

# The Utility of I-Poems to Explore Subjective Well-Being in Children and Adolescents with ADHD

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## Abstract

This study explores the utility of the I-poem methodology to investigate subjective well-being in children and adolescents with ADHD in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. Subjective well-being in this population has been studied extensively via quantitative methodologies. In addition, narrative studies, discourse and theme analysis, participatory and visual method studies have also contributed to deeper understandings in the field. The current study seeks to contribute to knowledge creation within this field of non-numerical studies in an attempt to decentralise the voice of researchers and highlight the voices of participants. In the I-poem methodology, self-report ratings of children and adolescents with ADHD between the ages of 10 and 18 years old ( $n = 376$ ) during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa was captured in an open-ended question. Data was analysed through the researcher's creation of themed I-poems. The findings delineate broad categories of positive, negative and neutral feelings of subjective well-being during the pandemic. Notions of subjective well-being are related to themes of home, school, social life, self-growth and reflection, experiences of change, rules, extra-curricular activities, concerns, loss, finances, the new normal, and emotions. The study illustrates the utility of the I-poem methodology to illuminate dimensions of well-being that may otherwise remain invisible. The study also amplifies the potential of the I-poem methodology to be used in conjunction with, and complementary to, other research methodologies.

## Keywords

attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, well-being, subjective well-being, i-poems, poetry methodology, COVID-19, South Africa

## Introduction

There are many studies that investigate the quality of life of children and adolescents with ADHD (Hakkaart-van Roijen et al., 2007; Wehmeier et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2013). However, there are few studies specifically examining the well-being of children and adolescents who have been diagnosed with ADHD, and the majority of those that have been conducted have obtained their data from parent-report well-being measures (Herbell et al., 2020; Peasgood et al., 2016), with only a few that have focused on patient-report methods of procuring data (Barfield & Driessnack, 2018; Peasgood et al., 2016).

The studies exploring ADHD children and adolescents' well-being indicate the general conclusion that their well-being is poorer than their neurotypically developing peers

(Herbell et al., 2020; Peasgood et al., 2016). The specifics of the studies did vary, however. Herbell et al. (2020) found that only 6.3% of children with mental, emotional and behavioural disorders (54.4% of whom were diagnosed with ADHD), were flourishing optimally and that this was positively influenced by constructive habits of parental coping and negatively affected by parental aggravation, often stemming from their child's difficulties. Using the Child Health Utility (CHU-9D) with the EuroQol-5 Dimensions for Youth (EQ-5D-Y),

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Peasgood et al. (2016) found that, compared to matched controls, children and adolescents with ADHD have significantly poorer outcomes and difficulty in school, have sleeping issues, often feel worried and sad, are perpetrators as well as victims of sibling bullying, and have a negative overall view of their life and family.

Barfield and Driessnack (2018) carried out a study whereby 20 children between the ages of 7 and 11 with a diagnosis of ADHD, were asked to draw a picture and tell a story about what makes them happy and what makes their life 'really good'. The results garnered themes of connectedness – particularly with family –, fun, action-related activities and nature/the outdoors (Barfield & Driessnack, 2018). These compelling findings tell us, although implicitly, what children themselves feel contribute towards their sense of happiness and subsequent well-being.

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the subjective well-being of South African children and adolescents with ADHD during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the aim was to obtain these experiences of subjective well-being from the young people themselves, and to showcase the experiences in the form of I-poems, as well as to compare the findings to those of other studies investigating similar topics. Specifically, the utility and efficacy of I-poems in depicting the young people's lived experiences and evoking 'felt sense' in the reader was explored as part of the study's aim. How subjective well-being presents in children and adolescents with ADHD during the COVID-19 pandemic, was the guiding research question.

## What are I-poems?

In 1982, psychologist Carol Gilligan published one of her most prominent works entitled 'In a Different Voice', where she expressed the necessity of incorporating feminine voices and their complex lived experiences into the psychological framework, particularly with regard to developmental and moral psychological theory (Gilligan, 1982). This arose through Gilligan's (1982) various studies with women; women contemplating abortion, women's moral judgements, and women's rights and responsibilities. She saw how the field of psychology was inequitably dominated by male opinion and that theory development was based on the study and voices of men, voices that were simply generalised to women by default of belonging to the common category of 'humankind' (Gilligan, 1982, 2018). Thus, the feminist 'Listening Guide' method of qualitative research analysis, and with it the use of I-poems in conveying the uniqueness of each voice, were born (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

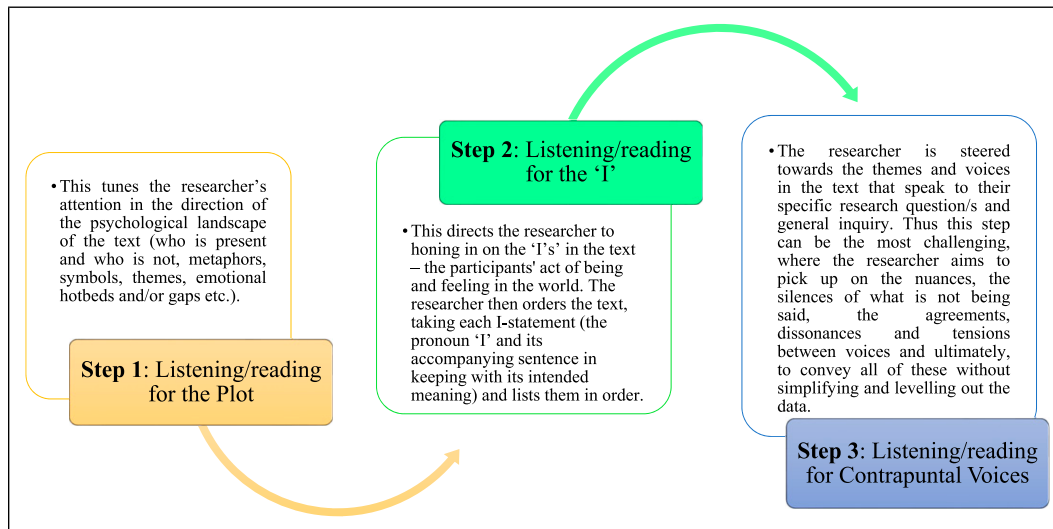
The 'Listening Guide' leads the focus by assessing the psychological features of the subject, how they navigate the specific terrain of inquiry and what parts of their subjective

experience speaks to the researcher's explorations. This 'Guide' is a way of engaging with the participant and their data through close listening, active responding and contextual positioning (Gilligan, 2015). Where both the 'Listening Guide' and the I-poem were used informally in 'In a Different Voice', they are now considered a more established mode of inquiry into the nuanced experience of those partaking in qualitative research focussed on psychological inquiry. The poem gets its name from the fact that each line in an I-poem typically begins with 'I', emphasising the subjective, distinctive and thus non-generalisable nature of the content to follow the I-statement (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan & Eddy, 2017; Koelsch, 2015). I-poems are created using a systematic, step-by-step approach that is relatively easy to follow, while at the same time being flexible and adaptable to the researcher's aims, purpose, and subject matter (Edwards & Weller, 2012).

