THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF MATRIC LEARNERS
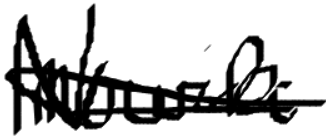
By

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Mini-dissertation in fulfilment of a Masters in Educational Psychology degree, Department of Education, University of Pretoria

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August 2022

Declaration of Originality

I, **NIKITA FOSCA NOWICKI (student number: 18294147),** declare that this mini-dissertation, which I hereby submit for the degree of Master's in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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Nikita Fosca Nowicki

August 2022

Ethical Clearance Certificate

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

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DEGREE AND PROJECT	MEd
	The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of matric learners
INVESTIGATOR	Mrs Nikita Fosca Nowicki
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- Informed consent/assent,
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- Registered title, and
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Abstract

The aim of this study is to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of matric learners, particularly in South Africa. The rapid spread of Covid-19 resulted in the South African government instituting a nationwide lockdown from the 27th of March 2020. Reports have stated that learners have experienced heightened levels of anxiety during the pandemic. A descriptive qualitative case study was used for this research. Five matric students were interviewed to gain insight into their lockdown experiences. Newspaper clippings reporting matric learner's experiences during this period were also collected from the GCIS database for further analysis. Moreover, inductive thematic analysis was done allowing for the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns from the collected data. The findings from this research provided an understanding of the lasting mental impacts of Covid-19 as well as the many positive experiences reported by the matric learners. The findings show that isolation and lack of human contact increased anxiety, which had a major impact on the student's mental health. Returning to school during the pandemic revealed a mixture of emotions expressed by the learners- from fear and anxiety to excitement. The change in daily routine was also noted to be one of the most difficult adaptations that the learners experienced during the pandemic, which resulted in increased distress. In addition, data reported that the Covid-19 pandemic was tackled by the 2020 matric learners through growth and development of mental and emotional capabilities. Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic has been a resilience enabler for most learners as they feel hopeful to face future adversities.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, education, lockdown, matric learners, mental health, well-being

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❤ Pray | Plan | Set Goals | Work Hard | Succeed | Thank God | Stay Humble ❤

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, RATIONAL AND CONTEXT TO STUDY

Over the past two years South Africa's resilience has been tested continuously following the Coronavirus outbreak of 2019 and the numerous infectious waves that followed. The World Health Organisation (WHO) stated that the novel virus emerged at the end of December 2019 in Wuhan, China (Mishra & Tripathi, 2022; WHO, 2020a). On the 11th of March 2020, the WHO declared the Covid-19 outbreak a pandemic and a public health emergency of international concern (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). Following this, governments across the world implemented various emergency public health measures to slow down the spread of the virus, which included social distancing, wearing of masks, sanitisation procedures, and closing of educational institutes and non-essential businesses (Anifowoshe, et al., 2020; Baloran, 2020). The intensity of these measures also varied across different countries depending on their current infection rates (Oraby et al., 2021).

The rapid spread of Covid-19 required a swift response from the South African government which resulted in a nationwide lockdown as of the 27th of March 2020 (Soudien et al., 2022; South African Government, 2020a). This decision afforded hospitals time to prepare for the rapid rise of infections, and a five-week hard lockdown (Level-5) followed by the tiered down implementation of lockdown levels, also allowed for necessary protocols to be instilled across the country (Soudien et al., 2022; Zuma, 2020). Essentially, lockdown Level-5 prohibited the movement of individuals from their residences, making exception for essential workers, medicine, and groceries (Kim et al., 2020). In addition, schools across the country were closed for approximately two months (Soudien et al., 2022; South African Government, 2020a). Further, as of the 5th of April 2022 the National State of Disaster has been lifted and South Africa experienced a reduced state of lockdown (Level-1) to minimise the effects and spread of Covid-19 until the 23rd of June 2022 when all Covid-19 protocols were lifted. In this study, I focus on South African matric learners

who matriculated in 2020 and how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected their mental health and well-being.

1.1 Background and Rationale

The South African government adopted a five-level system for their lockdown protocols which were implemented based on the country's infection rate (South African Government, 2020c). Each level contained different restrictions with regards to geographic containment, home confinement, selling of alcohol, prohibition of gatherings, and the closure of establishments, educational institutions, and business premises (Haider et al., 2020). Figure 1.1 presents a timeline of the events which continue to unfold during the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa. The period of focus for this study is highlighted from March 2020 to March 2021.

Figure 1.1

The Covid-19 Timeline

The Covid-19 Timeline

Dec' 2019	11 March 2020	27th March 2020	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	August 2020	Sep' 2020	Oct' 2020	Dec' 2020
Covid-19 virus emerged	WHO declares a pandemic	South Africa declares nationwide lockdown for 2 weeks. Alert level 5	Nationwide lockdown extended by another 2 weeks.	Alert level 4	Alert level 3	Alert level 2	Alert level 1	Educational insinuations reopened	Adjusted alert level 3 2nd wave new variant discovered

Feb' 2021	March 2021	May 2021	June 2021	July 2021	Sep' 2021	Oct' 2021	Dec' 2021	Jan' 2022	Present
Vaccine roll out launched	Adjusted alert level 1	Alert level 2 3rd wave new variant discovered	Alert level 3	Alert level 4	Alert level 2	Alert level 1	Alert level 1 4th Wave New variant discovered 30% of S.A. population vaccinated	Adjusted Alert level 1 Lifted restrictions	3rd wave new variant discovered

☐ Focused time period

Moreover, the implementation of lockdown resulted in unforeseen negative impacts on the economy and society at large. The combination of Covid-19 infections and lockdown has also amplified many of South Africa's adversities such as poverty,

unemployment, hunger, and placed additional strain on the healthcare and education systems (Kim et al., 2020; Soudien et al., 2022).

The impact of Covid-19 has had ripple-effect worldwide, with almost every element of society being impacted (Gavin et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2021). New stressors have also emerged since 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic in which the adolescent population were forced to overcome, adapt, and cope with the subsequent challenges without access to regular resources such as access to shops, food, and educational means (Borja et al., 2021; Clay, 2020). Moreover, the closure of schools left many learners without the provision of daily meals- provided by the school feeding scheme- as well as resources which were used in daily learning (Fouché et al., 2020; Soudien et al., 2022). Additionally, many learners live in overpopulated areas and overcrowded family homes as the majority of South Africa's population is classified on the lower-income spectrum (Gumata & Ndou, 2019). Therefore, marginal changes in economic conditions among lower socio-economic groups have an exponentially more noticeable impact on daily living.

The pandemic has also resulted in a reduction in income and job loss for many South Africans (Coker et al., 2020). Increased unemployment and salary cuts have added financial strain on families, increasing the likelihood of household abuse and violence (Clay, 2020; Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). Therefore, unemployed and stressed parents or guardians who are spending more time at home, may increase learners' exposure to possible abusive behaviour (Clay, 2020; Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). Furthermore, due to social distancing and other Covid-19 protocols, many individuals (including learners) have experienced boredom and loneliness due to isolation (Roy et al., 2021). Without daily routines, such as attending school or going to work, individuals have filled their time with relatively more sleep, watching television, and eating (Alexander et al., 2020). Moreover, previous research reported that young people who experience mental health concerns rely heavily on their daily routine as a coping strategy (Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). Thus, the increased stress and anxiety experienced during the pandemic have resulted in individuals having to cope within the limits of their resources and circumstances. According to Lee (2020), a daily routine can be an anchor in the lives of learners with mental health challenges. The author further stated that learners often relapsed in their

symptoms, experiencing frustration and anger when cooped up at home (Lee, 2020). For matric learners this was highlighted by the fear of the unknown regarding their final school year and having to adapt to new norms of learning and living.

More notably, lockdown restrictions have resulted in society's behaviour unconsciously mimicking the symptoms of mental health decline (Alexander et al., 2020). Lockdown has forced people to stay home, which left many individuals feeling hopeless with their daily routine and purpose being shifted (Fouché et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2021). Mental health was impacted by social isolation, sleeping for longer periods, no physical interactions and limited exercise which exacerbated symptoms experienced by individuals with mental health issues, such as depression (Roy et al., 2021; Thakur et al., 2020). Thus, lockdown worsened existing or exposed underlying mental health concerns among many individuals during the pandemic (Thakur et al., 2020). Moreover, the loss of routines, unstable food sources, reduced income, and loss of family members have added excessive stress on individuals (Fouché et al., 2020). Additionally, many individuals have also struggled during the pandemic without the physical support and interaction of others (Kim et al., 2020).

Furthermore, previous research has shown that learners have experienced heightened levels of anxiety during past pandemics (Fru, 2020). A thorough discussion of the Covid-19 pandemic is beyond the scope of the current study; therefore, I will explore the ways in which mental health and well-being of the 2020 matric learners during the Covid-19 lockdown period from March 2020 to March 2021 (Dao, 2020) were impacted upon. Furthermore, this report will outline the results which contribute toward a better understanding of the lasting mental health impacts of Covid-19 and guide the necessary support for learners facing the long-term effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on overall well-being and education.

