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The COVID-19 Generation

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Higher Education
Students in Portugal

Author: Rita Diniz Reis

Supervisor: Professor Graham Finley

INVICTUS

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll
I'm the master of my fate,
I'm captain of my soul.

William Ernest Henley (1875)

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Portugal, students from every level of education have had a difficult time managing their academic life, which was ruled by uncertainty and instability these past two years. These mindsets are often more evident in higher education students who, due to the nature of their circumstances of transition to the job market and higher levels of pressure to attain certain educational objectives, are more prone to the development of psychological disorders. These two years dominated by the exceptional experience of distance learning brought with them unprecedented consequences on the mental health of higher education students. This thesis aims to understand the challenges posed by this new learning method, and to what extent these students' rights to education and mental health were affected and protected during this period of global pandemic.

To be able to proceed with this assessment with a privileged understanding from the key stakeholders' point of view, an interview to a mental health professional working in a support center of a Portuguese faculty was conducted, and a survey was shared in social media networks accessed by higher education students, aiming to understand the conditions under which they studied during the pandemic, as well as the consequences on their psychological condition. The results revealed that, in spite of allowing students to fulfill their right to education, the distance learning method had severe consequences on their mental health during this period, aggravating feelings of anxiety, depression, isolation, among others. What is striking about this issue is the lack of action from the Government to counter these consequences, which will have a massive societal impact in the years to come, as this will probably be identified as the *COVID-19 Generation*. Due

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to the future impact that this phenomenon might have both on the social and economic levels, the Portuguese Government as well as public and private universities should consider investing more in health literacy and other methods to improve the accessibility to mental health support services.

Keywords: mental health, students, higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

In the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020, the world saw the rise of a new threat to public health: the virus SARS-CoV2, known as COVID-19. This new variant of the coronavirus species, originated in Wuhan, China, revealed itself more contagious and more lethal in older people and people that were already suffering from other diseases. Due to the high rate of contagion, most countries decided to shut borders and impose curfews and lockdowns within its own national borders. Masks started to be the new obligatory trend, and personal contact among peers was reduced to the bare minimum to avoid contracting the virus. Despite all the effects it has on people's physical health, no one predicted the impact that the containment measures were going to have on the mental health of the world population.

As countries decided to shut themselves to international travelers, businesses were also put on standby, and universities were closed, and students and professors were sent home. However, the lectures would have to continue, and the school year would have to have an end as if it was an ordinary year. Therefore, lectures were metamorphosed, and a new period of online learning began. Apps such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams were now *en vogue*, and students and professors had to adapt to a new reality that kept them in front of a computer screen for several hours per day and had them working for several hours after in the comfort of their homes.

However, the comfort of their homes might not be as comfortable in the long run as it was expected. Isolation, loneliness and lack of motivation and concentration left students on the verge of collapse when it came to mental health. This new reality also impacted professors who suddenly were obliged to adapt and overcome obstacles arising from this new teaching mechanism.

Moreover, the sudden change from in-person teaching to online learning found schools and universities unprepared and the need to adapt quickly to this new reality posed a few challenges for which the educational institutions were not completely ready, let alone professors and students.

The purpose of this thesis is to identify those challenges and how the Portuguese government responded to this crisis and assess the real impact that the confinement and the COVID-19 prevention measures had on high education students' mental health, and how it affected their educational success. Moreover, issues and challenges related to the method of online learning will also be accounted for, taking into consideration specific matters, such as data privacy and the new reality of students with disabilities. Additionally, factors, i.e., the economic downturn provoked by the contraction in sectors that were most affected by contingency policies, and the societal repercussions of the pandemic will also be contemplated.

Were the rights of students (e.g., right to education; right to health) protected during this unstable period? The connection between this topic and human rights might not be evident to the conventional public, but the relation between governmental decisions and the impact they have on the population is decisive to the fulfilment of human rights. Moreover, the impact of the process of shifting from in-person to online learning entailed several different challenges that might hinder students' academic success by undermining the satisfaction of their right to health, which encompasses mental health as well within its scope. It is, therefore, fundamental to assess the impact of this pandemic on the mental health of students because the realization of a great number of human rights depends on the maintenance of a plain state of mental wellbeing, which might not have been verified during these past years.

The methodology employed to elaborate this thesis was fundamentally based on pieces of news about the situation of the country in the past two years of pandemic, as well as studies developed by other authors or by governmental institutions. Both Portuguese and international legislation were also analyzed to establish a pattern of obligations from the government towards its population. In addition, an interview to a psychologist who works in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon (FLUL) support center was conducted, as well as surveys to higher education students through social media networks aiming to understand, from personal testimonies, the reality that has been in place these past years.

CHAPTER I: THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In the beginning of March 2020, the SARS-CoV-2 started spreading around Europe, affecting countries such as Italy or Spain more severely, and disrupting the normalcy societies were used to. Most governments found themselves on the verge of a breaking point with the sudden commotion in their economies and their National Health Systems close to collapsing as the COVID-19 cases increased exponentially each day, simultaneously to the growth of the death rate. Politicians were obliged to channel public expenditure to the health sector so that hospitals and healthcare facilities could respond to the population's medical needs, while at the same time keeping the economic flow running efficiently. However, because of the new virus' high contagion rate by direct contact between people, the world entered a new era of lockdowns, quarantines, and states of emergency and contingency measures. People were told to work from home, schools and universities were temporarily closed and commercial establishments, such as restaurants, *cafés*, and shops, started working under new restrictions, or were even closed. National borders were shut immediately to limit international travelling, allowing only deemed "necessary travelling" (e.g., for health and working reasons, and to return to one's home) for the sake of public health.

The situation in Portugal was slightly different than the rest of Europe because the country registered the first case of COVID-19 a month later than most European countries, which gave enough time for the government to put in place contingency measures to make sure it could mitigate the spread of the virus from the start, avoiding the disruption of the already unprepared and deficient National Health Service.

The State of Emergency was first declared on March 19th, 2020¹, renovated twice on April 2nd and April 16th respectively, and replaced on May 2nd, 2020 by the State of Calamity, which foresees a gradual opening in specific sectors.

Contrary to other European countries, the Portuguese National Health Service was not disrupted during the so-called first wave of the pandemic. However, the system was not fully prepared for what was coming with this public health emergency: protection

¹ "Decreto 2-A/2020, 2020-03-20," Pub. L. No. 2-A/2020 (2020), <https://dre.pt/web/guest/pesquisa/-/search/130473161/details/normal?!=1>.

equipment was scarce and health professionals were obliged to work without the minimum conditions².

The economic impact of this public health issue was also unprecedented, especially for countries that had high flow of revenue coming from tourism and exportations, and countries that had high rates of seasonal employment. For instance, Portugal saw its GDP growth decrease exponentially in 2020³ and its unemployment rate rise both in April 2020⁴ and in the beginning of 2021⁵. According to data shared by the Portuguese Institute of Employment (*Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional*), this wave of unemployment affected more workers with high school education, and adults that were 25 years old or less⁶. Moreover, the phenomenon of collective dismissal achieved new levels by doubling in 2020 and affecting about 7500 people⁷. According to a DECO PROTESTE study⁸, last year one in four Portuguese families lost at least 25% of their income. Regarding expenditure, most of the inquired in this DECO PROTESTE study pointed education as their primary expense since they had to purchase new equipment to face the needs of students that were confined to online learning. This loss of income was countered by moratoriums on loans, and social security measures, which were a deterrent to layoffs, but in reality reduced the revenue of workers by 1/3 while still allowing them to keep their jobs.

On this scenery of economic failure, students were one of the most affected groups by the contingency measures put in place by the government to limit the spreading of the virus. Within Portuguese borders, from March 19th, 2020 in-person

² Visão, “Visão: Covid-19 - ‘Falta de equipamentos de proteção para os médicos em Portugal roça crime contra a saúde pública,’” Sindicato Independente dos Médicos, August 25, 2021, <https://www.simedicos.pt/pt/noticias/4537/visao-covid-19-falta-de-equipamentos-de-protecao-para-os-medicos-em-portugal-roca-crime-contra-a-saude-publica/>.

³ Country Economy, “Portugal - PIB - Produto Interno Bruto 2020,” [countryeconomy.com](https://pt.countryeconomy.com/governo/pib/portugal), accessed April 10, 2021, <https://pt.countryeconomy.com/governo/pib/portugal>.

⁴ Ricardo Paes Mamede, Mariana Pereira, and António Simões, “Portugal: Uma Análise Rápida Do Impacto Da COVID-19 Na Economia e No Mercado de Trabalho,” June 2020.

⁵ Cátia Mateus, “2021 arranca com desemprego a subir para 7,2%. Desde setembro que o desemprego estava em queda,” *Jornal Expresso*, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://expresso.pt/economia/2021-03-03-2021-arranca-com-desemprego-a-subir-para-72.-Desde-setembro-que-o-desemprego-estava-em-queda>.

⁶ Paes Mamede, Pereira, and Simões, “Portugal: Uma Análise Rápida Do Impacto Da COVID-19 Na Economia e No Mercado de Trabalho.”

⁷ Vitor Ferreira, “Despedimentos Colectivos Duplicam Em 2020, Atingindo 7500 Pessoas | Trabalho e Emprego | PÚBLICO,” accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2021/07/23/economia/noticia/despedimentos-colectivos-duplicam-2020-atingindo-7500-pessoas-1971547>.

⁸ DECO PROTESTE, “Barómetro DECO PROTESTE: famílias portuguesas perderam grande parte do rendimento em 2020,” DECO PROTESTE, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://www.deco.proteste.pt/corporate/comunicados-de-imprensa/barometro-deco-proteste-familias-portuguesas-perderam-grande-parte-do-rendimento-em-2020>.

scholar activities of all students were suspended until the renewal of the state of emergency on April 2nd, 2020⁹. This legal decree issued by the Portuguese President declared that necessary restrictions to the right of learning and teaching could be applied by public authorities in order to reduce the risk of infection. These restrictions included the prohibition or limitation of in-person lectures and mandatory distance learning, as well as other provisions related to the education system. From then on, the process of distance learning began. Professors, students, and parents had to react quickly to this situation and adapt even faster to provide solutions to this atypical setting.

Before the beginning of the new schoolyear (e.g., September 2020-2021), the State of Calamity was alleviated with the gradual lifting of confinement measures, and the return of in-person lectures. This method was in place during the first semester of the previous schoolyear, until the worsening of the COVID-19 situation in Portugal in January of 2021 (that constituted the fourth wave of the pandemic) that led to the strengthening of contingency measures once again. That said, students were sent home again until April 19th. On April 19th, the Government allowed higher education institutions to re-open and restart face-to-face lectures. However, students, professors and university staff must be tested, even when they do not have any symptom of COVID-19 to prevent the spreading of the virus.

Due to the economic impact that the pandemic had in the country that resulted in the decrease of families' real income, the number of higher education students receiving scholarships (e.g., *Bolsas de Acção Social*) rose 4% when compared to 2020¹⁰, which translated to a 5% increase in the number of requests in 2021. This year registered the highest number of scholarships assigned since the 2005-2006 schoolyear, if we consider all types of scholarships (e.g., *Bolsas de Acção Social*; *Bolsas Retomar*; *Bolsas +Superior*; *Bolsas NEES*). If we consider only *Bolsas de Acção Social*, which are the ones attributed to students in a disadvantaged economic position, this year registered the highest number since 2009-2010, the schoolyear immediately after the collapse of the world economy. The other types of scholarships' process of attribution take into account

⁹ "Decreto do Presidente da República 17-A/2020, 2020-04-02," Diário da República Eletrónico, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/131068115/details/maximized>.

¹⁰ DGES - Direção Geral do Ensino Superior, "Número de Bolseiros do Ensino Superior cresce 4% e atinge 75 mil estudantes," April 2021, <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/comunicado?i=numero-de-bolseiros-do-ensino-superior-cresce-4-e-atinge-75-mil-estudantes>.

other factors such as the student's geographic location (e.g. *Bolsas +Superior*), and whether the applicant has any special education need or disability (e.g., *Bolsas NEE*).

In addition to this, in an official governmental document issued in January simultaneously to the return to distance learning, the Portuguese Government recommended that libraries, canteens and universities' residencies remained open. Additionally, the access to laboratories and scientific infrastructures should be guaranteed when considered indispensable to the realization of research projects, such as dissertations and theses.

To face these adversities, the Portuguese Government has put in place measures aiming at the economic recovery of the country, as well as at the regeneration of the job market. However, other problems aggravated by the pandemic, namely societal and emotional issues, and issues of accessibility to technological resources and digital literacy also need to be addressed when designing recovery plans and public policies.

