

The Effects of the Covid-19 Outbreak on the Positive Development of Young People in Malamulele, South Africa

By Thulani Andrew Chauke and Rachel Chinyakata

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought dire social, economic, physical and mental health consequences worldwide (World Health Organization, 2020). The rapid increase of Covid-19 infections and fatalities has caused much concern around the world and has resulted in the implementation of various mitigation measures. Covid-19 has taken everyone by surprise, and disrupted the world's economy tremendously. South Africa has one of the highest Covid-19 infection rates in Africa, and the South African government has embarked on a nationwide lockdown to minimise the spread of the virus. This decision was not welcomed by many people, especially unemployed youth, informal traders, post-graduate students at higher learning institutions, and matriculants.

Covid-19 has been proven to have an especially severe effect on people above the age of 60, and people who have compromised immune systems

or other underlying medical conditions (World Health Organization, 2020). Younger people in general do not face the same health risk from Covid-19 as the elderly, but their educational, spiritual, physical, and economic development will be impacted by the pandemic. These adverse impacts on young people's development will be the focus of this paper.

According to Delivorias and Nicole (2020), people living in poverty will be especially hard hit by Covid-19's economic effects, as they do not have enough savings to protect themselves against financial catastrophe. Furthermore, the Global Employment Trends for Youth (2020) highlight the impact that Covid-19 will have on youth unemployment, as 77% of youth hold informal jobs and perform manual routine jobs with no security, making them especially vulnerable to the disruptions caused by Covid-19. In addition, young people between the ages of 15–24 are more likely

to be unemployed post-Covid-19. According to UNHCR (2020), unemployed youth are more likely to be impacted by Covid-19 than employed youth.

South Africa's youth unemployment rate stands at about 52% percent of the country's overall 27.6% unemployment rate. Due to limited employment opportunities, many young people resort to informal trading and small businesses (Duncan et al., 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a temporary ban of operations for youth-owned businesses that do not fall under the essential services criteria. This has affected income generation in the lives of these young people. Results from a study conducted by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) indicated that 233 registered entrepreneurs from six provinces in South Africa across 17 different industries showed frustration in this period. More so, 95% of these entrepreneurs were worried that they could not afford to pay their employees, most of whom were young people. Furthermore, the CDE study indicated that 87% of the entrepreneurs could not work from home, resulting in an inability to take care of their families (CDE, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to many sectors of the South African economy closing. Amongst these is the tourism industry, which largely employs young people, and contributes significantly to the economic development of African countries. South Africa is the third top tourist destination in Africa, attracting over 10 million visitors in 2019 alone (UNECA, 2020). The closure of the tourism industry will result in many young people losing their jobs and their only source of income.

In response to the rapid spread of Covid-19, countries around the world have closed schools. Evidence indicates that the closure of schools, especially in times of global crisis, is linked to negative outcomes for youth. Kostelny et al. (2016) found that during the Ebola outbreak the rate of sexual activities amongst youth increased because of the closure of schools, resulting in unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Furthermore, UNFPA (2017) emphasised that in a time of global crisis hospitals and clinics may not prioritise the distribution of contraceptives, putting young girls at a higher risk of falling pregnant. The Lancet (2020) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019) have reported that pregnant women and new babies are at risk of Covid-19

“Youth from disadvantaged and rural schools will be more negatively affected than learners who have access to e-learning technologies and remote learning opportunities. Studies indicate that about 89% of learners in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to household computers, and 82% lack internet access. This makes it difficult for them to access education, thus increasing inequalities between the rich and poor.”

infection, indicating the need for social protection for these vulnerable groups.

The positive development of young people is enhanced in school environments (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017), and the closure of schools is likely to have a negative impact on young people who are in school (UNESCO, 2020). Youth from disadvantaged and rural schools will be more negatively affected than learners who have access to e-learning technologies and remote learning opportunities. Studies indicate that about 89% of learners in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to household computers, and 82% lack internet access. This makes it difficult for them to access education, thus increasing inequalities between the rich and poor. This inequality gap is a real threat to learning continuity at a time when most young people cannot go to school.

The lockdown measures taken by governments worldwide have forced many people to be locked up with their families. For some this is an opportunity to spend time with their families, but for others it has become an opportunity to abuse their partners (Time, 2020). Reports have indicated an increase in domestic violence worldwide during the Covid-19 pandemic (Zhang, 2020). This might be attributed to the frustrations felt by many families related to uncertainty about the future, poverty, and hunger, as many breadwinners are unable to work. According to scholars, there is an existing correlation between gender-based violence and poverty (Karupiah and Gopal, 2017; Slabbert, 2017).