1.2 Problem Formulation and Objectives of the Study

This qualitative study explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of 2020's matric learners, particularly during South Africa's lockdown period. The topic of matric learners, and their success during the academic year of 2020, is prevalent in research (Koen & Mgidi, 2020). The matric year is known to be one of the most stressful years of schooling as it sets the pivotal

milestone for a learner's future, such as attending university and being selected to study for certain courses or degrees. Therefore, many learners found the consequences of the pandemic challenging, including the conversion to online learning or self-study methods which added additional stress to a crucial academic year.

However, a lack of research exists regarding the long-term impact of Covid-19 on matric learners globally (Reimers, 2022; Shah et al., 2020). Furthermore, the mental health of matric learners is important for the productivity and well-being of future members of society and the workforce (Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). As a teacher, I have witnessed how the slightest change in a learner's schedule can disrupt their focus for the day. Thus, the consequences of a pandemic can severely uproot a learner's daily routine and create a major source of distress. In addition, as a counsellor, I have been exposed to school-going learners and the stressors they are currently facing. The objectives of the current report aim to contribute towards educational psychologists' understanding of the support needed for learners and parents or caregivers affected by novel situations or disruptions, such as the pandemic. In addition, this report also highlights how resilience in learners is an essential skill that needs to be encouraged to provide them with adaptive thinking to improve their responses to future pandemics or challenges (Ebersöhn, 2013).

1.3 Research Questions

My study has been guided by the following primary research question.

1.3.1 Primary research question

What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of 2020's matric learners in South Africa?

1.3.2. Secondary research questions

To address the primary question, the following questions will be addressed:
1. What mental health challenges have been reported during the first year (March 2020 – March 2021) of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa by the 2020 matric learners?

2. What challenges have the 2020 matric learners faced during Covid-19 (March 2020 – March 2021)?

3. What is the role of educational psychologists in addressing the continued impact of Covid-19 among matric learners?

1.4 Working Assumptions

In undertaking this study, the following was assumed:

1. Covid-19 has caused a large-scale global disruption to which parents, teachers, and learners have had to adapt (Ducharme, 2020; WHO, 2020a).

2. Poverty, levels of education, and socio-economic status affect an individual's ability to adapt (Novotny et al., 2020).

3. Lockdown has made life difficult for people in various ways and as a result, mental health challenges increased during this time (Bhattarai & Karki, 2020; Roy et al., 2021).

4. Lockdown has had an impact on the mental health and well-being of matric learners (Fegert et al., 2020; Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021; Roy et al., 2021).

5. The pandemic has disrupted matric students' education (Reimers, 2022; South African Government, 2020a).

6. The loss of learning time may have acted as a compounding factor in terms of how learners may have to deal with subsequent years (Engzell et al., 2021).

1.5 Concept Clarification

1.5.1 Covid-19

The newly discovered Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is defined as a respiratory viral infection (Mustafa & Green, 2020). It emerged in the city of Wuhan, China, during December 2019. The virus is easily spread through respiratory droplets (Ducharme, 2020; South African Government, 2020a). The most effective protocols to hamper the spread of Covid-19 were using facial coverings (mask), sanitisation, and social distancing (Baloran, 2020). This resulted in countries initiating lockdowns to stop individuals from gathering and further spreading the virus through direct contact (Anifowoshe et al., 2020).

1.5.2 Lockdown

The South African Department of cooperative governance and traditional affairs declared a state of national disaster on the 15th of March 2020 (South African Government, 2020c; Zuma, 2020) due to the magnitude and severity of the Covid-19 pandemic. A state of national disaster allowed for the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs to make regulations or issue directives concerning the management of the country with immediate effect. For example, the travel band, wearing of masks, and social distancing (Bama & Nyikana, 2021). The term lockdown further refers to the restriction of movement- a state of isolation to contain the spread of the Covid-19 disease. Moreover, the South African government implemented different levels of restriction as seen in Table 1.1, depending on the number of Covid-19 cases.

Table 1.1

An overview of alert levels is summarised in the Gazette (South African Government, 2020)

Alert Level	Indicates
5	High Covid-19 spread with a low health system readiness
4	Moderate to a high Covid-19 spread with a low to moderate health system readiness
3	Moderate Covid-19 spread with a moderate health system readiness
2	Moderate Covid-19 spread with a high health system readiness
1	Low Covid-19 spread with a high health system readiness

On the 26th of March 2020, South Africa entered into an alert level 5 which indicated a high level of Covid-19 infections with perceived low levels of readiness regarding the country's health care systems (South African Government, 2020c). This meant that the movement of people and goods was restricted unless deemed essential. All individuals were bound to their residence and all businesses were forced to close unless they produced or supplied essential goods such as food or medical

equipment. In addition, educational institutions were also forced to close over this period. All borders of the republic were also closed and any essential travel during this time required a permit. South Africa moved to alert level 4 on the 1st of May 2020, which indicated moderate to high levels of Covid-19 infections with a low to moderate health system readiness (South African Government, 2020c; South African Government, 2020; Zuma, 2020). Further, the alert levels were adjusted according to the available resources and infectious rate at that point in time during the pandemic. Annexure A provides a detailed breakdown of the levels and the restrictions in place over the focus period of this study from March 2020 to March 2021.

1.5.3 Pandemic

A pandemic refers to an epidemic that occurs globally with specific reference to the spread of a new disease or virus (Ducharme, 2020). The WHO declares a pandemic when outbreaks affecting a large number of people occur across the world or at various international borders (Ducharme, 2020; WHO, 2020a). On the 11th of March 2020, the WHO declared Covid-19 as a global pandemic (Ducharme, 2020; WHO, 2020a). Moreover, the containment of the spread of the new disease or virus is of vital importance. Countries are therefore encouraged to re-evaluate travel policies and plan for possible quarantine sites to protect the public.

1.5.4 Mental Health

Mental health is a dynamic and layered construct which carries many descriptions used by various countries. From a biomedical perspective, it can be defined as the absence of mental illness (WHO, 2018). The construct further entails an individual's ability to function, cope, and add value to society (Galderisi, 2015; WHO, 2018). In the context of this study, mental health refers to an individual's overall well-being including physical, emotional, and social health. Thus, mental health focuses on any present health issues, as well as an individual's ability to function efficiently in society (Beezhold et al., 2015).

1.5.5 Well-being

Well-being is a subjective term that defines an individual's state of happiness, comfortability, and health (Vernon, 2014). An individual can experience an imbalance in well-being when current life challenges outweigh the accessible

resources (Seligman 2012; Vernon, 2014). Seligman's well-being theory (2012; 2002) further defines well-being as being made up of five main elements: (a) positive emotion, (b) engagement, (c) positive relationships, (d) meaning, and (e) accomplishment. An individual subjectively measures their fulfilment of these elements, building onto their well-being to flourish and feel satisfied with life (Seligman, 2012; Seligman, 2002).

1.5.6 Matric learners

The department of basic education's School Act 84 of 1996 states that a matric learner attending high school is an individual between the age of 17 and 20 years old (Republic of South Africa Government Gazette, 2001). Individuals beyond this age will need to attend a college or an adult basic education and training centre. The focused high schools for this study will be government secondary educational institutions as defined by the Schools Act 84 of 1996, where a uniform system and laws are provided to govern the institution (Republic of South Africa Government Gazette, 1996).

Independent educational institutions are privately governed by the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA). Learners from independent schools will not be included in this study. Moreover, matric learners in government schools are required to write the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination in order to graduate. In this study, matric learners refer to adolescents who were enrolled in a government high school and completed their grade 12 academic year in 2020 by writing and obtaining an NSC.

1.5.7 Stress

Stress is defined as any change that causes strain- be it physical, psychological, or emotional (Biggs et al., 2017; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Shavaki et al., 2020). All individuals experience some degree of stress when faced with adversity which requires some degree of knowledge, skills, or resources for the individual to cope.

1.5.8 Coping strategies

Coping strategies refer to response strategies that are cognitive or behavioural that are used by individuals in times of adversity to manage the experienced stressors

and difficult emotions (Biggs et al., 2017; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Shavaki et al., 2020).

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The study has been guided by the following theories: 1) Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) and 2) The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). The PPCT model was selected as it provides a framework to view and understand the matric learners within their environment. The model states that an individual's environment is differentiated into different systems allowing for a detailed exploration of the possible effect each system has on the individual and their development (Henderson et al., 2020). In addition, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping examines the encounter (transaction) between the individual and their exterior environment (Biggs et al., 2017). The individual can perceive this encounter as a threat that might lead to a perceived inadequacy to cope; thus, increasing an individual's stress response (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Shavaki et al., 2020).

In conjunction, these two theoretical frameworks allow for the possible threats in each system to be evaluated and further identify the coping strategies utilised by the learners to create a positive environment to complete their matric year. Furthermore, in Chapter 2 of this report, the theoretical framework is discussed in further detail, highlighting its importance and relevance to the current study.

1.7 Paradigmatic Perspectives

In this section of the report, the paradigmatic perspectives that guided the study are explored and applied to the current study.