CHAPTER II: THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL

The Right to Education is enshrined in the Portuguese Constitution on Part I (Fundamental Rights and Duties), Title III (Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Duties), Chapter III (Cultural Rights and Duties), Articles 73¹¹ and 74¹². This right appears divided into two articles essentially because article 73 refers to formal and non-formal education and access to culture and science, whereas article 74 refers only to formal education and the State as the duty-bearer in assuring an effective education policy that guarantees equality in access to instruction and opportunities to everyone below 18.

In addition to the protection offered by domestic legislation, the State is also obliged to act according to international standards. Portugal ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on September 21st, 1990¹³, as well as both its protocols in 2003 and 2013, respectively. The country is also a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) since 1978, and its Optional Protocol since 2013. The Right to Education is enshrined on Article 28 of the CRC and declares that States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and that this right must be achieved on the basis of equal opportunity by taking *appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need*¹⁴. Although these obligations are referring to secondary education, it can also be applied on higher education as the State also has the obligation to increase its accessibility *by every appropriate means*.

The sentence “by every appropriate means” relates to the fact that, although higher education is not a mandatory obligation to be provided by the State, the State must ensure the progressive realization of this right, for instance, by the gradual reduction of tuition fees.

¹¹ Constituição da República Portuguesa, “Artigo 73.º - (Educação, Cultura e Ciência) - Lei Constitucional Nº 1/92 de 25-11-1992 - BDJUR,” accessed April 10, 2021, http://bdjur.almedina.net/item.php?field=item_id&value=273566.

¹² Constituição da República Portuguesa, “Artigo 74.º - (Ensino) - Lei Constitucional Nº 1/92 de 25-11-1992 - BDJUR,” accessed April 10, 2021, http://bdjur.almedina.net/item.php?field=item_id&value=273567.

¹³ United Nations, “United Nations Treaty Collection,” accessed April 16, 2021, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4.

¹⁴ OHCHR, “OHCHR | Convention on the Rights of the Child,” accessed April 10, 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

Nonetheless, the Portuguese Constitution does not refer the higher level of education as a right to which everyone has access *per se*, but rather as a right whose access must be facilitated by the State, always on the basis of merit, which relates, as mentioned, to the attribution of scholarships. This becomes problematic when it comes to the complete development of adolescents and young adults because their right to education becomes dependent on their economic capacity to finance their education, unless they are nominated to receive a scholarship, which does not even begin to cover all the additional monthly expenses that a student has when he/she enrolls in a higher education institution. It can be said that the right to education gains an elitist and restricted tone when higher education is concerned.

The international standard of the right to education is also complemented by the UDHR. Although it is a Declaration, and for that matter not legally binding on countries, most of its clauses have become Customary International Law, binding all nations whether or not they are parties to other Human Rights treaties that address certain more specific provisions. The right to education is addressed on article 13 of the UDHR and it focus not only on children, but on every human being, focusing on adult education as well. It provides that education must be directed to the full development of the human personality, as well as its dignity, among other goals. Similarly to what is presented by the Convention on the Rights of the Child in terms of aims and objectives of the enforcement of this right, adult education also emphasizes the empowerment of people, the maintenance of sustainable development, and the resulting realization of other human rights.

That said, it is clear the effect that the fulfilment of the right to education has on the satisfaction of rights such as the right to individual freedom and the right to fully participate in societies as informed citizens. It also determines the way students can make life choices in the future, as a higher level of education is strictly connected to an entrance in a job market that is more competitive, in which individual capacity related to socio-emotional characteristics will decide who is chosen or not. It is also directly interconnected to the right to health, which entails not only physical health but also

mental and psychological health. The right to health does not only encompass the absence of disease but the plain state of a healthy body and healthy mind as well.

On teenagers and young adults, the worsening of their general mental wellbeing has become an issue highlighted more and more over the past years. Their possibility of educational and academic success might be hindered by the lack of mental health and problems such as anxiety disorders and depression, which might instigate traits such as the fear of public speaking, for example. The fact that mental health issues might not be addressed in a timely manner can lead to several of those problems to be taken to the age of adulthood which can limit children and young adults' *opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults*¹⁵. This lack of mental health leads to a negative impact on the academic performance, consequently creating a vicious cycle on which academic success depends on mental health, and mental health also depends on academic success. The uncertainty about what the day after tomorrow will bring that young adults go through builds up the pressure and the stress that foster psychological disorders. On this setting, an adequate strategy to ensure that the right to education is effectively satisfied so as to avoid feelings of anxiety and depression connected to educational accomplishment is fundamental to mitigate those issues.

The fact that students are having lectures from home raises obvious concerns when it comes to the fulfilling of the right to education because online learning involves equipment availability (i.e., computers) and access to internet services at home. Furthermore, it is not only the satisfaction of the right to education that is at risk, but also the fulfilment of the right to health when mental health is concerned.

In addition to that, the effectiveness of distance learning has been widely questioned among the academic community, mainly because professors had to adjust their lectures from in-person format to the online method, using platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, which most of them had never had contact with before the pandemic, and because most students, according to different testimonials¹⁶, could not

¹⁵ World Health Organization, "WHO | Adolescents and Mental Health," accessed April 16, 2021, https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/topics/adolescence/mental_health/en/.

¹⁶ FMUL - Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade de Lisboa, "SARS-COV-2 – O vírus que veio mudar a vida dos nossos estudantes," Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade de Lisboa, accessed August 26, 2021,

keep up with their previously established school routine due to the fact that they were now confined at home permanently, and their concentration levels at home are proven to be lower than in face-to-face lectures at university.

Moreover, according to a study organized by Bettinger & Loeb in 2017¹⁷ on the effectiveness of online education in the United States, this method is proven to be less efficient on students that are less well-prepared, causing them to perform worse than in an in-person approach. This setting also increases the likelihood of academic failure in future stages of education, and the rise of the probability of dropping out. According to this research, online education will only increase the disparities between students that maintained a superior performance during in-person courses and those who were already falling behind, which will probably aggravate their situation regarding grades and academic performance.

In the next chapter I will be analyzing the challenges brought about by the swift adjustment from in-person to online lectures.

CHAPTER III: DISTANCE (ONLINE) LEARNING

- CHALLENGES

The sudden change from in-person to online lectures forced universities to adapt quickly to this new reality. Universities' hallways were now empty, and students were obliged to learn from home what they were supposed to learn in a classroom among their peers. This new environment brought with it several challenges that hampered efforts to make distance learning a process that ran effortlessly and efficiently.

First of all, in order to access learning resources and to attend lectures online, students had to have access to Wi-Fi and a computer. This issue might become problematic in low-income households with more than one child in school.

Second, the Portuguese economy has been facing, since last year, a recession that affected the job market and, consequently, the income available in Portuguese

<https://www.medicina.ulisboa.pt/newsfmul-artigo/99/sars-cov-2-o-virus-que-veio-mudar-vida-dos-nossos-estudantes>.

¹⁷ Eric Bettinger and Susanna Loeb, "Promises and Pitfalls of Online Education," 2017, 4.

households. This downturn affected students above all, raising doubts about whether they would be able to remain in school or not.

Having lectures at home might sound like a good idea as long as it does not extend for months in a row, with low or no social contact with peers. This has consequences in terms of learning effectiveness and academic performance that depends on the concentration and motivation levels.

Furthermore, the fact that e-learning requires the use of online tools and apps that most professors are not familiarized with makes it harder to have a well-organized schoolyear. In Portugal, most professors did not get any help managing these tools. The closing of universities brought with it the need to adapt and overcome challenges as quickly as possible, which forced professors to learn faster how to operate those tools. The repercussions that this environment of pressure had on lecturers was also noticeable, added to the fact that they might also be parents of children who are in school as well and to whom they need to give support. This obliges them to divide themselves into three distinct persons: by themselves, as professors, and as parents, which also has consequences on the level of their mental health.

Universities nowadays use apps such as Zoom that use the camera of students to make sure they are attending the lectures. The same *modus operandi* is used by those universities during tests and evaluations to assure that cheating is not an option for students. This involves data privacy issues that go against the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)¹⁸.

Additionally, during this period of distance learning, one might question him or herself regarding students with disabilities and how they managed to attend lectures and access school resources on the same level as students with no impairments. Moreover, this phase also had its impact on students that did not see themselves as impaired but suddenly witnessed their social support structures fall apart during confinement and lockdowns.

The last point developed below regards international students and how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their lives, whether they were foreign students coming to Portugal on mobility projects, foreign students enrolled in Portuguese universities, or

¹⁸ European Union, "What Is GDPR, the EU's New Data Protection Law?," GDPR.eu, November 7, 2018, <https://gdpr.eu/what-is-gdpr/>.

even Portuguese students participating in mobility interchange programs, such as ERASMUS+.

i. **Access to internet: did the pandemic aggravated the digital divide?**

Since March 2020, several universities in Portugal were closed¹⁹ and were then obliged to put in place distance learning methods to continue the academic year. Students were confined to their homes, taking online courses on their own personal laptops, using their home Wi-Fi connection. However, as it is evident, not all students have access to this type of equipment, particularly if we consider households with more than one child in school or, for example, low-income families who do not have enough economic resources to purchase or to pay for this type of equipment. In addition, during this period, parents were also working from home, becoming another potential Wi-Fi or computer user. It is, therefore, relevant to consider whether students have access to Internet with enough bandwidth to ensure they can view live lectures or download recorded classes. This issue also raises questions related to the access to learning materials which, during the pandemic, had to be downloaded. Nonetheless, not all students have a Wi-Fi connection that allows them to have timely access to resources uploaded online.

To counter possible situations of shortcomings regarding technological equipment necessary for professors and for students to attend lectures, the Portuguese Assembly issued a Resolution²⁰ recommending the Government to reinforce the acquisition of technological equipment and development of digital infrastructures for higher education students coming from low-income families.

This was also highlighted by the Portuguese Universities' Deans' Council (*CRUP – Conselho de Reitores das Universidades Portuguesas*) in February 2021, that wanted to see the policy of buying technological equipment for basic and secondary education

¹⁹ Dinheiro Vivo and Lusa, "Principais acontecimentos na educação desde o início da pandemia," Dinheiro Vivo, April 9, 2020, <https://www.dinheirovivo.pt/geral/principais-acontecimentos-na-educacao-desde-o-inicio-da-pandemia-12779972.html>.

²⁰ Assembleia da República, "Resolução Da Assembleia Da República n.o 66/2020," Pub. L. No. 66/2020 (2020), https://www.ulisboa.pt/sites/ulisboa.pt/files/documents/files/0000700007_0.pdf.

institutions be extended to higher education establishments²¹ because there are students with no access to either computers or Wi-Fi connection.

ii. **What about socioeconomic factors?**

This pandemic brought with it a significant downturn in the Portuguese economy, which was reflected in unemployment and reduction of household income to many families across the country and accentuated income disparities that were already a reality prior to the spread of this virus. These disparities affected students particularly mainly due to the many expenses they have each month (e.g., tuition fees, accommodation, food, transportation, among others).

Students generally apply for universities outside their residential area, forcing them to move to another city and taking on additional monthly expenses in tuition fees, books and other educational needs, accommodation (and additional fees, such as water and electricity), food, transportation, and leisure. The fact is that, although most public universities offer State scholarships to students who lack financial capacity to face these expenses, the consequences of this crisis on the Portuguese households made it more difficult for families to pay for their children's education. Consequently, the number of students receiving these scholarships this year increased 4%, which means that applications also increased²². Currently, more than 75.000 students are beneficiaries of financial aid to be able to continue studying. In addition to the regular scholarships sponsored by the State, there are also public universities assigning social support grants to fight school dropouts²³. In some cases, these potential dropouts were identified because students themselves went to the academic association (*Associação Académica*) of their faculties to report loss of income at their household that would lead eventually to higher education dropout.

²¹ João Porfírio, "Ensino superior quer apoio igual ao das escolas para compra de computadores," Observador, February 2021, <https://observador.pt/2021/02/22/ensino-superior-quer-apoio-igual-ao-das-escolas-para-compra-de-computadores/>.

²² Samuel Silva, "Há quase 75 mil estudantes do superior a receber bolsas de acção social," PÚBLICO, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2021/04/13/sociedade/noticia/ha-quase-75-mil-estudantes-superior-receber-bolsas-accao-social-1958269>.

²³ Lusa, "Covid-19: Associação Académica da Guarda lança bolsa para estudantes carenciados," PÚBLICO, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2021/05/07/p3/noticia/covid19-associação-academica-guarda-lanca-bolsa-estudantes-carenciados-1961598>.

