



YOUTH MENTAL WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE DURING COVID-19

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Youth mental
well-being

Life course theory and
youth development

Resilience

Impact of COVID-19 on
youth well-being



WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH? (WHO)

- Integral part of health and well-being
- Capital/resource that helps us to live in the present context and face different life situations and the demands they set
- Has intrinsic and instrumental value
- Underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we are in
 - Crucial for personal, community and socio-economic development
- Determined by a complex interplay of individual, social and structural stresses (societal circumstances) and vulnerabilities – and skills!
 - Every day we make numerous decisions regarding our mental health.



WHAT IS MENTAL WELL-BEING?

- Closely related to psychological well-being, subjective well-being, life satisfaction – and mental health (e.g., Forgeard et al., 2000; McGillray & Clarke, 2006)
- Preventing risk factors leading to sicknesses and promoting factors that support mental health add up to well-being
- Enables us to cope with normal life stresses, realize our abilities, learn and work productively, and contribute to the community
- Ability to recognize and use resources for maintaining mental health and managing life and its changes and challenges (Rider et al., 2021; Mendolia et al., 2021)
 - > more general and dynamic than mental health -> can change daily -> suitable for study of well-being in external shocks (e.g., pandemic).
- Includes also coping and resilience in mental challenges or crises (WHO, 2020)
- Mental wellbeing is built on skills, some of which may be stronger than others.



WITH THIS IN MIND, DRAW A LIFE PATH.

Take a minute to think about your life as it is now – what are the major or most important experiences or events that have been meaningful to you?

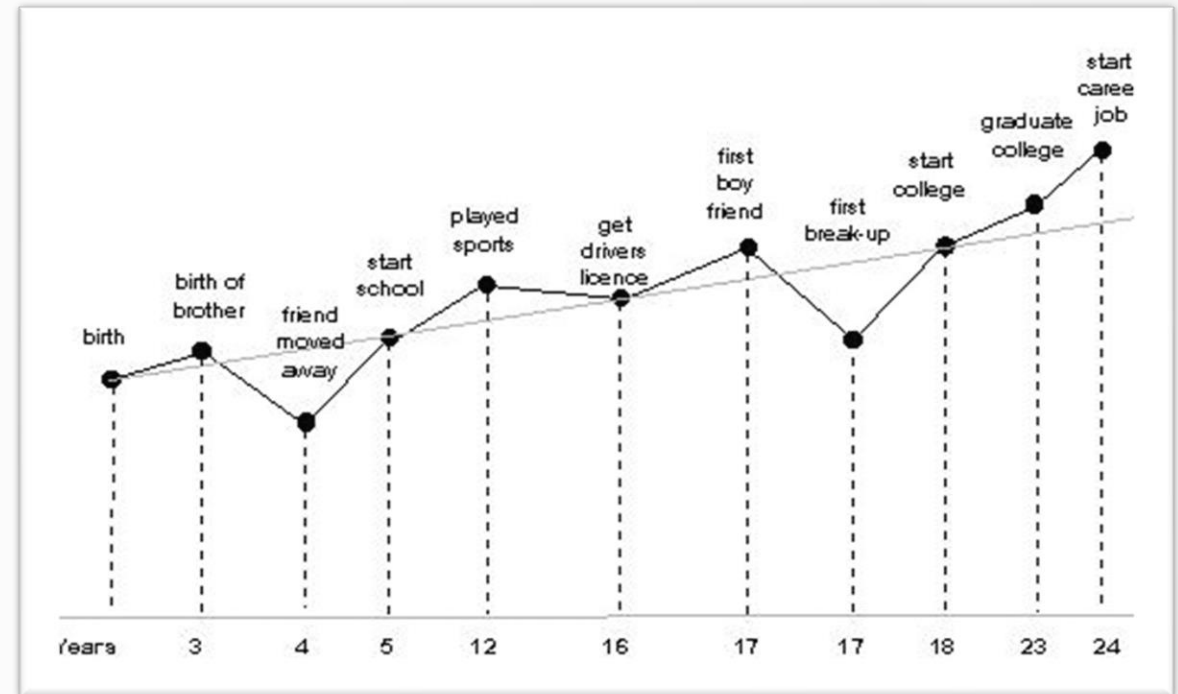
How would you describe your coping strategy for negative experiences?

Your good moments in life?

Your most important things in life?

Your dreams: big and small!

What has influenced you to become who you are today?





PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

- Many external and internal factors protect mental health -> need to be developed
- Our everyday needs include at least:
 - Intimacy with others
 - Being accepted and valued
 - Belonging in a community
 - Opportunities to live fully through play, work, studies or some other activity
 - Independence
 - Basics such as food, water and shelter
- Fulfilled needs support well-being - unfulfilled needs cause daily worry and anxiety
- The more important the need, the more notable the effects



Are things happening without you being able to affect anything?

Are your everyday needs satisfied?

Are you constantly feeling low?

What should you change to satisfy them?

“LIFE IS WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU WHILE YOU’RE BUSY MAKING OTHER PLANS”

Having an active role towards a life that looks like your own.

What makes you feel good? What works well in your life?

JOHN LENNON

Everyday small acts and changes.

Are things happening without you being able to affect anything? What gives you strength? What skills do you have?

Are things happening without you being able to affect anything?



DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

- Developmental tasks of different life stages accomplished (Havighurst)
- Normal cognitive development (Piaget)
- Independence, stable identity, self and self-beliefs
- Social relationships
- Individual psychological and biological factors (e.g., emotional skills, genetics, substance use)
- Exposure to unfavorable social, economic, geopolitical and environmental circumstances (e.g., poverty, inequality)
- Risks in developmentally sensitive periods especially detrimental
- Protective factors occur throughout our lives and strengthen resilience

**High level of positive
mental health**
(flourishing)

Moderate levels of emotional,
psychological and social
well-being, mental health
difficulties

High levels of emotional,
psychological and social well-being
and positive mental health

**Mental
health
disorder**

**No mental
health
disorder**

Low levels of emotional,
psychological and social
well-being, mental health
difficulties

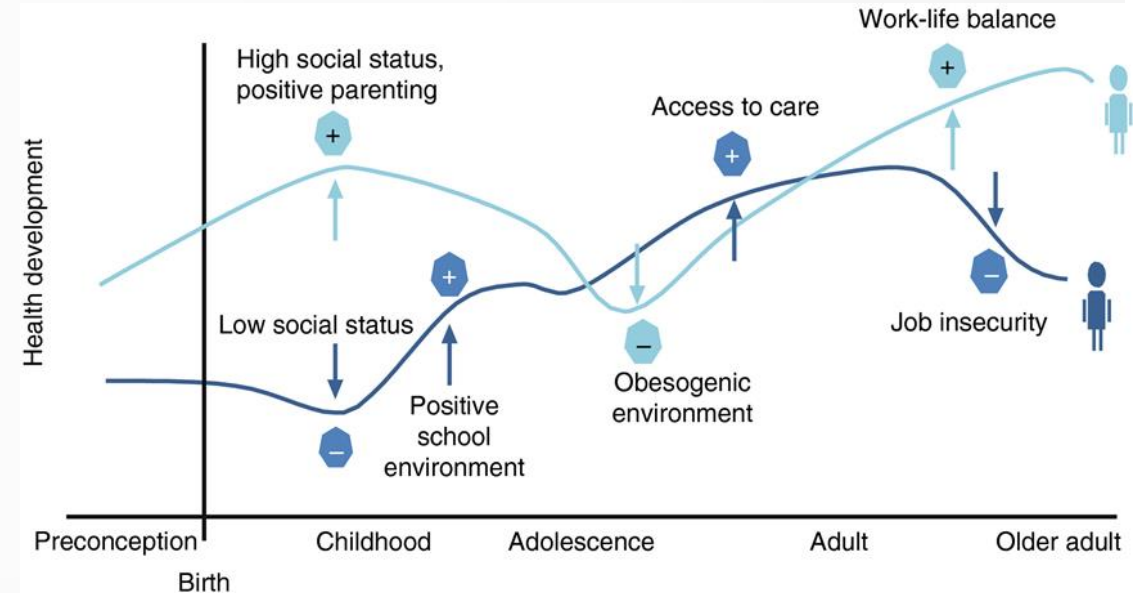
Low levels of emotional,
psychological and social well-being
and moderate levels of positive
mental health

**Low level of positive
mental health**
(languishing)



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONTEXT: CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

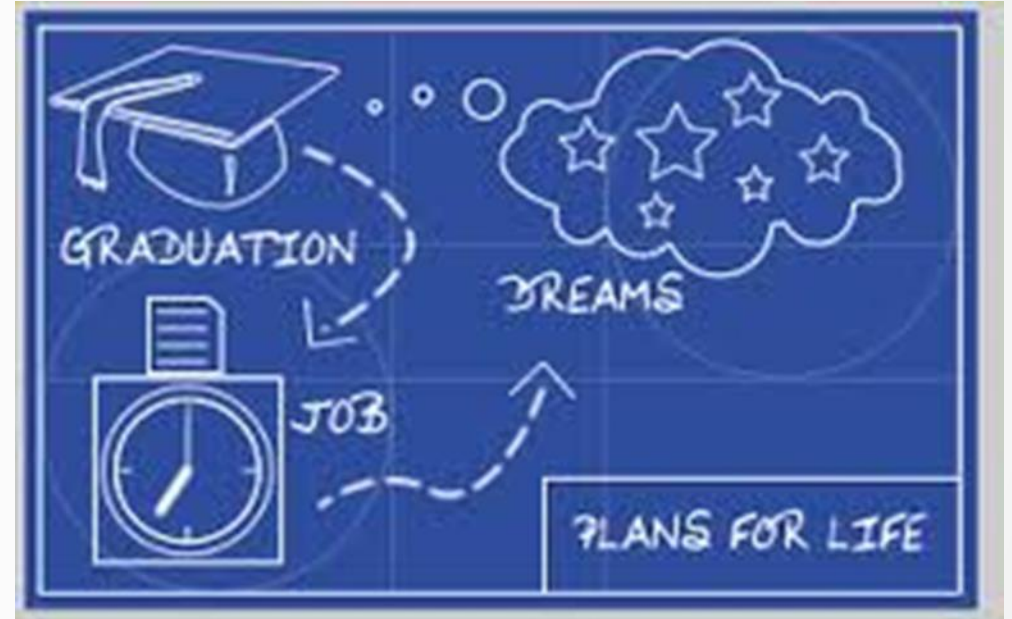
- Optimal growth circumstances in the environment support mental well-being and development
 - nurture, safety, security, warmth, etc.
 - e.g. young people; family social relationships
- Context promotes, hinders and directs (social) *needs* that direct behavior, e.g., fit between
 - contextual characteristics and expectations (at home, at school, in the neighbourhood)
 - youth capability, motivation and temperament (Chess & Thomas, 1999)
 - Understanding what contextual factors support growth at each moment -> never optimal





