

## **IMPACT OF THE COVID–19 PANDEMIC ON STUDENTS' WELL-BEING**

JANKA NOVÁKOVÁ\* – OLGA OROSOVÁ

*Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Faculty of Arts*  
*e-mail: [janka.novakova@student.upjs.sk](mailto:janka.novakova@student.upjs.sk)*

**Summary:** The Covid–19 pandemic has affected many people's well-being and mental health since it began in December 2019. This study aims to examine the impact of the pandemic on university students' well-being and mental health. The main method used was the Nominal Group Technique which helped to show the impact of the pandemic on three groups of university students. The study presents the impacts of the pandemic categorised into five dimensions of well-being, serious impacts and common impacts identified in the groups of respondents. The results highlight the need to introduce mental health support programmes and interventions to improve students' well-being and mental health in post-pandemic times.

**Keywords:** *Covid–19 pandemic, students' well-being, Nominal Group Technique*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Well-being is a positive state of mind experienced by individuals and societies. It is a construct that is determined by a person's social, economic, and environmental conditions [1] and represents an evaluation of their lives [2].

Viac & Fraser have proposed a comprehensive model of teacher well-being. According to this model, well-being is made up of four dimensions – social, subjective, cognitive and physical, as well as mental [3]. The social dimension of well-being is formed by the social interactions that an individual has established [4], while the subjective dimension includes the positive and negative evaluation of their life [5]. The cognitive dimension of well-being describes the process of acquiring knowledge, understanding, attention, memory, judgment, problem-solving and decision-making [6]. The physical and mental dimension of well-being is linked to stress-related impacts on health [3].

Many students perceived the Covid–19 pandemic as a threat to their health and social relationships [7]. Indeed, studies have shown that Covid–19 negatively influenced students' mental health [8] and that they had problems managing it. The life satisfaction of university students is disproportionately low when compared to the average for adults [9]. The pandemic had mainly social and economic impacts on students' lives [10] with many reporting loneliness and isolation. In particular, loneliness can be considered a strong predictor of mental health problems [11]. The impacts of the Covid–19 pandemic on well-being included elevated levels of stress, anxiety, sadness, isolation, financial insecurity and relocation. Due to isolation,

students tried to use video calls, phone calls and social gatherings, which partially minimised loneliness [8]. During the pandemic, many young people lost their jobs leading to financial insecurity. Housing insecurity was another impact accompanying the pandemic [12].

Based on this theoretical background, it is clear that the pandemic significantly affected students' lives. It is necessary to put more focus on mental health support programs in schools.

The objective of this article was to examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on university students' mental health and well-being.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The respondents were selected using a random selection method. The research sample consisted of 41 university students from Košice who were then divided into three groups. The first group (1) participated in the research in October 2022. This group consisted of 18 university students studying teaching (Bachelor's degree = 11; Master's degree = 7), 3 of them were men and 15 were women. The second group (2) participated in the research in December 2022. This group consisted of 12 university students also studying teaching (Bachelor's degree = 10; Master's degree = 2), 3 of them were men, 8 were women and 1 did not indicate gender. The third group (3) also participated in the research in December 2022. This group consisted of 12 university students, 2 of them were men and 10 were women. These students were in their third year of dentistry at the Faculty of Medicine. The data collection was conducted with the consent of the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts UPJŠ in Košice.

The main method used in this study was the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) – a methodical procedure that shows a group's opinion on a certain issue [13]. The technique was carried out in each group of respondents. In the current study, the NGT consisted of four steps. Firstly, there was a 15-minute "silent" brainstorming, where the respondents had to think about the question: "What impacts has the Covid-19 pandemic had on your mental health and well-being?" These impacts were subsequently recorded on a flipchart and then accompanied by a 20-minute discussion. In the last step, each respondent marked the impacts on a Likert scale (1-7; the midpoint was 4) according to severity. The following data analysis included two stages:

1. quantitative analysis
  - calculating the mean for each impact
  - the impact was considered to be serious when the mean exceeded 4
2. qualitative analysis
  - categorising the impacts from the flipchart into five categories by three mental health professionals
  - the five categories were social, subjective, cognitive, physical, and mental well-being (based on the Viac & Fraser model of well-being) with the fifth being the practical impacts on students' lives [3]
  - categorising the impacts from the flipchart into positive and negative by three mental health professionals.

## RESULTS

In total, there were 63 impacts recorded. After evaluating the severity of the impacts, 50 impacts were recognised as being serious ( $\bar{x} > 4$ ). 48 impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic negatively (N) affected the students' well-being while 15 impacts were positive (P).