However, the fact that students were studying from home might not really influence their expenses because most of them have to keep paying for their accommodation so that they keep the rental contract in force for the next school year. Moreover, the hypothesis of lectures restarting in-person, which was a remote chance at the time but still not impossible, might have led students to maintain their contracts in case they suddenly had to go back to university or to a mix of in-person and online lectures.

This panorama of permanent monthly expenses added to the economic instability of the Portuguese families led to insecurity regarding whether one would be capable of staying in school.

iii. **Effectiveness of online learning & academic performance**

The quick and radical change imposed by the first state of emergency in Portugal that steered students to the circumstances described above led to the generalized opinion that the goals students had for the academic year were not fully achieved, failing to meet their expectations. According to a study elaborated by the International Labor Organization on a global scale²⁴, most students either think that they did not learn everything they were supposed to or that they aimed to learn this schoolyear; or consider that they learned everything they were supposed to, but the effort made was overwhelmingly superior comparing to before the pandemic. Most of them regard online lectures as ineffective when compared to in-person classes mainly because it lacks the personal contact with the professor, making it harder to concentrate and to ask questions, clarify their doubts and obtain coherent information. Additionally, they often feel less motivated to study and to pay attention to what is being taught due to the lack of personal contact with their peers. This is particularly relevant when referring to 1st year-bachelor students who are generally still 17 or 18 years old, as the need for social contact in discussion groups with other young adults, for instance, as an incentive to the development of critical thinking and public speaking skills might be crucial for their academic success and development as psychologically healthy adults.

²⁴ Maria João Caetano, "Covid-19 teve impacto negativo na educação de 70% dos jovens," August 2020, <https://www.dn.pt/mundo/covid-19-teve-impacto-negativo-na-educacao-de-70-dos-jovens-12513822.html>.

When it comes to the effectiveness of online learning it is also important to consider that, as opposed to humanistic and more theoretical bachelors, scientific degrees frequently require students to be a part of practical in-person lectures in laboratories and workshops, and internships at hospitals (e.g., Medical School, Pharmacy Degree), which are not possible to take place if students only have online lectures.

In addition, one other issue of the online learning method is the fact that, because students are confined at home, professors may get the wrong idea regarding how students manage their time. From this perspective, students may feel like teachers are imposing more homework and asking for more to be done than before, causing them to feel overwhelmed by the extra work that is required from them.

iv. Lecturers' computer literacy

In its national study *Estado da Educação 2019*²⁵, the Portuguese National Council of Education (*CNE - Conselho Nacional de Educação*) highlighted the fact that most university lecturers were, in 2019, between 40-49 years old, and that the age group that comprised professors who were 50-59 and 60 or more years old has been increasing over the past years. This generation of lecturers had little contact with digital devices or gadgets such as smartphones or computers during their lives, as they were born before the exponential growth of the technological world in the end of the 20th century. Thus, they only possess basic digital literacy when it comes to the use of apps such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, which consequently decreased the quality of online teaching. Most professors did not obtain any assistance to improve their knowledge regarding these platforms, nor they had previous experience lecturing online²⁶.

Moreover, due to the fact that they lack digital literacy, most professors just try to replicate what is done in a classroom, maintaining the same approach they had during in-person lectures and apply it to online classes. However, this is highly unmotivating for most students and it lacks effectiveness. The face-to-face approach applied to an online context does not have the same output as it has in a classroom. It is not enough to put

²⁵ Conselho Nacional de Educação, "Estado da Educação 2019," accessed August 26, 2021, <https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/publicacoes/estado-da-educacao/1615-estado-da-educacao-2020>.

²⁶ Agência Lusa, "Covid-19. Cerca de metade dos professores universitários com fadiga elevada e exaustão," Observador, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://observador.pt/2020/10/26/covid-19-cerca-de-metade-dos-professores-universitarios-com-fadiga-elevada-e-exaustao/>.

up a Power Point presentation and read the slides as in a physical classroom because students tend to interact less during online seminars, and this method is extremely dull and monotonous.

v. Lecturers' Burnout

During this pandemic, professors had to change their teaching methods abruptly from in-person lectures to online learning. This swift transformation required more effort to respond to urgent needs and to face emerging challenges related to their professional, but also personal life. According to a survey organized by the Medical School of the University of Porto²⁷, 25% of the participants experienced anxiety and/or depressive symptoms, as well as sleeping problems during this period. Additionally, 37% of the inquired experienced *burnout* and exhaustion associated with their work. This phase not only represented a challenge for students, but it also became a defying task for professors who had to pull all efforts to make online learning a normal reality without losing any of the components that made in-person lectures so effective.

In an official statement issued by the teachers' union, this organization asked for the return of in-person lectures to happen this next school year (2021-2022) because *nothing replaces the contact between students and professors in a classroom*²⁸. Moreover, it also highlighted that most bachelor's and master's degrees approved and verified by the official Agency for Assessment and Accreditation (A3ES - *Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação*) were conferred certification based on the in-person method of teaching, and not on distance learning, which raises concerns on the level of quality of these courses when taught exclusively online.

vi. Data privacy

Students are not only watching lectures from their computers, but they are also being evaluated while confined at home. Apps used to watch lectures use both the camera and the microphone when those are on, which is something professors require students to do frequently so that they can verify the student is present in the class.

²⁷ id.

²⁸ Lusa, "Docentes do ensino superior querem regresso das aulas presenciais em setembro," June 2021, <https://www.dn.pt/sociedade/docentes-do-ensino-superior-querem-regresso-das-aulas-presenciais-em-setembro-13811298.html>.

This system of verification becomes problematic when taken to the next level on the examination period. There have been reports of universities in Portugal using apps, such as *Proctorio*²⁹, to maintain students under surveillance during the exam to avoid cheating. The system registers when the student looks away from the computer screen, alerting the professor that he/she is looking elsewhere. Moreover, it also records sound that is analyzed after by the professor on whether it is relevant or not for the exam. In sum, *Proctorio* has complete access to the students' surroundings and sound, capturing and recording everything.

Besides *Proctorio*, universities have also been using *Respondus*, which does not pledge to eliminate the collected data. These systems' installation goes against the European Union's basic norms of data privacy, violating the students' right to private life.

Furthermore, this method of teaching — distance learning — also involves online messaging, and live sharing of documents and files through apps such as *Google Drive* or even *Whatsapp*, that was used in Portugal by some professors that did not have access to computers with webcams, or students that did not have access to computers³⁰. These mechanisms, similarly to the apps mentioned in the paragraph above, might involve issues related to the right to private life, to anonymity, to reputation, personal image, to legal protection against any form of discrimination³¹ of both the students, professors, and the other members of their household whose image and sound might be captured by these apps. These rights are protected by the Portuguese Constitution on articles 26 — *Other personal rights (Outros direitos pessoais)* —, and 35 — *Use of ICTs (Utilização de Informática)*. On article 35, it is of extreme importance to highlight the 35.3: *Computers cannot be used for processing data related to philosophical or political beliefs, party or union affiliation, religious beliefs, private life, and ethnic origin, except with the express*

²⁹ Rádio e Televisão de Portugal, "Faculdade de Direito. Alunos em luta contra programa que vigia sons e movimentos," Faculdade de Direito. Alunos em luta contra programa que vigia sons e movimentos, accessed July 14, 2021, https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/faculdade-de-direito-alunos-em-luta-contra-programa-que-vigia-sons-e-movimentos_n1307313.

³⁰ Karla Pequenino, "Sem computador, alunos falam com professor no WhatsApp e vêem aulas na TV," PÚBLICO, accessed August 26, 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2020/05/15/impar/noticia/computador-alunos-falam-professor-whatsapp-veem-aulas-tv-1916373>.

³¹ Ana Hierro, "O ensino a distância e o tratamento de dados pessoais através da utilização de tecnologias," *Observatório Almedina* (blog), May 7, 2020, <https://observatorio.almedina.net/index.php/2020/05/07/o-ensino-a-distancia-e-o-tratamento-de-dados-pessoais-atraves-da-utilizacao-de-tecnologias/>.

*consent of the holder, authorization provided by law with guarantees of non-discrimination or for processing of non-individually identifiable statistical data.*³².

Apps used for online learning collect enough information, combine it with information shared by other companies who also collect personal data to draw profiles on its users, and potentially use those profiles on training of facial recognition systems³³ or on targeted advertising. Additionally, these mechanisms might also track students' and professors' shared documents, the time they spend online and their participation in different activities, which may raise issues related to the profiling of psychological and emotional behavior.

To minimize these privacy problems in higher education institutions, professors might record their lectures and upload them so that students might watch them without being forced to log in on those apps. Moreover, students must have the liberty to choose whether they want their cameras and microphones to be on, unless it is strictly necessary for the professor that students keep those instruments on.

vii. Students with disabilities and their adjustment to online learning

Similarly to other students, students with disabilities also had to change their learning and studying method from school to their own home. However, and although that situation also represents a struggle for students without disabilities, impaired students suffer much more from the impact of the pandemic due to the fact that they need to adjust their needs to a different reality.

Moreover, students that did not see themselves as disabled — for example, students with anxiety disorders or depression that hamper their efforts to undertake basic tasks on a day-to-day basis — had some experience of being so when social structures no longer supported their learning methods as before, and when it was required for them to isolate during confinement, leading to flawed social skills and lack of contact with their peers, which is proven to be fundamental for people with some kind of disability, whether physical or mental, to deal with emotional stress. Social support

³² Constituição da República Portuguesa, “Artigo 35.º - (Utilização Da Informática) - Decreto de Aprovação Da Constituição Nº CRP 1976 de 10-04-1976 - BDJUR,” 35, accessed August 26, 2021, http://bdjur.almedina.net/item.php?field=item_id&value=229783.

³³ Allen St. John, “It’s Not Just Zoom. Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and Webex Have Privacy Issues, Too.,” Consumer Reports, accessed August 26, 2021, <https://www.consumerreports.org/video-conferencing-services/videoconferencing-privacy-issues-google-microsoft-webex-a7383469308/>.

and social contact are important pillars in the development and maintenance of mental wellbeing³⁴.

Although necessary to make sure that online learning was effective on educating students the same way they would be in a classroom, live online discussion groups may have posed a serious challenge to students with anxiety. Some teaching and evaluation methods might reveal harmful to students with disabilities. For instance, students with anxiety and panic disorders are prone to be afraid of public speaking and of being under scrutiny; therefore, oral presentations or oral exams may put them under excruciating levels of anxiety, which is prejudicial for their health.

However, not everything is bad news. The fact that they could access lectures from home for sure facilitated their routine as they did not have to commute to the university campus, allowing them to learn in a location of their choice where they might feel more comfortable. Moreover, they could still access lectures after and replay them, making it easier to follow up on what was being taught. The fact that students with disabilities access learning materials online allows them to change the format of those documents to one that fits them best, such as turning e-reading papers into audio files for blind students, for example. Some universities adapted more easily to this setting by uploading transcriptions of video files that allowed deaf students to follow up on their previously recorded lectures.

In Portugal, the Inclusion Support Center (*Núcleo de Apoio à Inclusão*) of the University of Porto issued in March 2020 a guide on how to make sure everyone is included during this period of online learning³⁵. In this document, it was highlighted aspects such as the use of high contrast combinations to allow colorblind people to see more clearly, and transcription and subtitling videos and lectures. It also advised to promote different forms of evaluation and ways to demonstrate knowledge that would fit everyone equally.

The Portuguese Government also issued in 2020 a *National Strategy for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities 2021-2025* (ENIPD - *Estratégia Nacional para a Inclusão de*

³⁴ SPD, "Social Support - An Important Pillar For People With Disabilities," *SPD* (blog), April 29, 2013, <https://www.spd.org.sg/social-support-an-important-pillar-for-people-with-disabilities/>.

³⁵ UPorto, "Guião Para Docentes. Organização e Produção de Conteúdos Em Formato Acessível. Ensino à Distância.," Março 2020.

*Pessoas com Deficiência 2021-2025*³⁶) aiming to define certain goals in different political and societal areas that must be taken into account when designing public policies that need to have an inclusive character. For that matter, the National Strategy addresses challenges related to non-discrimination, employment, promotion of autonomy and an independent lifestyle, as well as education. On the education field, the Government establishes its main goals to promote the qualification of higher education within people with disabilities by improving the educational establishments' accessibilities and increasing the frequency of people with impairments in higher educational levels. This National Strategy rides along with the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified by Portugal in 2009, that addresses education on its article 24³⁷.

It foresees the foundation of Technical and Pedagogical Resource Centers (*Centros de Recursos Técnicos e Pedagógicos*) to support people with disabilities in universities.