The I-poem method demonstrates its numerous advantages as it allows the researcher to create poems with the respondents' voices and experiences, thus engaging with the data in a more emotional and creative manner, as well as producing results of a qualitative nature that provide a level of insight that quantitative analysis and objective data cannot produce (Edwards & Weller, 2015; Koelsch, 2015; Kucan, 2007). Qualitative inquiry and I-poems specifically, enable 'felt sense' from the participants which transfers into the reader; varying degrees and contours of feelings that arise through subtle sensations in the body and its awareness to space and context, and are 'felt' in the participants words (Gendlin, 1978). Similarly, Richardson (1993, 2001) describes how words can be felt, how they can subtly touch us in our bodily sensations so that our experience of the words' meaning in context mirrors, or at least resonates, with that of the words' creator. These words in the form of poetry takes this 'felt sense' a step further, reaching parts of the human psyche that simple prose, and certainly quantitative research, cannot (Faulkner, 2019; Freeman, 2001, 2011, 2014).

The 'Listening Guide' and I-poem methods do have their downsides, however. Each in-depth step in the process requires the researcher to engage with that specific individual's voice alone, and to contain the meaning and emotion in context when writing the participants' subjective experience in an I-poem. On a practical level, the time and energy-consuming nature of the method and the three different 'listening'/'readings' that are required – ordinarily resulting in having fewer participants in research utilising this method of inquiry, where often more voices aid in realising the complexity and variety of the topic being investigated – contributes to some of the method's disadvantages (Edwards & Weller, 2012).

Many studies along a wide spectrum of topics have since incorporated various forms of the 'Listening Guide' and/or I-poems as their method of research inquiry and analysis, topics ranging from the anger of adolescent girls regarding school related injustices (Brown, 1998), the relationships between boys (Way, 2001), modern mothers belonging to traditional



**Figure 1.** Steps in ‘The Listening Guide’ method of qualitative inquiry.

religious affiliations (Halbertal, 2002), alleged child maltreatment and the resultant family crisis interventions (Van Puyenbroeck et al., 2014), and how couples cope with cancer diagnoses (Kayser et al., 2007). In keeping with the original aim of the ‘Listening Guide’ method as revealing and lifting that of the oppressed female voice, several studies have focused on this population as a direction of investigation: Woodcock (2005, 2010) examined themes of agency in relating to the body, as well as the notion of school environments as controlling in the eyes of teenage girls in the United States. Magano (2013), in conjunction with the current study’s geographical location, explored a student’s multifarious journey studying towards a PhD at a local university using ‘The Listening Guide’ in featuring the female voice.

In the current study, an open-ended question asking respondents their experience of living in a pandemic, was analysed using a necessarily adapted version of ‘The Listening Guide’ and a combination of the I-poems and ‘it was poems’ method (Edwards & Weller, 2015; Gilligan, 1982). Figure 1 Due to the anonymised and online nature of the current study and the large number of participants, the process of each step was adapted to suit these circumstances. The ‘listening’ were instead ‘readings’, and active responding was not possible. The researcher instead focused on cultivating the ‘felt sense’ with each participants’ response while simultaneously orienting herself within their lived experience by engaging with their quantitative information (age, gender, category of school attended, intervention received/not received for ADHD symptoms, school attendance during the pandemic, and so on) while conducting each reading and creating the I-poems. The study sought to explore a research methodology that could potentially provide nuanced insights into the well-being of children and adolescents with ADHD. As detailed through the above-

mentioned studies, the use of I-poems to explore and reveal subjective experience is well documented, and was thus deemed suitable.

### Contemplating Well-Being Measures

A particular concern among many is the seeming interchangeability of the terms ‘happiness’, ‘well-being’, ‘quality of life’, ‘life satisfaction’ and ‘wellness’. This is evident in the definitions outlined in various measures assessing the constructs mentioned, and contributes to the proliferation of the constructs and mesh of similar questions used in many of these measures, thus further complicating their delineation. This often results in difficulty distinguishing well-being specific measures from those of the other aforementioned constructs. Moreover, advanced epistemological and ontological frameworks of well-being become necessary in constructing the measures and interpreting the data collected (Cooke et al., 2016; Diener; Fernandes et al., 2012).

Well-being in its basic form encompasses an individual’s state of overall happiness and contentment with regards to the psychological, social and environmental aspects of one’s life and one’s life, and the dynamic interplay between these aspects on an *emotional* appraisal level. The closely related concept of quality of life encompasses the same states and aspects as well-being, but rather on a *cognitive* appraisal level, as an individual perceives themselves in the different areas of their life (Diener et al., 2009; Minkkinen, 2013; The World Health Organisation Quality of Life Assessment Group, 1994).

Well-being and similar construct measures do not typically contain question items or take into account the factors of familial financial security, an individual’s sense of safety and security, basic needs being met, and family functioning or lack thereof (Cooke et al., 2016; Webb & Wills-Herrera, 2012).

Cromhout et al. (2022) found that well-being measures and the operationalisation and findings thereof, could differ across age groups, suggesting that some well-being measures are more suitable for individuals of certain developmental stages than others, thus garnering varying degrees of reliability and validity in the results. Similarly, it is argued that well-being measures cannot always be reliably used across cultures, posing a disadvantage for the accuracy of data for those measures which are not developed in the context in which they are used (Cummins; Rothmann, 2013). Such complications are particularly evident with indigenous cultures, whose well-being is not necessarily determined nor influenced by factors outlined in the Western theoretical frameworks inherent in the vast majority of well-being measures, such factors including filial piety (Yeh, 2023), spirituality (Dudgeon et al., 2017; Ohajunwa & Mji, 2018), the concept of the relational-collective self (a balance between autonomy and being part of a community) (Ohajunwa & Mji, 2018), kinship and family, and culture (Dudgeon et al., 2017).

