the other stuffs like so they had to use COVID or lockdown in order to import those, whatever that they are importing is this load of corruption in South Africa….its ANC and stuff. So, they're using that COVID-19 excuse and stuff to do corruption"* ***(Sibongile, Female, 19)***

> *"Well, COVID neh? So, when it first began it was.., I didn't take it seriously. I think a lot of people didn't…..at first, I was like, Oh, it's just another disease, or the government is trying to keep us indoors."* ***(Mary, Female, 25)***

Sibongile and Mary's submissions are supported by previous research conducted in Nigeria that reported 67% of the participants believed that the virus was a government scam, and that it does not exist (Obi et al., 2022). In another study conducted in Nigeria about conspiracy theories that were prevalent in the country, a participant declared that the virus was their government's way of siphoning state funds, and that the disease was just malaria (Wonodi et al., 2022). These quotes demonstrate the level of awareness, lack of clarity, and depth towards the whole subject of the COVID-19 virus and surrounding circumstances. The belief that the virus results from government corruption has a detrimental effect on oneself as the appropriate prevention measures would not be applied, thus increasing the infection and fatality rate. Living in a township is generally associated with one hundred percent augmented chronic risks, which usually include crime, violence, poverty, communicable diseases and developmental outcomes, namely substance abuse and dropping out of school (Pretorius & Theron, 2018). However, this was found to be factually incorrect as there have been many young people living in townships that have avoided and overcome expected negative outcomes (Pretorius & Theron, 2018).

There was one participant who mentioned hearing conversations about the virus coming from the 5G network. Their quote is presented below:

> *And uhm there was just a lot going on nje about the whole thing like COVID that I remember there was talks about 5G, like the 5G is causing COVID-19. So, there was just a lot going on* ***(Grace, Female, 25)***

With reference to Grace's submission, a great deal of speculation centred around the virus being caused by the fifth-generation mobile telecommunication technology known as 5G. 5G technology is known as a device-to-device (D2D) communication, which provides a preferment in energy transmission efficiency, total system capacity, and higher data speeds (Mane, 2022). Even though Grace did not provide information on where this belief stemmed from, it was widely publicised in the social media sphere that the COVID-19 virus was laced with the 5G chip that will inadvertently be injected into the blood streams of all recipients. This was consistent with Ovenseri-Ogbomo (2022) findings in a study conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa included, where some of the participants upheld the belief that the risk of contracting the infection was associated with 5G. Similarly, a worship leader from Abuja, Nigeria, reportedly publicly declared a similar claim that the Nigerian federal government only

implemented a lockdown to have 5G installed (Ndinojuo, 2020). These theories were false alarms lacking evidential support that facilitated only disastrous behavioural outcomes.

4.2.1. The world was coming to an end

The sudden and uncontrollable loss of lives and the rush to implement home confinement protocols, which shut down the entire country, raised feelings of confusion and fear. One participant recounted thinking the world was ending, which resulted in the participant experiencing feelings of worry about school, especially reaching tertiary. Banele said the following:

> *I felt as if the world was coming to an end, I thought about my matric because I wanted to finish and go to university. (**Banele, Female, 20)***

Banele's accounts of the pandemic indicate how she grappled with understanding the impact of the virus on her life. The strict isolation policies fed into growing concerns about future career development prospects. Thus, these concerns factored into prolonged feelings of hopelessness. These negative effects of the home confinement measures due to the COVID-19 virus were in line with a previous study conducted on the impact this pandemic has had on college students. Tao et al. (2022) reported that findings from the developmental trajectory suggest that negative life events in young people's lives correlate with heightened feelings of hopelessness and a dwindling future orientation. Tao et al. (2022), went on to say that whether there is a pandemic or not, once young people feel hopeless about the future, they will lose motivation or a vision for it, and these effects are usually intense and lasting. Thus, leading them to lose confidence and conviction of the hope in the future they previously imagined (Tao et al.,2022). Banele mentioned, *"I thought about my matric because I wanted to finish and go to university. I wanted to make a better life, out there so yeah I felt very sad and hopeless."*

This theme on the perception of COVID-19 explored the participants' attempts to comprehend the abrupt changes to the world, and how impactful they were to their overall mental capacity. It depicts how the mind was grappling to understand these tumultuous events thus their beliefs of circulating myths and conspiracy theories. Douglas et al. (2017) provided an interpretation of one's desires to follow conspiracy theories into three distinct categories. These are classified as epistemic, existential as well as social motives. Epistemic motives are usually driven by an overall need for understanding our environment (Douglas et al., 2017). It is noted in these participants' experiences as this was a new phenomenon, the mind's main goal is to

comprehend it to ultimately find ways to gain control over it. Existential motives provide one with a feeling of safety and in control over their current situation or environment (Douglas et al., 2017). Klepper went on to define social motives as allowing us to uphold a positive judgement of ourselves and our in-group. The urge to make sense and understand the complex is innate for everyone. People in marginalised communities may feel it profoundly as in most cases, they feel insignificant and unappreciated. Conspiracy theories may have provided these participants with a sense of control over what was happening around them and that they were seeing things for what they really were over everyone else. Furthermore, sharing insights about that particular situation may have reinstated their sense of meaning, significance, and overall value in life (Douglas et al., 2017). Being in cohorts with people who share the same beliefs and insights about a phenomenon promotes a sense of affirmation and reinforcement of the belief in conspiracies.

Obi et al. (2022), also revealed that the spread of misconceptions and conspiracy theories are prevalent among young people between the ages of 18 to 28 years old. More especially young people who are affected by unemployment, lower levels of education and social status (Obi et al.,2022). These conditions are observed among participants of this study, they come from a disadvantaged community, they are unemployed, and also hold a matric level of education. Even though one participant who was in tertiary education then disclosed conversations on the 5G myth, which further corroborates Obi et al. (2022)'s study that respondents who held a bachelor's degree were equally found to believe in the 5G misconception.

4.3. Theme 2: Experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown

4.3.1. Dealing with loss during the COVID-19 lockdown

The uncontrollable loss of life during the outbreak of the virus triggered increased mental health challenges. As the participants were relaying their experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown, it became apparent that the majority of them had endured psychological and emotional turmoil. A study by Evans et al. (2021) revealed that young adults appeared to be notably impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and emergent isolation measures. Participants stated that their experience of the pandemic was pervaded with painful feelings of loss. They explained losing family members and having to accept the reality of not being able to attend their funerals. Furthermore, described how the pandemic introduced a new way of life that they struggled accepting. The following quotes are provided:

"My experience of COVID-19 was very bad. Because I lost a lot of people. And I could not attend their funerals, that really affected me badly because I lost people who were very close to me; I couldn't even say goodbye to them in a proper way.."As I would say, that gave me depression because I lost a lot of people like my grandmother, my grandpa, my grandfather, my aunts and my cousins, but I could not go, understand? " ***(Grace, Female, 25)***

"I could say I I I struggled a lot mentally. Because I lost one of my sort of like great aunt, she was really like very close to me." ***(Mary, Female, 25)***

Taking from Grace and Mary's responses, it is evident how much the pandemic has taken from these participants and people in general. They recalled suffering psychologically when they lost their relatives and not being able to host or attend proper send- offs for them. Zungu (2021) expressed the mental pain of being deprived of the opportunity of paying final tribute to a loved one. Paying final respects to a relative who has passed on is a sacred connection between the family members that fosters closeness, complicity and begins the process of detachment (Cardoso et al., 2020). It is a mental health gesture that allows the living family members to make amends and reconcile with life. It also provides relatives with an opportunity to share grief and social support among each other and/or supporters. Kgatle and Segalo (2021) mentioned that when the necessary limitations were implemented due to the pandemic facilitated a feeling that of "a skipped stage" resulting in the development of complicated grief, which ultimately affects one's mental health. This was observed in the participants' submissions, where Grace reportedly lost multiple family members, which affected her mental health to a point where she self-diagnosed with depression. Likewise, Mary recalled being hurt such that she struggled to cope mentally. Therefore, this manifests the significance of the psychological value of acknowledging and practising traditional rituals of honouring those who have passed on among different cultures and societies.

"And my mother did get sick again, for she also had COVID. So it was just a lot and we couldn't go to the hospital to visit her.." ***(Grace, Female, 25)***

The inability to visit and care for relatives who had been admitted into hospital due to contracting the virus was just as difficult for relatives. Grace recalled being overcome by intense fear and worry when her mother was admitted into hospital and not allowed to see her, following the virus contamination. Cardoso et al. (2020) supported this saying that the

atmosphere of generalised fear is usually established through unpredictability and fear in situations like these. The fear becomes a result of two possible threats: losing a family member and an overall loss of control over events that may follow from that which subsequently triggers a sense of helplessness. The contamination of a close kin is mainly associated with bewilderment which induces distress because the idea of invulnerability is demolished. Additionally, the inability to support a family member during their hospitalisation also triggers emotional distress. Grace could have been possibly experiencing similar emotions.