As an example of this policy being previously enacted by public universities, the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Lisbon created in 2017 the Monitoring Committee (*Comissão de Acompanhamento*) to help students with *special educational needs* (*Estudantes com Necessidades Educativas Especiais*), as well as the Psychopedagogical Support Office (GAPsi - *Gabinete de Apoio Psicopedagógico*) that published several guides for lecturers to learn how to support students with *special educational needs*. For example, in 2020, the Office published the Guide for Professors on psychological and psychiatric disorders.

In addition, the *Career Guidance and Student Support Center* (NOCAE - *Núcleo de Orientação de Carreira e Apoio ao Estudante*) of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon also maintained online support to students with disabilities and special educational needs during the period of confinement. It also made accessible for the whole academic community resources with tips and strategies on different topics to help students cope better with the challenges they were facing at that moment, thus decreasing feelings of isolation, and helping them maintain a healthier lifestyle. The topics covered ranged from stress, food, sleeping schedules or insomnia, and procrastination, among others. These materials were shared on the faculty's social media

³⁶ XXI Governo Constitucional, "Estratégia Nacional Para a Inclusão Das Pessoas Com Deficiência 2021-2025," 2020.

³⁷ United Nations, "Article 24 – Education | United Nations Enable," May 14, 2015, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html>.

networks (*Facebook*, and *Instagram*, in which a hashtag was intentionally created to gather all related posts) and on the faculty's website as well, where they are still available³⁸.

viii. What about international students?

International students usually apply to interchange programs to have the experience of living and studying abroad, in a different language, while establishing contact with a different culture. As expected, the thought of being confined at home in a country where they lack the support foundation that they generally enjoy in their country of origin, in which the expenses could be similar to the ones in a normal year, was not particularly fascinating to these students. The panorama in Portugal was basically the same as in other European countries, therefore online lectures would be a reality even for international students. Moving abroad only to have to stay home attending lectures online would not be the ERASMUS+ experience most students dream of.

That is why, during last year, international students were particularly affected by the closing of national borders, as well as confinements and quarantines imposed in the country. In 2020 the number of international students in some universities decreased considerably, provoking a significant cut in the profits of Portuguese higher education institutions³⁹.

“International students” in this context is a group divided into two categories: i) international students in mobility (e.g., ERASMUS+ programme); ii) international students enrolled in Portuguese universities, being the majority from Global South Portuguese-speaking countries such as Brazil, Angola, and Cape Verde. This last group, when tuition fees are concerned, usually have higher costs of tuition to pay comparing to nationals, which has a huge impact in Portuguese universities' finances.

³⁸ “Faculdade de Letras Da Universidade de Lisboa - NApE Online Em Tempos de COVID-19,” accessed September 7, 2021, <https://www.lettras.ulisboa.pt/pt/estudantes/alunos/desenvolvimento-pessoal-e-academico/1483-nape-online-em-tempos-de-covid-19>.

³⁹ Isabel Leiria, “Estudantes estrangeiros caem para metade em algumas universidades,” *Jornal Expresso*, October 2020, <https://expresso.pt/sociedade/2020-10-04-Estudantes-estrangeiros-caem-para-metade-em-algumas-universidades>.

According to a study elaborated by Iorio et. al. in 2020⁴⁰ that analyzed qualitative data gathered through surveys posed to international students of both categories presented above (e.g., international students in mobility, and international students enrolled in Portuguese universities), the pandemic had a huge impact on the continuity of their studies in Portugal because most of them do not have access to scholarships, thus having to finance their own studies or relying on their family's financial support to do so. The economic downturn provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic certainly caused concern within the international academic community that might not be able to finance their education so easily. That situation is more predominant on international students enrolled in universities in Portugal than in ERASMUS+ students because the latter are offered scholarships to sponsor their time abroad. In addition, interchange programs are still dominated by students coming from Global North European countries, who have more economic capacity to pay for the expenses abroad⁴¹.

Furthermore, and on what online learning is concerned, the answers on the survey elaborated by Iorio et. al. (2020) were clear: 30,2% of the inquired do not feel comfortable using online digital tools to be able to access their lectures by videoconference; additionally, 10% share their computer with someone else, which makes it difficult to maintain a timely schedule to attend seminars.

According to the National Agency responsible for the ERASMUS+ programme, when it comes to Portuguese students applying to interchange programs such as ERASMUS+, in 2020, the number of students decreased significantly comparing to September 2019. While in 2019, 5192 students left the country to spend one or two semesters abroad, in 2020 those numbers shrunk drastically to 1509 students⁴². Most students made the decision to postpone their international experience due to the fact that online lectures would remain their only option even abroad.

⁴⁰ Juliana Iorio, Adelia Veronica Silva, and Maria Lucinda Fonseca, "O impacto da Covid-19 nos e nas estudantes internacionais no ensino superior em Portugal: uma análise preliminar," *Finisterra* 115, no. 55 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.18055/Finis20285>.

⁴¹ Ibid. 4

⁴² Sónia Simões, "Menos 71% de estudantes saíram de Portugal para fazer Erasmus," *Observador*, accessed August 24, 2021, <https://observador.pt/2020/10/22/menos-71-de-estudantes-sairam-de-portugal-para-fazer-erasmus/>.

ix. Only because students are confined...

In addition to these challenges directly connected to distance learning, there are also concerns related to societal factors that might affect students specifically because they are confined at home.

Due to the increasing pressure on families' income, there may be the situation in which students are obliged to move back to their parents' home, as mentioned, for not having the economic capacity to continue paying rent in the city to where they had previously moved to study. By moving back to their parents' home, students are subjected to a great number of different social situations that might be prejudicial towards their mental health, namely the lack of privacy that might cause them to refrain from seeking the psychological help they may need, or the exposure to domestic violence, whether it be physical, emotional, verbal, or psychological. In Portugal, in 2020 the calls for help due to domestic violence rose by 180% comparing to the same period of 2019 (e.g., first trimester)⁴³. According to the statement made by the State Secretary for Citizenship and Equality, 70% of the reported situations were already a reality before the pandemic, but the fact that people were confined at home increased the frequency of occurrences. Naturally this does not mean that every higher education student is affected by this phenomenon, but it does constitute a risk worth noting due to the high number of help requests. It is a phenomenon to which students might be exposed while confined at home.

Moreover, and because of economic constraints affecting families, students who used to have lunch at their university's canteen, now might not be able to have a complete meal every day at home, which has consequences *vis-à-vis* their development and education not only in the short-term, but also on the long run. Access to healthy food might be decisive to their future as it is proven to result in higher grades, better memory and quicker processing of information and data. The relevance of this matter was highlighted by the Academic Association of Lisbon (*Associação Académica de Lisboa*), that requested for the universities' canteens to be opened for students of both public and

⁴³ Lusa, "Covid-19. Pandemia agudizou situações de violência doméstica já existentes," PÚBLICO, accessed September 1, 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2020/06/16/sociedade/noticia/covid19-pandemia-agudizou-situacoes-violencia-domestica-ja-existentes-1920817>.

private institutions, referencing particularly the socio-economic impact of the pandemic⁴⁴.

Other issues related to the shift from in-person to distance learning are the emotional distress and the lack of parental presence provoked by the fact that what was before an environment to rest, to have fun and to put into practice different hobbies became an office and a workplace. The line that once divided the workplace from home started to fade, and that also had a major influence on the upsurge of mental health issues.

This situation led to other nuisances, especially prevalent in families with more than one child in school, related to this non-existent division between the space of studying, which could also be shared by different people, and the space for relaxing. Students who had lectures online most of the times might not have had the private space they needed to learn effectively without being interrupted.

The difficulty in reconciling study time and leisure time, avoiding procrastinating to the point of not meeting the university' deadlines, might have also constituted an issue aggravated during the pandemic because students were obliged to study from the comfort of their homes, favorable to sloppiness and self-negligence when it comes to discipline and school deadlines; the typical *I'll do it tomorrow, there's still time* was most likely a common scenario for higher education students during this period.

- BENEFITS OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Although the landscape seems far from ideal when it comes to distance learning, especially because of all the negative consequences it has on the mental health of students, there are also positive aspects about it.

Distance learning's main characteristic is the fact that students do not have to leave home to go to university to get access to knowledge and to the necessary resources. Therefore, there is no need for them to travel. Additionally, it maximizes the number of people that can get access to a specific subject because there are no physical constraints to the attendance in lectures and seminars (e.g., at university, classrooms have a lower

⁴⁴ Lusa, "Associação Académica de Lisboa defende acesso a cantinas universitárias para alunos do público e privado," PÚBLICO, August 2020, <https://www.publico.pt/2020/08/24/p3/noticia/associacao-academica-lisboa-defende-acesso-cantinas-universitarias-alunos-publico-privado-1929096>.

maximum capacity than an online classroom); therefore, in terms of cost-effectiveness, online learning's range is superior to in-person learning. However, that characteristic might also have a negative impact: more students mean less individual attention and less time to clarify possible doubts or questions that may arise.

Furthermore, distance learning might be flexible if professors tape their sessions and upload them online for students to download, simplifying the access to learning resources and enabling students to maintain their own learning schedule, which in turn might be beneficial for their mental health for allowing them to keep their own pace, alleviating the pressure connected to strict time frames. It also allows students with disabilities (e.g., hearing impairment, special educational needs) to take their time to watch lectures, with the option of slowing down the video, pausing or even rewinding it, as well as re-watching it.

Additionally, and despite the fact that it might damage their mental health because usually students expect to move out of their parents' home as soon as they leave for university, gaining their independence somehow, the fact that a great number of undergraduates had to move back into their parents' home due to the decrease in their economic capacity might have had a positive result, allowing them to either save some money that would otherwise be spent in accommodation or transportation, or allocate it to other needs.

Online learning also stimulates digital literacy and promotes the increasing of technical skills, such as the use of collaborative apps, online research and selection of suitable information, as well as sources. These skills are fundamental for students entering the job market as they are exceptionally valuable for most work opportunities.

In conclusion, although distance learning has some benefits, it is possible to say that the cons outweigh the pros, especially if we take into account the destructive impact it has on mental health when imposed on students during a confinement period in which isolation was the main feature.

CHAPTER III. PART I: COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN PORTUGAL:
EDUCATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

○ Governmental policies related to education and mental health

During this period of COVID-19, several were the public policies implemented by the Portuguese government to stop the spreading of the virus and to manage and counter the several consequences of a consecutive number of lockdowns imposed in the country. However, how many of those policies and measures put in place were related to the mental health of students? How did the government face the issues created and aggravated by this pandemic when it comes to mental health and the development of students so that their future, whether as students or as workers, is not jeopardized? What about health literacy: is it disseminated enough in the educational environment?

The Portuguese policy regarding mental health and countering its effects and consequences in society has not been the most effective tool in the past years, so that mental health issues have been prevalent in university students. There are even some who call mental health the *poor relative of health* in the country⁴⁵. Moreover, this prevalence has been increasing lately, particularly since last year, worsening the data on mental health since the beginning of the pandemic not only for students but also for the general population⁴⁶.

Although universities often have psychological support centers, that is not publicized as it should be, and students more often than not go through their bachelor's or master's degrees without seeking for the help they need to face recurrent episodes of anxiety, depression or panic attacks, that usually rise or aggravate during adolescence or when they are young adults (18-24 years old)⁴⁷. Psychological help outside the educational system is expensive and not everyone has the economic capacity to pay for therapy. The lack of support in the education system is evident; and has been shown during these

⁴⁵ Escola Superior de Comunicação Social FM, "Saúde Mental. Até Quando o Parente Pobre Da Saúde?," July 2021, <https://comunidadeculturaearte.com/saude-mental-ate-quando-o-parente-pobre-da-saude/>.

⁴⁶ Lusa, "Um em cada cinco portugueses considera que saúde mental piorou com a pandemia," SIC Notícias, accessed July 14, 2021, <https://sicnoticias.pt/especiais/saude-mental/2021-03-23-Um-em-cada-cinco-portugueses-considera-que-saude-mental-piorou-com-a-pandemia-7c853bd5>.

⁴⁷ Márcia Cunha, "Promoção Da Saúde Nos Estudantes Do Ensino Superior: Saúde Mental Positiva e Literacia Em Saúde Mental Em Análise" (Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo, 2020), http://repositorio.ipvc.pt/bitstream/20.500.11960/2515/1/Marcia_Cunha.pdf.

years in which mental health concerns have been obtaining high ground as the number one concern within the education community. Nonetheless, public policies have not been focusing enough on the development of children, adolescents, and young adults, especially those that are on the limbo when their future is concerned; that is, those living under the pressure of achieving certain educational objectives to ensure their future, a place in the job market that actually relates to the educational field of their choice, as well as their sustainable development as active members of society.