Further, Pavot (2018) describes some salient issues in measuring subjective well-being, citing transient factors as having the most effect on individuals' responses to items. Factors such as an individual's current mood and emotional state as influencing results, as well as the specific situation in which the assessment of well-being takes place, are such transient factors mentioned. In their own research, however, both Eid and Diener (2004) and Lucas and Lawless (2013) disregard such factors as current mood states as having a less than significant impact on the results obtained by subjective well-being measures. Factors that influence the specific situation of the assessment include factors that can be mitigated and cancelled out, depending on the research design, methodology and the researcher's purpose. For example, social desirability of 'being happy' is mitigated in anonymous survey designs as compared to face-to-face interviews, and ensures larger sample sizes to further allay the influence of such transient factors, both of which factors – a large sample size and anonymity – are characteristics of the current study.

## Methods

### Collecting Data for I-Poems

A couple of noteworthy diversions of this study in comparison to the original and subsequent uses of the 'Listening Guide' method and creation of I-poems, are that the data were collected from online questionnaires rather than interviews or focus groups, and so the I-poems are the voices of a far larger group of people than its usual research entails; the I-poems thus take on a 'we' group collective, while still remaining true to the subjective 'I' voices and experiences.

The beginning of the questionnaire delineated the inclusion criteria of the study's participants which the parent/s and/or guardian/s were requested to confirm. Participants were required to be between the ages of 10 and 18 years old, have

ADHD (any type) as reported by a specialist, understand English at a Home Language or First Additional Language level, and be enrolled in school across any of the nine provinces in South Africa.

A digital survey method through *Google Forms* was used to collect data. From August 2021 to April 2022, private remedial schools, ADHD support groups (in-person and online), and educational psychologists in all nine South African provinces were contacted in acquiring potential respondents. The invitation link to participate in the study was sent via email, WhatsApp, posted on Facebook groups, and/or on schools' parent communication portals – this depended on the preference of those few parties who agreed to circulate the invitation link. However, there proved to be a low response rate with this online method. Subsequently, key informants (schools, psychologists, remedial teachers) were further contacted in-person, and hard copy versions of the questionnaire for data collection was incorporated. Once the researcher received the hard copy questionnaires, the data was manually entered into the original *Google Form* for all data to be digitalised. Thereafter, the data was exported into an Excel spreadsheet for ease of organisation and management. This paper-and-pencil hard copy data collection strategy proved more effective than the online approach. The sample's demographic information can be found in Table 1.

### The People Behind the I-Poems

*How the I-Poems Were Analysed.* The open-ended question in the questionnaire, 'How has living in a pandemic made you feel', was analysed qualitatively. To incorporate the varied responses given in answer to the open-ended question, I-poems were combined with 'it was-poems' (Edwards & Weller, 2015; Gilligan, 1982). First, responses were separated into three categories: positive, negative and neutral responses, after which the positive and negative responses were sub-categorised into various themes. Positive and negative responses were delineated by the main feeling word and/or adjective in the sentence. For example, the words 'fun', 'nice', 'good', 'happy', 'enjoy' in a sentence, either with an explanation that followed or just the word itself, were categorised as positive. Similarly, words such as 'bad', 'bored', 'sad', 'scared', 'frustrated', 'not good' and so on, were classified as negative. Several responses had both positive and negative aspects, and these were separated as per the above delineation process. Neutral responses denoted those that explained general feelings and experience of sameness, along the lines of no change having had occurred in the respondents' lives and perceptions. Two responses, 'I put on weight' and 'I got a littel [sic] bit chubby', were classified as neutral as no explanation as to the feeling of this occurrence accompanied these

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics (Frequencies and Percentages) for the Sample's Demographic Information.

Measures	Freq	%	Valid %	Missing values freq
<b>Age</b>				1
10 years old	55	14.6	14.7	
11 years old	53	14.1	14.1	
12 years old	62	16.5	16.5	
13 years old	49	13.0	13.1	
14 years old	40	10.6	10.7	
15 years old	31	8.2	8.3	
16 years old	34	9.0	9.1	
17 years old	31	8.2	8.3	
18 years old	20	5.3	5.3	
<b>Gender</b>				1
Female	129	34.3	34.4	
Male	243	64.6	64.8	
Non-binary	1	.3	.3	
Identifies as non-binary, biologically female	1	.3	.3	
Identifies as non-binary, biologically male	1	.3	.3	
<b>Ethnic group</b>				5
African	75	19.9	20.2	
Asian	2	.5	.5	
Asian and white	1	.3	.3	
Coloured	33	8.8	8.9	
Coloured and Indian	1	.3	.3	
Indian	17	4.5	4.6	
Mixed Ethnicity	1	.3	.3	
White	241	64.1	65.0	
<b>Home language</b>				0
Afrikaans	62	16.5	16.5	
Afrikaans and English	16	4.3	4.3	
English	231	61.4	61.4	
English and Italian	1	.3	.3	
English and French	1	.3	.3	
English, IsiXhosa and IsiZulu	1	.3	.3	
ZuluEnglish and IsiZulu	6	1.6	1.6	
English and Portuguese	1	.3	.3	
English and Sesotho	1	.3	.3	
English and Setswana	1	.3	.3	
English and Siswati	1	.3	.3	
English and Tshivenda	2	.5	.5	
Filipino	1	.3	.3	
IsiNdebele	1	.3	.3	
IsiXhosa	6	1.6	1.6	
IsiXhosa and IsiZulu	1	.3	.3	
IsiZulu	18	4.8	4.8	
IsiZulu and Sesotho	2	.5	.5	
IsiZulu, sesotho and Sepedi	1	.3	.3	
Korean	1	.3	.3	
Sepedi	6	1.6	1.6	
Sesotho	6	1.6	1.6	
Setswana	5	1.3	1.3	
Shona	1	.3	.3	
Siswati	2	.5	.5	
Xitsonga	1	.3	.3	

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

Measures	Freq	%	Valid %	Missing values freq
<b>Province</b>				3
Eastern Cape	5	1.3	1.3	
Free State	2	.5	.5	
Gauteng	271	72.1	72.7	
KwaZulu Natal	52	13.8	13.9	
Limpopo	1	.3	.3	
Mpumalanga	11	2.9	2.9	
Northern Cape	0	0	0	
North West	0	0	0	
Western Cape	31	8.2	8.3	
<b>Medication for ADHD</b>				1
No	87	23.1	23.2	
Yes	288	76.6	76.8	
<b>Intervention/therapy for ADHD</b>				6
No	132	35.1	35.7	
Yes	238	63.3	64.3	

Note. N = 376.

responses. A combination “it was/I-poem” was then created for each category of positive, negative and neutral, with themes clustered together in stanzas (Edwards & Weller, 2012; Gilligan, 1982).

