

EDU WORLD 2022**Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues****COVID-19 PANDEMIC EFFECTS AT STUDENTS**

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Abstract

The pandemic context determined by the COVID-19 virus, continued by various forms of virus mutation, has had a significant impact, at a global level, at different levels: economic, social, and of course at an individual state. Thru this paper we want to present our findings during working with students at the Career Counseling and Psychological Guidance Center, University of Pitesti. During the pandemic times, the students were learning in an on-line system that seemed to determine various acting results, and different manifestations, at a psychological and even at a behavioral level. Psychologists from the Career Counseling and Psychological Guidance Center, University of Pitesti, assured the specialized support by organizing special webinars, individual and group-work sessions, and various presentation of the scientific data, meant to provide a significant support context for those who were in need, affected by the pandemic or, to be more precise, by its effects at a social and individual level. This paper pinpoints the variables that seemed to determine the influences on perceived negative effects relating to the pandemic context, at students. In this paper, the link between attachment theory and Erikson's theory on psychosocial development, is also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Covid-19 pandemic effects has been wide studied from various perspectives, but still there are lots of questions, both in a medical or a psychological sense, that researchers all over the world are trying to answer. During online-learning, the students perceived negative effects on pandemic restrictions were observed, varying from absence of negative thoughts or feelings to depression and panic disorder symptoms. During the pandemic restrictions, psychologists from the Career Counseling and Psychological Guidance Center, University of Pitesti, organized special webinars, individual and group-work online sessions, to provide a significant support for those affected by the pandemic and its effects, at a social and on an individual level. Data observed and collected from these interactions were presented in this paper.

1.1. Implication at emotional level

The researchers found that a large proportion of people suffering from covid-19 were diagnosed with neurological or psychological disorders, the most common diagnosis being 17% anxiety, followed by mood disorders 14%. Neurological symptoms were found in 39% of people hospitalized with COVID-19, which were developed within the next 6 months after hospitalization and compared to the negative effects of a respiratory disease, the risk of developing a neurological or psychiatric illness is higher, meaning a percent of 44% of those with COVID-19 with greater risk for developing neurological issues, compared to those who had the flu.

The psychological stress caused by the pandemic context is an important part, which can be caused by "longer hospital stays and the characteristics of the disease itself" (Taquet et al., 2021). People who had a more severe form of the disease also had a higher risk of developing neurological complications. Various adverse neurological and psychiatric outcomes occurring after COVID-19 have been predicted and reported. Overall, COVID-19 was associated with increased risk of neurological and psychiatric outcomes. Another study conducted in 2020 states that between 26-33% of survivors report symptoms of depression, 38-44% anxiety and 22-24% post-traumatic stress disorder (Taquet et al., 2021).

Anxiety and mood disorders can also be the result of a change in people's lifestyle during the pandemic, the influence of daily stress on adjusting to the conditions imposed, the excessive isolation adopted by certain people (for real reasons - several periods in that people have experienced certain conditions that they have not been able to identify and have voluntarily isolated themselves in the belief that they are suffering from COVID-19, or for reasons of anxiety, reaching high levels in this context).

2. Problem Statement

One of the main problems related to the pandemic context was to understand the triggers that could lead to organic and/or emotional vulnerabilities. Medical scientific approaches often indicated physical, nervous or emotional issues related to Covid-19 infection, developed long after the patients were medically cured (Marshall, 2020), especially at the increased risk groups such as students (Pedrosa et al., 2020).

Although emotional triggers are referred to even in medical research, at the time this research was made, there were small evidence on psychologic elements that could be linked with developing intense negative reaction to pandemic context. Research on attachment in adult significant relationships also has highlighted the connection between attachment and emotion (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 2000). More on this topic, when adults become distressed in the face of a threat, scientific literature sustain that they may seek out an attachment figure to regain an emotional sense of felt security (Simpson et al., 2010).

Emotional secure attachment should be understood as the capacity of growing healthy relationships with significant ones, following the natural course of growing up, not only in a physical sense but also from an emotional perspective, knowing that this should action as a possible coping resource during provocative times.

From this, we assumed that not having a secure parental attachment level, should be one of the factors that could determine and/or maintain the negative emotional reactions during provocative times, such as Covid-19 pandemic context, at students. Also, some current scientific data were also interested on this topic, highlighting this possible variable (attachment style) as being concerned when it comes to dealing with unexpected (Bussone et al., 2020).

In this paper we evaluated the parental attachment level of the participants not the current marital/couple satisfaction, although the quality of our early attachments profoundly influences our relationships later in life (Simpson et al., 2010).