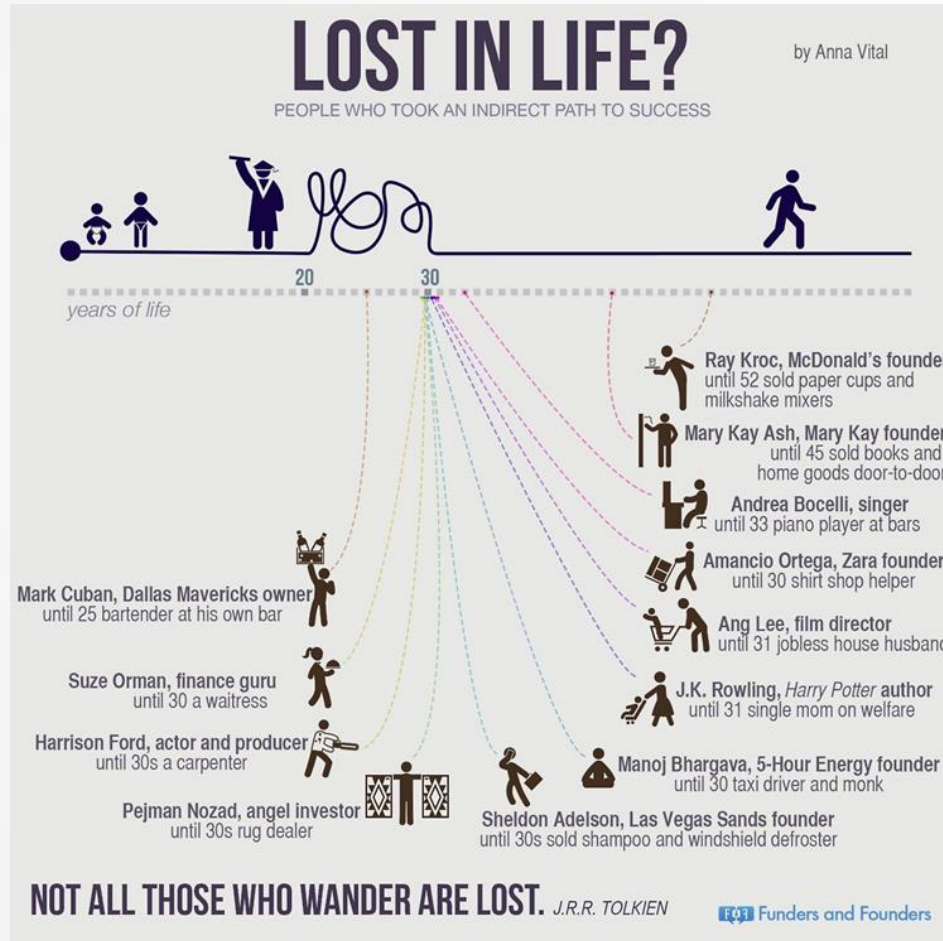
TRANSITION(S) TO ADULTHOOD

- Time of multiple, simultaneous changes
 - Demographically 'dense' phase (18-30 years)
- Two main transitions for typical adult roles
 - Discrete social and demographic passages
 - Educational system -> labor market
 - Parental household -> own household
- Important developmental tasks (Arnett, 2000; Lee & Mortimer, 2009; Serido et al., 2013)
 - Source of self-confidence and life management (Arnett, 2004; Cunnien et al., 2009)
 - Failure affecting well-being and other developmental outcomes (Danzinger & Ratner, 2010)





THE THIRD DECADE OF LIFE



"The Age 30 Deadline" (Arnett, 2004)

Age 25: most young adults achieved self-sufficiency, established their own household, obtained a full-time job and engaged in close interpersonal relationships (Wald & Martinez, 2003)

