

Well-Youth!

*Young People Affected
by Covid*



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INTRODUCTION

Mental health refers to a person's overall psychological well-being, including their emotional, social, and cognitive functioning. It encompasses aspects such as how a person thinks, feels, and behaves, as well as how they cope with life's challenges and stressors. Good mental health allows individuals to live fulfilling lives, maintain positive relationships, and contribute to society. Conversely, poor mental health can lead to a range of mental health disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and psychosis, as well as impairments in daily functioning and quality of life. It is important to prioritize and take care of one's mental health as it can significantly impact overall health and well-being.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on young people, especially in terms of their mental health and employment opportunities. The restrictions and lockdowns have led to extended periods of reduced income, job loss, or unemployment, which have negatively affected their financial and emotional well-being. Furthermore, young people may have experienced increased stress and reduced self-esteem due to the loss of the day-to-day structure of work, or the stigma associated with unemployment. In addition, the social security system itself can have a negative impact on mental health through the claims process, work capability testing, and job search conditions. These challenges can increase with duration, impacting not only mental health and life satisfaction but also physical health.

Therefore, initiatives such as the Well Youth project can help young people develop the necessary skills and competencies to effectively manage existential crisis situations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, promote well-being and help them adapt to new learning and working environments, and better prepare them for the labor market with balanced mental health



METHODOLOGY RATIONALE

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, particularly in young people, was increasingly evident. Social distancing measures have meant a disruption to normal life, leaving individuals feeling isolated and lonely. The worry of contracting the virus and witnessing its impact on others can also be overwhelming for many. Youth workers found themselves in a position where they had to face the challenge of mental health effects caused by the whole pandemic context and its measures. Many are lacking training and skills in order to approach this parallel pandemic phenomenon which are mental health problems.

The pandemic context has had a significant negative impact on the well-being of young people in various ways. Here are some examples:

Social Isolation	Disrupted Education	Economic Impact	Increased Screen Time	Fear and Uncertainty
The pandemic has forced many young people to stay at home and avoid social interactions. This isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression.	Many young people have had their education disrupted due to school closures and remote learning. This can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future.	The pandemic has led to widespread job loss and economic insecurity, which can impact young people who may be entering the workforce or relying on financial support from their families.	With more time spent at home, many young people have increased their screen time, which can have negative effects on mental health, including disrupted sleep patterns, increased anxiety, and reduced physical activity.	The pandemic has created a sense of fear and uncertainty about the future for many young people, including concerns about their health, the health of loved ones, and their ability to achieve their goals and dreams.

Overall, the pandemic has created a challenging and stressful environment for young people, which can have negative impacts on their well-being.



THE PARALLEL PANDEMIC

The mental health impacts of this pandemic are far reaching and can cause serious mental health problems that may require long term support. The pandemic has had far-reaching consequences for people of all ages, but official European reports report focused their attention on the impact on those aged 15–29. Based on these reports and other research papers we looked into how the crisis has threatened the mental health and mental well-being of young people. In this introduction we will summarize the main findings of the impact of the pandemic on young peoples mental well-being and why youth work can provide an educational framework in which young people can improve their mental-well being.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic go beyond the health crisis, as various non-pharmaceutical interventions – such as social distancing and lockdowns – have disrupted the social lives and personal relationships of all people. This has led to a parallel outbreak of mental health issues, particularly among young people, with increased emotional and social damage. In fact, high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, insomnia, depression and stress are among the effects observed by researchers studying Italy, Greece, Germany and other European findings. Many factors contribute to this phenomenon: fear of being infected; financial insecurity; family tensions during quarantine; and a feeling of disempowerment. The long-term repercussions will likely be far greater than those due to the virus itself. What is the reality for young Europeans? How has their mental wellbeing fared during the pandemic?

☹ Symptoms

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the social capital of young people, disrupting their social lives and prohibiting them from participating in community events. As a result of the restrictions on gatherings and the closure of educational institutions, young people have seen their opportunities to develop relationships, networks and skills greatly diminished.

Not only does this pose significant implications for the current generation's productivity and work–life balance; it could have lasting consequences for economic output in years to come. Additionally, with the shift to online learning, youngsters without access to resources such as computers or the internet may become more disadvantaged than those who do.



To make matters worse, many were met with boring routines, stress and compulsive use of smartphones while managing in such restrictive conditions. The psychological consequences this situation has had on them are unquantifiable. A general sense of insecurity, lower emotional well-being, depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts have resulted from this Covid-19 crisis (Wise, 2020).

In addition, the young people expressed a lack of faith in the future and a lack of motivation to start working; they expressed concerns regarding the health of their relatives and reduced time spent on learning activities and socializing. Such negative consequences were especially noticeable among young people already experiencing mental health issues before the pandemic and among disadvantaged groups. Those already deemed most vulnerable became increasingly disconnected from education, youth services, and support, while many remained inside most of the time, often in overcrowded housing.