4.3.2. Attending ukuthwasa (initiation process) during COVID-19 lockdown

Despite the increase in infections and fatalities in the country, participants like James were expected to attend ukuthwasa, which is commonly referred to as iithwaso in the Xhosa culture (Bakow & Low, 2018). Booi (2004) explains ukuthwasa as an experience that is characterised by a lot of mixed and contradictory feelings as it may be portrayed as a gift from the ancestors and a burden to the involved individuals. Ukuthwasa is referred to as a state of ancestral calling to become a traditional healer, mainly interpreted by Xhosa people as becoming isangoma or igqirha (van der Zeijst et al., 2020). Individuals who engage in ukuthwasa are known to the chosen ones and expected to be in full service of their ancestors because they are believed to be well cultivated about their needs and wishes (Bakow & Low, 2018). They can read, understand, and interpret ancestral messages, which are widely known to appear in dreams of related individuals; they conduct customs and rituals which are believed to be communication from the ancestors (Booi, 2004). They are mediators between the ancestors and surviving kinfolk(van der Zeijst et al., 2020). The following statements are James' accounts.

> *"I also had problems on my own regarding spiritual things, ancestrality and stuff, because now by that time, ngile ngaya ephehlweni, and I was off limits to everything. I didn't know anything about the outside world but then I also, you know, kept in touch with the world via phone…iphehlo alikho mnandi guys (chuckles), ukuthwasa akukho mnandi (pursuing ancestral initiation is not nice) but then it's something that has to do with you and which you believe how strong you are? How willing are you? And what sacrifices are you willing to make? Because I had to sacrifice my life at a young age my whole life."* ***(James, Male, 19,)***

For James, this experience was overwhelming. He was at the peak of his teenage stage, well in the process of understanding the developmental changes happening in his life, physically and emotionally. Orben et al. (2020) alluded to the significance of biological and hormonal changes associated with adolescence. Orben emphasised the sensitivity of social interaction during this stage and how social deprivation can have ravaging effects on brain and behavioural development. Peer social approval or rejection is fostered through social interaction, which enables these young people to develop an independent sense of social self-identity while simultaneously building stronger affiliations within the peer groups (Orben et al. 2020). Coincidentally, social relations promote cognitive abilities such as self-referential processing, mentalizing, and executive control, allowing adolescents to better understand other peoples' perspectives, their general way of thinking and reflect on themselves (Orben et al. 2020). Attending iithwaso meant that James was deprived of this fundamental developmental stage. He reported not being allowed to socialise with anyone; he was required to remain within the confines of the initiation house. Even though lockdown meant that no one could move around, with James, it seemed as if it was more intense as he mentioned not being permitted to speak to his relatives until after the completion of his initiation. A study by Kubeka (2016) provided supporting recounts from a participant who went through a similar initiation process where they revealed not being allowed to be anywhere but, in the house, where he was initiated in. Furthermore, Kubeka's study revealed that the participants experienced a loss of self during and post the initiation; they also spoke about reaching a sense of passivity about the process, which was also observed from James. James stated that the process was not what he had expected it to be, that it was not the kind of life he would have wanted for himself; however, he was compelled to reach a form of acceptance for the sake of culture and the people around him because declining his calling would have dire consequences. Shongwe (2022), confirmed this by saying that most young people fear rejecting pursuing iithwaso with the fear of what might happen to them. It is widely known that young people who were unsuccessful in this journey reportedly ended up inheriting lifelong mental disturbances (Shongwe, 2022).

Although James was guarded with his responses about his experiences at the initiation school, he anxiously revealed that this process requires one to completely give up their lives to the ancestors. They are not able to make their own decisions; everything is solely directed by his ancestors, and he must be compliant with the process completely. Taking from James' accounts, it may be suggested that assigning such a responsibility to an emerging adolescent may be unfair as their developmental trajectory has not reached the capacity to handle the complexity of these expected responsibilities. The anxiousness and sense of distress expressed by the participant

through his responses may have been an indication of the psychological and emotional overload they experienced through this process. In addition, the news that was going around about the pandemic, the uncertainty and not knowing his family's well-being because of the lack of contact could have been another factor that exacerbated the mental distress.

4.3.3. The pandemic made people adapt to a new way of life.

Living in this world means that one must adapt constantly; with the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, we were involuntarily forced to adapt to the "new normal" quarantine, and lockdown measures (Corpuz, 2021). The ripples of the pandemic did not only affect economic and social spheres, but they also affected individuals' personal lives. Two participants described how much life had changed from what they were used to. This theme also provides accounts of participants' accounts of the ill-treatment they experienced from the police force during the lockdown. The following quotes are indicative of their feelings:

> *"Life was not the way it was, things were different…we have to sanitize every second and wash your hands. We are not used to those things at first. We had no choice, in order for us to survive, we had to follow the rules."* ***(Sibongile, Female, 19)***

> *"It was just a routine all the time. I know life is about routine, but this routine was a very annoying one, because you wake up, you take a shower, you sit at home. You're only entertainment. It felt very stagnant."* ***(Mduduzi, Male, 22)***

Sibongile's interview is a depiction of subtle recounts of the personal struggles she experienced with the emergent protocols to be adhered to. For her, it seemed following these new sets of rules appeared heavy for one to comprehend. She acknowledges the negative impact of the pandemic on her life; however, she quickly shields these emotions with a positive perception which for her could have served a function of protecting herself so as to avoid possible contraction of the virus. This attempt to buffer the negative emotions she felt may have been an attempt to evade the degree of the impact of the lockdown events and how they may have affected her. Goldberg (2021) revealed that a study conducted on 3,300 adolescents found that approximately a third mentioned feeling depressed or unhappy during the lockdown. These pervasive feelings were brought on by feelings of helplessness and fear of contracting the virus and possibly losing their lives (Gittings et al., 2021). On the other hand, Mduduzi's recounts were more deliberate when he relayed his experiences of the lockdown. He alluded that his life

became an annoying routine. This made him feel like his life was stagnant, he had nothing new to look forward to. Gittings et al. (2021) alluded that these feelings of being stuck, frustrated and a sense of purposelessness during the lockdown were found prevalent among most young people especially those from low-and-middle-income families. These participants come from low-income families.

> *"At first I saw them [police] at spruit, they were holding people down and assaulting them and they came to my area, in Vosloorus, they were not talking to people but assaulting and making them roll on the ground and stuff.."* ***(Sibongile, Female, 19)***

> *"We were not allowed to go outside after five and we were standing at the corner by my house because my boyfriend was walking me home. I think it was half past five and there was no one on the streets, it was just us and the police came they screamed so harshly at us. Yho I was very scared they wanted to lock us up and we begged them not to.."* ***(Grace, Female, 25)***

In addition to the disruptive life changes caused by the pandemic, the deployment of the military forces as well as police enforcement to maintain order and subtle movements in township communities became a despairing experience. Sibongile expressed how panicky she felt following seeing videos from a neighbouring township (Spruit, in Katlehong) getting brutally assaulted by law enforcement. Following that experience, she also witnessed residents from her own community in Vosloorus receiving the same treatment from the very people who are meant to be protecting and looking out for the community. She mentioned feeling a huge sense of dread and concern as to how life has become and will be moving forward. Sibongile's submissions are in line with an article published by News24 in March 2021, where it detailed that law enforcement was reportedly using forceful strategies to assert the authority of the state (Cameron, 2021)."Scholars have recently shown that those who endured childhood trauma in places like the South African townships are at greater risk for negative mental health outcomes during Covid-19 lockdown" (Reed & Xaso, 2022, p. 93). Du Plessis (2021) reported that the police force that was deployed in Soweto enforced petty yet humiliating punitive actions on offenders by making them do squats and push-ups. On another day, they were seen firing rubber bullets at a crowd of people shopping for essentials outside a supermarket, in Johannesburg (Cameron, 2021). Residents expressed that following the shock of the pandemic, the police brutality moved them to the core, especially when people started getting killed from these

encounters (Du Plessis, 2021). A man for the Alexandra township was reportedly brutalised to death in his yard while drinking beer on his stoep. They reported this as a result of the man's brash attitude towards the police which they tried covering up by saying that they only gave him a few claps and pushes (Cameron, 2021). A report disclosed that the man died from blunt force trauma to his head (Cameron, 2021).

Langa and Leopeng (2020), evinced that the violent policing of black men in South African townships was led by racial stereotypes which portrayed black men as insolent, defiant and aggressive. Langa and Leopeng (2020) went on to say that the use of brutal force is entrenched in the social construct of hegemonic masculinities in which these men are seen as criminals while the security forces portray themselves as heroes who are 'merely' implementing the law. The shaming, undermining, and marginalising young black men reportedly affirms their sense of manhood (Langa & Leopeng, 2020). Grace also mentioned going through a similar experience with her boyfriend during the COVID-19 lockdown. She mentioned that her boyfriend was walking her home; unfortunately, they were met by law enforcement officers who immediately reacted with rage towards them. She expressed how they were ridiculed and screamed at them in such an inhumane and tyrannical manner. Arnold (2020) alluded that while the police and South African National Defence Force were brutally assaulting black citizens for any lockdown deviation, there was photographic evidence circulating of white people nonchalantly going about their lives, enjoying daily movements and/ gatherings with friends and families. Thus, confirming that excessive violence and barbaric actions were only expressed on black people (Arnold, 2020). Grace added that they were screaming words like *"you think you are special or what?"* and they had to beg and plead with the security officers not to imprison them. This further confirms Langa and Leopeng's reports of law enforcement officials' unrestrained behaviour, shouting at and manhandling township residents as well as threatening arrests, fines and warning for petty transgressions. The government's attempts to enforce protective measures due to the pandemic resulted in coercive actions that trampled on human rights.