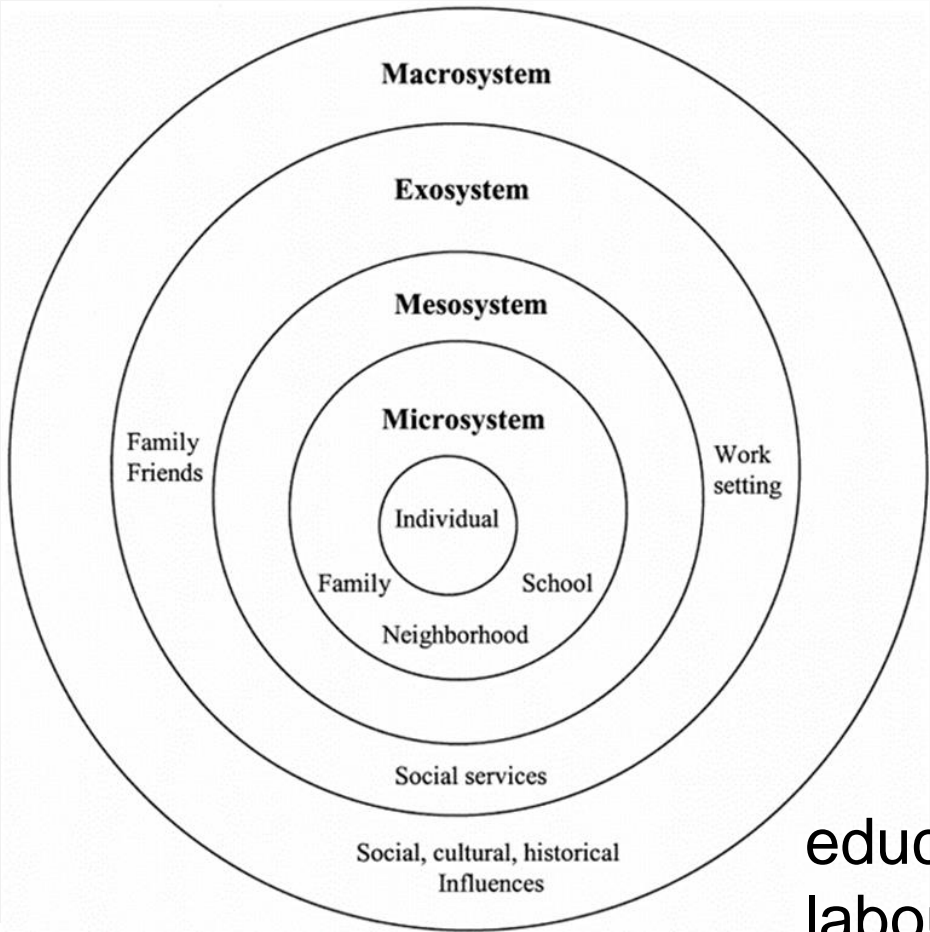
Gap years, entrance exams, labor market challenges, postponing family transitions.