The right to health in the Portuguese legislation is enshrined on the Basic Law on Health (*Lei de Bases da Saúde*; Law 95/2019)⁴⁸, that revoked the Law 48/90. In its first article, this law ensures the right to the protection of health: *1. the right to health protection is the right of all people to enjoy the best state of physical, mental, and social health, assuming the creation and development of economic, social, cultural, and environmental conditions that guarantee sufficient and healthy standards of living, work, and leisure. [...] 3. Society has a duty to contribute to the protection of health in all policies and sectors of activity.* More specifically, the Basic Law on Health addresses mental health on its 13th Base, on which it states that *“1. The State promotes the improvement of the mental health of people and society in general, namely through the promotion of mental well-being, prevention and timely identification of mental illnesses and the risks associated with them.”*

Although it has various mentions to *mental health* or *mental illness*, the Portuguese legislation does not, in any document, decree, or law, define what mental health actually is, let alone in the Constitution. Nonetheless, it is obvious that the scope of *mental health* and *mental illness* is vast, including *mental health problems that involve “some psychic suffering, although it does not meet the defined criteria for the diagnosis of a mental illness”*⁴⁹. Therefore, sporadic episodes of anxiety or depression caused by a specific event on a specific stage of a person’s life is considered as lack of mental health because it affects negatively the person concerned and his/her daily life.

⁴⁸ “Lei 95/2019, 2019-09-04,” Pub. L. No. 95/2019 (2019), 95, <https://dre.pt/pesquisa/-/search/124417108/details/maximized>.

⁴⁹ SER Mental, “Não há saúde sem saúde mental,” *SER Mental* (blog), accessed August 29, 2021, <https://sermental.pt/saude-mental/>.

On this rhetoric, and because young adults have been particularly affected by the effects of this pandemic on their mental health⁵⁰, it is imperative that the Portuguese government finds solutions to minimize the damage already made. However, the mechanisms of mental health support currently in place are either targeting general population or different age groups. In March 2021, the government issued a legal decree instituting a task force of behavioral science that is responsible for the assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the population. The task force has put into practice the government's directives requiring for it to evaluate the behavior of specific social groups in order to assess the probability of their compliance with COVID-19 measures and public policies related to the mitigation of the spread of the virus, as well as the promotion of mental health, publishing reports and scientific evidence relevant to the matter⁵¹.

The Portuguese Assembly has also issued a list of recommendations⁵² related to mental health protection and diagnose, as well as the mitigation of effects of the pandemic on the mental health of the Portuguese population, highlighting particularly the ages of childhood and adolescence. In addition, it recommends the hiring of psychologists to the National Health Service that was already foreseen in the National State budget for 2018.

When it comes to education, the National Assembly recommends that the government increases the number of outreach teams (e.g., *teams* of health professionals — psychologists, nurses specialized in mental health — that ensure responses based on prevention of mental health issues) in education establishments, which was also foreseen in the National Plan of Mental Health (*Plano Nacional da Saúde Mental*, 2017). However, this is not specific of higher education establishments, but rather of basic and secondary education.

Furthermore, one of the most important suggestions offered by the National Assembly concerns health literacy of professors and schools' administrative staff so that they are

⁵⁰ Cristiana Rocha Rodrigues, "Ansiedade, angústia, insónia: os efeitos secundários da pandemia nos estudantes," PÚBLICO, accessed August 29, 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2020/05/13/p3/noticia/ansiedade-angustia-insonia-efeitos-secundarios-pandemia-estudantes-1915654>.

⁵¹ Saúde - Gabinete da Ministra, "Despacho 3027/2021, 2021-03-19," Pub. L. No. 3027/2021 (2021), https://dre.pt/web/guest/home/-/dre/159762997/details/2/maximized?serie=II&parte_filter=31&dreId=159678463.

⁵² Assembleia da República, "Resolução da Assembleia da República 158/2021, 2021-06-04," Diário da República Eletrónico, accessed August 29, 2021, <https://dre.pt/web/guest/home/-/dre/164590040/details/maximized>.

capable of identifying symptoms of need of psychological counseling on students. Once again, this measure targets basic and secondary education.

Additionally, it also suggested the creation of curricula related to mental health literacy in the years of mandatory education (e.g., until the end of the secondary level of education). However, in the higher education level such courses are not mandatory components of the curriculum of any bachelor, other than psychology and health related degrees such as Medicine which deal with mental health directly in their professional careers. It would be fundamental to raise awareness to mental health in the higher education level in order to decrease the stigma related to the issue in question, and to consequently urge students to come forward to ask for help, reducing the negative consequences this problem has in the short and long term by approaching it as soon as possible.

Furthermore, the Assembly advises the Government to support higher education institutions in the setting up of national psychological follow-up response networks, and in the collection of data related to the identification of risk factors and in the prevention of suicide among students. The Assembly also issued Resolution 66/2020, mentioned in Chapter II, recommending the Government to promote the hiring of psychologists by the Social Services, which are funded by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES), thus endorsing mental health care of a better quality in the education community⁵³.

When it comes to the direct consequences of the pandemic, the Assembly's recommendations are related specifically towards health professionals and the psychological impact the virus had on infected people, their relatives, and acquaintances in the long run. Unfortunately, nothing else is mentioned when it comes to higher education and the mitigation of the pandemic's impact on the psychological state of students.

Although no other official governmental document refers the mental health of higher education students, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education advised higher education institutions to pay close attention to the mental health of

⁵³ Assembleia da República, Resolução da Assembleia da República n.o 66/2020.

students and to provide psychological support whenever needed⁵⁴ to mitigate the consequences that the pandemic had on undergraduates. The official statement issued a list of recommendations to reinforce the action of higher education institutions on fields relevant to students, such as the promotion of initiatives to combat school dropouts, to promote the cooperation between higher education and secondary education establishments so as to increase the rate of students that enroll in higher education, and to improve the inclusion and transition processes of 1st year students. Moreover, the ministry also recommends that universities support their students in the transition to the job market through the collaboration with employees and the launch of internship programs, among other proposals. It is worth saying that there is only one reference to mental health when advising universities to pay close attention to it and to support students whenever needed.

Nonetheless, universities have responded to the call for awareness and founded or reactivated their psychological support services to act on the demands of their pupils⁵⁵. As an alternative, universities that do not provide these services sent their students to external services of psychological help.

According to an analysis elaborated by the task force on behavioral science mentioned in the beginning of this topic, several universities and institutes implemented and endorsed campaigns related to a healthy lifestyle to be lived during the pandemic, such as online gym classes and healthy recipes.

Unfortunately, there are no governmental measures specifically targeting the mental wellbeing of students enrolled in higher education institutions.

⁵⁴ Gabinete do Ministro da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior, “Recomendação Às Instituições Científicas e de Ensino Superior No Contexto Das Medidas de Desconfinamento Controlado Definidas Pelo Governo,” March 2021, <https://site.ipv.pt/documentos/ComunicadoMCTES-DGES-11marco2021.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Lusa, “Com a Pandemia, Universidades Reforçaram Ou Criaram Serviços de Apoio Psicológico Aos Alunos,” August 2021, <https://www.publico.pt/2021/08/11/p3/noticia/pandemia-universidades-reforcaram-criaram-servicos-apoio-psicologico-alunos-1973815>.

CHAPTER III. PART II: THE PORTUGUESE CASE. HOW ARE STUDENTS DEALING WITH THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC?

INTERVIEW

An interview within the scope of this topic was carried out in the hope of understanding better the situation in Portuguese universities from the point of view of key stakeholders. This interview had the participation of Dr. Luísa Reis Santos, a psychologist in the psychological support center of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon that made herself available to clarify and describe the work of the support center during these two schoolyears affected by the pandemic, and how it changed after the beginning of the distance learning method.

The questions were formulated to comprehend how the work of the center was affected comparing to previous years and how the psychologists dealt with the impact of the pandemic on students in a first-person testimony. The interview was conducted through Zoom, in Portuguese and then translated to English.

To start, Dr. Luísa began by giving me her consent to record the interview so that I could then use the qualitative information needed for the thesis by proceeding to the transcription of the interview. She also clarified that there had been a recent change to the designation of the center that was previously called *Student Support Center (NAPÉ - Núcleo de Apoio ao Estudante)* and is currently called *Career Guidance and Student Support Center (NOCAE - Núcleo de Orientação de Carreira e Apoio ao Estudante)*. Thus, it is not only a center targeting psychological support but also a center on which students might find other resources related to their entrance in the job market or possible internships made available by the faculty.

After a modest introduction of the thesis, I proceeded to ask the questions regarding the work of the center as a psychological support facility⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ As a side note, I would also like to refer that Dr. Luísa was thoughtful enough to send me some more information on the NOCAE's initiatives during COVID-19 regarding mental health literacy in the educational environment by email after the interview.

The first question was more of a subjective one related to the effectiveness of the distance learning method. It would obviously be easier for professors or even students to answer this question. However, I consider that it is also important to hear what mental health specialists have to say, particularly if the prejudicial factors of this method are taken into account.

As expected, it was highlighted that students complained about difficulties in concentration and motivation. In addition, especially during the first confinement, students also complained that perhaps teachers did not know how to measure the amount of homework they were sending, and many students felt more overloaded and overwhelmed than when they were having face-to-face classes. Nonetheless, this situation might have been rectified in the transition to the current schoolyear (e.g., 2020-2021) because professors also needed some time to adjust to this new reality. The major problem of this method identified was the degree of interaction and interactivity between students and professors which was obviously lower than in face-to-face lectures. However, Dr. Luísa considers that the goals established for these schoolyears were achieved.

The second question was more focused on students' requests of psychological support and its frequency. It also focused on reasons comparing the before and after the pandemic.

Although it differs from institution to institution, at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, contrary to what was anticipated, the requests for psychological assistance decreased significantly. Nevertheless, this data does not mean that students are emotionally well, but rather that there are several factors that may have contributed to this situation, namely the unawareness of students that this support center actually exists caused by the fact that students are not physically present at the university and, therefore, might not be familiarized with its structures. This may be the case of 1st and 2nd year students who did not have the same process of integration in higher education. However, and because a new online reality was initiated, the support service was also made available online, raising other issues mentioned above in the thesis, such as the lack of privacy at home that may inhibit students from seeking help due to the circumstances of being confined with their parents most of the time. Another issue highlighted was the possibility of such a state of demotivation and unresponsiveness that made it difficult for

students to ask for help. There may also have been dropouts from higher education, which may also explain the decline in the appeals. In addition, the issues discussed on Chapter II (*Data privacy*) related to the prejudicial components of apps such as Zoom might also be applied in this context as the psychological support online might be realized through these apps.

Despite the decrease in the requests during this period of online learning, higher education psychologists share the apprehension that, when face-to-face teaching restarts, there will be an exponential growth in the number of assistance requests to compensate for those that have not been made in the meantime.

Higher education students are prone to have anxiety, stress and depressive symptoms owing to the context of pressure to attain certain educational objectives and of transition to the job market that follows this stage. Those feelings and symptoms remained during the pandemic and were aggravated by the circumstances of being confined at home, being therefore complemented by loneliness and demotivation, as well as lack of self-esteem. In sum, the reasons for seeking psychological support are essentially the same but aggravated by the social context in which they are currently inserted.

Additionally, the economy was profoundly impacted by the pandemic, which caused some instability in terms of income and guarantee of work of Portuguese families. This had repercussions on the students as well. Even those who have not been economically affected in terms of their parents' income or even their own income, because there also students with student-worker status, have some concern for the future, especially those who are closer to finishing their studies and to the transition to the job market. If the situation was not very promising in terms of employment before, currently it became even more unstable for young adults that have fragile employment contracts, such as *Recibos Verdes* or term contracts that are essentially contracts in place during a short period of time to satisfy temporary needs that companies might have, ending immediately after the period needed to meet those needs⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ Pedro Reis, "Contrato de trabalho a termo," *Web Emprego - Empregos, direitos e código do trabalho* (blog), May 11, 2009, <https://www.web-emprego.com/contrato-de-trabalho-a-termo/>.

Although the number of appeals were lower during confinement, the support center did not manage to respond to every request because there is a waiting list from previous years. The number of requests for support was increasing every year before the pandemic. The way students learned about the center differed throughout the years: in early days, it was through the faculty's website, whether in more recent years was through classmates. This interchange of information worked better while the method of face-to-face learning was still in place. While at home students end up communicating less, which also has repercussions on the level of trust that undergraduates establish with mental health professionals; it becomes more difficult for them to establish some proximity that allows students to talk about these matters, which require more intimacy. As it was more difficult to establish this bond of intimacy with distance learning also among students, perhaps it became more difficult to convey the information regarding the existence of the center.

The development of social interaction skills and the atrophy of the ones already trained and absorbed during students' lives are definitely issues emerging from the pandemic.