4.3.4. Friendships and socialising challenges

Authorities and governments of affected countries were impelled to implement protective measures such as, social distancing, self-isolation, quarantine, and lockdown to try and curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Shah et al., 2020). These protocols contributed to a profound loss of social connections that has led to loneliness and social isolation (Shah et al., 2020). More

than half of the participants mentioned experienced a drastic change to their social lives. They expressed finding it difficult to maintain relationships and friendships during the lockdown. The distress in their voice was noted when they were expressing concerns with losing connections with friends and family members through the virus or otherwise. Others expressed how they struggled transitioning back to their social spaces among friends and/or school. However, some participants took away a few positive experiences during the lockdown which included spending quality time with their families and saving money from not having to go out. Their responses are presented below:

> *"I think all social interactions were changed. I'm not as social, I don't engage people that much anymore. I couldn't really maintain a lot of social ties. There's a lot of people you unknowingly let go off because of communication"* ***(Michael, Male, 21)***

> *It made me less social, I don't really want to go out, I don't find the need to go out. I can hang out with friends but not for long periods of time. Even with school, it was a very hard transition to go back. Having to socialise with fellow classmates was a bit awkward. I'd go to lectures and go quickly rush home after that.* ***(Mduduzi, Male, 22)***

Taking from these participants' accounts, the pandemic has promoted lasting social interaction effects. The prolonged social isolation measures became adaptable to these participants, thus making it their new normal. It became difficult for them to extend basic human etiquette, such as socialising. One participant explained losing close relations due to the lack of contact. The participant mentioned being compelled to accept the circumstances of the situation they were subjected to. Maloy et al. (2022) supported this by saying that friendships essentially require more effort and emotional interconnectedness likely decreases due to lack of physical contact. Through this, it is evident that the pandemic has made it even harder to acquire relations and/or maintain existing ones. Mduduzi and Michael experienced the lasting implications of possibly developing social anxiety during the lockdown. They revealed letting go of friendships or relations during the lockdown and generally preferring not to engage in any social gatherings with friends even post lockdown. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defined social anxiety as a disorder characterised by intense, fear of social settings where the individual may potentially be scrutinized by other people. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) went on to mention that the majority of the time, within the social settings the individual may feel

that they will be negatively evaluated as intimidating, weak, boring, anxious, or overall unlikable. This is in line with Mduduzi's submissions as he mentioned that he preferred staying home or leaving school immediately after lectures as he avoided awkward conversations with his classmates. He mentioned that he began overthinking everything he said to people, especially new relations, he feared that if he cracked a joke, it might be misconstrued. This was also observed in the United States of America where young people are encountering newfound insecurities of public spaces and are reluctant to socialise with peers since lockdown (Medina, 2021). Medina (2021) added that this social phobia exacerbated students' anxiety about returning to contact learning, which is observed in Mduduzi's case where he revealed that transitioning back to school was difficult for him.

> *"Socially on the streets, the friends, people I know, things changed because now you get involved into a lot of bad habits, drugs, alcohol and everything made me cut off all my friends. Even now, people are all about the drugs. Like, you know, the higher grade, top range products, crystal meth, cocaine.."* ***(James, ,Male, 19)***

James mentioned having to cut his friends off during the lockdown as they had gotten into dangerous habits. He mentioned that they had their own "thing" as friends, they would only smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol, however, as soon as the pandemic started and some substances became harder to acquire, things quickly escalated into dangerous substance abuse habits which included, cocaine and crystal meth. He added that most of them started practising criminal activities to sustain their expensive habits. Cutting ties with them was significant for him to evade getting influenced into trying these substances out. Boachie et al. (2023), said that even though South African borders were shut down due to the lockdown and distributing substances became more difficult, suppliers became more coordinated. Boachie et al. (2023) went on to say that individuals who could not secure their daily drug of choice, were more likely to look for alternatives. The shortage of the psychoactive substances meant that people were experiencing acute withdrawal symptoms, thus substituting these drugs with prescription drugs (Boachie et al., 2023). A study conducted on adolescents from Uganda disclosed that an increase in age among young people likely increases their likelihood of being diagnosed with substance use disorder (SUD) (Kaggwa et al., 2022). Kaggwa explained this likelihood as facilitated by increased curiosity, bandwagon effect and impulsivity that young people at this age develop towards substance use. The sudden fixation over increased substance by these young people could have been a result of the aforementioned implications.

It affected me because we were not allowed to meet up with people. I felt as if I'm going to lose my friends or you're going to lose contact with family…I told myself that there's nothing I can do ***(Banele, Female, 20)***

"That really impacted my social life..I couldn't have those sort of interactions where I'm laughing, if I'm not studying..everyday I would be in bed sleeping. I am one person who suppresses a lot of their feelings. I didn't have a lot of people to talk to about it. I isolated myself, I spent a lot of time on social media. So that really just affected me and there was no way I could deal with it or speak to anyone about these feelings" ***(Mary, Female, 25)***

"A lot of changes, I couldn't be with my friends, I couldn't do things that I love doing, like basic things as going to the nearest shop. That didn't make sense. But it just came so quickly couldn't even deal with the emotions and couldn't" ***(Grace, Female, 25)***

Ayers et al. (2022) found that friendships of young people from higher subjective Socioeconomic Status (SES) were reportedly affected the most by the pandemic. Ayers documented that young females who are less educated and coming from lower socioeconomic status were probable to experience these negative effects of friendships. Their friendships are usually relatively temporal and unstable (Ayers et al., 2022). These participants who presented the above quotes possess these characteristics. Majority of their concerns centred around their social lives going through a radical change. They seemed to be experiencing distressing emotions, and they did not have an outlet to express those emotions. Mary mentioned resorting to sleeping to alleviate these anxiety-ridden feelings, Banele revealed experiencing fears of friendship loss and Grace mainly focused on struggling to do basic daily things she was used to and struggling to understand or deal with her emotions during that time. According to Saladino et al. (2020) the prolonged stress that was associated with the pandemic has been linked to an inability to manage traumatic and negative emotions that potentially cause anxiety of depression among young people.

4.3.5. The lockdown provided an opportunity to bond with family.

Even though the pandemic heavily has shaken up lives, affected mental health and the overall welfare and caused many tragedies worldwide. Governments globally had to implement social

recession protocols to relieve infection rates thus ultimately mitigating fatalities (Li et al., 2022). The youth between the ages of 10-to-24 years has reportedly been found to be the most vulnerable to the negative effects of these measures (Li et al.,2022). These effects included psychosocial implications that included heightened mental health challenges, substance use, reduced social and physical activity as well as reduced overall well-being (Li et al., 2022). However, through all of this, there were silver lining moments of documented positive implications of the lockdown. Close to 50% of the participants reported experiencing some positive outcomes from the lockdown that included spending quality time with close relatives. Here are the participants' submissions:

> *"I think it was better because I wasn't alone. I was with my family, my siblings. So as soon as I would feel like that I'm losing myself Id go and be with them. We would be watching TV, laughing, playing games..we really bonded a lot through that. As much as my mental state was not at its best but at least I had people around me to make me forget of what's happening around the world"* ***(Grace, Female, 25)***
>
> *"For my family had spent more time with them, I hadn't spent that much time with them so I was actually spending time with them.."* ***(Michael, Male, 21)***
>
> *"I'd say it was both good and bad. Good in the sense that I got to spend more time with my family.."* ***(Mduduzi, Male, 22)***
>
> *"So I got to spend a lot of time with my family.."* ***(Mary, Female, 25)***

The opportunity to spend time with loved ones during the lockdown, seemed to have provided these participants with a sense of comfort and peace of mind. Knowing that they had their families with them served as encouragement for them to stay hopeful through the turmoil. Furthermore, through their responses, one can infer that they were mindful about the significance of having the emotional and psychological support of their family. Research conducted in China about behavioural changes among family members during the lockdown, indicated a relatively fair and positive state of relations (Zhang, 2020). October et al. (2021) also supported this by revealing that the COVID-19 lockdown relatively had a positive impact on families as it facilitated better relationships through communication compared to before the lockdown. Family affinity is a fundamental element that can buffer strenuous outcomes that are caused by stressful situations which consequently promotes an increased overall appreciation of one another during trying times (October et al., 2021). These factors were reported in the participants' responses. Grace further mentioned that her ability to retain sanity and/ or peace

of mind was through the comfort of knowing that her family was present to provide her with the support she needed. Through this, one can conclude that the manner in which a family functions not only creates close bonds, but it also creates a foundation that promotes socialisation, nurturance, protection, social identity, economic support, and overall care that assures adaptation and successful development to function and flourishing within society (October et al., 2021).

4.4. Education during lockdown

The education system has also suffered a major blow during the lockdown which had a glaring impact on learners from poor and vulnerable communities (Reddy, 2022). With the South African education system so structurally fragile from the injustices that came about during the apartheid era that displaced many schools and learners (Soudien et al., 2021). The pandemic has exacerbated these inequalities such as access to school materials, better nutrition and household incomes which ultimately affected any form of social mobility of these marginalised communities (Soudien et al., 2021). This theme intends to discuss how the COVID-19 impacted learning days, learners' different learning experiences as well as educational opportunities for learners from disadvantaged communities such as that of the Vosloorus communities.