Prolonged life course phase between ages 18-25(~30); emerging adulthood

Transition to work/adulthood extended and fragmented

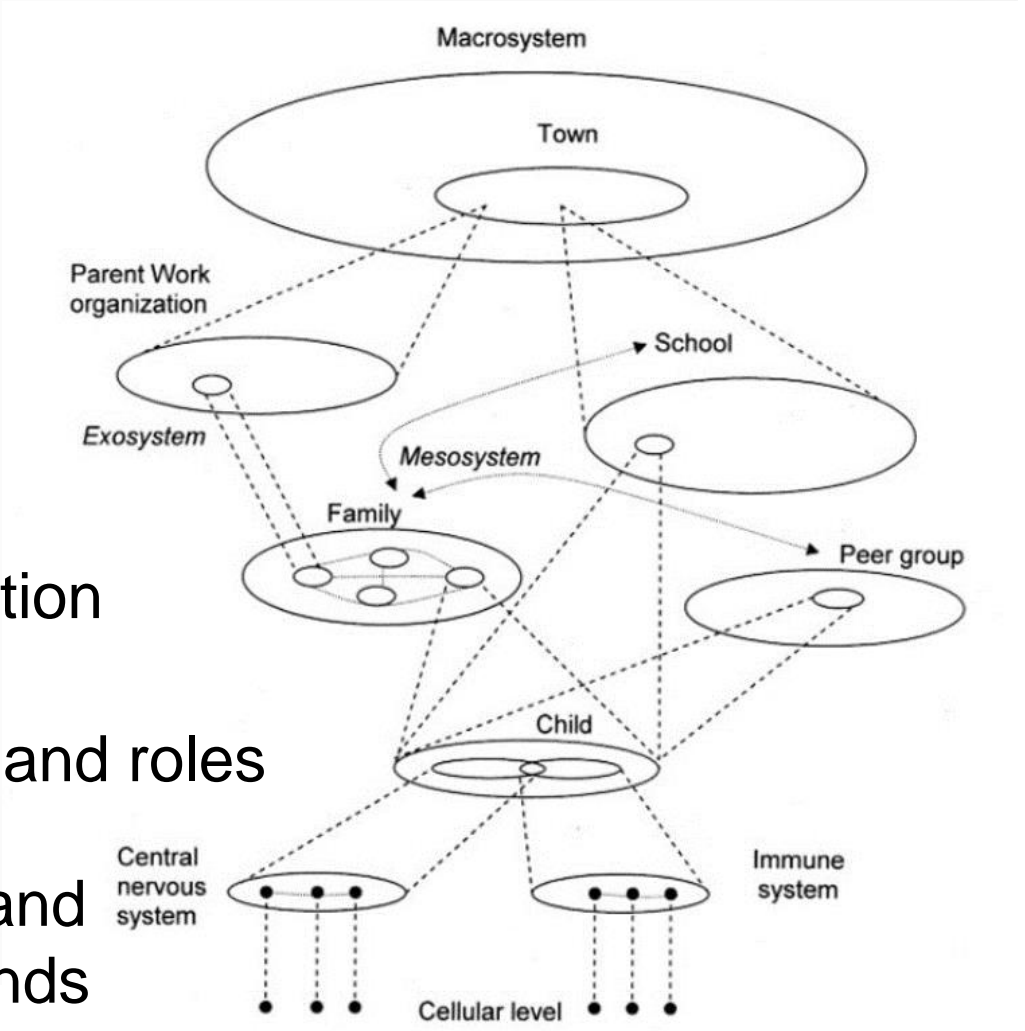


CURRENT CHALLENGES



global
cultural
social
family institution
diverse norms and roles

education structure and
labour market demands





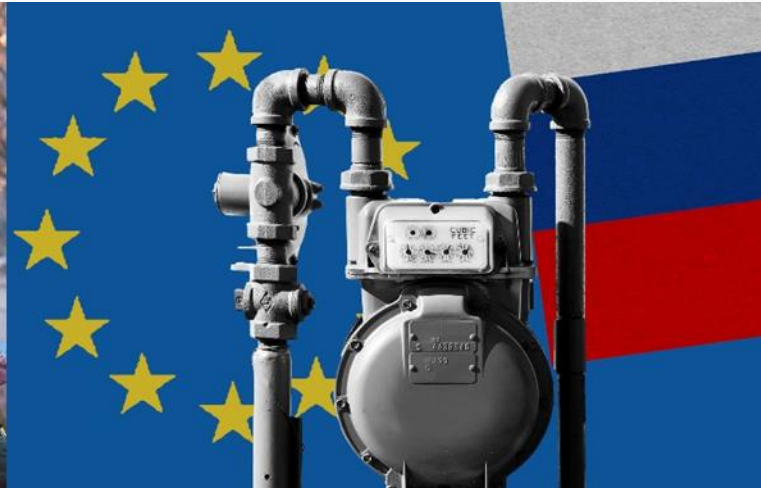
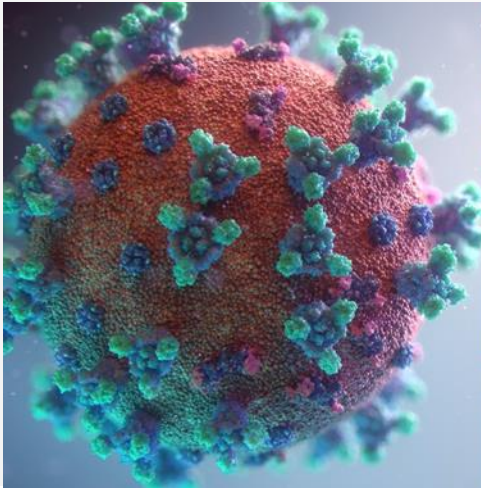
CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

- Restructuring of labor markets and macroeconomic conditions
 - Past economic crises; most strongly struck by the 2008 crisis (Brüggen et al., 2017); mental health consequences
 - Irregular and part-time employment possibilities in the late 2000s
 - “Hard times” led to a downturn in personal financial situations
 - (Economically) vulnerable (Gesthuizen & Scheepers, 2010; Rothwell & Han, 2010)
- Changes in young adults’ financial resources due to irregular and uncertain income
 - Pandemic has generated financial and employment challenges on emerging adults
 - 43% unemployed facing trouble making ends meet (Eurofound, 2021)
- Affecting the transition to adulthood and developmental task timing (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011)
 - Challenges in attaining economic stability and self-sufficiency



GENERATION OF YOUTH IN EUROPE TODAY

- ❖ Most hard-hit by the current economic crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic
- ❖ The war and raised inflation rates
- ❖ Rising household debt in many European countries
- ❖ The share of instant loans rising
- ❖ Young people struggle with their finances





COVID-19 AND EMERGING ADULTS

1. Developmental tasks

- Crisis effects vary according to life course stage (Elder & Shanahan, 2006): crucial developmental period
- Developmental task progression (Ranta, 2015; Recksiedler & Landberg 2021)

2. Short- and long- term mental health problems

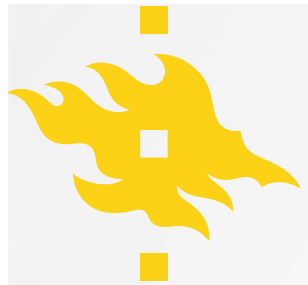
- Anxiety (20%), stress, depression (25%) (Czeisler et al., 2020; Racine et al., 2021; Santomauro et al., 2021); twice as many pre-pandemic
- Psychosocial adjustment (pandemic-related stress may exacerbate adjustment difficulties over time). (Bernasco et al. 2021; Wright et al., 2021)
- Emotional security and psychological safety at stake





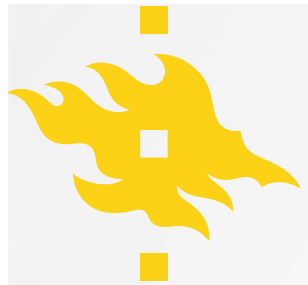
WHY DOES THE PANDEMIC AFFECT YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH?

- Increased loneliness while striving for autonomy and belonging (Janssens et al., 2021)
- The fewer social connections, the higher the sense of loneliness (Sabato et al., 2021)
- Loneliness predicts increased income and career concerns among young adults aged 18-29 (Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom)
- While other predictors varied in each country, as well as the levels of experienced income and career concerns, loneliness was the only consistent predictor in all countries for both concerns.
- Highlights how isolating the pandemic was for individuals from all three countries, but also how effective loneliness can be to hinder confidence in one's financial and career development trajectories.