1.7.1 Epistemological Paradigm

This study was guided by an interpretivism paradigm. Interpretive research aims to understand the social world and involves multiple social and historically constructed realities (Maree, 2017). Moreover, interpretivism allows the researcher to acknowledge that there are many indefinable realities constructed by individuals (Wagner et al., 2012). This is therefore a suitable paradigm for the current study as it centres on finding the meaning and understanding of the constructed and multiple realities of matric learners (Wagner et al., 2012). This interpretive paradigm is an

observation of what social science is defined as and is a lens through which the practice of research can be examined (Maree, 2017). Using an interpretive paradigm, matric learners' experiences regarding Covid-19 were described and understood. Most of the data was gathered through an interview utilising research questions that were generally descriptive, open-ended, and non-directional (Wagner et al., 2012). This assisted the researcher in the deeper exploration of the knowledge constructed by subject's personal views and experiences. Therefore, the knowledge (epistemology) in interpretive research is subjective and idiographic because of its context-dependent approach, in which the 'truth' is explored across personal meaning making and human experience (Wagner et al., 2012). Consequently, advantages of using an interpretive paradigm include individual differences in perceptions and experiences of the data sample that can be studied in greater depth by the researcher (Maree, 2017). However, a qualitative interpretive approach is also limited due to its subjectivity- leading to researcher bias and context-specific results that cannot be generalised to the greater population (Dudovskiy, 2018). This paradigm also emphasised the qualitative analysis of data over quantitative.

1.7.2 Methodological Approach

Qualitative research is a strategy or plan that moves forward by making use of an underlying philosophical assumption (Maree, 2017). This strategy created a framework for the researcher to select, gather, and analyse the data. The qualitative research methodology is used to provide the researcher with the necessary tools to be able to study a complex phenomenon being the Covid-19 pandemic, in a more contextual way (Maree, 2017). These tools included observations, documents, and semi-structured interviews. Moreover, this approach is suitable to better understand this complex phenomenon related to a specific group of individuals. In the present study, individual perceptions of matric learners during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown period are investigated and the effects of the pandemic on the well-being and mental health of participants are determined. Therefore, a qualitative study allowed for an in-depth understanding of individual learners' experiences related to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the credibility of this study is enhanced by using the methods mentioned above for data collection- observations, documents, and interviews -

therefore ensuring triangulation (Maree, 2017). The advantage of qualitative research is that it provides information regarding possible actions by asking questions (Kelle, 2006). In addition, qualitative methods provide insight into social situations and cultures that quantitative standardised tests and measures do not account for (Maree, 2017). However, qualitative research is time consuming, and the gathering of information can become too broad (Maree, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative results are not statically representative of the population (Maree, 2017). Additionally, the researcher's bias can have a negative influence on the collection and interpretation of the data, tainting the credibility of the study (Kelle, 2006).

1.8 Research Methodology

1.8.1 Research design

In this study, I utilised a case study design exploring the effects of Covid-19 on 2020 matric learners' mental health and well-being. Yin (2014) defines a case study as a qualitative, empirical method in which the researcher examines a contemporary phenomenon set within a real-world perspective. Moreover, various sources of evidence are used in a case study design which allows for the collection of rich detailed data. The data collected in the presented study included the following types of evidence: 1) textual data (Annexure B), 2) interviews (Annexure C), and a 3) research journal (Annexure D). Further, a case study design assisted my research in explaining the 'why' and 'how' of the social phenomenon under question. Specifically, a descriptive case study was used to explore and explain the phenomenon of the mental health and well-being effects of the Covid-19 pandemic while providing additional information on the topic (Maree, 2017).

According to Creswell (2007), a case study should be conducted within a bounded system to prevent the scope of the research from becoming too broad. The boundaries indicate the breadth and depth of the qualitative study, as well as the criteria for participation selection (Baxter & Jack, 2015). In the present study the case was bound to include government schools located within Johannesburg. Participants included in the study had to have matriculated in 2020. The delimiting boundaries within the context of this study include the limited number of interviews conducted (Erickson, 2020) and the location of the sign-up sheet, resulting in the catchment area being approximately within a 5km radius of the researcher's

wellness centre. The government high schools within a 5km radius from where the sign-up sheet was placed were all quintile five ranked schools- hence, all participants attended a quintile five ranked school. The quintile ranking was introduced by the Department of Education as a means to bridge the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged schools by providing greater financial aid to lower-resourced schools (Dass & Rinquest, 2017; Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019). Moreover, the quintile ranking categorisation is based on two main factors. Firstly, the school's socioeconomic status and secondly, the school's geographical area with a specific interest in the area's average income, unemployment rate, and general literacy level (Hall & Giese, 2008, Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019).

1.8.2 Selection of participants

The sampling strategy utilised in the current study included non-probability, purposive, and convenience sampling methods (Maree, 2017). Within purposive sampling, I studied a group based on characteristics or circumstances that is beneficial to the study aims (Wagner et al., 2012). The characteristics of the sample was as follows: matriculated in 2020 and attended a quantile five school within the Johannesburg region. Therefore, participants were selected on the basis of their willingness and ability to provide valuable information regarding their knowledge and personal experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic during the 2020 matric year (Alkassim et al., 2016). In addition, convenience sampling is used in situations where participants are chosen centred on the fact that they are easily accessible to the researcher (Maree, 2017). A sign-up sheet was placed at the reception desk at the researcher's wellness centre at which I lease rooms.

My involvement at this centre is strictly rental agreements and has no daily involvement with practitioners and their clients. Permission was granted by the managers of the wellness centre (Annexure E), allowing me to place the sign-up sheet at the reception desk. The sign-up sheet contained a cover information page about the study and a second page, which required the volunteers to provide their names and contact information.

Further, I checked the sign-up sheet (Annexure F) daily for new sign-ups. A call was then scheduled with the potential participant to obtain demographic information which included screening items such as the year of graduation, the

school they attended, and the possible mental impact experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. This call was pertinent to ensure that the volunteers met the criteria stipulated for the study. With every new signup, I called the participant and then replaced the sign-up sheet with a new sheet. This was done to further protect participants' identities. This meant that once five volunteers had met the criteria the sign-up sheet was removed. However, any respondents who signed up who did not meet the stipulated criteria, was shared relevant information on how to deal with anxiety, stress, and other helpful information that may aid them in challenging times. This was not necessarily relevant during my research as the five volunteers were accepted into the research study.

Furthermore, the five participants in this study were purposively selected for an interview based on the following criteria:

1. The participant matriculated from high school in 2020.
2. The participant attended a government school located in Johannesburg, South Africa.
3. The participant felt that to some extent their mental health and well-being was affected by Covid-19.

Using the stipulated methods, the following table highlights some characteristics of the participants included in the study.

Table 1.2

A summary of interview participants who volunteered and met the stipulated criteria for the study

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	School
Participant 1	Female	White	School A
Participant 2	Male	White	School B
Participant 3	Male	Indian	School B
Participant 4	Female	Indian	School C
Participant 5	Female	Coloured	School A

1.8.3 Data generation and documentation

I relied on multiple data generation techniques including semi-structured interviews, documents, and a research journal to enhance the rigour of the study (Maree, 2017). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow an informal and flexible conversation (Seidman, 2006). Emphasis of the interview questions were placed on how the participants understood the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, thus allowing for a constant process of engagement and opportunity to obtain rich, detailed answers (Flick et al., 2004). Moreover, a set of predetermined open-ended questions were developed in advance (Annexure G) to address the research questions of the study, following the recommendations made by Maree (2017) regarding the effects of Covid-19 and the lockdown on mental health and well-being on participants. A semi-structured approach also allowed for further probing and clarification during the interview (Maree, 2017). Moreover, I was attentive to the participant's responses identifying emerging lines of inquiry related to the phenomenon, which was noted in the research journal

As planned, interviews were conducted with the five participants at a time and place that was convenient for each of them. The conducted interviews were approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length. The interviews were conducted in English, with four of the interviews being in person and one interview was online due to the participant not having transport. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and consent from the participants. Additionally, the use of an audio recording allowed me to focus on the interview dynamics and research topic, as well as ensuring that the participant's answers were recorded on their terms and reflected their individual realities (Seidman, 2006). Detailed notes were also made regarding non-verbal cues and emerging themes from the interview data, which formed part of the research journal. After, the interviews were transcribed verbatim for the data analysis process which consisted of 179 pages. Transcribing the individual interviews verbatim provided the opportunity to revisit the data to enhance transferability, authenticity, credibility, and confirmability (Seidman, 2006).

Furthermore, documents or textual data focus on any type of written communication. In this study, 50 South African newspaper articles on the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) database from March 2020 to March 2021 were analysed. The South African Council for Education (SACE)

provided access to this database with permission to use newspaper articles as secondary data in the current study. For documentation purposes, a record of the newspaper articles being used was stored on *Google Drive.* As a researcher, it is important to handle documents with care as they may not provide an objective truth. Therefore, it was important that the documents were contextualised within the circumstances of their construction (Flick et al., 2004).