The positive responses contained themes of school, social, self-growth/reflection, emotions and other. More specifically, these themes encompassed the following: the pleasure of staying home and various positive implications thereof; for various reasons, the preference for online school; the enjoyment of being with and spending time with family (social); the opportunity for reflection in various forms, such as newfound gratitude for one’s life and family, as well as self-growth such as practising skills or learning new skills; one word or short phrase positive emotion and experience words: other experiences that did not fit into the above categories.

The negative responses contained themes of change, rules, social, home, school, extra-curricular activities, concern, loss, finances, new normal, emotions and other. More specifically, these themes encompassed the following: negative effects of the pandemic; the specific dislike of obligatory hygiene laws, primarily the wearing of masks, as well as sanitising; craving social interactions and missing family and friends; the dislike of having to stay indoors and at home for lengthy periods without reprieve; the aversion and challenges with online schooling; the displeasure of not being able to partake in extra-curricular activities and sports; general concern for the world, oneself, one’s family and friends; loss in the form of loved one’s passing away due to the virus or due to the implications of the pandemic; financial worry and/or loss due to parents’/guardians’ financial and job-related issues; fear that the pandemic and its implications will continue and become the new normal way of life; one word or short phrase negative emotion and experience words; other experiences that did not fit into the above categories.

Every respondent’s response ( $n = 349$ ) was incorporated into the ‘it was/I-poems’. The context and thus the meaning and essence of all the responses were kept as originally written by each respondent; by this it is meant that feelings and explanation words associated with certain experiences were kept together and not separated, as should be evident when reading the poems. As per the style of I-poems, the responses were used exactly as they were written by the respondents; no words were added and only unnecessary function words and repetitions were excluded from the poems. As such, spelling, grammatical and other errors were purposefully left unattended. This too serves to more fully engage the reader, in that they are drawn into the authentic lived experience and narrative of the respondents; engagement is thus ensured on a more personal and emotional level. Also in line with general I-poems, there is no particular structure or scheme to these poems, and they follow a free-verse poetry form (Edwards & Weller, 2015; Gilligan, 2015; Koelsch, 2015). Where there were exact or almost exact feelings and/or experiences written by respondents, these were combined together with a numeric superscript inserted next to the feeling/experience indicating the number of respondents who felt/experienced the same aspects of the pandemic. The poems are entitled ‘Living in a Pandemic...’the GOOD’, ‘the BAD’, and ‘the NEUTRAL’, respectively.

With regards to the positive and negative ‘it was/I-poems’, each main theme of change, rules, social, home, school, extra-curricular activities, concern, loss, finances and new normal – for the negative ‘it was/I-poem’ – and school, social, and self-growth/reflection – for the positive ‘it was/I-poem’ – were interspersed with stanzas encompassing the combined themes of emotions and other (denoted by italicised text) so as to separate the themes in avoiding monotony and thus make for more impactful reading. Many responses were simple one-

phrase or one-word responses, and these were clustered together as a list of sorts at the end of the poem, in such a way that the author hopes the impact will be greater than having incorporated the emotion and experience words elsewhere in the poem, where they may become lost.

Due to the online and anonymised nature of the research as well as the large sample size, verifying representativeness via member checking or respondent validation was not possible. Thus, trustworthiness and rigour were safeguarded through various methodological strategies, including integrity through continuously analysing and accounting for researcher bias in the creation of the I-poems, meticulous keeping of records and steps in the research and I-poem creation process, and ensuring that the meaning – as understood by the researcher – and context of each participants' response was kept in its original form. Thus, descriptive validity was met in that the researcher did not embellish or distort participants' responses, and interpretative validity was met in that the researcher engaged in constant, conscious efforts of sensitivity to capture the meaning of each young voice that took part in the research (Coleman, 2022; Hayashi et al., 2019; Maxwell, 1992; Morse et al., 2002; Noble & Smith, 2015; Rezapour Nasrabad, 2020).

### ***Making It Visible and Bringing It all Together*** **Living in a Pandemic...the BAD**

It's a mixed feeling situation...it has had its downs<sup>2</sup>...

#### **Theme of Change**

I feel sad<sup>2</sup> because  
 a lot has changed<sup>4</sup>  
 my life has completely changed  
 I changed a lot  
 irritated because  
 it changed our lives  
 it changed everything  
 it just changed my world  
 sometimes it feels abnormal  
 nothing is the same

#### **Theme of Rules**

Everything is very restricted  
 the struggle of all these rules...  
 Overwhelmd.  
 I hate sanitiser

I feel a little bit annoyed, irritated because  
 when The sanitizer gets on a cut it is sore  
 I have to sanitise things and my hands  
 I just don't like it.  
 Masks is a issue, its red bad  
 I don't like<sup>11</sup>, hate!<sup>2</sup>, really hate  
 wearing a mask  
 I feel terrible, sad<sup>3</sup>, uncomfortable, claustrophobic<sup>2</sup>, unhappy, irritated, stressed, annoyed<sup>2</sup>, not nice  
 because we have to wear masks, stupid masks  
 I feel unsafe, its painful  
 because it feels like you can't breathe  
 like it drains me and suffocates me  
 It made me feel trapped.  
 It is very difficult...the masks  
 I can't have fun at school just because of the mask  
 my mom and dad nagging to wear mask over my nose and sandising  
 I'm tired of wearing mask  
 I want to not wear a mask.  
*It has been horrible at times*  
*a lot of bad moment*  
*I often experience extreme loneliness*  
*I was left with my thoughts and I don't like my own thoughts*  
*It made me feel alone*  
*even when I know that ppl care about me but I don't feel it*  
*I don't like it<sup>5</sup>.*

#### **Theme of Social**

I felt sad<sup>2</sup> and it was hard, because  
 a lot of events got canceled  
 we were not around people  
 I hate it  
 because no social life, social interactions  
 made life pretty boring  
 having to social distance is so hard, difficult, stressful  
 it makes me feel upset

The boredom of not seeing other people became overwhelmingly exhausting

I can't touch and reach out to people who feel upset.