PERCEIVED STRESS AND COPING

- The higher the stress during the pandemic; the larger the changes in mental health (Achterberg et al., 2021)
- Instability, helplessness and difficulties in achieving ambitions and future planning (Di Blasi et al., 2016)
- Loss of generalized trust (interconnection in society) and withdrawal from society related to well-being (Huang et al., 2011); decline in 2008 recession (Ervasti et al., 2019).
- Lack of opportunities on a continual basis (in important transitional domains) causes constraints in further developmental tasks.
 - Current developmental theories emphasize that experiences in one life domain can impact events and opportunities in another life domain as development *cascades* across different domains and time (e.g., Dodge et al., 2009; Masten et al., 2005)
- Might result in identity establishment and individualization problems, which make youth passive to social change and fearful of the future with risks and uncertainty.



HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE COPE?

- Building and reflecting one's hopes about the future.
 - Imposed constraints and opportunities on individual agency (Salmela-Aro, 2009)
 - Evaluations based on causal attributions: optimistic or task-avoidant (Nurmi, 1991)
 - Confronting challenges and handling stress.
- Different ways of anticipating and reacting to change (e.g. Pearlin et al., 1981):
 - For some, they signify challenges: increased agency;
 - To others, they mean defeat, stress and insecurity: loss of agency
- → The psychological effect of events depends on how they are perceived (the cognitive judgement of events, Lazarus stress appraisal theory)



UNDERSTANDING THE CRISIS EFFECTS

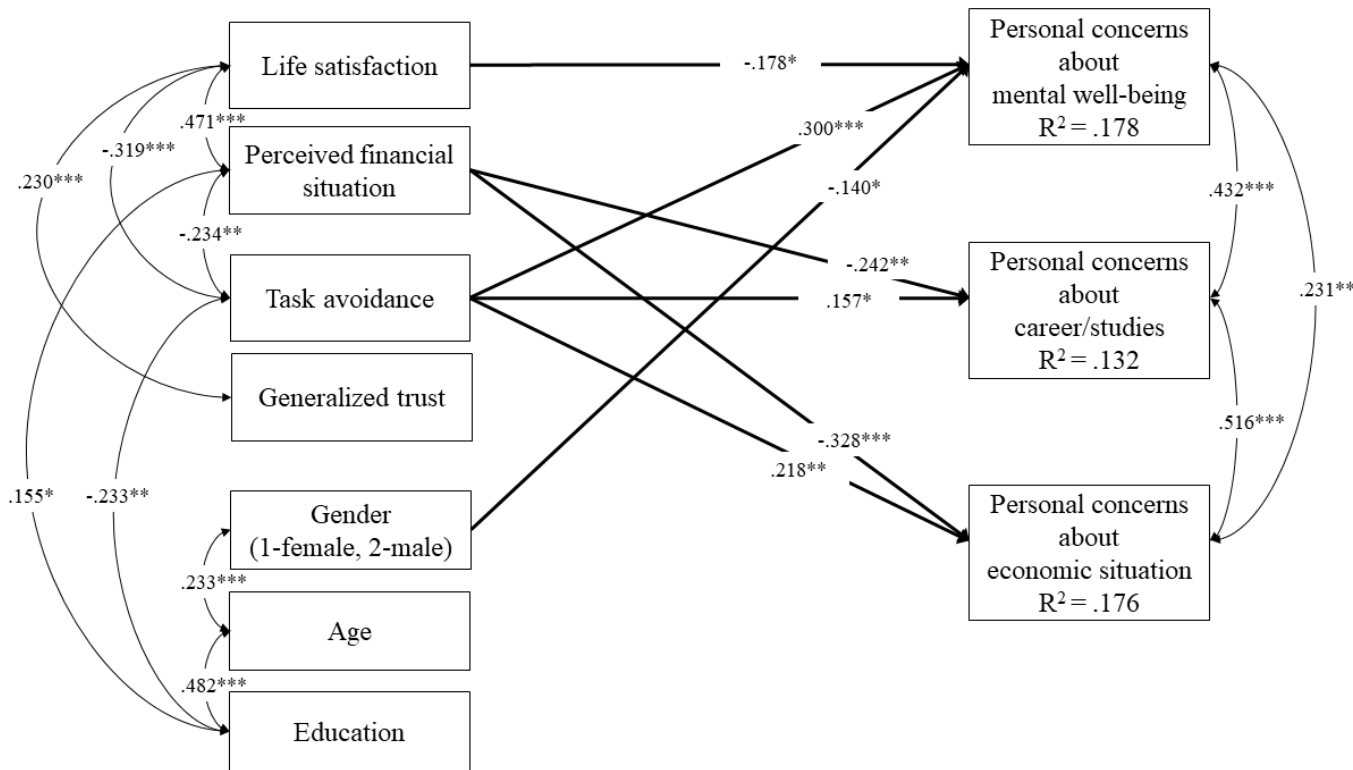


Figure 1. Predicting personal concerns among 18–29-year-olds ($n = 216$). *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Young adults more concerned in all domains, also lower life satisfaction and financial situation.

Current low life satisfaction related to mental health concerns, and lower perceived financial situation was related to concerns about career/studies and financial situation.

Task avoidance related to more frequent concerns in all domains, whereas generalized trust and education were not.

Task avoidant youth less educated and perceived their life satisfaction and financial situation as weaker.

Young women were more concerned about their mental well-being.