When it comes to first year students, a clarification session is always part of the welcoming activities of integration. During these, doubts related to both economic and psychological support are clarified. However, not all students are present as it is not mandatory to participate, therefore not everyone has access to that information in the first place.

To counter this situation, since 2017-2018, the faculty has been developing a mentoring program to support new students⁵⁸. In the training of mentors (e.g., 2nd and 3rd year students who will take in 1st year students) there is also a module on the functioning of the faculty in which it is explained the various services offered, including the psychological support service. Mentors are students with a higher level of sensitivity to mental health issues so that they can suggest psychological support if they detect that a colleague is not well. During the past two schoolyears that were affected by the pandemic, this mentoring programme was also switched to the online method. The programme does not cover students from every bachelor available in the faculty, but that is one of the goals of the

⁵⁸ Tiago Artileiro, "Faculdade de Letras Da Universidade de Lisboa - Mentorado FLUL: Um Programa de Alunos Para Alunos," November 2020, <https://www.letras.ulisboa.pt/pt/noticias/1613-mentorado-flul-um-programa-de-alunos-para-alunos>.

center. This programme depends entirely on volunteer students; therefore, it is necessary that they are aware of the psychological complications that came with the pandemic so that they can provide an effective help, thus making health literacy an important subject, although they are also responsible for other areas such as the integration of mentees.

Despite the fact that this technique is applied through students and to students, professors are still not targeted to be instructed on mental health literacy and to be able to engage with students when it comes to the possible need to psychological support. Hence, it is on the exclusive responsibility of the center and mentors to engage with students on this topic.

Nonetheless, there is still a waiting list in place, which is also explained by the lack of staff to face the demand of students. Psychologists perform more functions at a university than just the obvious task of helping students on psychological matters, which also limit the number of students they can assist.

In an ultimate effort trying to decrease the length of the waiting list and help more students, meetings and appointments started to happen every 15 days, which allows assisting twice as many students than before (e.g., previously they were assisted every week). However, this makes the process take longer to evolve, the sessions are more spaced out, which also requires a larger effort on the psychologists in terms of mental effort and memory in order to provide a sense of continuity of treatment to students and an effective therapy.

Another issue related to psychological support is the fact that, as mentioned, psychologists in higher education institutions have more than one task on their to-do list. Therefore, support centers' physical infrastructures are also intended for another type of services. As such, health professionals only have certain hours when they can use the room for appointments; moreover, it is also only possible to offer this psychological support at specific hours stipulated by the faculty. Thus, it becomes extremely difficult to overcome these limitations of time and location. These issues were also present when the online method of distance learning was being employed.

When it comes to students with disabilities, the way they dealt with the online setting this year differs from student to student. On the one hand, there are students

who prefer online education because they do not have to commute to college, but on the other hand, for others it was more complicated. To illustrate, for students who already had some anxiety and in particular social anxiety, it was difficult to have the camera turned on, for instance. They felt extremely exposed, and some students felt more anxious about having to participate in class than when it was face-to-face.

Regarding special educational needs and students who, as explained in Chapter II, did not see themselves as disabled until the social apparatus no longer supported their needs, there were some cases of students with difficulties who already felt some isolation or distance from their peers but going to classes and being in a common space was something very positive for them. With online education, however, they felt even more isolated because that moment in the classroom was when they could still maintain contact with their classmates. Thus, staying indoors all day may have been more problematic in some cases. For students with disabilities, the physical isolation might have been even more evident. Additionally, anxiety, lack of motivation as well as depressive symptoms were also part of their psychological framework.

Students felt constrained and limited on several distinct levels, specifically due to the lack of personal contact and the missing out on the experience they were supposed to have in college.

When it comes to external sources of support that students can use themselves in a spirit of self-help, such as podcasts or apps, there is not much that is recommended by universities' psychologists, particularly because those resources have to come from reliable and credible professionals of health, which require prior research on their part to be able to suggest such resources.

However, students that are left in the waiting list do not go home empty handed: an alternative is always indicated as soon as they request psychological support, immediately after the screening session, in which expectations are determined. When placed on the waiting list, students are informed that there is another service of psychological support in place — the Medical Center of the University of Lisbon —, available to any student from any faculty of the University of Lisbon. It provides free psychological assistance for students with scholarships; for the other students it is paid, but the amount requested is still much lower than in private clinics.

To improve the quality of the service, several higher education institutions have joined together in a collective effort in a network association (RESAPES - Network of Psychological Support Services for Higher Education; *Rede de Serviços de Apoio Psicológico do Ensino Superior*) to identify and rectify possible shortcomings on the response to the needs of students. It promotes assemblies and meetings in which the state of each institution at this level is debated.

Nonetheless, this has not resolved the issue of the waiting list, which has also been aggravated by the incapacity of the National Health Service (SNS – *Serviço Nacional de Saúde*) to answer students' requests. This alternative continues to be offered to students despite the obvious concerns that it raises related to accessibility resources. Access to this service depends on the provision of a family doctor, which many students do not have, the lack of psychologists in health centers is abysmal, and the same waiting list issue persists on this service.

Regarding the policy implemented by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education (MCTES) when addressing students' mental health, there is a clear lack of investment in initiatives promoting the countering of psychological consequences of the pandemic. Nonetheless, the same cannot be said about the Ministry of Health. A psychological support line was inserted in the NHS line (SNS 24) in partnership with the Psychologists Association, which represents an advance in this area.

At the Faculty of Arts and Humanities particularly, a psychological support cellphone line was created. Yet, it did not work for a long time because, also at the University of Lisbon, another more general line was created, and it was not worthwhile to overlap the two lines. These types of telephone lines are, however, for very punctual support. There will often be a need for continuity support, an area in which the government should undeniably invest more.

Additionally, an improvement in the investment in support structures is absolutely necessary, especially in increasing the number of psychologists in health centers which is still insufficient to respond to the demand.

This interview brought to the discussion other issues that otherwise would not be highlighted in this context, namely concerns related to the precarious conditions of

psychological help infrastructures, such as the center's waiting list that resulted in the need to increase the time between each appointment, as well as the difficulties that mental health professionals face when trying to perform their job of psychological assistance which encompass not only the lack of available time to support students, but also the fact that they are responsible for several other assignments related to different matters. It can be argued that during this difficult time

SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

For the purpose of understanding the mental health effects of the pandemic on higher education students from their perspective, an online survey was developed using *Google Forms*. The survey was disseminated online on different social media networks, such as *Facebook* university groups and *Whatsapp* groups accessed by higher education students. It was answered on a volunteer basis, and it did not target any specific area of studies. Each student could only fill in the survey once as they had to log in to their email account prior to answering the form. Nonetheless, the survey was completely anonymous, being entirely impossible to trace back the answers to the students, preserving their privacy.

The questions were specifically focusing on study habits and routine during the pandemic, concentration levels, psychological symptoms, issues related to the process of distance learning, and one last question regarding the future prospects from students' perspective.

The main issue encountered on the realization of this survey was the participation of students. Although the participative sample might not seem representative of the whole higher education universe, the results obtained are certainly corroborated by information indicative of the mental health state of students in Portugal shared by *mass media* channels, as well as by the consequences of the pandemic that affect students indirectly. In addition, this survey's purpose was not observing the whole universe of students, but rather construct an idea of a pattern of mental health instability during the pandemic that repeats itself on students by comparing their answers.

The survey started with a short introduction explaining its objectives and the rationale behind it. Students were asked to respond truthfully and after a short process

of careful thinking so that the answers would translate, to some extent, the reality of higher education undergraduates in Portugal during confinement since the beginning of the pandemic. To preserve their anonymity, they were also warned not to write their name on the form.

The first questions were regarding personal details, such as age, gender, and study area. Most answers came from 23 years old students (19,4%), followed by 22, 21 and 20 years old (16,1% each). Female participants were the majority of respondents, constituting 80,6%.

Regarding fields of education, it varied particularly between Humanistic (e.g., Law, Philosophy, History, Political Science and International Relations, European Studies etc.) and Scientific bachelors (e.g., Environment and Sustainability, Medicine, Communication Design, Industrial Automation, etc.). These questions allowed us to understand the participants' background to find out whether that had any relation to the psychological impact of the pandemic, which was not corroborated by the statistics and responses. Both male and female participants felt the psychological effects of the pandemic, with no substantial difference regarding symptoms.

The next questions were more specific of study habits and changes to it during the confinement. According to the results, 61,3% of the inquired spent less time studying. Most participants said that, on a daily average, they studied two hours less than before the pandemic. The reasons enunciated for that range from *I can't concentrate for long periods of time* to *I spend a lot of time having online lectures, which are really overwhelming, and I have no desire or will to keep studying afterwards*. There are also those who answered that after spending hours in a row sitting in the same place in front of the computer, they have no motivation left to study, which was not the case while they had face-to-face lectures. Others presented reasons related to procrastination, constant feeling of tiredness despite the fact of not leaving home, anxiety, and apathy.

The ones who stated that they spend more time studying than before (38,7%) presented reasons related to the time they save for not having to commute to university, the need to compensate for the information that is lost in online learning, anxiety issues that were fought by spending time studying to keep themselves occupied, or even due to having to teach themselves what professors should be teaching. In addition, the *exaggerated*

amount of work that professors require from students is also mentioned as one of the reasons for spending more time studying.

Regarding routine, more than 50% of the participants (54,8%) admitted they could not maintain a healthy routine since the beginning of the pandemic. Most present reasons related to demotivation; the time spent sitting while attending lectures in front of the computer, which is extremely unhealthy; the time spent sleeping or isolated at home, that is evidently prejudicial to mental health and the development of behavioral and emotional skills for the future; and changes in the sleeping schedule. There are also references to the psychological effects of having to leave the city where he/she was studying and the effects it had on the routine. Another reason mentioned is emotional distress and the lack of hobbies which resulted in a state of unresponsiveness and inertia, limiting their routine to waking up, sitting in front of the computer and turning on *Zoom* to attend the lecture.

When it comes to eating habits, the results were the opposite of the previous question, with 61,3% of the participants answering that they could actually maintain a healthy diet. However, the 38,7% who could not keep a nourishing diet mentioned alcohol ingestion, increase in the frequency of desserts and fast food consumption, and the skipping of meals during the day due to the fact of having a deregulated sleeping schedule. In addition, reasons also include eating just because of anxiety symptoms or simply out of boredom. Contrary to this, there are also references of people who stopped eating because their psychological state did not allow them to.

Most participants, while having lectures online, resided in their primary home (77,4%). 19,4% resided in a home/room rented in the city where they were studying, and 3,2% in a university residence. From those who moved back to their primary home, only half of them could keep an isolated and organized place to study. 4,2% said that it was not possible to keep an isolated space, but it was still organized and clean.

Regarding mental health more specifically, the most chosen psychological symptoms were anxiety, lack of motivation, self-destructive behavior, procrastination, panic and uncertainty about the future, frustration, and insomnia. It is noteworthy to highlight that only one participant stated that feeling the need to be with other people physically. The fact that only one student chose this hypothesis can probably be

attributed to the fear of being infected with COVID-19 even though most participants highlighted the fact of being constantly alone and isolated as one of the reasons for not keeping a healthy diet and routine. In a more alarming tone, 2 students admitted to have had suicidal thoughts during the pandemic. Fortunately, both students declared that they had searched psychological support. However, none of them had knowledge about any psychological support center in their universities.

When it comes to the mechanisms used to counter the psychological effects of the pandemic, most participants emphasized physical exercise, meditation, and online gaming to abstract themselves from the current reality. There were also students who mentioned psychological support and a few resorted to medication to help them get through this difficult period.

Surprisingly, and taking into account the answers to other questions related to the matter, only 32,3% of students sought psychological support. Those who did not sought assistance attributed that decision especially to the lack of economic resources. There was also one participant who mentioned that ended up trying self-help mechanisms by searching on the website of the British and Australian National Health Services, also referring the lack of information in the Portuguese National Health Service's website regarding anxiety issues and hypochondriac symptomatology.

The majority of students does not know any psychological support line for undergraduates. Moreover, when universities' psychological support centers are concerned, more than 50% (51,6%) of the participants stated that they are not aware of any center in their university, which is worrisome because low-income students who do not possess the economic resources necessary to seek external psychological help might not be aware of the free options available for them, consequently missing the support they need. These results go back to what Dr. Luísa stated regarding the way students learned about the Faculty of Arts and Humanities' support center. Their awareness to the free option of consulting with their universities' psychologists was enhanced by the face-to-face social interaction at college within the academic community which allowed for the word to spread faster. It is also responsibility of the institution to raise awareness to the services available for students. Furthermore, the government also has the responsibility to implement public policies to boost the capacity of these services to be as effective as possible. This requires investment both on infrastructures and staff.