In addition, fieldnotes in the form of a research journal (Annexure D) were kept during the interviews and thematic analysis process which was included as a data source. According to Greef (2002) and Schwandt (2015), fieldnotes describe the written account of a researcher's observations and reflections on new terms and experiences during the research process, contributing to the richness of qualitative data. Delamont (2004) further states that anything not recorded during the research process is lost data; therefore, the research journal assisted in documenting all interactions and taking notes during the meaning making processes that assisted with the capturing common themes for analysis. For the purpose of the study, the fieldnotes were used to inform the transcription process of the individual interviews. Moreover, the fieldnotes were utilised in tandem with the verbatim transcripts to increase the accuracy of the interpretation of a participant's response (Henning et al., 2004).

1.8.4 Data analysis and interpretation

The purpose of qualitative data analysis and interpretation is to define, identify, and understand participants' experiences and how they construct meaning (Maree, 2017). Using a theoretical thematic analysis I aim to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, the aim of qualitative analysis is to discover numerous potential realities from the results until data saturation is achieved (Lynass et al., 2012). However, the thematic analysis process is not a fixed approach as it is flexible for interpretation by the researcher. Moreover, data analysis in the current study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guideline. These guidelines are stipulated below.

Step 1: Familiarisation of the data

The transcripts and newspaper clippings were read and re-read, allowing me to familiarise myself with the body of data. Notes and early impressions were made in the research journal (Annexure D). Figure 1.2 is an extract from the research journal highlighting the early impressions that were noted.

Figure 1.2

Extract from the research journal

Notes and early impressions from intake interviews:

- Many learners saw the Covid-19 pandemic as a season of growth
- They often felt that they wouldn't not 'feel sorry' for themselves as others were going through much worse
- They worried about the grade behind them as they were missing out on the important matric foundation that they received in the previous year
- Some learners had not taken the time prior to this interview to reflect on their matric year, meaning they had the illusion that they did not have any mental impacts
- The home environment and daily routine are a major influence on mental health and well-being

As I read the newspaper clippings, interview transcripts codes were added to *Miro Team Collaboration* software. The code, a word or brief phrase, was added as a comment and indicated by a yellow speech bubble. Highlighting was utilised to ensure the context of the coded idea was maintained. The different coloured highlighting related to the identified codes. Figure 1.3 provides an example of how this was done in the study with the newspaper clippings and Figure 1.4 is an example of how the interview transcripts were coded and highlighted.

Figure 1.3

Coding the newspaper clippings on the Miro board

Figure 1.4

Coding the interview transcripts on the Miro board

Figure 1.5 is an example of the comments expanded showing the codes that were added.

Figure 1.5

Expanded comments showing an example of the codes of the newspaper clippings
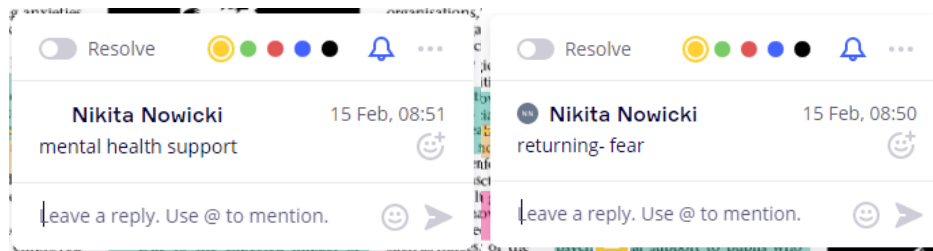
Step 2: Generating codes

Open coding was utilised allowing for codes to develop and be modified as the data was worked through (Magurie & Delahunt, 2017). Each newspaper clipping was analysed, and codes were identified. These codes were further used to analyse the interview transcripts and were modified as the analysis developed. Figure 1.6 indicates the final codes that were developed after reading the newspaper clippings, as well as the interview transcripts.

Figure 1.6

The final codes that were developed

Further, Figure 1.7 shows a snippet of the codes and their related extracts from the newspaper clippings. The same process was done for the interview transcripts. The full table of codes and extracts for the newspaper clippings were included in Annexure H, and for the interview transcripts in Annexure I.

Figure 1.7

A snippet of the codes and extracts

Emotions felt around returning to school	• When schools started opening, there were many families who were cornered about contracting Covid-19, especially those with comorbidities or other underlying conditions. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg.10) • This explains why my siblings and I had mixed feelings about going back to school after almost six months. We had sleepless nights, anxiety and fear during the days leading to our return. But after a week of going to school, we all seem fine. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • I had a hard time fitting in with the crowd, seeing that I've been isolated for six months. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • Due to the fear of Covid-19, some parents have decided to home school their children and some have decided not to send their children to school for the rest of the year. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • 72% of the respondent reported being very worried about learners returning to school. However, this varied significantly: more affluent households had a lower concern, while there was higher concern among larger households with very young children and pensioners. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020) • Parents are extremely anxious to get their children to school. (Pretoria News: Sept 2, 2020, pg.3) • I am fearful of the day I lay a loved one to rest because of this virus and that is why I'm not sure about sending my angel to school unless the department can assure us of our children's safety. (Weekend Argus, Jan 9, 2021, pg.5) • I have one daughter; she has one life. I refuse to risk my baby girl's life when every day we hear of someone dying. (Weekend Argus, Jan 9, 2021, pg.5) • Returning to school can be traumatic for parents and children alike. (The Star: Jan 11, 2021, pg.3)

Step 3: Searching for themes

Organising the extracts within the tables allowed me to read over the collected data pertaining to the research question and start the process of looking for themes and patterns. Figure 1.8 presents the codes divided, depending on their use in the newspaper clippings or the interview transcripts or both.

Figure 1.8

Where the codes were found
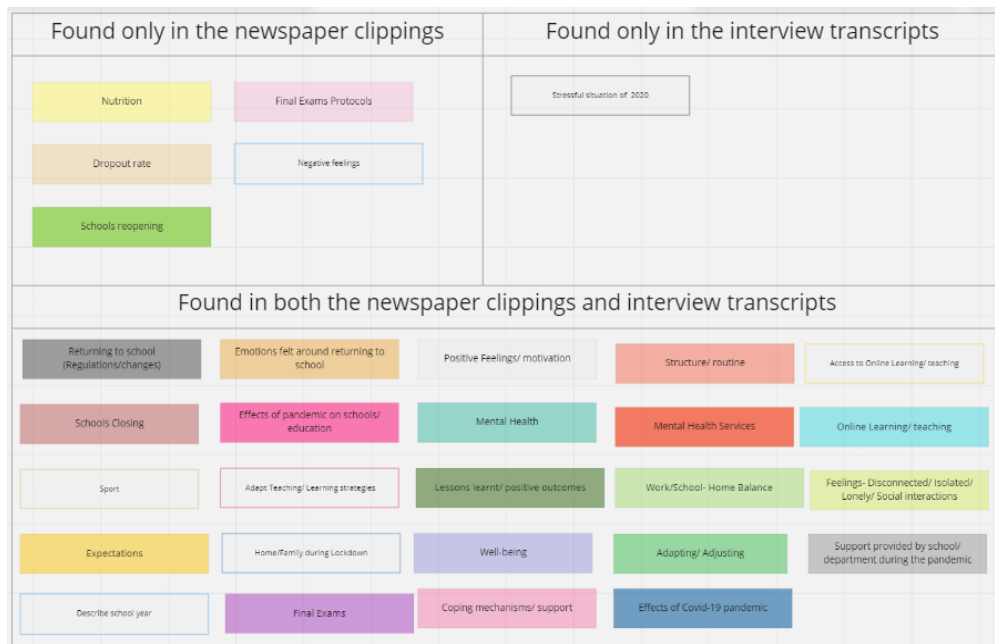
Using the codes that appeared in both the newspaper clippings and the interview transcripts, I grouped the codes which related to one another- forming possible themes. Figure 1.9 below shows the organisation of codes into possible themes.