I am a very social person, an interactive person

I love to spend a lot of time with people

I have lost a lot of friends during this time

Covid made me feel very lonely.

I missed

my friends<sup>8</sup>

my family<sup>3</sup>

my teachers

my school

I missed

going out with friends

parties with friends

I MISSED MY FRIENDS.

It made me feel bored<sup>3</sup>, depressed<sup>2</sup>, sad<sup>13</sup>, alone, stressed, frustrated<sup>2</sup>, bad, isolated, terrible, not nice<sup>2</sup>, lonely<sup>3</sup>,

because I could not see<sup>14</sup>, visit<sup>3</sup>, play with<sup>5</sup>, go to, be with<sup>3</sup>, talk to, have contact with, spend time with, hug<sup>2</sup> my friends<sup>30</sup>

because I could not see/visit<sup>2</sup> my family<sup>7</sup>, relatives

I started To get sad and lonely

cuz I am The only child.

I couldn't go and see the people I love and care about,

the people I want to see

I'm sad

because I always have to stay apart from each other

I don't like to stay away from my friends

Not nice to live like this

I loved going to school after the pandemic to see my friends

I NEEDED TO SEE MY FRIENDS + BE WITH PEOPLE.

### Theme of Home

Being stuck at home was a curse

hard to get out of the house

had to stay home the whole time

I can't go to places like we used to<sup>2</sup>

to have fun<sup>3</sup>

for entertainment

not even the shops

couldn't go or do anything.

It's very boring<sup>3</sup>

cause you have to be indoors all the time

nothing to do<sup>4</sup>

I barely had anything to do

wanted to get out the house

I hated when I could not go out

I felt like we are in prison

...we were just sleeping and just eating at home.

Was not nice had to stay indoors

I felt isolated<sup>2</sup>, lonely, frustrated<sup>13</sup>, mad, annoyed, angry, unhappy,

to stay inside house

to stay indoors

we could not go anywhere<sup>4</sup>

I couldn't leave the house

We were trapped inside

I felt locked in, caged

I was by myself and got into my head

...extremely depressed.

It was not easy at all...I felt trapped<sup>3</sup>

because could not go outside<sup>2</sup>

because I'm an outside person, I can't live my life in a building

I just have to go out

I felt sad, confined

cause I could not go outside to play<sup>2</sup>

...I live in a flat

It is

just hard being trapped with people we see everyday

under one roof

...we get on each other's nerves and almost commit murder.

I fear, don't like, am scared

going out my house

to go to public spaces

of big public gatherings

Because of the virus...



I am scared of what might happen  
 I am nervous when people look at me  
 I feel unsafe to show my whole face in public  
 I am very corsious of doing secieal stuff  
 when we started going out again I become extremely anxouis  
 very aware of any virus coming near me.

*It made my life miserable*

*I fell into depression*

*I had been in an abusive household during lockdown...*

*I realised the impact of not having somebody to talk to about the mental strain I'd been experiencing*

*I didnt feel well at all.*

### **Theme of School**

I used to enjoy school  
 I hated<sup>2</sup>, I battle to do  
 online school, online learning  
 homeschooling with my mom.  
 It made things worse  
 because we could not go to school  
 I wanted to go to school  
 affected my school work  
 I like, enjoy being at/going to school  
 with my friends and teachers  
 do different Things  
 speak to friend  
 It made me feel angry, sad<sup>3</sup>, confined, frustrated,  
 because I couldn't go to school<sup>4</sup>  
 not to be able to play with my friends at school  
 miss my friends.  
 I missed school<sup>3</sup>, normal school a lot  
 I felt nervous  
 ...uncertainty of when we could return to school  
 Now has gotten better at we are back at school  
 I love school.  
 I felt isolated from the right to learn  
 online school was hard<sup>5</sup>, very stressful, boring<sup>2</sup>, difficult<sup>2</sup>,  
 draining

there is too much homework  
 I don't understand everything  
 struggling to concentrate  
 no social interactions to distract from school work  
 learning things in groups became overwhelmingly exhausting  
 struggle to find motivation  
 hard getting new information  
 it made me feel stupid  
 it's harder to stay focused when there isnt a person speaking  
 directly to you  
 Doing schoolwork at home was not the same  
 My enjoyment for school has gone down a lot.  
 I have missed out on a lot of learning and I feel behind  
 lots of time has been lost  
 the pandemic set our education far back  
 I was a top student before COVID  
 Now at school  
 I feel that I cant keep up<sup>2</sup>  
 I cant cope  
 everything moves so fast  
 there's hardly ever time  
 I can't keep up with the pace  
 I work so hard but I feel like it's never enough  
 I feel like I am going to fail  
 everything has become more difficult  
 I miss a lot of school because I often feel sick  
 its more difficult  
 I am not prepare for exams  
 my Mark's dropped  
 I find classes too long  
 I feel tired all the time  
 made me clustraphobic with the seating  
 school work that has been a lot  
 we still cant change classes  
 the masks feel like drains me...I oftin fall asleep in class  
 I miss out on important work, fall behind  
 I have gotten lazy with school work.

Its Horrible

This pandemic...Feels like you are being punished for something you did not do.

*It has made me feel in a weird space because we are living in a constant fear*

*afraid at what might happen sometimes*

*worrying and waiting*

*It was stressful and still is.*

### **Theme of Extra-curricular Activities**

The pandemic has taken a lot of in-school opportunities

...made school hard to enjoy

Sport isn't that same as it used to be...

can really affect people with ADHD as sport helps cope

I hate covid, I was miserable, frustrated<sup>2</sup>, bored, depressed, because I could not

play soccer

do most sport activities

do horse riding

do many extra-murals

do my sport

do swimming

do sport at school – cancelled.

### **Theme of Concern**

It was the most trying time globally

I was sad<sup>2</sup>, uncomfortable, scared<sup>7</sup>, very scared, worried<sup>3</sup>, so worried, afraid<sup>2</sup>

for my family

of losing friends and family

for my family that they will get sick

that I will lose my parents

to lose my family or friend

about what could happen to me and the people around me

that me or my family would get sick and die

because people that I now my dear and I can't do anything

of people we love dying

of getting sick<sup>2</sup>

about my Grandparents

that I would get covid

that something might happen to me

because I don't want any of my family to get sick

about my favourite person- Granny

...not being able to see her made me sad.