The effects were also evidenced by declining life satisfaction and related issues. It is likely that job losses and financial burdens, as well as decreased independence, have negatively impacted this trend; however, research findings suggest that lockdown measures were a direct contributor to these reductions. Despite a slight improvement in 2020 when restrictions were eased, mental well-being dropped during 2021's spring lockdown once again and reached an even worse level than the one recorded at the start of the pandemic.

A survey recently conducted by Sentio Solutions among young Greeks in October and November of 2020 revealed that more than 60% reported a decline in their mental health due to the pandemic. Stress, monotony, pessimism and lack of motivation were some of the most common negative emotions associated with these findings. Further, 68% said their social activities had reduced, 10% said nothing had changed, and 57% believed psychological support services were difficult to reach or access. These results are evidence of the significant impact the pandemic is having on their daily lives; from social interactions to career prospects - it seems youth are being deprived of fundamental aspects of their lives.

As educational organizations and institutions and employers closed, social events were cancelled, and in-person meetings limited, it is likely that feelings of social exclusion soared. This was especially true for those who lost work temporarily or permanently, and those needing to move away from their usual environment. These feelings of being left out and falling behind could be seen in the Living, Working and COVID-19 e-survey; respondents were asked to agree with the statement 'I feel excluded from society'. The highest proportion amongst this group was young people without jobs (50% in 2021, rising from 42% in 2020). It was also 29% among students (up from 20%) and 27% among employed young people (up 16%).



YOUTH WORK

The pandemic of 2020 created a challenging environment for youth work, by disrupting social interaction opportunities and hindering young people's participation. No longer able to rely on face-to-face activities to connect with their peers, 81% of youth workers found it difficult to conduct any type of activity. This finding was supported by a survey taken during 2021; for instance, data collected from RAY Network illustrated the abrupt effects of the pandemic on youth work (82 & 83).

Youth work has a large part to play in safeguarding the mental health of young people (77). It offers numerous prospects for socialisation, the sharing of experiences and building a sense of community; it can even help them manage their psychological issues (78). Creative and educational activities provide an opportunity for growing personally and professionally; skills such as working together with others, problem-solving, leadership capabilities and critical thinking are fundamental for strengthening self-esteem and preserving good mental health (79). Furthermore, due to its basis on interaction and trust between youth workers and youths, it gives a vital system of support that can be beneficial to psychological wellbeing (80).

Here are five explanations why youth organisations should put a high value on mental wellbeing:

1.

Young people tend to feel more comfortable with youth agencies than traditional healthcare services.

2.

Youth groups can target those teenagers who might have an elevated chance of facing mental health issues.

3.

Intervening early in the case of mental health struggles among young individuals yields better results in adulthood.

4.

Every interaction and exchange with youngsters provides the possibility to advocate for positive mental wellbeing.

5.

Numerous activities conducted by these agencies inherently aid in raising the level of mental wellbeing.



WARNING SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS FOR YOUTH

As parents, guardians, educators, and community members, it's crucial to be aware of the warning signs of mental health problems in young people. Some of the warning signs to look out for include:

☹ **Changes in Mood or Behavior**

A young person experiencing a mental health problem may exhibit changes in mood or behavior that are unusual for them. They may become more withdrawn, irritable, or aggressive. They may also experience sudden changes in their personality or appear to be more anxious or sad than usual.

☹ **Difficulty Coping**

Mental health problems can make it difficult for young people to cope with everyday stressors. They may become overwhelmed by schoolwork or social situations and may struggle to manage their emotions.

☹ **Changes in Sleep Patterns**

Changes in sleep patterns, including difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, may be a sign of a mental health problem. Young people may also sleep excessively or have difficulty waking up in the morning.

☹ **Changes in Eating Habits**

Changes in eating habits, including loss of appetite or overeating, may be a sign of a mental health problem. Young people may also become preoccupied with their weight or body shape.

☹ **Loss of Interest**

A young person experiencing a mental health problem may lose interest in activities that they once enjoyed. They may become less interested in socializing with friends or participating in extracurricular activities.



☹️ Self-Harm

Self-harm, including cutting or burning oneself, may be a sign of a mental health problem in young people. It's important to seek help if you notice any signs of self-harm.

☹️ Substance Use

Substance use, including alcohol and drug use, may be a sign of a mental health problem. Young people may turn to drugs or alcohol as a way of coping with their emotions or to self-medicate.

If you notice any of these warning signs in a young person, it's important to seek help from a mental health professional. Early intervention is crucial in preventing more serious mental health problems from developing.



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Mental health and wellness are important aspects of overall health, especially for young people. Adolescence is a time of significant changes and challenges, and it is essential for young people to develop healthy habits and coping strategies to maintain their mental and emotional well-being.