4.4.1. Struggled to cope with online learning.

Several participants divulged early on their struggles with the transition to online learning. They revealed that the abruptness of the transition did not allow them any time to get accustomed to it. They were just thrown into the deep end, and they were expected to find ways to cope with very little or no assistance. They recalled it being a very stressful experience especially with the overwhelming workload they were given. The following is what was said by the participants.

> *"The transition from contact learning to online, I had to learn a new form of learning in which I really struggled. I didn't cope with online learning. Like mentally I was not okay. There was a lot going on, the workload. It became two times more than before and at school they didn't care, they just needed to get their work done."* ***(Mary, Female, 25)***
>
> *"I was not used to online studying, I would have interaction with my lecturers, not like via zoom, I would say maybe at 8, I would go online so that I could talk to him/her*

because maybe they are not going to be available from 10. When we were at school, their concentration would be on us, but now with this thing, I had to teach myself. I had to be independent, but my life before was nice and easy, especially because the lecturers were there. Also, we could meet with other students anytime to discuss lessons or assignments but now on zoom, not everyone was available. So, I couldn't cope, I was just alone." ***(Grace, Female, 25)***

A study from south-eastern Spain reported that about 66.3% of their participants had very little to no experience in online learning and further disclosed that about 55% of the same participants considered that their academic performance worsened when compared with contact learning (Chiner et al., 2021). This coincides with the participants submissions on how the pandemic had significantly affected their learning experiences. They expressed feeling overwhelmed by the workload. To them it seemed as if the school and the educators neglected them throughout that period, their only concern was getting the job done and they overlooked all the implications of the lockdown. All these effects significantly decreased their motivation to carry out schoolwork which decreased their overall academic performance. Chiner et al. (2021) had similar findings on a survey they conducted in Spain on 496 college students revealed that about 82.6% of students complained of excessive assignments, little or no lesson explanations was 78.6% and 57.4% felt abandoned.

Grace went on to mention that educators were rarely available when compared to times before the lockdown, they could easily consult with them on campus. Their schedules clashed the majority of the time which resulted in them having to teach themselves most of the course content. Educators neglected learners and provided no feedback on any activities they participated in (Chiner et al.,2021). Furthermore, peers within their classes were out of reach, the luxury of having easily accessible group discussions when faced with challenges did not exist during the lockdown. When they arranged zoom calls, not everyone could make it to those discussions which left students feeling isolated and alone. Barrot et al. (2021) reiterated that learners' decreased interaction with their peers and educators caused mental health challenges that included stress, loneliness and isolation which had an adverse impact on their overall learning experience.

"I was only able to do my schoolwork at night because there were no distractions. That was very frustrating because there are some things that I wanted to do during the day but I couldn't do them. I would depend on the library for most of my schoolwork. At

home I didn't have that freedom, I had to be a person who's active at night." ***(Grace, Female, 25)***

Learning from home was another serious challenge for learners like Grace. Grace had challenges with attending her online lessons because of distractions. Not having access to the library had a glaring effect on Grace's overall home learning experience. It got to a point where she had to alter her study times during the night to when everyone was sleeping to limit distractions and improve effectiveness. Many students faced akin challenges in their home learning environments where they experienced unfavourable learning conditions consisting of significant disruptions (Barrot et al.,2021). Barrot et al (2021) affirmed that these obstacles were aggravating when the student came from marginalised areas. These conditions are observed from Grace as she lives in the disadvantaged community of Vosloorus.

According to South Africa Statistics (StatsSA) (2022), an assessment was conducted on different households in South Africa for their readiness for online learning in 2020 and found clear inconsistencies in access to important basic resources required for online learning. The study revealed that the majority of the households did not have any digital tools such as laptops and/ tablets that will enable students to learn online (StatsSA, 2022). Even though the participants did not mention struggling with access to digital tools to aid their learning experience, this could have been a result of their socioeconomic status as affording digital gadgets in low-income communities is sometimes regarded as a luxury, other needs seem to override any gadgets. Chomunorwa and Mugobo (2023) confirmed this in their study that all of their participants said that access to a digital device is nearly impossible. Some mentioned that none of their relatives are employed, they mainly survive through social grants, and sometimes they do not have any food to eat so they cannot afford digital devices (Chomunorwa & Mugobo, 2023). Harrisberg (2022) also said something along the same lines that South African citizens living in neglected and underdeveloped places with increased poverty, crime and unemployment rates regard internet access as a luxury. The study further disclosed that even though cell phone ownership in 2020 was high by 91,3% in all South African households with young people between the ages of 5-24 years old, laptop ownership was still low by 24,7% (StatSA, 2022).

Among the lack of access to digital gadgets, the Amnesty International organisation noted that only 10% of all South African households had internet connection (Amnesty International, 2021). This was supported by a breakdown presented by StatsSA (2022), that approximately 50.4% of households led by white citizens had internet connections, Coloured led households had 13.7%, Indian combined with Asian lead households had about 11% (StatsSA, 2022).

However, households led by Black Africans were found to have the lowest percentage among all the population groups with internet connection availability by 3.6% (StatSA, 2022). Another study by Hlatshwayo (2022), confirmed young people from marginalised communities struggled with poor connection issues which led to ill and/ poor hearing or grasping anything during online lectures and/ presentations. Hlatshwayo added that this caused immense psychological distress on the young people to a point of developing mental health issues which ultimately made some learners to drop out. An educator in Hlatshwayo's study revealed that his class had about 300 students registered, however, attendance during the lockdown was only between 50 and 60 learners (Hlatshwayo, 2022). Hlatshwayo (2022) precisely affirmed that Eskom's shortfalls on the delivery of power was one of the prime contributors of poor access to the internet thus poor access to online learning. Furthermore, Chomunorwa and Mugobo (2023) study touched on the inaccessibility of the internet due to lack of mobile data. Participants from their study mentioned that affording data was one of the reasons they struggled with online learning. Mobile data is currently very expensive and buying it for the sake of online learning was an extra burden to an already struggling household (Chomunorwa & Mugobo, 2023). Therefore, these findings support that young people in poor communities experienced increased challenges with online learning which made the whole experience unbearable with no way of receiving any form of education during the lockdown.

4.4.2. Learning deficits and Losses

The South African education system was unprepared for the world going into total lockdown (Reddy, 2022). It was forced to come up with emergency remote-learning regimens (Reddy, 2022). Adequately resourced schools and homes were able to swiftly move into online curriculum coverage with good connectivity, positive learning environment. However, the majority of learners had very little to no structured learning. 60% of participants in this study disclosed that they lost approximately six months of learning time during the COVID-19 lockdown. Others went on to mention that the learning losses resulted in educators skipping relevant parts of the syllabus so they can get pushed to the next which significantly affected their overall progress and marks. They further revealed that in some cases, they were blamed for not doing well as being a factor of them not working hard enough. Their accounts are presented below:

"So I was like, Okay, maybe it's just a temporary thing, it's going to be done now. I tried to tell myself not to panic, but then it got worse after staying home for five months without going to school." ***(Sibongile, Female, 19)***

"Ekasi(in the township) was just difficult, especially academics. We didn't go to school for six months, a full six months! I was in Grade 10, basic fundamentals of FET you find in Grade 10. I didn't get that." ***(James, Male, 19)***

"For like the two, three months of the lockdown, I didn't have school. We were not ready to be online yet as a university." ***(Mduduzi, Male, 22)***

"We stayed at home for a long time and we had to study on our own with no teachers and you didn't know whether we are correct on some things or not." ***(Banele, Female, 20)***

Andres et al. (2023) reported that South African learners lost about 46% of learning in a period of two years following the pandemic. The participants' responses depict the extremity of the impact of the lockdown of the education system especially in marginalised communities. This was not only observed in learning losses, it also impacted the learners' overall mental health as Sibongile mentioned panicking over missing so much school while others were learning. Sibongile shared that it got to a point where she struggled to formulate a basic essay, her writing skills were significantly affected by this. Mazrekaj and De Witte (2023) revealed that between March 2020 and May 2022, South Africa among nine European countries as well as the United States of America have the highest recorded delay in expected learning progress or a loss of already obtained knowledge.

Dorn et al. (2021) also added that some learners slipped backwards, and lost knowledge and skills already acquired. Increased learning deficits were noted among learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds and the deficits remained constant throughout the pandemic (Mazrekaj & De Witte, 2023). Participants interviewed for this study have similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Giannini et al (2022) also reported that a large number of young learners from low-and-middle-income countries could not read and understand a simple story. Additionally, for Sibongile, going back to school was hard for her as she felt that was not normal and she felt anxious about being around people, specifically her classmates as she was not used to them. Giannini et al (2022) supported that learning deficits are likely to cause mental health deterioration which affect one's overall well-being which may have been what Sibongile was experiencing during this time.

Schools from marginalised areas did not have means to implement and sustain online learning which meant that about two-thirds of learners had almost no contact or communication with their educators during the lockdown (Soudien et al., 2021). This negatively impacted learners like James who did not receive the fundamental knowledge required for the grade he was in. Similarly, even though some learners had educational material, they lacked teacher guidance and educational support to use these materials (Sabates et al., 2021). Banele's accounts seem to mirror the same effects.