- Inequality of COVID-19 effects from an economic and demographic perspective
- Young adults exhibited significant personal concerns in diverse age-related life domains: economic situation and career and studies -> holistic well-being
- Young adults' task avoidance, was related to more frequent concerns in all domains (economic situation, mental well-being, and career/studies), life satisfaction, economic situation and education.
- Trust in education -> mastery and control -> well-being -> lack of hopelessness (Ross & Huber, 1985) - > explanation for negative relation between education and task avoidance
- Personal concerns not predicted by education: the pandemic was a threat to all of us



“CONFLICT, STRAIN, AND ADAPTATION” (SERIDO, 2020)

- Unpredictable economic, social, and political consequences
- Young millennials as the “Lost” (Hur, 2018), “Unluckiest” Generation
- Attributional strategies: present situation as something out of own control, expecting future failure (Elliott, 2008).
- Young adults are expected to manage constantly changing circumstances, increase flexibility and tolerate insecurity
- Individual and social factors supporting well-being
- Urgent need for individual support and strong youth policies for youth empowerment, mental health, and career advancement in the pandemic aftermath.
- Supporting emotional and social resources to strive in educational and career contexts at an early stage
- Supporting youth agency and self confidence





RESILIENCE AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR?

- Emotional and personal factors and inherent psychological resources (Angulo-Ruiz & Pergelova, 2015; Lusardi et al., 2010)
 - Pessimistic youth prone to low levels of agentic behavior tend to see a crisis as uncontrollable (Ranta et al., 2020)
- Psychological resilience = psychological resource of "bouncing back"
 - Coping with challenges, supporting well-being, and recovering from stress (Smith et al., 2013)
 - Important quality particularly during the pandemic (Donisi et al., 2021; Jacobson et al., 2021; Yildirim et al., 2021)
 - But is it a personal trait or characteristic (Luthar et al., 2000) or a dynamic process activated in difficult times, and which requires different protecting factors? (Liu et al., 2017)



SOCIETAL CONCERN OF YOUTH

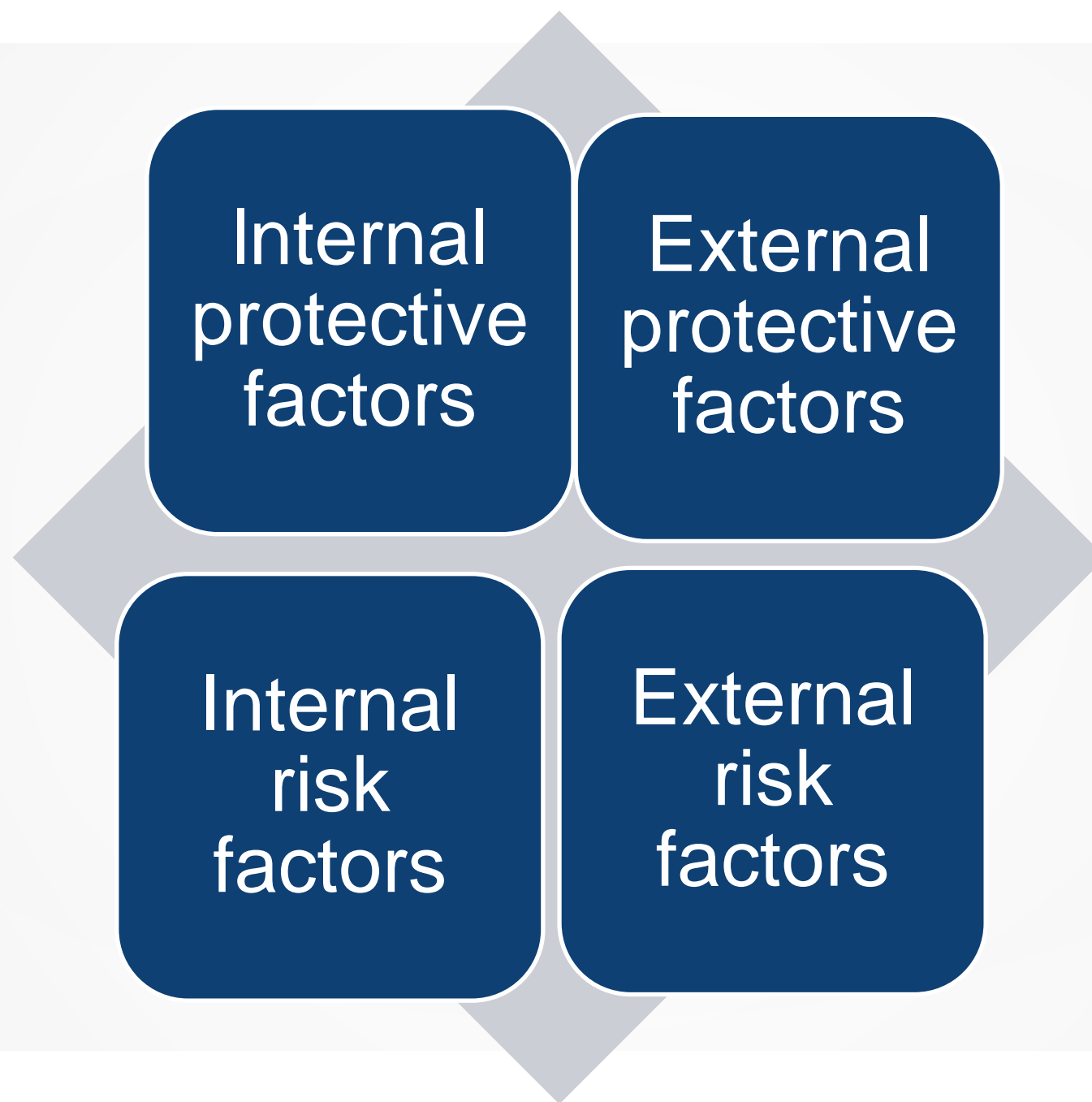
- The need for action on mental health is indisputable and urgent.
- Young people who had more difficulties and vulnerabilities before the pandemic tend to be those with higher risk of suffering during the pandemic.
- Universal concern of the effects of the pandemic on emerging adults.
- A trait alone is insufficient to withstand the magnitude nature of its impact.
- In extreme conditions, such as a pandemic, resilience not sufficient to overcome the actual and perceived impact and to withstand the extreme hardship and uncertainty.
- The pandemic decreased young people's ability to adapt to the present situation, this being a risk factor for mental health (Browne et al., 2022).