It was very scary, not nice when

my family got covid

I had covid 19 virus

family falling ill with covid

its side effects made my dad have a heart attack

Covid my mom had it, it was very bad

...she was admitted in hospital.

It made worry more about what happens around me

I was scared<sup>4</sup>, worried, sad<sup>6</sup>, angry, upset,

about what's going to happen to other people

everyone is going to die

because of all the people who have died

because there was so many people dying

cause people were dying left and right

about bad things like people dying

because we lost a lot of people

because it got lots of old people sick

because lots of people were dying

that people were dying in such an uncommon way

so many people died

with people passing away

to live during a time where millions die

It was very hard.

To many people die

we lost many people

I feel bad for the people who are sick and the hospitals

others lose their jobs

I feel terrible

The situation is traumatic

It feels like it's the end of the world.

*I find it very difficult to control my mood at times*

*It has*

*put an emotional pressure on me*  
*made me feel more stressed than it should*  
*made me have anxiety*  
*gave me a lot of stress*  
*gave me a lot of anxiety*

*Emotionally damaged.*

### **Theme of Loss**

I felt sad<sup>5</sup>  
 that people I love have died<sup>2</sup>  
 because I lost everybody that I love that got sick  
 cause my oma and uncle past away because of covid  
 lost some family and friends  
 as i lost my Grandad and Uncle  
 It was horrible, terrible, difficult  
 lots of loved ones passed  
 losing friends  
 lost some family and friends  
 i lost my grandmother  
 ...i could not even say goodbye because of the pandemic

I hate it.

*It was not nice<sup>2</sup>*

*I used to enjoy most things...*

*school was good*  
*life was all around great*

*Now I only enjoy the things close to me*

*life has gotten Way Worse*

*Its been a struggle.*

### **Theme of Finances**

Its been struggles here and There

I lost hope financialy

I cant do horses riding...  
 my family cant afford it anymore

I thort that the share price will fall and my mom will loose her  
 job

I am annoyed becuse we ar struggling to get money...

that was a big change for me

It was tough...

my parents worked very hard.

*I feel tired:*

*it's placed more pressure on me then the other years*  
*very tired of everything*

### **Theme of New Normal**

We tried to read book by trying to calm ourselves...

to adjust it tryly a new normal of content

I feel scared, afraid that

things won't go back to normal<sup>2</sup>

it won't end<sup>2</sup>

its never going to end

I feel like it will stay the same for years

but hoping not

I want to be Back to normal<sup>2</sup>

Everybody saying life us back to normal

NO its not

I'm scared because we (the world) don't know whats coming next.

*My worse two years*

*I am more worried about my future*

*I stress for the nearst future*

*I have been less and less positive of whats going to happen to  
 me after school*

*I've lost so much positivity that my imagination has made false  
 worlds.*

*It made me feel isolated from the real world out there*

*I feel<sup>3</sup>, felt<sup>2</sup>*

*like I am in a closed room*

*locked up and over protected*

*like locked away sort of*

*like I am in a small circle*

*that all my freedom has been taking away.*

*I feel like I'm only in the beginning of an outbreak*

*I wish*

*the pandemic never came*

*it never happened*

*covid-19 will end*

*the pandemic will go away*

*I hate COVID-19!*

*It can't be put into one emotion*

*there is one to meny feelings, you can't just pick one...*

*It was/is, I felt/feel:*

Mad<sup>2</sup>; Angry<sup>4</sup>;  
 Bad; Very bad; Insecure;  
 Awkward; Sometimes bored<sup>2</sup>; Bord;  
 Borred; BORED; Bored<sup>10</sup>; Tough; Hard<sup>4</sup>;  
 Horrible; Terrifying; A bit frantic; Cautious<sup>3</sup>;  
 Aware; A little bit upset; Upsetting; Upset<sup>3</sup>; Not  
 trusting; Useless; Frustrating; Frustrated; Irritated<sup>3</sup>;  
 Irritating; Annoyed; Very annoyed; Heartsore; Unhappy; Not  
 happy; Not happy at all; A little bit sad; A bit sad; More sad;  
 Sad<sup>20</sup>; Nelly sad; Very sad; Depressed<sup>3</sup>; More dersposion;  
 Depress; Extremely depressed; Misrable; Confused;  
 Uncomfortable; Very un comfortable; Not interested; Unsafe<sup>2</sup>; A  
 little bit worried; Worried<sup>4</sup>; Very worried; Worrysym; Slightly  
 anxious; Anxious<sup>4</sup>; Nervous<sup>3</sup>; Very nervous; A bit scary<sup>2</sup>;  
 Scary<sup>5</sup>; Scard; Scerd; Scared<sup>17</sup>; ISOLATED; Isolated<sup>4</sup>;  
 Extremely isolated; Lonely<sup>9</sup>; Really lonely; Caged up;  
 Confined; No freedom; Claustrophobic<sup>2</sup>;  
 Emotional; Stressed<sup>8</sup>; More stressed out;  
 Stressful<sup>4</sup>; Unsure; A little  
 uncertain; Uncertain<sup>3</sup>;  
 Tired<sup>3</sup>

## Living in a Pandemic...the NEUTRAL

Its been interesting

I put on weight, got a littel bit chubby

I don't know what to say...

Its been, I felt

pretty much normal

not much different

pretty much the same

no difference really

mostly the same

still chatted with friends and family via what's app video calls

the same<sup>11</sup>

did not affect me that much

sometimes I do not notice the mask on my face

I never cared much about pandemic as long I am fine and my family is okay

normal

no different

fine<sup>2</sup>

hasent realy changed that much

i relliy didnt care about it i just waiched tv the whole year.

Nothing<sup>2</sup>/not much<sup>2</sup> has changed<sup>3</sup>, not much difference

it doesn't bother me much

I didn't mind living in a pandemic

I feel like Ive just got on with it

it hasnt really affected me<sup>3</sup>...

since no-one close to me died of covid-19

except that we wearing makes and sanitasing ect

I still go to school

my mom still has a job

income is comin in

life hasn't been that different for me

I didnt feel a diff to be honest

People really over reacted over the pandemic.

## Living in a Pandemic...the GOOD

It's a mixed feeling situation...it has had its ups<sup>2</sup>...

### Theme of Social

I loved, was happy not being near people<sup>2</sup>

Im a lot less akward

helped me enjoy my own company

I no longer feel as self conscious

like everyone is judging

I'm more introverted

My self-esteem has improved drastically.