The social dimension included 14 impacts (*Table 1*). The most notable impacts were social isolation (N), lack of contact with friends (N), spending more time with family (P), lack of communication skills (N), absence of family contacts (N), helping parents (P), problem establishing new contacts (N), aggression in society (N) and difficulty returning to society (N).

**Table 1**  
*Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the social dimension of well-being*

Group of respondents	Impacts	Mean	Positive-Negative
1	<i>social isolation</i>	6.33	negative
	<i>lack of contact with friends</i>	5.56	negative
	<i>spending more time with family</i>	5.17	positive
	<i>lack of communication skills</i>	4.72	negative
	<i>absence of family contacts</i>	4.67	negative
2	<i>lack of contact with friends</i>	5.75	negative
	<i>social isolation</i>	5.58	negative
	<i>spending time with family</i>	5.5	positive
	<i>helping parents</i>	4.75	positive
	<i>problem establishing new contacts</i>	4.33	negative
3	<i>social isolation</i>	6.08	negative
	<i>aggression in society</i>	5.75	negative
	<i>difficulty returning to society</i>	5.67	negative
	<i>loss of family</i>	3.25	negative

In the subjective dimension of well-being, there were 19 impacts (*Table 2*). The most notable impacts were valuing the simple things in life (P), uncertainty (N), loss of motivation to learn (N), fear (N), self-realisation (P), negative emotions from the surroundings (N), fear for the family (N), introversion (N), fear of information from the media (N), depression (N) and anxiety (N).

**Table 2**  
*Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the subjective dimension of well-being*

<b>Group of respondents</b>	<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Positive-Negative</b>
1	<i>valuing the simple things in life</i>	5.11	positive
	<i>uncertainty</i>	4.94	negative
	<i>loss of motivation to learn</i>	4.89	negative
	<i>fear</i>	4.56	negative
	<i>change in the ranking of values</i>	3.72	positive
	<i>arguments</i>	3.22	negative
	<i>underappreciation</i>	2.89	negative
2	<i>self-realization</i>	4.75	positive
	<i>negative emotions from the surroundings</i>	4.58	negative
	<i>anxiety at mass events</i>	3.83	negative
	<i>better self-control</i>	3.58	positive
3	<i>fear for the family</i>	5.33	negative
	<i>loss of motivation</i>	5.33	negative
	<i>introversion</i>	5.25	negative
	<i>fear of information from the media</i>	5.00	negative
	<i>loss of self-confidence</i>	4.83	negative
	<i>depression</i>	4.17	negative
	<i>anxiety</i>	4.17	negative
	<i>financial insecurity</i>	3.58	negative

The cognitive dimension of well-being included 8 impacts (*Table 3*). Each impact was serious and negative except for better school-life balance.

**Table 3**  
*Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the cognitive dimension of well-being*

<b>Group of respondents</b>	<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Positive-Negative</b>
1	<i>lack of practice</i>	5.83	negative
	<i>improving time-management</i>	4.83	positive
2	<i>improving time-management</i>	4.93	positive
	<i>better school-life balance</i>	4.83	positive
	<i>lack of information about the situation</i>	4.17	negative
	<i>negative evaluation of social networks</i>	4.17	negative
	<i>positive evaluation of online education</i>	4.08	positive
3	<i>lack of practice</i>	6.33	negative

In the field of physical and mental well-being, there were 11 impacts (*Table 4*). The most serious impacts were addiction to social networks (N), laziness (N), stress from online learning (N) and disruption of personal space during online education (N).

**Table 4**  
*Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the physical and mental dimension of well-being*

<b>Group of respondents</b>	<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Positive-Negative</b>
1	<i>addiction to social networks</i>	5.94	negative
	<i>laziness</i>	5.00	negative
	<i>stress from online learning</i>	5,22	negative
	<i>poorer sleep</i>	3.06	negative

Group of respondents	Impacts	Mean	Positive-Negative
2	<i>stress</i>	5.17	negative
	<i>laziness</i>	5.08	negative
	<i>disruption of personal space during online education</i>	4.67	negative
	<i>poorer sleep</i>	3.75	negative
3	<i>laziness</i>	5.17	negative
	<i>increased food consumption</i>	3.58	negative
	<i>increased alcohol consumption</i>	2.42	negative

In the fifth category, there were 11 impacts of the pandemic (Table 5). The most notable impacts were more time to work (P), stereotype (N), absence of face-to-face education (N), more physical activities (P), small space for online education (N), comfortable environment at home (P), more time in nature (P) and travel problems (N).