GROUP WORK: PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS FOR YOUTH MENTAL WELL-BEING

- Protective factors maintain health, strengthen performance and help us cope with hardship and crises. By strengthening protective factors, we support well-being.
 - Buffer against vulnerability and compensate the influence of risk factors
- Risk factors threaten continuity of life, weaken our performance and increase insecurity
 - The more simultaneous risk factors, the stronger their impact
- Internal and external
- Some protective and risk factors relate to our personal characteristics and thoughts, some to society, culture and external circumstances
- We have no influence over some of the protective and risk factors, such as genetics

Which protective and risk factors in young people's life can you identify?





EXAMPLES

INTERNAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- looking after physical health
- ability to verbally express emotions
- talking about worries
- ability to establish and maintain friendships
- self-fulfilment through e.g. hobbies
- self-appreciation and acceptance
- ability to solve problems and conflicts

OTHER FACTORS

- sense of acceptance • genetics • early relationships

EXTERNAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- family and friends
- attending school and studying
- support of safety net and good relationships with people in the safety net
- ability and courage to seek timely help from professional services
- safe growing environment

OTHER FACTORS

- parents' work and income • being heard



INTERNAL RISK FACTORS

- vulnerable self-esteem

Poor relationships with friends and family

- isolation and alienation from familiar relationships
- sense of helplessness

talking about worries

- sense of inferiority

OTHER FACTORS

- sense of acceptance • genetics • early relationships

EXTERNAL RISK FACTORS

- separation and losses
- violence
- bullying
- alcohol and other substance use

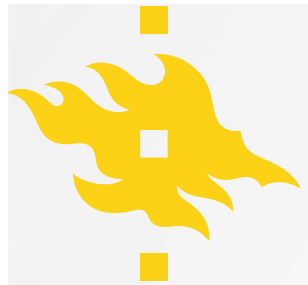
Harmful living environment

OTHER FACTORS

- unemployment or risk of it
- mental health problems in the family

Abuse

Substance abuse



SOME FURTHER READING

Masten & Obradovic (2008) Disaster Preparation and Recovery: Lessons from Research on Resilience in Human Development. *Ecology and Society* 13(1).

Masten & Motti-Stefanidi (2020) Multisystem Resilience for Children and Youth in Disaster: Reflections in the Context of COVID-19. *Adversity and Resilience Science* 1:95–106

Nuckols, J. A., Silinskas, G., Ranta, M., & Wilska, T.-A. (2023). Income and Career Concerns Among Emerging Adults From Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom During COVID-19. *Emerging Adulthood*.

Ranta, M., Silinskas, G., & Wilska, T.-A. (2020), Young adults' personal concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic in Finland: an issue for social concern, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 40 No. 9/10, pp. 1201-1219.

Silinskas, G., Ranta, M., & Wilska, T.-A. (2021). Financial behaviour under economic strain in different age groups: Predictors and change across 20 years. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 44, 235–257.

Thinking Long-Term About Adolescents And The COVID-19 Pandemic; <https://www.s-r-a.org/webinars>



Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



The effects of Covid-19 on young people's mental health and psychological well-being An updated literature review

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June 2022

Youth Partnership

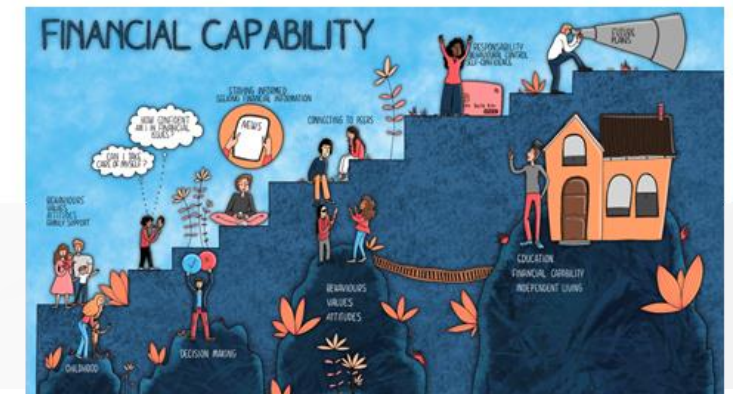
Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



Young people's financial capability Taking care of your finances is taking care of yourself

Mette Ranta, PhD

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KIITOS,
THANK YOU!

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