*It made me feel*

*no pain*

*I was calm and peaceful.*

It was

fun

### Theme of School

and I was

happy not to go to school<sup>4</sup>, to have online school<sup>4</sup>, homeschool

my own schedule, in my own time  
 no social pressure  
 I could control - noisy kids muted  
 the best year of my school carrier.

### Theme of Home

I liked, loved, enjoyed, was happy being at home<sup>8</sup>  
 with family<sup>10</sup>, my mother, my parents<sup>2</sup>; becoming closer<sup>4</sup>  
 play games<sup>2</sup>  
 be with cats  
 baking  
 free on the farm  
 arts and crafts  
 woodwork  
 playing online with my friends  
 staying in my pj's all day  
 laughing  
 to write my book  
 call my friends all the time  
 bkf and indoor trainer  
 to think about my future  
 Being stuck at home was a blessing  
 ... happy that I spent enough time with my dad before he  
 passed.

*It made me feel*

*'okay-ish'*  
*GOOD,*  
*okay<sup>3</sup>,*  
*good<sup>2</sup>,*  
*fine.*

*it was*

*somewhat easier to concentrate*  
*fun at times,*  
*fun,*  
*betu fun.*

*It brought big changes*

*I like wearing mask's because they can have cool designs on  
 them*

*eventually I got used to covid*  
*its getting a little better,*  
*definitely better,*  
*I feel better*  
*I believed everything would be alright.*

*It made me feel*

*sort of normal again<sup>2</sup>*  
*a bit happy*  
*happy<sup>4</sup>*  
*like everything will be okay.*

### Theme of Self-growth & Self-reflection

I feel more comfortable  
 with myself  
 doing most things  
 talking to people  
 around the people I care about  
 to sit still in environments longer.

It has made me feel good

more aware

to know

to prevent.

With all this time...

*improve my skill*  
*eager to learn new skill's*  
*focus on my health*  
*gym*  
*reading*  
*what I'm gonna do next year*  
*self-reflect*

*ponder about what I can do*

*...for the better*

I got happy and excited.

I have learnt a lot;

I have lost a lot;

I have gained a lot;

I have forgotten a lot;

I have gotten closer to God

I have learnt one simple thing:

Attitude of gratitude

I will always be thankful for life

I appreciate my family more

greatful for every day

opportunity to enjoy the simple life

greatful for covid teaching unity in family

I appreciate time with my friends more

I am happy to still have my Mom, Dad, family and teacher.

*It made me feel*

*much less stressed*

*rather pleased and chilled*

*great.*

it taught me a lot of things about life,

to be patient understanding and Peaceful

I have overcome my gaming addiction

I feel like a better person<sup>2</sup>

I know more about myself

I am more confident than ever that I have what it takes to succeed.

## Discussion

Findings from this study offered both unique insights, as well as alignment with the themes and findings of other studies looking at the same population of children and adolescents with ADHD during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study by Korpa et al. (2021), for instance, saw the majority of their sample as suffering from overall adverse mental health. The emotional mood states of sadness, boredom, irritability, anxiety, and little interest/enjoyment in children and adolescents with ADHD during the pandemic as reported by their parents (Melegari et al., 2021), were all mirrored in this study's sample of young people, with sadness and boredom being the two more prominent emotional states that respondents themselves reported feeling. This was seen in the numerous one word responses from the young people in the study – 'unhappy', 'not happy at all', 'a bit sad', 'sad<sup>20</sup>', 'very sad', 'depressed<sup>3</sup>', 'extremely depressed', 'BORED', 'bored<sup>10</sup>' - as well as many similar sentiments. Also consistent with this study's findings, boredom was considered one of the top frustrations experienced by adolescents and young adults in the USA, according to both child- and parent-report (Sibley et al.,

2021). Parents in the study by Sciberras et al. (2020) saw stress related to the pandemic as concomitant to increased irritability, anxiety, nervousness, worry, fatigue, negative thoughts and diminished enjoyment in activities, all of which were self-reported to varying degrees by this study's sample. Shah et al. (2021) also reported increased irritability in their sample during the lockdown in India, as reported by the parents of the children and adolescents with ADHD. Depressed mood, sadness and loneliness were emotional states reported fairly frequently by this sample, as akin to the study by Sciberras et al. (2020). Higher levels of anxiety were found by Navarro-Soria et al. (2021), and Bobo et al. (2020) too saw anxiety as associated with worse well-being, results similar to this study's self-reported feelings of anxiety and similar emotions such as nervousness and worry.

Various risk factors associated with the mental health, emotional and psychological well-being, life satisfaction and quality of life of children and teenagers with ADHD were cited by previous studies and were echoed by many young people in this study. These risk factors encompassed the following: less exercise and less time spent outdoors (Navarro-Soria et al., 2021), difficulty socially isolating (Korpa et al., 2021; Navarro-Soria et al., 2021; Sibley et al., 2021), Covid-19-related worry, increased parent-child and family conflict, and tension in the household (Korpa et al., 2021). As these studies found in their own investigations, such risk factors could have contributed to the negative emotions experienced by the young people in this study, as evident in the negative 'it was/I-poem'. School closure and the implications thereof was a common theme in many studies that was too seen in this study's findings, specifically, various difficulties with the online mode of learning and the changes it wrought (Bobo et al., 2020; Korpa et al., 2021; Navarro-Soria et al., 2021; Sibley et al., 2021).

A primary positive implication of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns imposed worldwide, was being able to spend more time with one's parents and family (Sciberras et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2021; Sibley et al., 2021), a finding that was reflected in the responses of the young people in this study, as demonstrated through responses such as 'I liked/loved/enjoyed/was happy being at home<sup>8</sup> ...with family<sup>10</sup>, my mother, my parents<sup>2</sup>...becoming closer<sup>4</sup>' and 'Being stuck at home was a blessing...happy that I spent time with my dad before he passed'... Another positive aspect cited by previous studies and several respondents in this study, was having a flexible schedule (Bobo et al., 2020), and being less busy and generally calmer (Sciberras et al., 2020). Some of the respondents in this study alluded to their enjoyment of school closures and online learning as improving their well-being due to less social and school-related pressures, a finding which both Bobo et al. (2020) and Sciberras et al. (2020) noted in their sample.