Figure 1.9

Organising the codes into possible themes
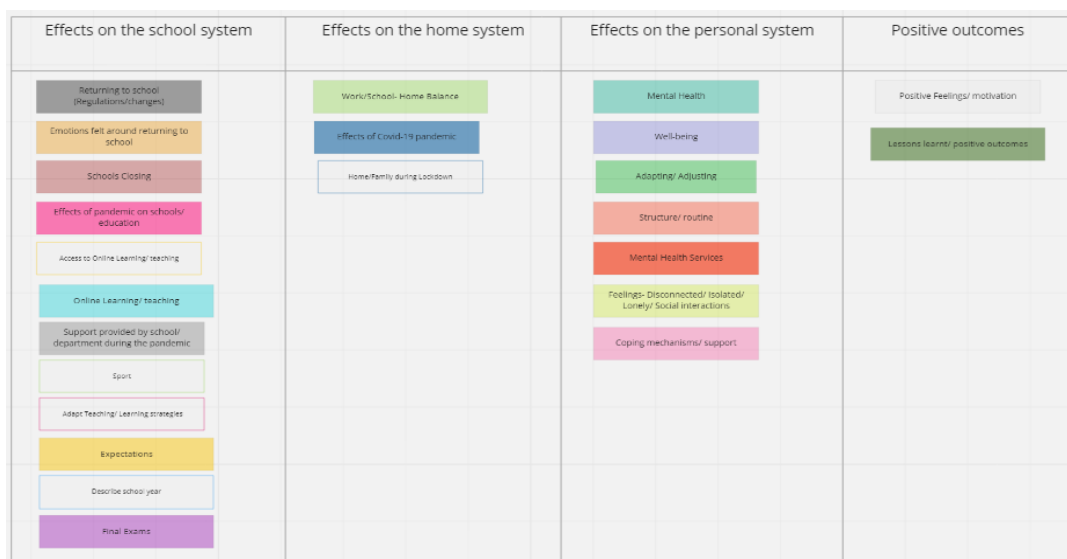
Step 4: Reviewing and finalising identified themes

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme is generated when it essentially captures important information concerning the research question. The themes were reviewed and finalised ensuring they aided in answering the research questions set out in the beginning of this study. Further, sub-themes were identified to logically organise the data. Figure 1.10 shows the sub-themes that were identified with the associated codes beneath.

Figure 1.10

Identified themes and sub-themes
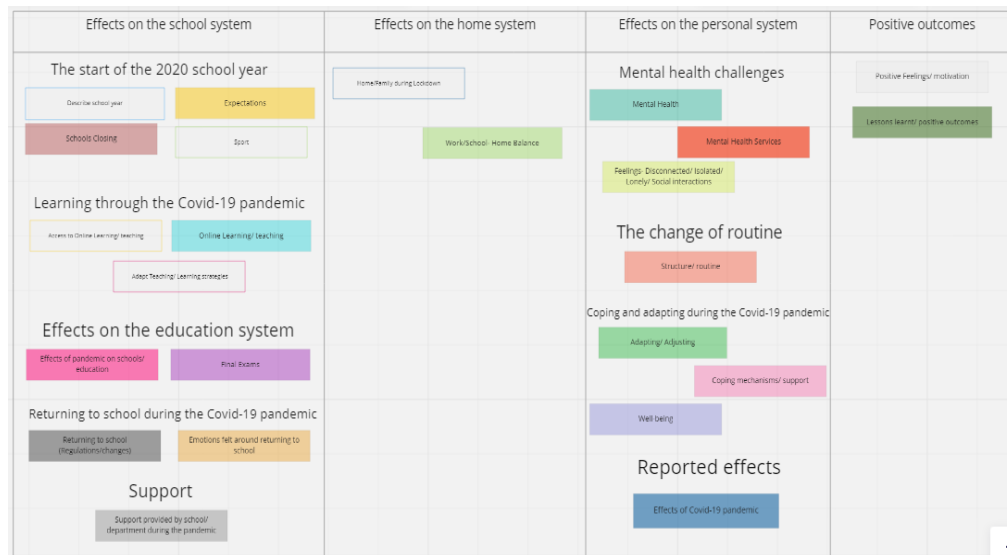
Step 5: Naming the themes and sub-themes identified

Figure 1.11 provides an overview of each of the four main themes identified as well as their subsequent sub-themes.

Figure 1.11

Overview of main themes and sub-themes
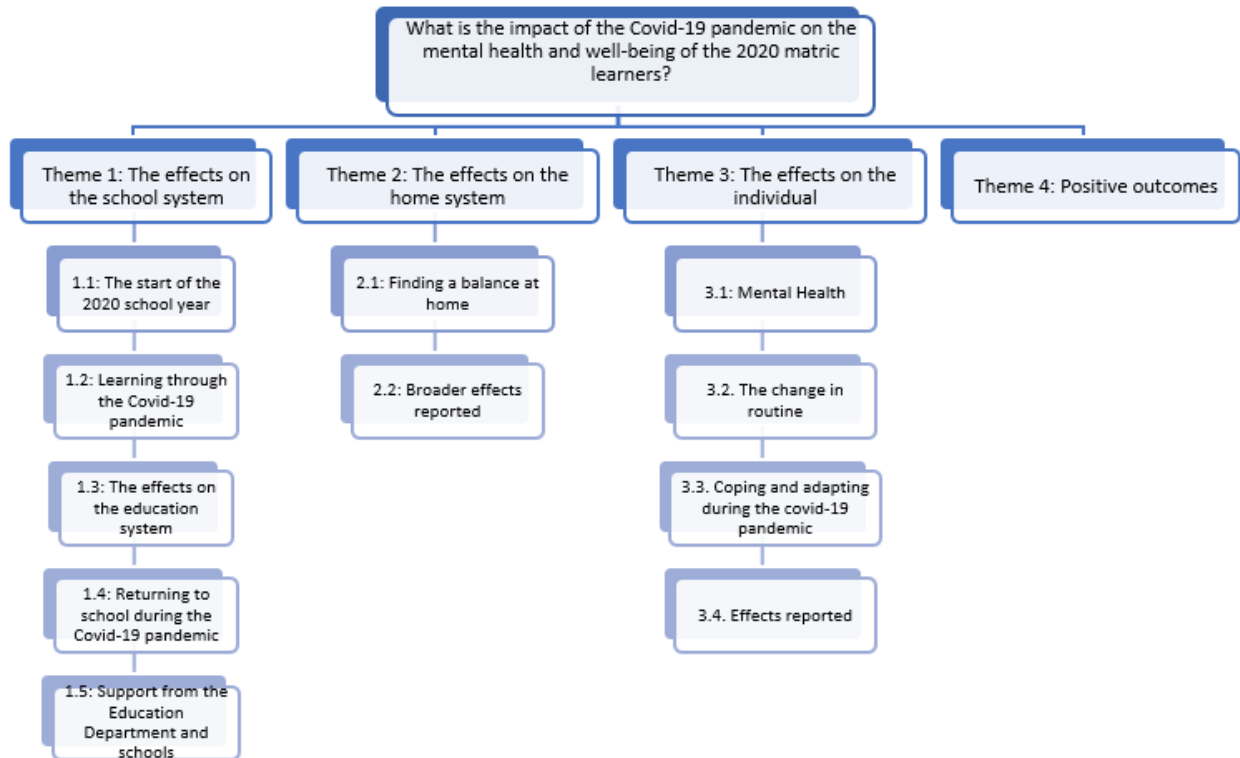
Step 6: Write up of the report

In Chapter 3 of this report interpreting the data was produced utilising the themes identified in the above steps. Following the guidelines allowed for the research to move in the direction that the data takes, instead of following a set of specific rules (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To enhance the rigour of the thematic analysis, Vaismoradi et al. (2013) suggest that the researcher keeps a research journal which included throughout the research process of the current study. Moreover, an advantage of the thematic analysis is that it allows for unanticipated responses and outcomes to be analysed as they occur throughout the research process (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Using thematic analysis also grants this study a deeper understanding of the effects on the learners' experiences (Alhojailan, 2012). However, the use of thematic analysis is limited by its flexible stance of "anything goes" regarding interpretation (Antaki et al., 2002). This will be minimised by

following Braun and Clarkes' (2006) six-phase guideline throughout the data analysis process as it provides some form of structure to ensure some form of rigour and credibility to the study. Another potential limitation includes the flexibility of the study, resulting in the researcher not knowing which aspects of the data to emphasise (Antaki et al., 2002).

1.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an important element while conducting research. To ensure the study was conducted ethically, the researcher instilled the stipulated guidelines by the Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. Ethical clearance was firstly obtained to conduct this study (Annexure J) by the University of Pretoria. Furthermore, permission was granted from the wellness centre manager to place a sign-up sheet for voluntary participation in the study (Annexure F). Detailed information about the study and the participant's role were also provided in the informed consent letter (Annexure K) which each participant had to read and sign. Moreover, participants were not only informed about the process of the study but were also made aware of their voluntary participation. Therefore, participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Further, the researcher respected privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality when dealing with the data and collecting it in an ethical manner. To protect the participants from potential harm, participants' identities remained undisclosed and were not reported upon in the write up of results in order to achieve anonymity (Neuman, 2006). Recorded and written data were handled with confidentiality and stored on a password protected laptop. In addition, the learners' views, shared experiences, and possible mental health effects were be respected by the researcher and kept confidential (Maree, 2017). Participants were not misled or deceived in any way throughout the study (Maree, 2017). There was respect for the participant's beliefs, values, and knowledge. The participant's specific needs were given the utmost importance during the study in terms of ethical considerations

1.10 Trustworthiness of the Study

The quality criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (2007) guided the research ensuring trustworthiness and adding rigour to the study's findings. The criteria included five main elements, namely dependability, transferability, confirmability, credibility, and authenticity. Dependability refers to the research findings being reliable and credible (Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). To ensure dependability, documentation of the research process has been captured in the research journal showing the logic and traceable steps and allowing for the process to be critiqued. Transferability is described as the generalisability of the findings from this study to another setting (Maree, 2017).