Regarding the impact of the pandemic in social life and personal relations, most participants unexpectedly answered that, in the future, it would not be more difficult for them to participate in social events. However, there are still 41,9% who responded that it would be challenging for them due to several reasons, namely, and I quote, *I don't know how to interact with people anymore. It seems as if I am five years old again.* Of those 41,9%, most of them referred the loss of social skills due to being confined at home having online lectures which does not provide students with the opportunity to interact with each other during classes, and the fear of being with people because of the virus' high rate of contagion despite the vaccination process currently in place. There are even students who mention high levels of anxiety just by thinking about social gatherings.

This has a huge impact in the development of socio-emotional skills that are transversal to different contexts, such as the academic and the labor market context. The loss of socio-emotional skills will consequently lead to the compromising of several different rights that contribute to the development of students as sustainable, profitable, and active members of societies. The development and maintenance of such skills is directly interconnected to three broad areas: "the ability to regulate and manage one's emotions; the ability to set and achieve goals; and the ability to develop interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and success in life"⁵⁹. The maintenance of these skills is fundamental towards the emotional regulation that helps students cope with different contexts and situations that may arise, such as distance learning and confinements, as well as the capacity to feel empathy towards others, which promotes cooperation and supportive behavior among peers. Both are fundamental for higher education students entering the job market for being decisive in their adaptability to new circumstances required by most employees.

When distance learning is concerned, most participants spent between 5 to 7 hours in front of their computer, or more than 7 hours. However, it is important to emphasize the one participant who added the option *0 hours* because he/she does not have a computer.

⁵⁹ Louise Yorke et al., "The Importance of Students' Socio-Emotional Learning, Mental Health, and Wellbeing in the Time of COVID-19," RISE Programme, March 2021, <https://riseprogramme.org/publications/importance-students-socio-emotional-learning-mental-health-and-wellbeing-time-covid-19>.

Directly connected to this topic is the average time that each student manages to keep focused during the lecturing period. Most students (38,7%) answered that they could only maintain their focus until the end of the first hour of lectures. 35,5% of participants can keep their focus up to 2 hours.

This concentration issue raises questions of motivation that evidently affects their academic performance. The less time students can keep their focus during lectures, the more information will be lost in the process, and consequently, the more time students have to study to keep up to what is being taught; furthermore, this situation might give them the impression that they are teaching themselves as they have to make a more significant effort in the learning process.

The main issues highlighted by the participants in regard to distance learning were the failures in the Wi-Fi connection and the difficulty of accessing to the faculty's library, and the fact that the spaces of lectures, study and rest are not appropriately defined as to allow students to associate each area with different feelings: study areas are usually associated with schoolwork, whereas resting areas are associated with relax and leisure. Additionally, study areas are usually kept private, decreasing inconvenient intrusions of family members during lectures, which is also one of the issues raised by the survey's participants.

Furthermore, another problem mentioned by students was the access to learning resources such as books, and the difficulty in accessing video/audio files sent by professors caused by the inapt technological equipment that most of the time does not allow students to have more than one app open.

The lack of support from professors is also mentioned, especially when compared with the assistance given before on face-to-face lectures.

All of these constraints on the distance learning process of education contribute to the increase of demotivation and for the worsening of psychological consequences, such as anxiety, irritability, lack of concentration and, in the worst-case scenario, lethargy towards educational achievements that might culminate in possible dropouts or academic failure. Consequently, these outcomes compromise students' academic future and, in the long run, their entrance in the job market and thus their sustainability as independent adults.

RITA DINIZ REIS

On a scale of 1 to 5, being 1-Horrible and 5-Excelent, 35,5% of students who participated in the survey evaluated their online learning experience with 3. 29% evaluated with 4, and 25,8% with 2. From those who evaluated with 3 or less, it was asked of them the reasoning behind their assessment.

The reasons varied between the hardship of reconciling education with family life (younger siblings who were also at home), the necessity of supplementing the lectures with more research and investigation after spending hours in a row looking at a computer screen, and the fact that *Some professors do not even know what a computer is*. The hyperbole is blatant, but it translates the challenging reality of lack of digital literacy of Portuguese professors that hinders the online learning method effectiveness. This issue was raised by several students that even affirm that professors should have made a more significant effort to adapt their teaching method to the online regime.

As expected, there were also students who highlighted the fact that they did not need to commute to university, while at the same time that same factor left them in a position of loneliness and isolation for not having contact with their colleagues and friends at college. It is worthy of remark that, surprisingly, one student defined the distance learning period as a *blessing*; and also expressed concern regarding the return of face-to-face lectures due to the new COVID-19 variant, which is more contagious among young adults.

Regarding the expectations of students about the knowledge acquired in this previous schoolyear, 45,2% of students considered that they did not obtain the necessary skills and knowledge for the development of competencies. Similarly, 48,4% of participants did not get the grades they anticipated.

Due to this landscape of uncertainty and negative impact on their mental health, almost 30% of the inquired considered dropping out of higher education this previous schoolyear. The lack of motivation, too much work, low levels of support from professors, and adverse psychological conditions were among the reasons presented for that. Students also considered leaving their education in stand by and come back once the situation had improved so that they would not have to deal with the uncertainty and loneliness.

In the last question of the survey students were asked to reflect and analyze the impact that the confinement period and distance learning will have on their future.

Almost all of them showed some level of concern when it comes to the maintenance of the use of online learning, which will lead to more isolation and less social interaction, thus having consequences on the emotional intellect of young adults on the long term. The societal impact of this issue will be understood in a few years.

Although being isolated at home has brought with it negative consequences, a great number of students has experienced symptoms of social anxiety and will have, in the near future, innumerable setbacks in coming back to the routine and daily life they had before the pandemic, with face-to-face lectures in which they will be ultimately forced to communicate with each other once again.

However, there is also the other side of the coin: students that considered themselves introverted, now realized how important it is to be surrounded with people with whom they can socially interact.

In retrospective, the academic skills and educational competences acquired during these schoolyears might also be questioned in the future as the effectiveness of the distance learning method has been widely questioned by both professors and students. The survey brought to my attention that the situation regarding the confinement period was even more severe on students' psychological health than expected.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic, that started in 2019 and has been dominating the way the world population behaves and the way the world is run since then, has brought with it serious consequences not only on the physical health, but also on the mental health level of the general population, particularly due to the public policies implemented to prevent the spreading of the virus.

In Portugal, the pandemic and the consequent proclaimed states of emergency and calamity have been having a critical effect on the economic level, reducing the consumption, and increasing the unemployment rate as companies and commerce (especially those coming from sectors that were most affected, such as tourism and the catering sector) are going out of business, and workers are sent home to work in the *layoff* regime. Families' incomes have been decreasing since as well as the available

economic resources. As schools and universities were also closed, Portuguese students started their period of distance learning, leaving them more isolated than ever before. Contact with their colleagues was limited due to being confined at home, and the process of online learning has not been as effective when compared to face-to-face lectures, mainly due to the lack of contact between students and professors. This has taken a major toll on the psychological health of higher education students, for whom the future is even more cloudy nowadays in terms of their transition to a job market that was already unstable before the pandemic. This situation has brought with it questions linked to the protection and the relation of the right to education and the right to health, on which also depend the satisfaction of several other human rights that students are supposed to enjoy, such as the right to attain an adequate standard of living, and the right to participate actively as informed citizens in the societies in which they are inserted.

The distance learning process that was put in place to fulfil the right to education was probably the only possible solution for students to continue to have access to education during this period of lockdowns. Nonetheless, this method brought with it several distinct issues that had an enormous impact on the mental health of higher education students that were discussed in this thesis. The identified concerns are particularly connected to the **i)** availability of digital and technological equipment both on the part of students and professors, which diffculted the access to learning resources; **ii)** the economic landscape that instigated questions of whether students would be able to finance the continuation of their education process if financial support was not made available for them, and the focus on the maintenance of expenses despite the fact of being confined home (most of them in their primary home); **iii)** the academic performance and the effectiveness of online learning; **iv)** the lecturers' lack of digital literacy that consequently decreased the quality of the lectures, and the environment of pressure and psychological repercussions that it had on professors' mental health, leading them into a situation of *burnout* and exhaustion associated with their work that also contributed to the inefficacy of distance learning; **v)** the issues related to data privacy in the use of apps to maintain students under surveillance during the examination period; **vi)** the adjustment of students with disabilities to online learning, and the effect of the pandemic on students who did not see themselves as disabled but the lack of support of the social structures that no longer fit their needs anymore imposed that status on them;

vii) the consequences on international students that saw their international experience postponed or delayed; viii) and finally, the concerns that appeared not only connected to online learning, but more to the fact that students are confined at home and exposed to a great number of societal phenomena that rose with the pandemic (e.g., domestic violence; lack of privacy that might have inhibited students from asking psychological support; access to healthy food that might not have been possible to every student).

The only possible solution offered to students delivered their right to education in a bronze platter, instead of a silver one, because many were the faults and shortcomings in this method that revealed prejudicial to their mental health, when applied in compliance to confinements and lockdowns, particularly due to the fact that there were almost no governmental mechanisms in place to face these consequences. Students' right to mental health was jeopardized not only by the methods employed to counter the effects of the pandemic on the economic level, but also by the methods employed for them to enjoy their right to education (in this case, distance learning). Within this context, their right to sustainable development and to attain a certain standard of living in the future are also compromised by mental illnesses whose consequences persist in the long term. That said, and considering the impact that mental health has on the development of psychosocial skills and academic success, it is undeniable that the right to education has also been jeopardized in this context due to the straight connection between the two. Furthermore, this risks not only the rights already mentioned, but also the future development of students as social beings integrated in the society which, according to the results of the survey, constitutes one the fears shared by higher education students who consider that they do not know how to communicate with people anymore.

The survey developed within the scope of this thesis has shown that the process of distance learning was prejudicial in every aspect, particularly when concentration and motivation levels are concerned. Students never spent more time in front of a computer than during this stage of online lectures, and they have never had such low levels of concentration. This landscape has had costs on their motivation levels, as well as in their satisfaction with this method of learning. Most students saw their symptoms of anxiety and depression aggravating during this pandemic and affecting their academic performance. This lack of mental health leads to a negative impact on the academic performance, creating a vicious cycle on which academic success depends on mental

health, and mental health also depends on academic success. The uncertainty regarding the future of young adults builds up the pressure and the stress that foster psychological disorders. As mentioned before, an adequate strategy to ensure that the right to education is effectively satisfied so as to avoid a negative impact translated in anxiety or depressive symptoms connected to educational accomplishment is fundamental to mitigate those issues.

The avalanche created by the correlation between academic success and mental health, and all the constraints of the distance learning method contributed to the low levels of motivation and the worsening of psychological state, and have led to a great number of students considering dropping out of higher education or putting their graduation on standby for now.

Although some students know of the existence of centers of psychological support within their faculties or universities, the majority of students are not aware that this option is available for them for free. Additionally, the faculties' centers often have infrastructures and staff limitations that makes it difficult to accompany students and to respond to every request for psychological help. Moreover, and considering the economic landslide that Portugal has been living, students do not have sufficient economic resources to seek for external help.

The governmental response to these issues has been insignificant so far. Besides the inauguration of a psychological support line by the Ministry of Health, and recommendations made by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education to higher education institutions regarding the mental health support of students, no other measure has been put in place to contain these consequences.

In addition, when mental health literacy of professors and students is concerned, there is also a gap in the measures in place both at the governmental and at the universities' level, which has not been of help as the situation deteriorates. Nonetheless, when mental health awareness is concerned, there has been an increasing movement in the Portuguese society, particularly in the media and from people themselves.

On the one hand, it is a positive development in order to demystify and reduce stigmatization; but it is also necessary to ensure that this awareness is maintained in the post-pandemic period, as well as the promotion of mental health literacy.

To sum up, although I do recognize that it was the only possible solution to assure that the right to education was fulfilled, I also consider that the distance learning method should have been implemented in a better way so as to protect the mental health of students and to improve the quality of education, consequently improving the satisfaction of rights that will be enjoyed in the future and leading to the sustainable development of emotional skills that will contribute to the integration in the job market and to the overall happiness of these beings.

For instance, the digital literacy of professors should have been improved during the pandemic to enhance the quality of the lectures and to improve the motivation of students who, then, would not feel like they had to teach themselves throughout the schoolyear. Moreover, it would have been fundamental to avoid the severity of the consequences of this pandemic on the psychological level to raise awareness of availability of psychological support at universities that students can access online for free. In addition to this, universities' psychologists should have only one focus during emergency times such as the one we have been experiencing, so that they could respond to help requests in a timely manner; currently this does not happen because psychologists have other tasks related to different services offered by the faculties' support centers. Directly connected to that is the fact that a waiting list might pose a problem deterring the offer of help to undergraduates. To combat this, the Portuguese Government must invest in the promotion of mental health awareness national-wide and in the hiring of psychologists to the National Health Service to respond to the demand.