Here are some key points to consider when discussing mental health and wellness for young people:

☺ **Understanding mental health**

It is important to educate young people on what mental health is and why it is essential. Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and it affects how we think, feel, and act. Mental health issues can arise from a variety of factors, including genetics, environment, and life experiences.

☺ **Common mental health challenges**

Young people can experience a wide range of mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, and addiction. It is crucial to recognize the signs of mental health challenges and seek support when needed.

☺ **Self-care**

Young people need to prioritize self-care to maintain their mental and emotional well-being. This includes getting enough sleep, exercise, eating a healthy diet, and engaging in activities that bring joy and fulfillment.

☺ **Coping strategies**

Coping strategies are essential tools for managing stress and anxiety. Young people can benefit from learning healthy coping strategies, such as mindfulness, journaling, deep breathing exercises, and talking to a trusted friend or family member.



☺ Seeking support

It is crucial for young people to seek support when they are struggling with their mental health. This can include talking to a mental health professional, reaching out to a support group, or confiding in a trusted friend or family member.

☺ Breaking the stigma

There is still a stigma attached to mental health issues, which can prevent young people from seeking the help they need. It is important to break the stigma and encourage young people to speak openly about their mental health challenges.

☺ Promoting positive mental health

As a society, we can work together to promote positive mental health for young people. This includes creating supportive environments, reducing stressors, and encouraging healthy coping strategies.

In conclusion, mental health and wellness are crucial aspects of overall health for young people. By educating young people about mental health, providing resources and support, and promoting healthy habits and coping strategies, we can help young people maintain their mental and emotional well-being and live fulfilling lives.



SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

There are many specific mental health problems that can affect young people. Here are some of the most common ones:

☹️ **Anxiety Disorders**

Anxiety disorders are characterized by excessive and persistent worry, fear, or panic that interferes with daily activities. Common types of anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder.

☹️ **Depression**

Depression is a mood disorder that causes persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyed. It can interfere with daily activities and may even lead to thoughts of suicide.

☹️ **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that can cause hyperactivity, impulsivity, and difficulty with attention and focus. It can interfere with academic, social, and emotional functioning.

☹️ **Eating Disorders**

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses that involve distorted eating habits and behaviors. Common types include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder.

☹️ **Substance Use Disorders**

Substance use disorders involve the excessive and compulsive use of drugs or alcohol, despite negative consequences. It can lead to addiction, physical health problems, and mental health issues.

☹️ **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

PTSD is a mental health condition that can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. It can cause flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance, and hypervigilance.



☹️ **Bipolar Disorder**

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder that involves cycles of mania and depression. It can cause changes in energy, activity, sleep, and behavior.

☹️ **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**

OCD is a mental health condition that causes unwanted and intrusive thoughts, as well as repetitive and compulsive behaviors that interfere with daily activities.

It is important to seek professional help if any of these mental health problems are suspected, as early intervention can lead to better outcomes.

Concrete examples of these mental health problems above:

<h3>Anxiety</h3> <p>Excessive worry, fear, and uneasiness about everyday situations, which can lead to physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, and rapid heartbeat. For example, a young person may experience anxiety before a test or exam, or when facing social situations.</p>	<h3>Depression</h3> <p>Persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and disinterest in activities that were once enjoyable. Depression can also cause physical symptoms such as fatigue and changes in appetite. For example, a young person may experience depression after the loss of a loved one or due to a difficult life event.</p>	<h3>Bipolar disorder</h3> <p>Extreme shifts in mood, energy, and activity levels, from high periods of elation (mania) to low periods of depression. For example, a young person may experience a manic episode where they have heightened energy and euphoria, followed by a depressive episode where they feel hopeless and withdrawn.</p>
<h3>Eating disorders</h3> <p>Abnormal eating habits and attitudes towards food and weight that can lead to severe physical and mental health problems. Examples include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder.</p>	<h3>Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder</h3> <p>Difficulty with focus, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, which can affect academic and social functioning. For example, a young person with ADHD may have trouble paying attention in class and completing tasks, or may interrupt others in social situations.</p>	<h3>Substance use disorders</h3> <p>Problematic use of drugs or alcohol that can lead to physical and mental health problems, as well as social and legal consequences. For example, a young person may engage in binge drinking or drug use to cope with stress or difficult emotions.</p>



It's important to note that these are just a few examples of mental health problems, and there are many other conditions that can impact young people's well-being. It's also important to remember that everyone's experiences with mental health are unique and may vary in severity and duration.



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IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTION AND WELLNESS

Prevention and wellness are important for maintaining good mental health and overall well-being. They involve taking steps to promote positive mental health, prevent the onset or worsening of mental health problems, and reduce the impact of existing mental health conditions.