The promotion of positive and holistic youth development is essential, as young people are the backbone of society and determine the future of any given society. The objective of this study was to explore the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the positive development of youth in Malamulele, South Africa, and to give recommendations

towards the well-being of youth during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach to understand the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on positive youth development. Through qualitative methodology, the meaning that people ascribe to social and human problems is understood as part of the development of solutions to these problems (Creswell, 2014). De Vos et al. (2011) indicate that qualitative research is important because its focus is on exploring realities from the perspective of participants. A qualitative approach was therefore essential for this study because it helped participants describe their own stories as influenced by their lived experiences. Information was collected from participants using online semi-structured individual interviews, enabling participants to be interviewed in their natural context and allowing for an interaction between the researcher and the respondents. The interviews were conducted online because of the social distancing measures put in place by the South African government to minimise the spread of Covid-19.

The study looked at the experiences of eight young people between the ages of 18–35 living in Malamulele township in Limpopo province in South Africa. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants by selecting the characteristics of the respondents to be included in the study. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse the study findings. Informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and voluntary participation were adhered to in this study. The researcher explained the objectives of the study to participants, and no participants were forced to participate.

Results and Findings

The findings of the study indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected the health and well-being of young people in Malamulele township, as well as their educational, spiritual, economic, social, and emotional development.

Educational Development

The Covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected the educational development of young people, as indicated in this study. Education is one of the

most important components of the development of a young person. All eight participants indicated that the 2020 academic year has been disrupted by the lockdown measures implemented by the government. P1 and P2 stressed that the lockdown has interrupted their studying patterns and therefore their exam preparations:

P1: 'I used to read early in the morning before I go to school and later at night before I go to bed but, now I hardly do it because am not even sure to when we are going to write our exams.'

P2: 'Closing of school was necessary but, something I guess should have been done to disrupt the exam because now our exam preparation is disturbed. We just read for the sake of reading.'

Due to the fact that they are out of school and with the uncertainty surrounding exams this year, the participants indicated that they feel demotivated to study. Failure to prepare for the exams might have a negative impact on their academic performance.

The study further revealed that the initiative taken by the Department of Higher Education to promote remote-learning is not working for some of the participants, as their home environments are not conducive for studying. As one participant indicated:

P1: 'I share my room with my brother, so even if I want to study my brother just wants to be around making noise. I can't chase him away because it's his space too.'

Shared living spaces make study very difficult, unlike studying at a university library. A 2020 study conducted by UNESCO highlighted that young children from poor backgrounds found it difficult to study online because of the lack of resources and a conducive environment.

The responses of participants in the study also indicated that most young people in Malamulele township could not continue with their studies online, as they do not have e-learning materials such as computers and the internet. As one of the respondents commented:

P2: 'I find it difficult to study online because I do not have modern technology like other kids from rich families.'

From the above statement, it can be denoted that the Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed inequalities in South Africa, despite many initiatives taken by the democratic government to eradicate poverty. In addition, the gap between the haves and the have-nots continues to widen. Modern technology is needed for a young person to study from home and attend online classes, but this is out of the reach of many. According to UNESCO (2020), the effect of Covid-19 is much worse for underprivileged learners who tend to have fewer educational opportunities outside of school, due to a lack of access to technology. Furthermore, the disruption in education during the pandemic could result in a rise in child labour and child marriage, further impacting the growth and development of developing countries (UN, 2020).

Participants in the study indicated that some institutions have ceased academic activities due to a lack of resources such as trained staff to deliver lectures online:

P1: 'At my institution everything has stopped, there is no communication whatsoever, no online lectures.'

P2: 'I might not be affected as some full-time schoolers but, this time of year I thought I would have completed my studies.'

Academic activities in some institutions have stopped completely, meaning that progress for many has also stopped, and that the 2020 academic year might be lost for some students. This will ultimately delay the completion of their studies, and their ability to achieve their set goals.

Nutrition

The study also indicated that the nationwide lockdown has resulted in malnutrition for some young people, as it has cut off their access to school feeding schemes. As one participant explained:

P3: 'I am raised by a pensioner, who is always ill. I can sleep without food sometimes while am not at school. But school is open am able to get healthy food not now schools are closure are worried.'

According to UNESCO (2020), many children and young people rely on free or cheaper meals for healthy nutrition, and when schools are closed their nutrition is compromised. The closure of

“The closure of schools as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic is contributing to the malnutrition of learners who depend on school feeding schemes. This consequently affects their overall well-being and functioning.”

schools as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic is contributing to the malnutrition of learners who depend on school feeding schemes. This consequently affects their overall well-being and functioning.

Spiritual Development

Spiritual development is of significance in ensuring the holistic well-being of young people, as it promotes community participation, socialisation and personal development. Participants were asked to reflect on how Covid-19 is affecting their spiritual development. They gave varied responses, as indicated below:

P4: 'I usually go to church every Sunday and Wednesday, I am affected so much because at church I also do counselling session. I cannot fellowship with other believers who I call my other family because they support me.'