This study is specific to researching the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on 2020's matric learners; however, the interventions and solutions can be applied to similar contexts where matric learners' mental health and well-being are impacted.

Further, confirmability depends on the researcher's ability to construct objective interpretations from their recorded data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The researcher was continuously aware of their own possible bias and personal experiences, which was further documented in the process of thematic analysis and in the research journal. This ensured credibility as the voice of the participants guided the results (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Thus, credibility refers to the truth value of the study (Creswell, 2014). Interviewing five participants allowed for data to be collected from different individual encounters and the analysis reviewed similarities and differences within the dataset. Furthermore, utilising different data generation methods enabled triangulation which also increased the study's trustworthiness (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Moreover, authenticity is concerned with the degree to which the true voices of the participants are heard, adding value to the research field of educational psychology (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

1.11 Chapter Outlines

The following section provides an outline of each chapter in this report.

Chapter 1: Introduction, Rational and Context to study

This chapter begins by introducing the study followed by the rationale and the purpose for the study. The research questions that guide the study were stated followed by the working assumptions and clarification of concepts used in the study. The research process is covered in detail and the ethical considerations pertaining to this study were also highlighted.

Chapter 2: Interpretive Framework

In this chapter, the underlying theories which help to guide this study were discussed. The chosen theories are thoroughly explained and applied to the phenomena of this study.

Chapter 3: Results and Findings of the Study

The results and findings of the study were based on the thematic analysis of the newspaper clippings and interview transcripts. Furthermore, the research questions were addressed regarding the findings.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

In the last chapter, the contributions and limitations of the study were discussed, and recommendations were made for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Viewing similar studies and existing literature offers up research that can be further compared to provide an in-depth understanding and quality (Bukhari, 2011), especially on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of matric learners The focus of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literature on the focused topic and to explore the two chosen theories in detail-Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Furthermore, an integration of these two theoretical frameworks that were utilised were applied to the content of this study concerning the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on matric learner's mental health and well-being.

2.2 An Overview of Literature

Since 2020, numerous researchers have focused on the impacts experienced by the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of these impacts include educational disruptions and the online teaching movement (Berg, 2020; Borja et al., 2021; Fouché et al., 2020; Koen & Mgidi, 2020; Roy et al., 2021; Spaull & Van der; Upoalkpajor & Upoalkpajor, 2020) work impacts that included job loss (Alexander et al.; Clemens et al., 2020; 2020 Kim et al., 2020), the impact of the restrictions of being confined to a residence, social distancing, and wearing masks (Caron et al., 2020; Coker et al., 2020; Naidu, 2020; Thakur et al., 2020), as well as the mental health and well-being implications among the global population (Clay, 2020; Fegert et al., 2020; Lei et al., 2020; Naidu, 2020; Roy et al., 2021). For the purpose of the current study, the mental health and well-being effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are the main focus.

2.2.1 Mental health and well-being effects of the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an emotional and psychological impact across societies (Baloran, 2020). Countries in a state of emergency and the fear of infection reportedly led to increased levels of anxiety among people (Roy et al., 2021). A study by Fegert et al., (2020) was concerned with the challenges and

burden of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and adolescents across Europe. The authors stated that the advantages brought by the Covid-19 lockdown regarding family cohesion and time for personal growth, far outweighed the negative implications (Fegert et al., 2020). However, learners reported experiencing heightened levels of anxiety, symptoms of depression, reduced opportunities for stress regulation and lack of peer contact, as well as increased risk of domestic violence and malnutrition (Fegert et al., 2020). Moreover, the closing of schools and the prohibition of social group activities negatively impacted adolescents given the importance of peer contact for their well-being (Oberle et al., 2010). In addition, many children and adolescents spent most of their time at home watching television, playing indoor games, or sleeping. Thus, over this period, children and adolescents were less active and more sedentary (Guan et al., 2020).

According to Thakur et al. (2020), inactivity during this developmental stage can lead to psycho-social problems and addiction disorders such as depression, anxiety, or gaming addiction. Furthermore, more time spent indoors decreases sunlight exposure and absorption of Vitamin D. Previous studies have shown that individuals with Vitamin D deficiency are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health issues (Bhattarai & Karki, 2020; Guan et al., 2020).

It is therefore evident that mental well-being of people has been affected by the pandemic (Bhattarai & Karki, 2020). According to Naidu (2020), the current rate of depression and anxiety is remarkably high compared to prior months preceding the Covid-19 pandemic within South Africa. Increased stressors have been attributed to the changes in sleeping and eating patterns, increased difficulties in concentration, and worsening of pre-existing mental health problems (Clay, 2020). Reportedly, many learners struggling with existing depression highlighted contracting Covid-19 as their top stressor (Clay, 2020). These stress levels among most individuals have also risen with the abrupt disruption of normal lives and routines. A study by Galea et al. (2020) looked at the mental health consequences of Covid-19 and physical distancing. The authors highlight the mental health effects of the previous SARS epidemic in 2002 with regards to the reported prevalence of PTSD, stress, and psychological distress among individuals (Galea et al., 2020). Similarly, Lei et al. (2020) reported that individuals who were quarantined during the 2002 SARS epidemic reported symptoms of depression, heightened anxiety,

experienced panic attacks, and even self-harm tendencies. Thus, with the current Covid-19 pandemic still being experienced to date (2022/09), long-term mental health impacts are yet to be discovered.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time model (PPCT)

The PPCT model is multidimensional and allows for a richer, more profound understanding of a learner and their socio-ecological system (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). Thus, this model allows for the adolescent to be viewed within each system and how the family, within the micro-context, supports the adolescent during challenges. The PPCT model further enables the researcher to explore an individual's development in the context of the environment. This is important as matric learners are the most vulnerable and possibly the most adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (Henderson et al., 2020). Bronfenbrenner also explained that events that occur during the historical period of a person's life powerfully shape and condition their development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Therefore, the PPCT model focuses specifically on the concept of time and how an individual and their environment changes and develops within a specific context. This theory substantiates this study as the current pandemic plays a vital role in the reciprocal impact of the environment and individual development (Henderson et al., 2020).

The PPCT model has four main components; namely, 1) person, 2) process, 3) time, and 4) context which need to be considered when understanding an individual's development or change within their context (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). The *person* component takes into consideration the personal characteristics that influence an individual's social interactions, such as their characteristics, their ability to deal with stress, and their socioeconomic status. The *process* deliberates the proximal processes which are viewed by Bronfenbrenner (1999) as the primary mechanism for development. Developmental processes are the reciprocal interaction between the person and the environment. *Time* is viewed at three levels. Micro-time refers to what is happening during a specific proximal process (Henderson et al., 2020), while meso-time is the current time and the extent to which

the process occurs such as a day, week, or year. Further, macro-time focuses on the shifting expectancies in the specific generation or the wider society that are affected. Macro-time also concerns the future that has not been entered or experienced by individuals and includes the upcoming times of future generations (Henderson et al., 2020). Furthermore, this model places the learner at the centre of the five core encompassing systems which all influence the learner's development (Chachar & Younus, 2021). Lastly, the *context* involves the five systems as mentioned above in which the individual interacts; the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem which is founded in The Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

Firstly, the microsystem encompasses the individual's immediate environment in which they actively participate in (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). These environments can include home, family, school, or peer groups. Moreover, these environments have the greatest influence on a child's development as they engage in proximal processes (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). Secondly, the mesosystem consists of the interrelation between two or more microsystems. The mesosystem is therefore considered a system of the microsystem (Rosa, & Tudge, 2013) and can include, for example, the relationship between the home and school environments. Thirdly, the exosystem consists of environments that are not directly experienced by the individual but can, however, influence what happens in an individual's setting and relationships, such as their parent's work and the health care system. Fourthly, the macrosystem refers to the social culture, values, beliefs, and laws which influence the above systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Swart & Pettipher, 2016). And lastly, the chronosystem is the concept of time and how each system and individual changes or develops over time. It also considers the influence of major events in a person's life throughout a timeline. These events could occur in the person's microsystem and/or externally- such as pandemics or natural disasters. Thus, the chronosystem allows for a deeper understanding and observation of the individual and their relationship between the community and broader society (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

2.3.2 Transactional model of stress and coping

There are three main models of stress and coping as indicated in Figure 2.1 which view stress differently and respectively (Cummings, & Sanders, 2019; Quine, & Pahl, 1991). For the purpose of this study, the third approach - the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Folkman and Lazarus (1984) - is the most satisfactory as it emphasises the relationship between the person and their environment.