4.4.3. Forced to finish and skip fundamental parts of a curriculum.

The magnitude of the learning looses were accompanied by a series of harrowing ramifications. Sibongile and James were both in grade 10 when the pandemic hit South Africa and was forced to go into lockdown. They went for months without any learning time and by the time they went back to school, they only attended classes twice a week, alternating between groups of students within their classes. It was so late in the year that their school and educators decided to cut out important material within their curriculum so as to cover for the remainder of the year. Their accounts of that experience is presented below:

> *"I just think we just learned little things at school and we jumped to the next grade. When we got to the next grade, we were told that since COVID-19, there were some topics that had to be cut off. The teachers pushed topics that they thought were important for the next grade and they said other topics we will be taught in Matric. When we reached matric we were told that certain topics were supposed to be taught in grade 11 and now they had to squeeze it in in grade 12. We were put under a lot of pressure."* **(Sibongile, Female, 19)**
>
> *"COVID just changed everything rapid, with a snap of a finger and the most difficult thing was having to adapt to the change. School changed, the educator was rushing us to finish the curriculum because time was against us. We had pressure to pass and go to the next grade when you only come to school two days a week. In grade 11 I thought I would drop out. I saw myself dropping out because of the pain I went through, emotional stuff, mental issues and the workload I wasn't used to.* ***(James, Male, 19)***

The pandemic took away students' opportunity of completing all the learning they would have completed in a typical year (Dorn et al., 2021). Students of colour from low-income settings were notably affected the most by "unfinished learning" (Dorn et al., 2021). Sibongile and

James expressed feeling pressured by their educators with a heavy workload with very little time to carry it out, in order to complete the year. They mentioned skipping essential topics and only learning a selected few. They had to squeeze in the skipped topics in the next grade which now meant that they browsed through those topics just to grasp the gist needed to get an idea. Dorn et al. (2021), said that unfinished learning unprepared learners for the next grade while enabling them to miss crucial building blocks of knowledge essential to complete high school. James was on the verge of dropping out of school due to the pressure, emotional and mental challenges that these effects came with. Notwithstanding Minister Blade Nzimande's mantra of "making assurances that no single student of institution will be left behind" township students experienced exactly that (Dlulane, 2020). Educational, economic, and political decisions were taken without them which overlooked daily struggles faced by these disadvantaged communities, especially during the lockdown (Knowles et al., 2023).

> *I was basically at home most of my degree, COVID-19 hurt us as a country and youth because there's some experience that I didn't get. As a marketer, I was supposed to be in service training, I missed out that experience because of the lockdown.* ***(Mduduzi, Male, 22)***

Stone et al. (2022) indicated that education from different levels and types was negatively impacted by the lockdown. Vocational courses were noted to be at high risk as they required practical skills and online learning did not accommodate that (Stone et al., 2022). This meant that there were prolonged consequences in terms of acquiring practical knowledge. This is observed in Mduduzi's accounts, where he revealed that due to the lockdown, he missed out on in service training required for every marketer to complete their training. That ultimately affected his changes of securing employment as he appeared inexperienced to employers. Mduduzi went on to add that the challenges with securing employment have led him to seek alternative ways of making money, that is, working as a waitress at his aunt's catering business.

4.4.4. Matric students prioritized over other grades.

It was found that other grades were prioritised over other grades during the hard lockdown. Sibongile and James alluded that they had academic struggles that were a result of neglect that they experienced from their schools and educators. Matriculants were given more attention

over other lower grades. They mentioned that contact and academic lessons during the lockdown were only offered to matriculants. The following quotes are presented below.

> *"The only people that they were giving attention to were matrics even though we all came to school for education but they were the only ones given attention. It seemed like they didn't care about the rest of us."* ***(Sibongile, Female, 19)***
>
> *"The matriculants of that year were the ones who had any contact with the school, socially and physically. That didn't sit well with me because it is not like matriculants are the only people who are learning."* ***(James, Male, 19)***

Grade 7 and 12 learners were the first grades to return full time to attending following 33 and 28 days of no lessons respectively (Soudien et al., 2021). The remaining grades returned later through rotational basis, alternating with other learners (Soudien et al., 2021). This is in line with Sibongile and James' claims that matriculants were given attention over other grades. Soudien et al. (2021) mentioned that socio-economic status played a role in the loss of learning time in other schools. Students from low Socio-economic Status were reportedly found to have lost about 65% of learning time when compared with learners from well-resourced schools with adequate infrastructure, vastly trained and motivated teachers were able to find quicker ways to ensure that their learners lost minimal learning time (Maree, 2022). Vally (2019) revealed that although education is a universal right for every child in South Africa, the quality of the education is not equal for all students, especially black students. Vally (2019) went on to add that about 75% of the South African schooling system is made out of peri-urban and rural areas which are marked by downright dysfunctional, overcrowded and under-sourced institutions. Taking from these arguments, the pandemic could have exacerbated already existing inequalities and challenges of the South African education system. Vulnerable areas such as the Vosloorus township were and/ would have been the first to experience these impacts severely as its education quality is already challenged. Lack of educators, infrastructure as well as resourced schools have placed learners from the township at a disadvantage. Prioritising other grades over others may have been a decision made on good intentions, however, it evidently disadvantaged other grades.

A grade 12 pupil had a different perspective of how learning was delivered during the lockdown. Her quote is presented below:

"What happened is we had to stay at home for a long time. And we had to study on our own with no teachers and you didn't know whether we were correct on some things or not. That affected my matric." ***(Banele, Female, 20)***

Soudien et al (2021) indicated that Grade 12 learners lost approximately 35% of learning time in which they were expected to take an external standardised examination that was not adjusted. Learners were expected to recover the time lost by shortening the time scheduled for examination preparation (Soudien et al, 2012). Taking from Banele's response, it is evident that even though Grade 12 learners were prioritised they were still among the affected. The system made attempts to salvage the situation, the minority was still left destitute. Dendron Secondary School, in the rural areas, took it a step further in attempts to close the gap with their students by moving them in with their teachers to continue the curriculum and support where needed during the lockdown (CBS News, 2020).

4.4.5. Blamed for poor performance.

James revealed that skipping the curriculum fed into many challenges they faced as learners. They struggled with understanding content; two days of learning was not enough for them to grasp anything in class. This led to poor performance in their respective grades which, according to him, resulted in his educators reacting harshly towards him blaming him for ill performance. The quote below presents his accounts.

*"I was blamed for things that I didn't know. There were things our teacher expected us to know and when we told her that we didn't know. She said 'wena bohlelileni ekhaya (why were you not coming to school). I mean I don't know how the curriculum goes and I didnt take that very well, in a way, I hated school. I would ask her to please bear with us because there are things that were not taught in Grade 10 but she did not care."****(James, Male, 19)***

There has been very little research published on challenges between learners and educators indicating that teachers blamed students for lack of performance with schoolwork. Chomunorwa and Mugobo (2023) revealed that the majority of their participants indicated the lack of interest from their educators about their educational needs during the lockdown. They said that they did not receive any positive feedback from their educators, and they also seemed not interested in using educational technology (Chomuronwa & Mugobo, 2023). This is in line with James' expressions of his experiences during the lockdown where he disclosed the lack of assistance and interest, he received from his educators which he

revealed that it may have been a result of his failing some tests. Further, there has been research about learners not receiving adequate support from their home situations. Maree (2022) reported that some learners experienced challenges with parental support with their education. Although different, these situations may have a similar effect on the learners. This was a result of similar social circumstances and deprivation such as lack of resources in disadvantaged areas, lack of trained and motivated educators as well as infrastructure. Mifsud (2021) shed some light on a situation that could have possibly led to the neglect of learners during the lockdown, where educators were notified to plan realistic communication and dissemination to students on educational content. Furthermore, it was also disclosed that educators should not be pressured to carry out classes through live video streams or other online platforms (Mifsud, 2021). In areas like the Vosloorus township, through this approach, education delivery could have easily fallen through the cracks especially in cases where there is no way of holding educators accountable. Moreover, teachers were encouraged to deliver realistic and convenient feedback to students on learning process and expecting teachers to correct all students' tasks was perceived as unrealistic. One can assume that from these statements, students' educational needs may have been overlooked and neglected by educators.

4.5. Social Media and the Lockdown

Social interaction was significantly impacted by the lockdown which saw the majority of the population seeking alternative ways of maintaining connections with those close to them. Social media has been the main source of providing that channel of communication among people (Drouin et al., 2020). Social media can be easily defined as an interactive computer transmitted technology that lubricates the creation and/or sharing of information, ideas in addition to other forms of expression through virtual networks and communities (Wong et al., 2020). The various popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, LinkedIn and blogging platforms such as TikTok (Wong et al., 2020). Majority of the participants from this study reportedly increased their social media usage from these listed platforms during the lockdown. They mentioned that the deprivation of physical interactions, social media provided them with social support as well as information acquisition. Other participants disclosed that social media became their only source of entertainment. The education system also relied on some social media platforms to convey information to their students. One participant revealed that as much as social media provided positive feedback for

her overall social life, however, the misuse of the platforms came at the cost of her education when she performed poorly on her matric examination. This section will look into the social media usage of the youth of the Vosloorus township.