P5: 'Covid-19 it has helped me to stayed connected to God and gave the personal space I never knew I needed.'

P4's response indicates that church is a source of social support, belonging, and security for the individual. Participation in church activities promotes spiritual development, which is important for improved health and well-being. The Covid-19 pandemic has robbed young people of the opportunity to take part in such activities. The church plays a central role in many young people's lives, as a place of worship and as a place for emotional support, as some young people are more likely to confide in their pastors than in their parents. In contrast to this, P5's response is interesting, as it indicates that the pandemic has helped some young people to reflect on their lives and to form a closer connection with God.

Responses from other participants indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic has helped some

young people to strengthen their faith, providing them with the opportunity to demonstrate resilience:

P7: 'I think in a time like this young people need to be strong and believe to this time shall pass.'

P8: 'Some parents and youth might lose income due to coronavirus pandemic, and it will hurt but they need to trust almighty God to will rescue our beautiful land.'

P7 and P8 shared words of encouragement in the face of a global crisis. They also both agreed that since churches are closed, parents should take the lead in ensuring the development of their children's spiritual health.

Economic Development

South Africa has high levels of youth unemployment, which will be further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The study indicated that the lockdown is negatively affecting the economic development of young people. Participants who are entrepreneurs were sceptical about the survival of their businesses post-Covid-19:

P5: 'As an entrepreneur am fed up, do not know if my business will survive post this Covid-19 thing.'

P6: 'I run a salon but, my business is closed now because hairdressers are not providing essential service. I running a loss at this period and I hope soon we can return to work.'

Entrepreneurial activities have been affected in Malamulele township, as only essential services can remain open during the lockdown. This means that many young entrepreneurs are running at a loss and living in fear, as they do not know when the pandemic will end, and whether their businesses will survive. The World Leading Travel Trade Show (2020) attested to this finding by stating that young entrepreneurs in the travelling industry are worried about the future of their business post-Covid-19. Young people who run businesses as informal traders are more affected than those whose businesses are registered, as they do not fit the criteria to benefit from the government's Covid-19 relief funding for SMMEs.

More so, even those entrepreneurs who are registered are finding it hard to apply for this

funding, as there is a lot of paperwork required and some banks are taking advantage of the current situation to offer them loans which will leave them further indebted. The government's relief funding is difficult to access, as it requires tax compliance, UIF compliance and six months' bank statements (CDE, 2020).

The study also revealed that even young entrepreneurs who run spaza shops (and who are therefore considered essential workers) are struggling to make a profit because the economic activities of their customers have also been disrupted due to the lockdown:

P5: 'I am running a spaza shop people are not buying items in form of cash, they just come and borrow and I can't say no because people have no money at this moment. I fear that I might close the business when I run out of money to order new stock.'

P6: 'I run a small business and I have hired two youth and now I have no money to pay them. Am worried if post-Covid-19 they will return to work or not.'

The responses above show that Covid-19 is hindering economic activities that are essential to young people's economic development and the overcoming of poverty. This finding concurs with a recent report by the CDE, which indicates that young entrepreneurs are in distress during the Covid-19 pandemic, as they do not know how they will pay their employees (CDE, 2020). According to Bouey (2020), the income for SMEs has dropped by more than 50 percent, with street vendors' businesses hardest hit.

Social Development

Social distancing is encouraged as a measure to minimise the spread of Covid-19. This limits physical gatherings and socialisation with friends, neighbours, and others in the community, which in turn affects social and behavioural development. As one participant commented:

P1: 'It's really difficult because I am always inside the home. I cannot even socialise and play with my friends. Just staying at home is very frustrating.'

From the above quotation, it can be denoted that the lockdown measures are negatively

affecting the social development of many young people. Social activity and interaction have been limited, and this consequently results in the deprivation of emotional and social development of many young people. According to the UN (2020), Covid-19 is having profound effects on young children's social development. Social distancing is an important measure in the mitigation of the spread of Covid-19, but measures also need to be taken to ensure that the social development of young people is supported.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has caught the world by surprise, with its impacts being felt in all sectors of life. South Africa's nationwide lockdown in response to the pandemic is having a negative impact on education, the economy, health, and the development of young people.

This study indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic is further exacerbating inequalities in education, as learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are unable to afford the e-learning technologies necessary for remote learning. The study also showed that the health of young people who depend on school for nutrition has been affected. The nationwide lockdown is affecting the social and religious development of young people, as many young people cannot socialise or attend religious gatherings, consequently leading to the deprivation of their holistic development. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the temporary closure of many youth-owned businesses, and those that remain open have reported low profits.