**Table 5**  
*The practical impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on well-being*

Group of respondents	Impacts	Mean	Positive-Negative
1	<i>more time to work</i>	4.94	positive
	<i>complications with visiting a doctor</i>	3.89	negative
	<i>lack of exercise</i>	3.67	negative
2	<i>stereotypes</i>	5.33	negative
	<i>absence of face-to-face education</i>	5.08	negative
	<i>more physical activities</i>	4.83	positive
	<i>small space for online education</i>	4.76	negative
	<i>comfortable environment at home</i>	4.75	positive
	<i>more time in nature</i>	4.67	positive

Group of respondents	Impacts	Mean	Positive-Negative
3	<i>stereotypes</i>	6.17	negative
	<i>travel problems</i>	4.83	negative

## DISCUSSION

The situation associated with the Covid-19 pandemic functioned as a threat to health and social relationships [7] and was negatively correlated with students' mental health and well-being [8]. For this reason, it was decided to examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on university students' well-being.

There were several impacts recorded in the research sample. The highest number of impacts were recorded in the subjective dimension of well-being with the least in the cognitive dimension. The most serious impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic were detected in the social and cognitive dimensions of well-being. The impacts in the social dimension were expected and are in line with theoretical knowledge [7, 8, 11].

The most serious positive impacts were in the fifth dimension of well-being where the practical impacts of the pandemic were categorised. The positive impacts included students having more time to work, more time for physical activities, more time spent in nature, comfortable environment at home.

The most common impacts identified in the three groups of respondents were social isolation and laziness. The impacts identified in at least two groups of respondents were lack of contact with friends, spending time with family, fear, loss of motivation, lack of practice, improving time management, poorer sleep, stress, and stereotypes.

Social isolation was perceived as having a serious impact on all the groups of respondents. In particular, the social isolation experienced during the pandemic predicts the mental health problems of students [8, 11].

In future studies, it is recommended to expand the research sample and use another or more complex research method. Although the impacts were categorized by mental health professionals, the model of well-being used for categorising was originally designed for teachers. Since the study included future teachers as well as future dentists, the model may not have fully captured the impacts.

## CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that students experienced several serious impacts on their well-being affecting their lives. Given this, it is necessary to put a greater focus on preventive and intervention programs aimed at improving well-being in post-pandemic times. Future teachers will create an important part of education and will affect the well-being of students. It is important to improve the well-being of teachers, ultimately helping to reduce the chance of pupils' risky behaviour.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency, Contract No. VEGA 1/0371/20 and APVV 15-0662.

**REFERENCES**

- [1] WHO, 2021. *Health Promotion Glossary of Terms*. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240038349>.
- [2] Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., Oishi, S.: Subjective Well-Being. The Science of Happiness and Life Satisfaction. In: Snyder, C. R., Lopez, S. J.: *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 63–73.
- [3] Viac, C., Fraser, P.: *Teachers' well-being: A framework for data collection and analysis*. OECD Education, 2020, 81 p. [https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/WKP\(2020\)1/En/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/EDU/WKP(2020)1/En/pdf).
- [4] McCallum, F., Price, D., Graham, A., Morrison, A.: *Teacher well-being: A review of the literature*. 2017. 60p.
- [5] OECD. *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*. OECD Publishing, Paris, 2013, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264191655-en>.
- [6] Van Horn, J. E., Taris, T. W., Schaufeli, W. B., Schreurs, P. J. G.: The structure of occupational well-being: A study among Dutch teachers. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 2004, 77 (3), pp. 365–375. <https://doi.org/10.1348/0963179041752718>
- [7] Schwartz, K. D., Exner-Cortens, D., McMorris, C. A., Makarenko, E., Arnold, P., Van Bavel, M. et al. COVID-19 and Student Well-Being: Stress and Mental Health during Return-to-school. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, 2021 March; 36 (2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08295735211001653>
- [8] Active Minds. *Covid-19 impact on college student mental health. Student Survey Infographic*. 2020. <https://www.activeminds.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Student-Survey-Infographic.pdf>.
- [9] Ainslie, D., Figueira, C., Shepherd, J., Vizard, T.: Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 4 February 2022. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/4february2022>
- [10] Patterson, Z. R., Gabrys, R. L., Prowse, R. K., Abizaid, A. B., Hellemans, G. C., McQuaid, R. J.: The Influence of COVID-19 on Stress, Substance Use, and Mental Health Among Postsecondary Students. *SagePub.*, 2021 May, 9 (5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968211014080>



- 
- [11] Hughes, G., Spanner, L.: *The University Mental Health Charter*. Leeds, Student Minds, 2019, 92 p.
  - [12] Eurofound. *Impact of COVID-19 on young people in the EU*. Publications office of the European Union: Luxembourg, 2021.
  - [13] Van de Ven, A. H., Delbecq, A. L.: The nominal group technique as a research instrument for exploratory health studies. *AMJ Public Health.*, 1972, 62 (3), pp. 337–342, <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.62.3.337>.