Thus, we considered important to obtain significant data on this topic, having as participants students from different specialisations from the University of Pitesti.

The research was made during the pandemic context, respectively online study, therefore the activities led by the Career Counselling and Psychological Guidance Centre, University of Pitesti were conducted exclusively online, in form of webinars or individual/group counselling.

In this paper, the link between attachment theory and Erikson's theory on psychosocial development, is discussed. Erik Erikson is known for his outstanding professional work in the field of human development research (Maree, 2021) being a continuator of psychoanalytic theory, which he nuanced in a personal way, by emphasizing the socio-cultural impact on human development. Erikson sustained that the most important developmental events do not take place strictly during childhood but may occur in other various significant psychosocial disorders caused by current life stress factors (Sarang et al., 2019) such as pandemic context caused by Sars-Cov 2. Erikson is one of the pioneers of theories sustaining the continuous human development throughout its entire life. On the other hand, he acknowledges the fundamental importance of the early life years in human becoming, promoting the idea of the unconscious and its determinism in the general functioning of man.

Erikson theory proposed as a central point the idea of "identity crisis". According to him, in each of the 8 evolutionary stages, man will go through a period of developing crisis, which is based on individual potential in relation to the real challenges of the socio-cultural environment. Thus, as a person gets older, he or she will face new, challenging contexts/people/situations, whether he or she has surpassed the previous ones. However, the outdated aspects and / or episodes will be kept in the personality structure of the subject and will directly and indirectly influence the way of solving / adapting

to the new requirements imposed by the social context in each distinct stage. It thus becomes fundamental for the balance and good person logical integration, to overcome the tasks or challenges of the current stages, to allow the right adjustment in the face of the difficulties imposed by future stages.

3. Research Questions

Having a clear view on the psycho-social developmental theory, we wanted to understand how this can sustain an explanation for the negative outcome associated with the pandemic context, at students.

We understood students age as being representative for the 6th stage on the developmental theory according to Erikson, meaning 20-35 years old, having a specific intense need, defined by Erikson as an existential stage crisis: intimacy vs. isolation. Erikson referred to “crises” as being a chance or an obstacle, depending on various social and personal factors, that could lead a person to a next existential level by gaining and maintaining psycho-emotional balance, or by blocking or negatively consuming a man’s personal resources.

Understanding that the issue of intimacy¹ it’s of a big importance at this stage, not only at a personal relationship level but also at a social one (Tackie, 2022) we have measured if there could be found connections between being in a significant intimate relation and the perceived effects of the pandemic restrictions, and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results on Attachment style questionnaire

Participants	Secure Attachment	Avoidant Attachment	Ambivalent Attachment
Men	16%	36%	52%
Women	19%	44%	37%
In a relationship	39%	16%	55%

Table 2. Extraversion / Introversion vs. Perceived negative effects of pandemic restrictions

Participants	Extraversion	Introversion
Men	64%	16%
Women	72%	25%
Perceived negative effects from total	46%	37%

4. Purpose of the Study

Thru this research we wanted to observe students during COVID-19 pandemic period, in an effort of understanding the possible existing correlations between various variables such as gender differences (Burani & Nelson, 2020), attachment style and specific temperamental traits. All the activities presented in this paper were organised and conducted by the Career Counseling and Psychological Guidance Center, University of Pitesti, meaning online work activities such as webinars on various interesting subjects, individual counselling, or group counselling. This paper is based on Erik Erikson theory on

¹ Erikson described intimate relationships as those characterized by closeness, honesty, and love. Romantic and sexual relationships can be an important part of this stage of life, but intimacy is more about having close, loving relationships - <https://www.verywellmind.com/intimacy-versus-isolation>

psycho-social development, thru this study wanting to understand and furthermore to explain the possible link between theory and practice, during pandemic times.

5. Research Methods

In order to evaluate the emotional state of the students, we applied a questionnaire for determine the extravert or introvert type of appurtenance and an parental attachment questionnaire (IPPA), in order to determine possible factors of influence on the perceived negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic context.

For this research we have collected data from students participating at webinars and work-sessions organized by the Career Counseling and Psychological Guidance Center, University of Pitesti, and that were implied in a romantic partnership, at that moment. During these online meetings we promoted free speech among participants and supported them to develop their conscious analytic abilities to indicate the missing pieces that they felt in relation with themselves, manly their unsatisfied needs, thoughts, fears and frustrations or somatic reactions (Terluin et al., 2006), during pandemic restrictions. The research was based on 108 respondents from various specializations from the University of Pitesti that completed both questionnaires, but also based on the information taken by observing them and their answers, while working together. They were invited to self-evaluate their couple satisfaction where it was the case, on a Likert scale from 1-5 (1 – I want to break-up, 2- unsatisfied, 3- it could be better, 4- satisfied, 5- very satisfied).