4.5.1. Social Media usage during the lockdown

The COVID-19 lockdown may have facilitated addictive behaviours globally including South Africa. Young people are usually vulnerable to falling victim to addictive behaviours such as the problematic usage of social media platforms (Paschke et al, 2021). There has been a significant increase in social media presence since the pandemic started. All the participants of this study noted a drastic increase in their internet presence throughout the pandemic, specifically during the lockdown. Their social media presence which included browsing the internet for information about the virus, connecting with friends and relatives, entertainment reasons and/ or engaging on educational material allowed them to move from 1-to-2 hours of internet presence to circa 8-to-11 hours a day. Their responses are presented below:

> *"During the lockdown I became more active in the social world than before. I am on Facebook, whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok..im just on anything that i could find where i could find entertainment. I would keep up with latest trends, the news also and I feel during that time, that's where you could learn anything about COVID.* ***(Mary, Female, 25)***
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> *"During COVID, I think it was higher because I had less to do of course. Maybe in a day, because I'm thinking Netflix, I'm thinking all these things, probably for 12 hours. I was searching on Instagram and scrolling on Twitter"* ***(Michael, Male, 21)***
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> *"During lockdown, it went from an hour to being constantly on the phone. I think my screen time usage was an average of 11 hours a day according to phone updates."* ***(Mduduzi, Male, 22)***

Social media presence increased profoundly across the globe. People are genetically programmed to survive through physical interactions with others. The restrictions of physical activities enabled people to find alternative ways of association. From the participants' responses one can gather that they all turned to one mode of maintaining interaction or communication with the outside world which is social media. The mitigation of social interaction also meant that the alternative way of interaction coupled with the fundamental need for human contact will increase markedly. The participants' accounts depict the extent of their increase in social media usage when comparing it with a time preceding the COVID-19

lockdown. Luo et al. (2021) found that compared with before the pandemic, weekly social media presence notably increased from 17.2 hours to 21.4 hours during COVID-19. Fischer et al. (2021) implied that with the implemented social distancing measures, people looked for other ways of accomplishing their daily tasks such as working, staying informed, shopping, and attending school, and social media became the only platform which provided the majority of those properties. Fischer et al., (2021) conducted a cross-sectional survey study on the changes in perceptions and use of mobile technology and health communication in South Africa during the COVID-19 lockdown which found that the lockdown has impelled the majority of their participants to increase their social media or any technology usage. The study further revealed that about 392 (96.8%) of 405 participants disclosed that they will maintain their technology usage even post pandemic (Fischer et al., 2021). Comparably, a cross-national online survey conducted in the United Kingdom (UK), Norway, Australia, and the United States of America (USA) found that Facebook (94.6%), YouTube (69.6%), and WhatsApp (43.1%) were the most used social media platforms (Thygesen et al, 2021). A large majority of the participants from the different countries unveiled that Facebook was their most used platform, extending from 89% in Australia and 97% in the USA (Thygesen et al, 2021).

Katz et al. (1974) proposed another reason for the excessive use of the internet and social media. They came up with The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) individuals who use social media usually seek to fulfil psychological urges. The UGT says that the gratification does not come from social media, however, how the gratification acquired is dependent on the reasons and motivations of the individual's usage of the platform (Katz et al.,1974). Previous research has found that using UGT was linked to numerous classifications of gratifications, namely, for entertainment, social interaction, convenience utility, learning and information seeking (Ahmaad, 2022). This could be used to explain Mary and Michael's desire for constant social media presence as an attempt to curb feelings of loneliness and somehow maintain some social connection with the outside world. Michael also indicated that he mainly used social media platforms because he had little to do now that he was home majority of the time and social media was the only distraction. Furthermore, the participants' accounts of their increased social media usage could be linked to the assumption that when the audience selects the social media platforms to satisfy specific needs, it enables the different socials to create ways of competing among each other to draw on people's gratifications (Ahmaad, 2022).

4.5.2. Positive social media impact during the lockdown

Increased social media engagement has been associated with adverse mental health effects such as anxiety, stress, depression, cyberbullying and social isolation (Vaingankar, 2022). Although much of the narrative on social media has centred on the negative implications it has on mental health, participants from this study have highlighted its positive contributions to their lives. Vaingankar (2022) alluded on a review that shed some light on impactful uses of social media, for instances, authentic self-presentation and suicide prevention which are generally linked to young people's mental welfare. The term mental welfare refers to their overall happiness, positive relationships and outlook, personal growth, and life satisfaction (Vaingankar, 2022). This sub-theme presents the participants' experience of the positive impact of increased social media usage during the lockdown. Their responses are presented below:

> *"It was good because you know, you are connected, you can talk to people you miss and all that…social media contributed to my education through access to people, getting scopes, memos just having instantaneous information from people. We had social groups and allowed me the comfort of not attending lectures but still being informed so I think social media really helped in that aspect of my studies."* ***(Micheal, Male, 21)***
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> *"I learned a lot from these platforms in my field of study. Like I would follow people doing education just to see how things are during teaching in all forms, like primary and high schools. I also got to see how teachers teach online as something maybe, as I advance in my career, I would use."* ***(Mary, Female, 25)***
>
> *"Because I do marketing, social media gave me a bit of insight on how social media works for companies and stuff. Social media has tools to tell you where your target population is, the ages, profile visits, how many times you have viewed a product, the number of shares so i got to see how digital marketing works."****(Mduduzi, Male, 22)***

Overtime, social media has fiercely reduced the cost of communicating, connecting, and sharing information with other people (Allcott et al.,2020). Longest and Kang (2022) mentioned that young people in their early 20s are digital natives which denotes that social media is a requisite tool that allows them to connect to different people globally regardless of an outbreak of a pandemic. This is in line with Michael's submissions where he mentioned that social media served him well during the lockdown as he was able to still be in contact with people. Social media has been known to provide increased social support for individuals who

may need it and those that may not be able to find offline social support groups (Beaudoin & Tao, 2007; Naslund et al., 2016). Kusuma (2022) alluded that previous studies have observed how young people benefit from enhancing social linkages, communication and technological skills and social media facilitates these benefits. Kusuma (2022) 's study found that about 81% of adolescents affirmed that social media provides them with a sense of home. Even though Michael did not provide a reason, these factors listed above could have influenced his choice of increased social media usage. Previous scholars who have espied social support through social media networks, unveiled that individuals generally support their peers by sharing and forwarding posts and/ online news that would potentially benefit their online networks (Longest & Kang, 2022). Sibongile provided a response that supports this claim, where she mentioned spending majority of her time on Facebook because she believed her online network needed to see content, "*I was always used to Facebooking most of the time, ngiyi-share-rist mina (I am a share-rist), il do the job and share posts….my people needed to see content and stuff."* Longest and Kang (2022) added that people commonly gain interpersonal support through interacting with like-minded people on social media networks which was noted as an essential element in reducing depression symptoms an individual may feel.

It is also noteworthy that social media networks have facilitated a learning experience for students where it reinforced student engagement as well as improved learning and performance (Allcott et al.,2020). Furthermore, it rendered numerous opportunities to students to enhance their learning methods (Allcott et al.,2020). This has been observed in the Mary, Micheal and Mduduzi's quotes, where they alluded to receiving educational support through various social media platforms. They mentioned having access to information expeditiously required for their academic advancement in the form of scopes, memos and/ receiving information about lectures presented that they could not attend due to data availability or internet connection challenges. These social networks enabled students to communicate, access and research information as well as collaborate with each other (Allcott et al.,2020). Mary affirmed that she was able to access information relating to her field of study that may assist her in advancing her career. Mduduzi was also able to gain knowledge on how social media helps in bridging the gap between companies and consumers in terms of advertising along with increasing their brand awareness. Through these positive effects, one may deduce that social media has facilitated change and unites people through maintaining connections, accessing educational material and collaborating with each other academically as well as providing skill development tools which consequently expose new career information for students and achieve specific goals.