It became obvious through these (almost) two years of pandemic that, due to the severity of the consequences of the pandemic on students, which will be perceived in a few years when analyzed in retrospective within the social context and taking into account the generational effect on the long run, this will probably always be identified as the COVID-19 Generation.

RECOMMENDATIONS: WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IN THE FUTURE?

As a way of contributing to the improvement of the mental health of students, I have put up a list of recommendations targeting the elaboration of public policies and projects

aiming at increasing the quality of mental health services in higher education. These recommendations will be both on the governmental level and on the university level.

First of all, although psychologists in universities' support centers are, of course, mandated to exercise confidentiality principles towards students who require their services, those students might not feel compelled and comfortable enough to seek for help in these centers for being reticent regarding confidentiality as they know that other colleagues and professors maintain contact with school psychologists. Therefore, the Portuguese government might counter this issue by establishing partnerships and agreements with psychologists and psychiatrists outside the educational environment so that students coming from low-income families can enjoy state-sponsored psychological help. There are already psychologists providing their services voluntarily for a lower amount of money which depends on the economic status of higher education students⁶⁰.

Second, as most students spend their time online these days and might not want to seek professional help to deal with psychological issues, universities and government, in a joint action carried out with the help of mental health professionals, could come up with motivational guides and self-help resources available for download in their online platforms and websites. Universities might also organize workshops on self-help and motivation available for both students and professors. In addition, when it comes to psychological help during the pandemic, universities should make an effort to maintain their websites updated regarding the services available and the resources students have access to, if any.

Furthermore, at the university level, there are several different initiatives that can be put into practice to improve the mental health of both students and professors. One is the organization of online meetings between students and lecturers, promoting entertainment activities and social gatherings through the computer screen that allows for social interaction outside the classroom but still within the educational environment. This has been done in universities abroad, such as the University College Dublin, and it allows for a more personal interaction between professors and students that it is usually missing on the distance learning method. It also contributes for the increase of students'

⁶⁰ Clínica Babel, "Clínica Babel - Consultas para Estudantes Universitários em Lisboa," Babel - Clínica e Estudos Psicológicos, accessed August 31, 2021, <https://www.clinicababel.com/areas-de-intervencao/consultas-estudantes-universitarios/>.

motivation levels. Additionally, integration activities of a cultural nature that would take place after the lectures might also help first year students to *loosen up* and integrate more easily.

Another initiative that could be developed by higher education institutions is the promotion of diverse evaluation methods for students with psychological setbacks provoked by the impact of the pandemic. For instance, oral presentations might not be an effective evaluation method for students suffering from fear of public speaking or anxiety disorders. What must be done is to replace that method of evaluation for another one with which the student might be more comfortable.

In addition, professors might be encouraged to provide personalized positive feedback to each student based on an individual assessment during the semester, as well as to send emails regularly to check in on students' progress.

Following this rhetoric, both government and higher education institutions, when designing their policies related to mental health and emotional stability, must take into account voices of students and their contributions, and encourage their active participation as policymakers, applying the same method that is used when children are concerned.

Moreover, and to help students that are falling behind due to the psychological effects of the pandemic, universities could invest in the promotion of tutoring programs, on a voluntary basis on the part of professors, in order to contribute to students' educational needs by filling in possible shortcomings in their learning process, and to decrease the probability of potential school dropouts due to academic failure. Professors would then meet students that they assessed more negatively on a weekly basis. This would also enhance the interaction between students and lecturers, establishing a relationship of proximity that consequently increases their level of motivation and concentration. This method of engagement between professors and students has been proven to be effective by a university in New Zealand in 2016 that achieved almost the same rates of success when applying the method of distance learning as it did when the lectures were face-to-face⁶¹.

⁶¹ Tony Thistoll and Anne Yates, "Improving Course Completions in Distance Education: An Institutional Case Study," *Distance Education* 37, no. 2 (May 3, 2016): 180–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2016.1184398>.

What's more, one of the biggest flaws of distance learning was the professors' lack of digital literacy that did not allow for lectures to run efficiently and effortlessly. When issues come up, information gets lost; students become discouraged and demotivated, and the efficacy of online learning is questioned. To fight this phenomenon, professors should be taught how to work with online platforms and websites. Thus, the government must promote digital literacy through workshops and seminars to help lecturers apply a different teaching method than the one they use in in-person courses, making online learning more successful.

During this school year dominated by distance learning, professors were fundamental in making sure the education system would still work in an online approach. However, they could not predict the psychological impact these circumstances would have on students. On the same line of thought of the previous recommendation, in addition to digital literacy, professors must be instructed on mental health. It is crucial to educate professors on how to identify signs of psychological disorders to guarantee that mental illnesses are spotted in an early stage or before they develop any further. This measure also helps preventing possible dropouts and assists in assuring a sustainable development of young adults as active members of society in a plain state of health.

The effects of the confinement on higher education students can also be countered through the promotion of courses and workshops related to mental health literacy and through activities that stimulate the development of socio-emotional skills that are transversal and applicable both in the educational context and in the labor context that follows higher education, contributing to positive social outcomes.

This development and the process of being literate in mental health must lie on top of the publicity of awareness campaigns aiming at the decrease of stigmatization in the educational environment, as well as in the civil society. The decline of stigmatization will consequently incite students to seek psychological help without any fear of discrimination based on health issues.

Students with disabilities' needs — whether their disability is physical or psychological — should also be considered individually when establishing a post-COVID approach to mental health support. Their reintegration in the education environment as social personas should be done through recourse to activities that encourage inclusion in a personalized manner, taking into account individual necessities.

Universities and other higher education institutions should target alumni that have been granted scholarships and subsidies and collect the maximum information possible on the impact of the pandemic on the psychological effect on those students so as to verify whether disadvantaged students were more affected by the pandemic or not. This would allow psychologists to give an individual and personalized response according to the severity of each case.

Due to the blow inflicted last year to the Portuguese economy, higher education students have had difficulties wrapping their heads around about how they are going to continue financing their education and paying for all the additional expenses it entails. This situation, added to the psychological burden they have been experiencing, has resulted in an increase in dropouts in the 2019-2020 schoolyear, which was the first one affected by the pandemic⁶². Therefore, there is an urgent need for the government to act to counter this tendency through, for instance, the development of partnerships with local authorities in order to combat school dropouts through additional subsidies to families affected by unemployment during the pandemic.

Additionally, on the governmental level, an investment on higher education establishments that promotes further development on psychological services, especially when it comes to infrastructure and staff, is necessary to improve the quality of those services and to prevent shortcomings in the access to psychological support.

All these measures and recommendations must be put into practice and enforced with the active participation of targeted students in its elaboration so that their needs and requests are heard and satisfied properly.

⁶² Lusa, "Abandono No Ensino Superior Aumentou Em 2019/20," 2021, <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2021-07-23-Abandono-no-ensino-superior-aumentou-em-2019-20-6ed805a8>.

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RITA DINIZ REIS

ANNEXES

Impacto da pandemia nos estudantes

Este inquérito tem como objectivo a recolha de dados relativamente aos hábitos dos estudantes durante a pandemia, ao impacto que a pandemia teve nos mesmos em relação à sua saúde mental, e aos métodos utilizados para lidar com a situação. Este questionário tem como principais alvos estudantes universitários.

Os dados recolhidos serão utilizados de forma anónima e serão utilizados no estudo de caso de uma tese de Mestrado em Direitos Humanos e Democratização, cujo tema é o impacto da pandemia no direito à educação e nos estudantes em Portugal.

As respostas deverão ser dadas de forma pensada e verdadeira de modo a que os resultados reflitam a realidade dos estudantes em Portugal. Os inquiridos não devem escrever o próprio nome no questionário.

***Obrigatório**

1. Idade *

2. Género *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Feminino

Masculino

Prefiro não dizer

3. Qual a tua área de estudo? *

Hábitos de estudo

4. Hoje em dia, consideras que passas mais ou menos tempo a estudar? *

Tem em conta que se trata de uma média diária.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Menos *Avançar para a pergunta 5*

Mais *Avançar para a pergunta 6*

Avançar para a pergunta 7

Quantas horas a menos? E porquê?

Tem em conta que se trata de uma média diária

5. *

Avançar para a pergunta 7

Quantas horas a mais? E porquê?

Tem em conta que se trata de uma média diária

6. *

Avançar para a pergunta 7

Rotina

7. Consideras que conseguiste manter uma rotina saudável após o começo da pandemia/durante o período de confinamento? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Sim *Avançar para a pergunta 9*

Não *Avançar para a pergunta 8*

Se não,
porquê?

Consideras que conseguiste manter uma rotina saudável após o começo da pandemia/durante o período de confinamento?

8. *

Hábitos alimentares

9. Consideras que mantiveste uma dieta saudável desde o começo da pandemia? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Sim *Avançar para a pergunta 11*

Não *Avançar para a pergunta 10*

Se não, porquê?

Consideras que mantiveste uma dieta saudável desde o começo da pandemia

10. *

Durante o período de ensino à distância onde é que residiste?

11. *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Primeira habitação
- Residência universitária *Avançar para a pergunta 13*
- Casa/Quarto alugada/o na cidade onde estudo *Avançar para a pergunta 13*
- Outra: _____

Secção sem título

12. Caso tenhas respondido "primeira habitação", consideras que conseguiste manter um espaço isolado e organizado para estudar? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Sim
- Não
- Outra: _____

Saúde mental

13. Selecciona as opções que se tornaram uma realidade para ti ou que se agravaram durante pandemia *

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- Ansiedade
- Depressão
- Falta de autoestima
- Necessidade de pedir ajuda
- Falta de motivação
- Procrastinação
- Insónias
- Pânico/incerteza sobre o futuro
- Abuso de substâncias
- Pensamentos suicidas
- Frustração
- Sedentarismo
- Stress
- Comportamentos auto-destrutivos
- Preocupação constante

Outra: _____

14. Quais os mecanismos que utilizaste para fazer face às consequências psicológicas desta pandemia? *

15. Tens conhecimento de alguma linha de apoio psicológico para estudantes? Se sim, especifica o nome. *

16. Durante a pandemia procuraste apoio psicológico? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Sim

Não

17. Caso tenhas pensado em procurar apoio psicológico mas não o tenhas feito, menciona a razão.

18. A tua faculdade dispõe de algum serviço de apoio psicológico? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Sim

Não

Não sei

19. Consideras que, no futuro, será mais difícil para ti participar em eventos sociais? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Sim

Não *Avançar para a pergunta 21*

Secção sem título

Consideras que, no futuro, será mais difícil para ti participar em eventos sociais

20. Respondeste sim. Porquê? *

Ensino à distância

21. Quantas horas, em média, passas em frente ao computador? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Menos de 1 hora

Entre 1 e 3 horas

Entre 3 e 5 horas

Entre 5 e 7 horas

Mais de 7 horas

Outra: _____

22. Quantas horas, em média, consideras que consegues manter a concentração durante o período de aulas online? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Até 1 hora
- Entre 1 e 2 horas
- Entre 2 e 3 horas
- Entre 3 e 4 horas
- Mais de 4 horas
- Outra: _____

Quais os principais problemas que tiveste na educação à distância? (Ex.: problemas de conexão)

23. Quais os principais problemas que tiveste na educação à distância? *

24. Tens computador em casa? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Sim *Avançar para a pergunta 27*
- Não

25. Tens Wi-Fi em casa? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Sim *Avançar para a pergunta 27*

Não

Se respondeste não a uma das questões anteriores, qual a solução que arranjaste para assisti às aulas online?

26. *

Aulas à distância

27. Como avalias a tua experiência de educação online? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Muito negativa	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excelente

28. Se avaliaste com 3 ou menos, justifica. *

29. Consideras que obtiveste o conhecimento esperado e necessário para o desenvolvimento de competências durante este ano lectivo? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Sim *Avançar para a pergunta 33*

Não

30. Relativamente às notas, consideras que obtiveste os resultados pretendidos? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Sim

Não

31. Consideraste, durante esta pandemia, desistir do ensino superior? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

Sim

Não *Avançar para a pergunta 33*

Respondeste sim. Porquê?

Consideraste, durante esta pandemia, desistir do ensino superior

32. *

○ Futuro

33. Reflete e analisa brevemente o impacto que o período de confinamento e a educação à distância terão no teu futuro. *

Obrigada pela tua participação!

Este conteúdo não foi criado nem aprovado pela Google.

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