One of the key benefits of prevention and wellness is that they can help individuals build resilience and cope better with life's challenges. By focusing on self-care and developing healthy coping strategies, individuals can reduce their risk of developing mental health problems, or lessen the impact of existing conditions. Prevention and wellness can take many forms, such as:

🕒 **Education and awareness-raising**

Providing information about mental health and well-being, and encouraging individuals to seek help when needed.

🕒 **Early intervention**

Identifying and addressing mental health problems early, before they become more severe.

🕒 **Stress management**

Developing strategies for managing stress, such as exercise, mindfulness, or relaxation techniques.

🕒 **Healthy lifestyle**

Encouraging healthy habits, such as regular exercise, a balanced diet, and adequate sleep, can help promote good mental health.

🕒 **Social support**

Building and maintaining supportive relationships with friends, family, or mental health professionals can help individuals cope with life's challenges.

By prioritizing prevention and wellness, individuals can take an active role in maintaining their mental health and well-being. This can lead to improved quality of life, increased productivity, and better overall health outcomes.



HOW CAN A TRAINER IN THE COURSE PROMOTE WELL-BEING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE?

A trainer in a course can promote well-being among young people in several ways:

- 1. Create a safe and supportive learning environment**

The trainer can create a safe and supportive learning environment where young people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. This can include setting ground rules for respectful communication and creating a non-judgmental atmosphere.
- 2. Encourage self-care practices**

The trainer can encourage young people to prioritize self-care practices, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy, exercising regularly, and taking breaks when needed. The trainer can also provide resources on self-care and stress management.
- 3. Foster positive relationships**

The trainer can promote positive relationships among young people by encouraging teamwork and collaboration in group activities. They can also model positive communication and conflict resolution skills.
- 4. Provide access to resources**

The trainer can provide information on local resources for mental health support, such as counseling services, crisis hotlines, and support groups. They can also create a referral system for students who may need additional support.



5. Incorporate mental health education

The trainer can incorporate mental health education into the course curriculum, such as teaching about common mental health problems, coping strategies, and resources for seeking help. This can help reduce stigma around mental health issues and increase awareness about the importance of seeking support.

The concrete example could be:

<p>Mindfulness exercises</p> <p>Trainers can lead young people through guided meditations or breathing exercises to help them learn how to stay present in the moment and manage their thoughts and emotions.</p>	<p>Physical activities</p> <p>Encouraging young people to engage in physical activities, such as sports, dance, or yoga, can help them develop physical fitness, increase their energy levels, and improve their mood.</p>	<p>Creative arts</p> <p>Engaging in creative activities, such as drawing, painting, or writing, can provide a healthy outlet for self-expression and help young people develop coping skills.</p>
<p>Group discussions</p> <p>Trainers can facilitate group discussions on topics related to mental health and wellness, such as self-care, stress management, and coping strategies.</p>	<p>Goal-setting exercises</p> <p>Helping young people set realistic and achievable goals, such as academic or personal goals, can help them build self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment.</p>	<p>Social activities</p> <p>Encouraging young people to participate in social activities, such as volunteer work or community events, can help them build positive relationships and a sense of connection with others.</p>
<p>Mind-body exercises</p> <p>Activities such as yoga, tai chi, or Pilates can help young people connect with their bodies and minds, reduce stress and anxiety, and improve overall well-being.</p>		



These are just a few examples of activities that trainers can use to promote well-being among young people. It's important to remember that every young person is unique and may respond differently to different activities, so it's important to offer a range of options and adapt the activities to meet their needs.

When building a course curriculum for young people affected by the pandemic, youth workers should keep in mind the following knowledge:

☺ **Understanding the impact of the pandemic**

Youth workers should have a good understanding of how the pandemic has affected young people in different ways. This includes understanding the economic, social, and psychological impact of the pandemic on young people.

☺ **Knowledge of mental health issues**

The pandemic has led to an increase in mental health issues among young people. Youth workers should have knowledge of common mental health issues and how to identify warning signs.

☺ **Trauma-informed practices**

The pandemic has been a traumatic experience for many young people. Youth workers should have knowledge of trauma-informed practices to help support young people in a sensitive and appropriate way.

☺ **Knowledge of digital tools**

The pandemic has led to an increased use of digital tools for education and communication. Youth workers should have knowledge of digital tools and how to use them effectively in the course curriculum.

☺ **Importance of self-care**

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of self-care for mental health and well-being. Youth workers should promote self-care practices and provide resources to support young people in their self-care routines.

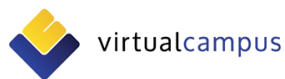
☺ **Flexibility and adaptability**

The pandemic has created a constantly changing environment, and youth workers should be flexible and adaptable in their course curriculum to meet the changing needs of young people.

By incorporating these knowledge areas into their course curriculum, youth workers can help support the well-being and success of young people affected by the pandemic.



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