4.5.3. Negative social media impact during the lockdown

Noting the positive impact of social media, it is also fair to be mindful of the presence of possible negative implications. Vaingankar (2022), set forth that recurrent social media activity is affixed to deleterious behaviours which include, suicidality, self-harm, and addictions. This sub-theme will represent participants from this study's negative experience of social media during the lockdown. Where two participants shared that it had a pernicious effect on their mental health when posts on police and army brutality were shared all over the platforms. Furthermore, the fake news about the virus also caused panic and distress on some of the participants. One participant broached how her social media addiction cost her her academic studies. The following quotes are presented:

> *"It was bad because during COVID, you'd see a lot of stuff on people's status messages, for instance, how the army was treating people, you know, that fear. Fake messaging those that fake posts about what people think of COVID and all that. So those things mess with your mind if you keep seeing them."* ***(Micheal, Male, 21)***
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> *"I was not happy with my matric results..they were not what I expected. On the other side, I blamed facebook that only if I had studied when I used social media most of the times, I would have passed with a bachelor pass. I studied one hour, two hours and got back to share posts..my people needed to see content and stuff. I was always used to facebooking most of the time, ngiyi-share-rist mina (I am a share-rist), il do the job and share posts. It became an addiction..I hated to lose my phone because I had to beg people to borrow me their phones to log on to facebook and it was very frustrating."* ***(Sibongile, Female, 19)***
>
> *"We learnt about the disease; we learnt about conspiracies. There was a lot going on, even talks about 5G..like the 5G is causing COVID-19."* ***(Mary, Female, 25)***

The stringent lockdown measures that forced people to remain confined in their homes, arguably became a life stressor that led them to increase their social media usage (Lochner et al.,2022). Majority of the participants of this study reported a significant increase in the social media activity during the lockdown. Michael expressed that seeing people's posts about the army and police brutality on people from townships evoked feelings of fear. Pretorius et al (2021) said that fear is the most frequent adaptive response to perceived or actual threat, including virus and/ disease outbreaks. It is activated for the sole reason of promoting safety (Pretorius et al., 2021). Michael's instant fearful response to the infodemic that was circulating on the internet could have been associated with a safety response. Pretorius et al. (2021) added

that the unflagging sense of fear was associated with dread of becoming infected with the virus, transmitting the virus to significant others and/ loved ones becoming infected. Pretorius et al (2021) further added that this unrelenting fear could give rise to stress therefore increasing psychological distress that can adversely affect one's mental health. The World Health Organisation advised against the spread of fake information about the virus as it potentially may cause confusion, leading to risky behaviours, overlooking evidence-based advice thus stirring mental distress (Montazeri et al., 2023). This is consistent with Michael's quote, where he mentioned that he suffered mental distress due to the distress caused by the overabundance of fabricated information along with accurate information about the virus and police brutality inflicted on vulnerable citizens.

Social media is also known to make people addicted to it, people spend a considerable amount of time on social media networks which takes away focus and concentration on daily duties and/ tasks (Lochner et al., 2022). According to Cho et al. (2023), social media prompts social liability where users feel compelled to support their online network ties. This is observed in Sibongile's submissions where she revealed being addicted to Facebook, to posting and sharing "content" and believing that her network needed to see her posts. In addition, she mentioned feeling frustrated when she lost her phone because she struggled with staying in touch with the online world. Furthermore, Sibongile mentioned that her social media addiction got to a point where she neglected her academic obligation which overall resulted in her not getting desirable grades. Explaining social liability through the social exchange perspective, it may be deduced that social media is an exemplary platform that allots an opportunity to conserve social relations at relatively low costs and possibly high returns. This theory can be applied to the COVID-19 lockdown where the majority of the population heavily relied on social media to sustain their social relationships. Cauberghe et al. (2021) said that the increased social media usage during the COVID-19 pandemic could have been favourable for its users as it served as an escapism from psychological distress that may potentially cause loneliness and anxiety. Through these accounts, it may be possible that Sibongile could have been experiencing psychological challenges due to the isolation and social recession which fed into her social media addiction which consequently affected her life. During her interview, Sibongile reported that the severity of the pandemic hit her late; she had hoped the South African government would quickly repeal their decision of putting everyone under lockdown. She mentioned not being to see her father and friends during the lockdown. She further mentioned that she cried about that experience and remembered that she had to toughen and not show people her emotions, which could have fuelled her reliance on social media to try and curb those feelings.

4.6. Brief Summary of the Findings and Discussion

This chapter has presented lived experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown of young people between the ages of 18 to 25 years old and gives more insight about where the study was conducted. The objectives of the study were used to explore the aim of the research. It shared a detailed experience of how the home confinement protocols that were implemented disrupted normal traditional practices among families and communities, social activities and the education system. The lockdown protocols left young people with harrowing emotional and psychological distress especially when they lost loved ones from contracting the virus and they were not able to mourn loved ones who had passed. Furthermore, it exposed them to extreme police brutality at the hands of ensuring the curb of the spread of the virus which led to some people losing their lives. Although there were ample negative effects of the lockdown, some of the participants reportedly had a worthwhile experience of the lockdown which included bonding and getting to spend quality time with loved ones which provided them with a sense of meaning and comfort during that difficult time.

Moreover, the lockdown also forced them into a new way of life characterised by interacting and generally living their lives through social media. Majority of the participants disclosed relying on social media for their academic lives. This included communicating with fellow classmates about their academic material and/ finding support through online research. They also mentioned that communicating with friends and family was facilitated through social media. Social media provided them with an opportunity to stay connected to the outside world while protecting themselves from getting infected with the virus. However, there were notable negative effects of excessive social media usage during lockdown. Participants revealed getting addicted to the platforms to a point of neglecting their daily tasks and duties. Their academic lives took a complete back seat when they gave their time away to social media networks. The abundance of fake and authentic negative news about the virus as well as the assault reports from the police and South African army also took a toll on their mental health resulting in psychological distress.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

This chapter briefly discusses the summarised findings of the research following the objectives of the study. Further, it provides a conclusion of the research and future recommendations to remedy the condition of township youth as well as future research studies.

5.2. Summary of findings

As a reminder, this study sought to address two objectives which will be explored through the participants' interpretations. The guiding theoretical framework of this research rests on the disruption of social interaction by the pandemic, which affected young people's overall physical, mental and psychological well-being.

5.2.1. Objective 1: To explore young people's lived experiences of COVID-19 related lockdown.

This objective explored young people's experiences of the COVID-19 related lockdown, how it impacted on their mental health which also affected other areas of their lives, such as, overall well-being, academics, and social interaction. The findings unearthed the frightening inequalities that young people in the Vosloorus township lived under daily. The COVID-19 restrictions ravaged through the community of Vosloorus disrupting traditional social dynamics, community engagement and limiting face-to-face interactions. Similarly, the pandemic has piloted an augmented sense of grief as township youth, like many others worldwide, experienced the loss of loved ones. Young people alongside their relatives were not able to participate in customary mourning rituals and gathering for funerals due to the lockdown restrictions robbed them of inherent communal support systems. The inability to collectively grieve as well as absence of closure may have lifelong implications to these young people's emotional and psychological ability to deal with loss. Majority of township communities connect through specific cultural and spiritual practices, remembrance and mourning included. The lockdown disrupted the ability to engage in these practices which may have ultimately affected and complicated people's grieving process. This experience facilitated young people's reliance on social media to try and cope with the unprocessed grief.

The implementation of home confinement measures at the hands of the COVID-19 related lockdown in the beginning of the pandemic magnified already existing challenges faced within their community. Majority of the young people in the township are uneducated, unemployed and affected by a comorbidity of mental health challenges that are never treated. The social

recession adversely impacted their daily psychological and emotional functioning. Interacting with peers within the community, at school, working and/or engaging in physical activities was their way of escaping from the harsh reality of living in a poorly resourced and disadvantaged area. The dawn of the pandemic and the strict enforcement of the lockdown protocols left them with atrocious mental health problems. They reported feeling intense feelings of loneliness, stress, isolation, boredom, and mental distress. The underdeveloped and non-existent mental health awareness as well as assistance within the community is one of the major factors that is destroying the youth of Vosloorus. The main outlets that provide mental health services, that is, the main hospital, is lacking the capacity to help the majority of the community, as it is understaffed and falling apart. And there seems to be no hope from the government in terms of assisting the community.

These negative mental health implications had a domino effect on other aspects of these young people's lives. They revealed that they struggled to cope and adapt academically, their academic lives were completely shut down in conjunction with mobility and social interaction. By the time they went back to school, they had missed so much time and were behind with work, similarly, they were expected to catch up with the work so as to be able to write exams and complete the academic year. Those who were able to have some form of academic progress, received very little or no form of support from their institutions in terms of access to information or guidance from educators. They were expected to make means for themselves, considering the fact that most of them come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Majority of these young people mentioned that the abrupt transition to online learning resulted in them struggling with keeping track of their studies. They reported preferring face-to-face interaction with the educators as they were able to seek help on subjects they needed assistance on, whereas with online learning, the experience was totally different, they struggled getting assistance from educators. In some cases, educators would deliver the material and not follow-up on if the students understood the content or not. They further mentioned that securing a virtual appointment was also difficult, educators were either not available to assist students or could not keep track of all the students needing assistance. This immensely affected their mental welfare, as they had to deal with emotional and psychological repercussions of falling behind on schoolwork and possibly failing the academic year with no possibility of receiving any assistance or recovering.

The sudden implementation of lockdown protocols impacted the quality of social support these young people received. Social support is an intrinsic element in providing psychological and

emotional resources facilitated through social interaction. Social support is significant in times of distress and young people's usual ways of acquiring social support and interacting with others was acutely disrupted. Their interactions were reduced to core networks which included family members, and/or live-in housemates. They were deprived of an opportunity of socialising beyond their core networks that may produce conversations with helpful advice for coping with stressful and challenging situations. They disclosed that the strict home confinement measures had a negative effect on their social relationships, they lost close friendships from school. Social connectedness is pivotal to young people's socioemotional functioning across various outcomes, such as mental health and academic performance. Thus, the significance of social connectedness to peer relations contributes to the onset and maintenance of psychopathology.