Figure 2. 1

The three main models of stress

1. Stress = Strain	2. Stress = Stimulus	3. Stress = Transaction
A person's psychological response to negative or disturbing factors in the environment. (Selye, 1956; Kagan & Levi, 1974)	Stress is a characteristic of those negative or disturbing events. (Symonds, 1947; Weitz, 1970; Welford, 1973)	Stress is a process that involves continuous interactions and adjustments between the person and the environment. (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984)

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is one of the most comprehensive frameworks for stress as it provides a structure to evaluate the process of coping within stressful events (Cooper & Quick, 2017; Shavaki et al., 2020). Stressful events are considered to be person-environment transactions which depend heavily on the impact of the external stressor (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019; Cooper & Quick, 2017). Furthermore, stressful events can be taxing or exceed the individual's resources and endanger their well-being (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019; Shavaki et al., 2020). Moreover, Lazarus and Folkman's model of stress examines the encounter (transactions) between the individual and their exterior environment (Biggs et al., 2017). The individual can further perceive this encounter as a threat that might lead to a perceived inadequacy to cope; thus, increasing an individual's stress response (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

Lazarus (1993) defines coping as a set of strategies that are implemented as appropriate for specific situations rather than a personality trait. Which means there is ultimately no 'best way' of coping with stressful situations. Rather, individuals will adopt various strategies to promote psychological adjustment across a multitude of scenarios that induce a stress response (Laubmeier et al., 2004). Furthermore, an individual's ability to cope is determined by their cognitive appraisal of the event experienced (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019). Cognitive appraisal refers to the assessment process that determines the degree to which specific transactions between an individual and their environment are seen as stressful (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The practice of coping starts firstly with the automatic process in the primary appraisal phase that occurs subconsciously when the individual analyses the event or situation (Shavaki et al., 2020). A stressful event will affect the individual's well-being when it makes them experience unpleasant emotions, sickness, or injury (Shavaki et al., 2020). If the event or situation is evaluated as a threat, the next step of the process occurs which is known as the secondary appraisal. In this phase the individual interprets the stressor as harmful, a threat, or a challenge, evaluating it against their abilities which allow them to cope and manage their stress response through the use of available resources and past experiences (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019). The individual then engages and works out the best way to deal with the situation and change the undesirable conditions. The last step of the process is the coping response to the current event. During this phase the individual makes use of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage or reduce the stressor (Shavaki et al., 2020) and creating a more positive environment (Trougakos et al., 2020).

Furthermore, there are two forms of coping that an individual may adopt after appraising a situation (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019). Firstly, emotion-focused strategies are concerned with internal emotion rather than the external stimuli which trigger an emotional response (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019; Shavaki et al., 2020). In this response the individual focuses their efforts to regulate their own emotions associated with the uncomfortable stressor and acknowledging that no action can change the harmful event (Trougakos et al., 2020). The coping strategies adopted could involve the individual avoiding the situation or changing their mindset to see a more positive aspect of the situation (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019; Shavaki et al.,

2020). The second form of coping encompasses problem-focused strategies (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019; Laubmeier et al., 2004). These strategies alter the stressors through actions by directly manipulating the stressful event. This is done through the individual developing and learning new skills and finding alternative options that allow for the stressful event to be managed. Individuals seeking emotional support from those around them is both an emotional and problem-focused strategy (Abu Shosha & Kalaldeh, 2019; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

2.3.3 Integration of the conceptual framework

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980) both guide the current study and the interpretation of the collected data. The aspect of the *person* in the PPCT model views the individual's characteristics (personality and current mental health status), available resources (financial, skills, emotional, and material), and their ability to cope with the stress in order to complete their matric year during the Covid-19 pandemic (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). In the context of the pandemic, many individuals were pushed to their limits, experienced a new type of stress, and did not have the necessary resources to cope (Henderson et al., 2020). The *process* in this research is the matric learner and the Covid-19 pandemic which highlighted the reciprocal interaction that was novel and forced many individuals to adjust and adopt coping strategies (Chachar & Younus, 2021). The *context* of the matric learners needs to be understood as multiple environments in which the individual interacts and influence them (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

The microsystem of an individual's context refers to the immediate environment, which would refer to the individual, home, school, and place of worship (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). The mesosystem is the interrelation between the major systems (Rosa & Tudge, 2013) being 'home and school' and 'home and work'. During the Covid-19 pandemic there was a major shift within these systems, resulting in these interactions being limited to the individual's household and a loss of routine (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). Further, in the exosystem the environments that are not directly experienced by the individual (Swart & Pettipher, 2016) included their parent's work, extended family, neighbours, and support systems. The loss of loved ones during a time when social gatherings, such as

funerals, were prohibited also made grief and closure exceedingly difficult which could have exacerbated the mental health decline of many learners during their crucial schooling year (De Smet et al., 2020). Lastly, the macrosystem refers to social culture and milieu, the government and health care system, and the economic system which was massively impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). South Africa being in a state of national disaster during the Covid-19 pandemic (South African Government, 2020c) meant that new laws were implemented with immediate effect, and in turn heightened many individuals' stress levels due to the unknown which had a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of many individuals (Bama & Nyikana, 2021; Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020).

In the context of this study, *time* looked at each ecological system and how each individual changed over time with specific focus on the Covid-19 pandemic influencing human development (Henderson et al., 2020). Micro-time adjusts during the proximal process (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). The Meso-time refers to the period of this study from March 2020 to March 2021 taking into consideration the lockdown experience, with a specific focus on matric learners. Macro-time refers to a future time, being the possible long-term effects experienced due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Henderson et al., 2020; Swart & Pettipher, 2016). Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) allows for the individual to be viewed in an organised manner, using the five ecological systems. Thus, understanding the mutual interaction between the matric learners and their various ecological systems provides insight into how they perceived the events that have unfolded during the pandemic (Chachar & Younus, 2021). Every individual would have encountered different experiences with ranging impacts, and therefore the ecological perspective allows for the researcher to gain a comparative explanation from the participants (Bronfenbrenner, 2001).

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1980) applies to the following research as it demonstrates how the learners viewed the stress of the Covid-19 pandemic and developed coping strategies (Abu Shosha & Al-Kalaldeh, 2019; Jean-Baptiste et al., 2020). Many individuals regarded the Covid-19 pandemic as a threat (Jean-Baptiste et al., 2020). Moreover, the pandemic is interpreted as the imbalance between the demands placed on learners (staying at

home, no in-contact school attendance) and their limited coping resources which included social support, resources, and coping skills (Trougakos et al., 2020). Consequently, learners may have felt that they had little to no control and were unable to manage the situational effect. Furthermore, the transactional model factors in the ability of each adolescent to appraise a situation differently and respond to the situation, catering for individual differences in the acquired coping strategies (Jean-Baptiste et al., 2020). The primary appraisal stage is the interpretation of a situation, identifying if there is an imbalance between the demands placed on the matric learner having to stay at home due to the new lockdown regulations and the learner's coping strategies available to them- social support, resources, skills of knowing how to handle the situation (Jean-Baptiste et al., 2020). The secondary appraisal stage is the analysis of available resources and experience. If there is limited or no social support, resources, or skills of knowing how to handle the situation then the learner is left with limited abilities to manage the source of the problem. The coping response can be an emotional- or problem-focused response. Helping the learner to change how they feel about the situation and manipulate any factor to make the situation more pleasant.

Therefore, the transactional model identifies alternative methods of managing psychological responses to stressors as it considers a cognitive approach (Jean-Baptiste et al., 2020). Studies have reported on learners' well-being as being affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (Buheji, et al., 2020; Greyling et al., 2020), leading them to find ways to cope with the increased stressors experienced. Being disconnected from their support systems, schools, extended family, and religious groups increased the challenges experienced (Jacobson, 2020; Samhsa, 2020). The coping strategies or stress responses adopted by an individual are also based on their personal experiences, age, personality, social support, and socio-economic resources. The coping strategies are an important factor in the transactional model of stress and coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

Borja et al. (2021) reported that matric students implemented coping strategies such as developing new skills through online courses, helping with household chores, reminiscing on previous travels, or outings with friends and family. Similarly, Baloran (2020) states that the top six reported coping strategies of students

during the Covid-19 pandemic included following strict protective measures to reduce transmissions, avoiding going into public places, researching Covid-19 preventative mechanisms of transmission, being busy at home (mostly on social media), and praying or worshipping. Moreover, coping strategies become crucial as the long-term exposure to stress, as stated by Ali (2020), affects individuals' immune systems, reducing their ability to recover from illnesses and having an impact on their mental health. Using the process of a thematic analysis, the coping strategies that matric students in South Africa utilised are highlighted from the newspaper clippings and the interview transcripts.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored the literature in line with this research. Furthermore, the theoretical framework which have guided the study was discussed in detail. The theories and existing literature aids to identify common patterns and trends throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

3.1 Introduction

In Chapters 1 and 2 the research methodology, theoretical framework and strategies underpinning the present study were discussed. In this chapter, the results of the study are presented in terms of the main themes and sub-themes that emerged following the thematic analysis. Where necessary, verbatim quotes from the participants and excerpts from the newspaper clippings were utilised to support the themes and sub-themes under discussion. Furthermore, the findings are interpreted and guided by the theoretical framework (as addressed in Chapter 2) and current research was explored adding to the credibility of the interpreted data. The results of this study assisted in answering the research question at hand: What impact did the Covid-19 pandemic have on the 2020 matric learners' mental health and well-being?