The theme of self-growth and reflection was found by Arnout and Al-Sufyani (2021), who saw heightened spiritual

connection, increased gratitude and improved emotional strength and resilience from self-report methods in their Saudi Arabian adult sample. This general self-growth and reflection theme was not evident in previous studies with children and adolescents with ADHD, however, it was indeed seen in this study's young participants: 'With all this time...eager to learn new skill's...focuse [sic] on my health...self-reflect' and 'I have learnt a lot, I have lost a lot, I have gained a lot, I have learnt one simple thing, the attitude of gratitude...I will always be thankful for life...grateful for covid teaching unity in family...I am more confident than ever that I have what it takes to succeed'.

The theme of concern was not noted in the studies conducting research with children and adolescents with ADHD specifically, however, it was a finding reported in the general child and adolescent population during the pandemic, all by studies utilising self-report methods (Bourion-Bédès et al., 2021; Magson et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2021). Also through self-report, Tang et al. (2021) found that Chinese children and adolescents without ADHD valued the extra time afforded them to spend on hobbies, interests and personal activities – which was replicated in this study – where the studies looking specifically at children and adolescents with ADHD did not mention such findings.

Transcending the many similar findings of the current study to those of others, were numerous insights that this study alone discovered; many responses and themes were not directly mirrored in other known studies, and herein lie some of this study's uniqueness. These included the feelings of confinement reported by several young people, as denoted by responses such as 'I felt locked in, caged...I was by myself and got into my head', 'I felt trapped<sup>3</sup>...Im [sic] an outside person, I can't live my life in a building', 'trapped with people we see everyday under one roof...we get on eachothers nerves and almost commit murder [sic]' and 'being stuck at home was a curse', as well as other similar words and phrases. An emotional state and experience that came up often in this study's young population was the feeling of being scared and the situation of the pandemic as being scary, which other studies did not allude to: 'I am scared...going out my house...to go to public spaces', 'Because of the virus, I am scared of what might happen...I am nervous when people look at me...I feel unsafe to show my whole face in public'. The dislike of the rules and regulations put in place due to the pandemic was another theme that was seemingly not found in other studies; there were many responses outlining the dislike of masks and sanitising that an entire theme was necessarily made to encompass them, with some potent examples being: 'the struggle of all these rules...very restricted', 'masks is an issue, I don't like/hate!<sup>2</sup> wearing a mask...stupid mask', 'it feels like you can't breathe, like it drains me and sufficates me [sic]', 'it is very difficult...my mom and dad nagging me to wear mask over my nose and sandising [sic]' and 'I hate sanitiser...when it gets on a cut it is sore'. Further, the theme of loss and finances did not emerge explicitly in the findings of previous studies on the same topic and with the same population, while it clearly manifested in the current study. Responses such as

'I felt sad<sup>2</sup> that people I love have died...I lost everybody that I love that got sick', 'It was horrible, terrible, difficult...lots of loved once's [sic] passed...Grandad...uncle...ouma...I could not even say goodbye to my grandmother because of the pandemic...I hate it' and 'I lost hope financialy [sic]...my family cant [sic] afford it anymore...I though that my mom will loose her jod [sic]', 'we are struggling to get money...my parents worked very hard' illustrated these themes through the unveiled emotions elicited by the loss of loved ones and financial uncertainty.

All these themes and experiences are very personal in their manifestation, and thus are more likely authentically reported by the actual persons to whom such experiences occur, and who in turn experience the accompanying emotions. Therefore, it could be that these experiences, emotions and themes unreported by other known studies emerged due to one of the unique hallmarks of this study: the sample themselves reported their own personal experiences of the pandemic, and did not rely on parents' perceptions of their children's experiences. These self-experienced responses assisted in determining common emotions and themes and linking them to other studies, which in itself provided much insight. However, here emerged perhaps the most unique aspect of the study, whereby every participant's voice was 'seen' and heard through the creation of I-poems, portraying the palpable and unfiltered emotion and distinct experiences of the young people who took part in this study. The study demonstrated the phenomenal utility of I-poems in eliciting Gendlin's (1978) 'felt sense' in the reader such that the intimacy between the reader and the young participants' embodied experiences was unrivalled to simply reporting themes as indications of well-being. The creation of the I-poems was incredibly time consuming, and ensuring that the meaning of each participants' response remained as originally intended while incorporating so many responses in a coherent manner was the most challenging aspect of this method. However, the freedom afforded in the unstructured and free-verse nature of the I-poems and the dynamic affect they created acted as a strength that surpassed the challenges the method engendered. Thus, new and markedly personal experiences of an under-researched and significant population came to light through this study's findings, specifically through the creation of I-poems and supplemented by common themes and emotion words.

## Conclusion

The use of the I-poem (and 'it-was poem') methodology in this study highlights the multi-dimensionality of the subjective well-being of children and adolescents with ADHD during the COVID-19 pandemic; the expressly personal experiences and accompanying emotions of each participant was brought to life through the creation of the I-poems in a way that other types of research methodologies, certainly quantitative and even other qualitative, would have been unable to emulate. The poems depict positive, negative and neutral feelings of subjective well-being in the participants to various degrees, encompassing numerous themes such as school, social, self-

growth/reflection, emotions and other (positive) and change, rules, social, home, school, extra-curricular activities, concern, loss, finances, new normal, emotions and other (negative). Many of these themes, experiences, emotional states and risk factors were mirrored in a number of other studies investigating similar topics – overall worsening of mental health and well-being and the associated risk factors of less exercise, less time spent outdoors, difficulty socially isolating, pandemic-related worry and increased family conflict and tension; emotional mood states of sadness, boredom, loneliness, anxiety, and diminished enjoyment in activities; themes of spending more time with family, having a flexible schedule, being less busy, enjoyment and challenges of school closures and online schooling, and self-growth and reflection. Some themes and experiences, on the other hand, appeared to be specific to this study's findings – confinement, dislike of rules and regulations due to the pandemic, the loss of loved ones, and financial insecurity/decrease in socioeconomic status. In conducting this research, the findings add to the body of knowledge concerning the subjective well-being of children and adolescents with ADHD in South Africa and globally, as well as contributing to the novel research of this vulnerable population's well-being in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact thereof. The themes and responses assist those who live with (parents, siblings) and those who work with (educators, psychologists, other professionals) youth with ADHD to understand and empathise with these individuals on a deeper level, likely leading to enhanced well-being for both parties. Further research that explore I-poems in conjunction with other research methodologies is encouraged.

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