5.2.2. Objective 2: To explore the use of social media as a mechanism to adapt.

Social support was not limited to geographical status, online social interaction platforms were available, even before the pandemic. The results revealed that social media platforms remained the most used form of communication or interaction during the lockdown. There have been reports of positive associations that arose with social media usage during the lockdown. Young people disclosed receiving emotional support from peers especially with regards to academics. Many students globally were struggling with adapting to online learning, social media provided these young people with an outlet for their emotions and mental health as it was well received by other peers online. They reported seeing internet posts about similar daily experiences from other young people which was an indirect form of comfort and support. And for the most part, it was beneficial for them as they managed to cope through the difficult times. Social media became infodemic, in that it reported on informative news pertaining to the pandemic as well as false and disturbing news. Similarly, it was used for academic and exercise classes so as to improve one's physical health and onset of affective disorders. However, previous research has associated its excessive usage to devastating mental health problems. Online texting or messaging was linked to increased mental and emotional distress. Participants mentioned that they mainly used social media to control or suppress feelings of loneliness because they had nothing else to do. Social media became the only thing available to keep them preoccupied. Moreover, the effects of the excessive online activity, the information shared especially about the foreign virus and what it was doing to people reportedly caused some participants to suffer from mental distress. This experience evoked potent feelings of fear to a point of triggering paranoia. Thus, this indicates how overloaded and troubled their mental health is, and if the

effects are still not treated, young people in townships may very well be headed straight for complete desolation.

5.3. Limitations of the study

The study presented comparable data, adding knowledge on the implications and impact of the COVID-19 related lockdown. While the study was necessary and significant to the body of knowledge, it also has some limitations. The study took on a qualitative research approach, as a result the findings cannot be generalised to other young people living in different townships within South Africa. Another possible limitation of this study is that a small sample size was interviewed, thus opinions and perceptions of these young people cannot be a representation of all young people living in townships. The age of the participants is limiting the relevance of the findings as other young people beyond these age groups may have different views. Additionally, this study only interviewed Black young people as part of the sample, which was restricting the findings to only one racial group considering how racially diverse the South African country is. Moreover, this study only interviewed the youth and not their parents, guardians, or educators for supporting insights so as to strengthen the quality of the study. Interviewing parents or guardians would have provided the study with more information on the gravity of the challenges these young people faced during the lockdown. Furthermore, interviewing the educators would have also shared insights on the young people's academic struggles as well as challenges with teaching in township schools that lack so many resources.

Despite all the limitations listed above, this study has provided important information about the status and living conditions young people living in townships go through. It also shared insights about experiences of these young people on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which ultimately restructured their whole lives. Additionally it revealed the quality of the education system offered in township schools as well as the magnitude of unemployment in marginalised communities such as this one.

5.4. Recommendations

Unfair distribution of resources in this country has been a major challenge for marginalised communities. It should be noted that the majority of the young people living in townships were severely impacted by the pandemic, from mental health all the way to lack of valuable social skills, as well as quality education and skills. The researcher recommends that the government as well as able organisations within the country look into the possibility of meeting the township youth halfway in terms of providing necessary tools to aid in mental health struggles.

The South African government can invest in adding more mental health facilities in townships. In order for one to access proper and consistent mental health assistance is through the private sector which is out of reach for the majority of these young people as they may not have the means to afford it. Thus investing in more of these free treatment facilities means investing in these young people's wellbeing which ultimately allows them to perform the best they can. Investing in educating and equipping more people with mental health skills in terms of offering training for more mental health care professions to usher young people into practising mental health positivity can be beneficial for these young people and the community. Furthermore, this will also help the public health system improve the psychiatric assistance provided by local hospitals as well as arming local clinics with readily available mental health aid and not overcrowding them with very little staff assistance. The public health department should conduct and facilitate consistent workshops and training forums that will educate the youth, family members and community about the significance of mental health. They should equip the community with interventions and tools they can apply to protect themselves. This will also help in eradicating the stigma and stereotypes that are associated with seeking mental health assistance within townships and among the black communities as more people will be receiving adequate assistance. The world is forever changing, there are different things that affect people in different ways so consistently providing these services will enable the public healthcare system to stay informed about struggles and challenges faced by township communities thus allowing them to improve their strategies and come up with possible solutions and recommendations.

The government can also ensure quality education for all, through commitment of ensuring learning proficiency in the foundation phase as it impacts the quality of their learning outcome in the future. Economic empowerment from the South African government for these young people can be one of the greatest tools to reducing unemployment and poverty. This can be facilitated through empowering these young people with skills in the form of learnerships and community centres to teach skills to help develop themselves. Moreover, since the world is swiftly moving into the fourth industrial revolution, free digital marketing and skills courses will assist young people in establishing projects that will sustain their own income generating activities.

5.4.1. Recommendations for future research

For future research, based on the limitations identified in the study, future studies should consider a larger sample size of the participants. Future studies may also consider applying a mixed methods research approach which will enable a fair representation of opinions and views of young Black people living in townships thus providing more understanding of the research problem to the reader. Researchers should also include views from family members and educators from the educational institutions within the community, this will ensure views of the experiences these young people endured from parents and educators are also represented in the findings.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

RESEARCHER**: LINDOKUHLE DLAMINI**

The experiences of COVID-19 related lockdown and social media usage among the youth from Vosloorus in the Mfundo Park area, Gauteng.

I……. agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I agree to the following: (Please make a cross on the relevant options below).

YES	NO	I agree that my participation will remain anonymous.
YES	NO	I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report.
YES	NO	I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.
YES	NO	I agree that the information I provide may be used in an anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.
YES	NO	I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I can withdraw from it at any point should not wish to continue as a participant.
YES	NO	I understand that I have the right to withhold responses to any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering.

……. ……

Participant Name Participant Signature, Date and Time

…… ……..

Study Staff Conducting Discussion Study Staff Signature, Date and Tim

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Experiences of COVID-19 and COVID-related lockdown

1. Tell me a little about yourself, your age, relationship status, education level, what you do for a living?
2. What is your education level?
3. What language do you speak?
4. Tell me about your experiences of COVID-19 lockdown, how did it impact your life?
5. As a young person living in a township in South Africa, how can you describe the effects the COVID-19 lockdown has had in your life, socially, mentally, academically and financially, if any? Elaborate.
6. How did you cope or overcome the effects you experienced during the lockdown?

Social Media Usage

1. How did you keep contact or maintain contact with family and friends?
2. Can you tell me more about your use social media during the lockdown?
3. How frequent was your usage of social media?
4. Did you use social media for business or as a form of generating income for yourself? Elaborate (If yes, how did you make it work for you?)
5. How frequent did you use social media to promote your business?
6. Did you use social media for academic reasons?
7. How frequent did you use it?
8. Can you say social media provided you with comfort and relief during times of distress such the COVID-19 lockdown or it made the situation worse? Elaborate
9. How did social media facilitate getting back to the “normal” life, socially, mentally, financially and academically?
10. Moving forward what would you suggest could or should be done in order to help young people living in townships acquire resources to aid them achieve their goals?

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

Hi, my name is Lindokuhle Dlamini, and I am a master's student in Research Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the experiences of COVID-19 related lockdown and social media usage among the youth in Vosloorus, Gauteng under the supervision of Professor Langa Malose and Dr. Nomhle Ndimande-Khoza.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this research project is to explore the lived experiences of young people between the ages of 18 to 35 years old, living in townships during the COVID-19 hard lockdown from March 2020 to August 2020. As part of this project. I would like to invite you to take part in an interview.

What does participation in this study involve?

This activity will involve answering questions and will take approximately 60 minutes. The research will be investigating COVID-19 lockdown lived experiences of young people living in the township of Vosloorus, Gauteng. How the lockdown affected your lives, socially, financially, academically and/-or mentally. Additionally, how you used social media to cope with possible psychological distress, maintain relationships, keep up with schoolwork as well as for entrepreneurial benefits. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. To maintain privacy, the interview will be conducted in a private location agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. You have the right withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to or stop the interview at any time.

What are the benefits and risks of participation?

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, you will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no repercussions or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. However, the study will be beneficial to the community as it will raise awareness of the struggles faced by young people living in the townships. Further, the study will amplify the urgent need for intervention with the needed resources to support young people living in townships.

You may experience distress and discomfort during the interview, we will stop the interview or resume another time. You do not have to answer all questions and you may stop participation at any time. To offer support, the researcher will provide a contact list for psychosocial services which may include, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) at (0800 456 789), the Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre, the Family Life Centre (FAMSA) at (011 788 4784) as well as at the local clinic and hospital.

How will we ensure confidentiality?

This recording will be stored in a password protected computer and only the researcher will have access to this recording as well as the transcribed audio files. It will be deleted after 6 years or 3 years after publishing. The research will also adhere to anonymity and confidentiality conditions, the participants' identities will solely be known to the research and their responses will not be linked to the participants' identities in anyway. The researcher will ensure the use of pseudonyms instead of participants' names to represent your participation in my final research report. Moreover, the research will also consider confidentiality, this that no third party will have any personal information of the research participants as transcripts, and audio recordings will be stored in a secured password protected laptop.

Who can I contact about problems or questions?

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me here; Lindokuhle Dlamini, 1538407@students.wits.ac.za, +27 64 003 5937 or my Supervisor; Prof Malose Langa, Malose.Langa@wits.ac.za. This study will be written up as a research report which will be readily available online through the university library website. However, if you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers in an anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

PLAGIARISM INDEX REPORT

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