6. Findings

Based on the collected data, we have found some important information relating the factors that could influence the perceived effects of the pandemic restrictions, at students.

Based on the questionnaire addressed to the participants, results are showing that students who felt the pandemic context as being very restrictive, developing intense negative toughs and feelings associated this period (sadness, fury, aggressively, frustration - anxiety and depression symptoms).

Moreover, from Table 1 it can be seen a really important information, respectively that the emotional attachment issues (36% - avoidant, 52% - ambivalent) seemed to correlate with experiencing increased negative thoughts, signs, and symptoms specific to anxiety disorders, at students, during COVID-19 pandemic context. From Table 2 from a total of 108 participants, the negative effects at an emotional level were intensely perceived by a total of 83% of respondents. According to previous parental attachment scores obtained by the participants, we can see that there is a link between parental attachment and the perceived negative effects linked to the pandemic context, resented by the students at an emotional level.

An interesting finding was made linking current social life of the respondents with the intensity of the negative felt symptoms. Based on the respondents' answers, we observed a significant connection between the students who claimed that they were satisfied in the relationships they had at the time (meaning they had a good perceived level of intimacy) and the low level of frustration regarding the

pandemic restrictions. We can link that to Erikson developmental theories that suggested as main crisis for 20-35 years group being the privacy vs. isolation theme.

According to Erik Erikson's theory, at youth age, the main interest (crisis) is forming and maintaining intimate relationships (Gold & Rogers, 2016), not being able to form and keep stable and satisfying relationships in an intimate sense, will lead to social isolation, thus risking developing various types of dysfunctions.

Finally, there were no significant differences on perceived negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic context between extraverts vs. introverts – Table 2, meaning that there were no significant correlations between temperamental traits and the impact of pandemic restrictions. Also, there were no significant differences between genders – Table 1, on the perceived effects of the pandemic restrictions.

Based on the collected data, we can conclude that regarding the students participating in the research, it's not about the temperamental traits, that indicates the amount of energy and specific way of manifesting it, or the number of social connections that a person might have, but it's about how people choose to spend their energy and the quality of one's relationships, that seemed to make a big difference on the perceived effects of the pandemic restrictions.

As the scientific literature is showing, regardless the negative experience that one might live, such as school expulsion (Nagaratnam & Yeo, 2018), relationships that are perceived as providing moral support and guidance can make a positive difference on the impact an objective negative experience might have.

In addition, we support further research on various methods and perspectives for supporting the subjects dealing with lack of significant emotional relationship quality from attachment theory approach, such as humanistic interventions, pinpointing the role of mindfulness technique (Yang & Oka, 2022).

7. Conclusions

Based on the findings presented in this paper, we can conclude that the Covid-19 pandemic effects were noticed at different age groups, having various manifestation at a neurological, physical, emotional, or mental level. At students, there were some important links observed, between the parental attachment, couple satisfaction and the perceived negative effects of the pandemic context.

Thus, according to the data of the research sample, we must highlight the importance of social needs satisfaction at young people that seemed to make a difference between types of reactions and the intensity of negative symptoms felt by students, related to the pandemic context.

However, although the secure emotional parental attachment seemed to have a big impact on the way students perceived the pandemic restrictions that should not be mistaken with the emotional dependencies that could have negative outcomes. In Erikson's view, prolonged adolescence can create a significant gap between psychosomatic and psychosocial maturation, with direct negative effects on personality development. On the other hand, a prolonged childhood may participate in human cognitive development (through the constant support and guidance provided by significant primary figures) but will predispose the future adult to the risk of being emotionally underdeveloped (Hochberg & Konner, 2020), through lack of autonomy and learning from direct, unmediated adult experiences, the prolonged adolescent could have a direct significant negative impact on his future.

Therefore, this paper pinpoints the importance of emotional secure attachment that can action as a life preserver (lifeline) mainly during provocative times, but that should not be misunderstood with relationship dependency or co-dependency.

Although research-based outcomes are indicating towards some gender differences when it comes to anxiety and panic disorder based on our findings, the somatic symptoms were being present also at female as at men, and the variables that we referred to in this study (the presence of the absence of the secure attachment) may indicate an answer for what mechanism(s) could contribute to the impact of felt anxiety, at young adults, regardless their gender.

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