There is a greater need for specific youth development relief in South Africa to mitigate the negative effects of Covid-19. The government must collaborate with different stakeholders to assist learners from disadvantaged backgrounds with e-learning materials and support so that they can adequately participate in remote learning. South African government departments should also have a specific youth development relief fund to mitigate the effect of Covid-19 on the economic development of youth. Government departments, districts, metros, and local government should prioritise youth development post-Covid-19 to help young people bounce back from the effects of the pandemic. Positive youth development should

be prioritised for the sustainable development of the nation. ■

Reference List

- Bouey, J. (2020). Assessment of COVID-19's Impact on Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Implications from China. [online] Rand Corporation. Available at: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT524.html>
- Centre for Development and Enterprise. (2020). COVID-19: The Impact on Small Businesses and Gaps in Current Solutions: The Case for Better Solutions to Support Entrepreneurs in Townships. [online] Centre for Development and Enterprise. Available at: <https://www.cde.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/THE-IMPACT-OF-COVID-19-ON-MICRO-SMALL-BUSINESS-IN-DEVELOPING-COMMUNITIES.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). If You Are Pregnant, Breastfeeding, or Caring for Young Children. [online] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>
- Cresswell, J. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th Edition. California: SAGE Publication.
- Duncan, C., Kanayo, O. and Djemilou, M. (2019) The Impact of Skills and Training on the Growth and Development of Informal Traders: A Case Study of the Long Street Kiosk in Cape Town. Prof. S.P. Van Der Merwe. *13th International Business Conference*. 22-25 September 2019, South Africa, North-West University, pp. 1-1897.
- Delivorias, A. and Scholz, N. (2020) Economic impact of epidemics and pandemics. [online] European Parliamentary Research Service. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/646195/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)646195_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/646195/EPRS_BRI(2020)646195_EN.pdf)
- De Vos, A., Strydom, H., Fouche, C. and Delport, C. (2011). *Research at Grass Roots: For the Social Sciences and Human Services Professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Godin, M. (2020). As Cities Around the World Go on Lockdown, Victims of Domestic Violence Look for a Way Out. [online] Time. Available at: <https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>
- Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. (2012). GEM 2012 Global Report. [online] Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. Available at: <https://www.gemconsortium.org/report/48545>
- ILO. (2020). Global Employment Trends for Youth (2020). [online] International Labour Organization. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_737648/lang--en/index.htm
- Karupiah, P. and Gopal, P. (2017). Intimate Partner Violence and Poverty: Malaysian Indian Women in Penang, Malaysia. In: G. Bonifacio, ed. *Global Currents in Gender and Feminisms: Canadian and International Perspectives*. Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 225-236.
- Kostelny, K., Lamin, D., Manyeh, M., Ondoro, K., Stark, L., Lilley, S. and Wessells, M. (2016). 'Worse than the war': An Ethnographic Study of the Impact of the Ebola Crisis on Life, Sex, Teenage Pregnancy, and a Community-driven Intervention in Rural Sierra Leone. [online] Save the Children's Resource Centre. Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/14092/pdf/worse-than-the-war-post-ebola-ethnographic-report-on-sierra-leone.pdf>
- Qiao, J. (2020). What Are the Risks of COVID-19 Infection in Pregnant Women? [online] The Lancet. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30365-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30365-2/fulltext)
- Slabbert, I. (2017). Domestic Violence and Poverty: Some Women's Experiences. *Research on Social Work Practice*. Vol. 27 (2), pp. 223-230.
- Taylor, R., Oberie, E., Durlaks, J. and Weisberg, R. (2017). Promoting Positive Youth Development Through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects. *Journal of Child Development*, Vol. 88 (4), pp. 1156-1171.
- The World Leading Travel Trade Show. (2020). COVID-19 Travel Business Impact Series. [online] WYSE Travel Confederation. Available at: <https://www.wysetc.org/covid-19/covid-19-travel-business-impact-series/>
- UNECA. (2020). Economic Impact of the Covid-19 on Africa. [online] United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Available at: <https://www.icafrica.org/en/news-events/infrastructure-news/article/economic-effects-of-the-covid-19-on-africa-by-unece-672655/>
- UNFPA. (2017). Recovering from the Ebola Virus Disease: Rapid Assessment of Pregnant Adolescent Girls in Sierra Leone. [online] UNFPA Sierra Leone. Available at: <https://sierraleone.unfpa.org/en/publications/recovering-ebola-virus-disease-rapid-assessment-pregnant-adolescent-girls-sierra-leone>
- UNESCO. (2020). COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Respects. [online] UNESCO. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-schoolclosures>
- United Nations. (2020). Policy Brief: The Impact of Covid-19 on Children. [online] United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-children>
- World Health Organization. (2020) Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) – Events as They Happen. [online] World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>
- World Health Organization. (2020) Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19. [online] World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches>
- Zhang, W. (2020). Domestic Violence Cases Surge During COVID-19 Epidemic. [online] Sixth Tone. Available at: <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1005253/domestic-violence-cases-surge-during-COVID19-epidemic.83>