3.2. Interpreting the Findings of the Study

Conceptualising the context of this study allows for a deeper understanding of the learner's experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic within their context. The PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) emphasises the importance of exploring the individual within their environment (home and school), gaining an understanding of how the individual changes and develops within a specific timeframe. Figure 3.1 illustrates the four identified themes from Chapter 1. Thus, the identified themes place the learners at the centre of this study, encompassing their five core systems that influence their development and coping strategies.

Figure 3. 1
The identified main themes
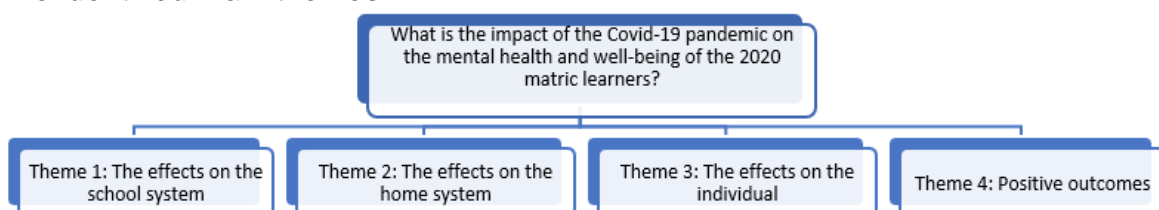
Furthermore, this section reports on the identified themes and associated sub-themes discussing each theme in detail for the data analysis and interpretation process for both the newspaper clippings and the interview transcripts.

3.2.1 Theme 1: The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the school system

Figure 3.2 provides an explanation of Theme 1, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria and extracts supporting the chosen theme from a newspaper clipping (Annexure H) and an interview transcript (Annexure I).

Figure 3. 2
Theme 1 with sub-themes and extract examples

Theme 1: The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the school system
This theme describes any effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the school system found in the newspaper clippings and interview transcripts. This theme provides an understanding of the 2020 school year from the learners' descriptions and expectations, their experience of schools closing, having to learn during the lockdown, having to return to school in the middle of the pandemic and the support that was provided to them during this time.   *The premises were quieter and cleaner. When I entered the classroom, my classmates were seated according to the physical distance rule of 1.5m apart from one another.* (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4)   *The worst part about returning back… I think it was the adjustment again. So, after going from normal classes to online classes and then we went from online classes to normal classes the adjustment, especially because the way they set up the classrooms and the way they were doing the normal classes was quite different.* (Interview P3, line 479-484)

Sub-theme 1: The start of the 2020 school year	
Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
All data relating to learners describing their 2020 academic year, the expectations they had for the school year, the announcement of schools closing and how this unfolded including the banning of extramural activities.	All data relating to the events or experiences after schools had closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sub-theme 2: Learning through the Covid-19 pandemic	
Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
All data relating to the matrics experiences of learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.	All data relating to the learner's expectations at the start of the 2020 school year, the general

	effects on the school system, learners returning to school and the support provided.
Sub-theme 3: The effects on the education system	
Inclusion Criteria All data relating to the general impacts on the education system, including the cancellation of extra murals and final matric exams.	Exclusion Criteria All data relating to the learner's expectations at the start of the 2020 school year, matric's experience of learning, learners returning to school, and the support provided.
Sub-theme 4: Returning to school during the Covid-19 pandemic	
Inclusion Criteria All data relating the learners returning to school during the covid-19 pandemic, the new regulations made and the emotions they felt.	Exclusion Criteria All data relating to the learner's expectations at the start of the 2020 school year, matric's experience of learning, the general effects on the school system, and the support provided.
Sub-theme 5: Support from the Education Department and schools	
Inclusion Criteria All data relating to any support that was provided to the matrics by the school or the education department during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Exclusion Criteria All data relating to the learner's expectations at the start of the 2020 school year, matric's experience of learning, the general effects on the school system, and learners returning to school.

3.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1: The start of the 2020 school year

The start of the 2020 school year included no significant differences for learners in comparison to the previous years. Learners were excited to start their final school year and were feeling the pressure from the start of the curriculum.

> *At the start of the year, everything was normal. We had no stress except academic stress* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6). *At the beginning of the year, everything was just normal and exciting* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6). Participant 4 shared the same feelings: *Being the beginning of matric I was overwhelmed in general because you know everyone goes on about oh matric, last year high school* (Transcript P4, lines 16-18).

Furthermore, the first Covid-19 case in South Africa was reported on 5 March 2020 (Fouché et al., 2020). On the 26th of March 2020, the president announced a national lockdown (South African Government, 2020a) resulting in all schools closing. The matric learners only started to return to school on the 8th of June 2020, which meant that the fun, exciting matric year that they had hoped for had changed dramatically.

I was looking forward to my matric year and having a matric dance, but it didn't go as expected (Daily Sun: Nov 3, 2020, pg.2). *The coronavirus has changed almost every single expectation I had for the year 2020. The cancellation of our matric farewell, sports tournaments, cultural evenings, and all other anticipated events has led me into an incomprehensible state of mind* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6).

This disappointment was shared by all the participants and was reported by numerous newspaper articles.

Yes (it was a disappointing year), in that a lot of things were taken away like the matric dance (Transcript P1, lines 678-679), *(2020 was) disappointing, it wasn't the worst, but it was pretty disappointing. I think we all excited for it we expected more like, we knew the stress, but we also knew the perks, which we didn't get* (Transcript P4, lines 1258-1260), *The lavish matric dance, the matric blazers and jackets, the exclusive matric lawns, the fun and final high school sports days and concerts. The pandemic nearly took all of it away* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15), *As we all know, 2020 has not been the year we all expected it to be.* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6)

3.2.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Learning through the Covid-19 pandemic

The initial three-week lockdown period soon turned into five weeks, with a return date for learners set for three months after infection rates in the country continued to rise, forcing learning to remain online or through self-learning (Soudien et al., 2022). It is important to note that South Africa is a minority country that lacks the infrastructure and resources to connect many learners online (Adarkwah, 2021). Thus, the high data costs and poor signal in rural areas left many learners disconnected and without the proper learning resources or support. Additionally, most government schools still utilise traditional teaching methods resulting in teachers and learners having to shift towards a new and foreign pedagogy with limited prior experience and training (Doukakis & Alexopoulos, 2020; Soudien et al., 2022).

The participant interviews and newspaper clippings all revealed different experiences of the way in which schools dealt with teaching methods during the

lockdown period. Participants 1 and 5 attend a government school (A) which did not have access to online learning. The school (teachers and learners) also had not used online platforms prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that faculty had to quickly adapt during the lockdown period and to try find a suitable platform to connect with their learners and continue teaching.

We had no online classes (Transcript P1, line 109). *As soon as the first lockdown hit, we had to figure out, you know, what platform we were going to use* (Transcript P1, lines 35-37), *In the beginning, we were all still trying to find out ways to make online work for us. We used like Google classroom to sort of get going* (Transcript P5, lines 189-200), *This was brand new for us* (Transcript P5, line 220).

Moreover, the learners from government school A- which Participant 1 and Participant 5 attended- were provided with PowerPoint slides on Google classroom and students were expected to manage their own time working through the content. This meant that no questions could be asked to teachers or direct support was granted as there were no live interactions during this time. The learners were told to wait until they returned to school to ask any questions.

(there was) no live communication it was all just pre-recorded or just working through slides by ourselves in textbooks and notes (Transcript P1, lines 109-111), *It was basically just you go on Google classroom, and they give you the work you need to do and you basically just work through it yourself using the textbook* (Transcript P5, lines 224-226), *There was no way we could ask questions easily, they would say okay save your questions for when we come back and revise the sections* (Transcript P1, lines 131-134).

However, Participants 2 and 3 attended government school B which afforded a very different experience to their learning during the lockdown period. School B had used online platforms prior to the lockdown to send extra work to learners. When the president announced level five lockdown and the closure of schools, school B provided training to the learners the week before schools closed which assisted them with the online transition.

My school did handle that quite well with online lessons even throughout the lockdown when no one was in (school) (Transcript P2, lines 31-33), *The school actually did quite well they introduce online schooling, and we did quite a lot of online classes because we were in the middle of term one* (Transcript P3, lines 31-34), *They also did like a week before, they showed us how to use it, they told us how to use it and they made sure we knew* (Transcript P3, lines 337-339).

The structure at school B was also maintained where learners still followed their normal timetable, joining online meetings for each subject where the teacher would teach in real-time. This allowed for the learners to ask questions and interact with their teachers and peers.

While it was online it was, it was structured sort of well, it was structured like a normal class, where you know, everyone gets… instead of going into to a classroom, everyone gets online to watch the teacher present in real-time, so it was live, it wasn't recorded or pre-recorded and the teachers just had a normal lesson (Transcript P2, lines 153-157), *They set up Google classrooms for us and we would have to separate classes for whatever our electives were like physics, maths, and all of that, and they gave us timetables so that would schedule Google meets* (Transcript P3, lines 312-316), *So, you could ask questions, you could talk to other people in the class if you wanted to* (Transcript P2, lines 164-166)

Furthermore, Participant 4 attended government school C which also did not offer online teaching during the lockdown. Moreover, prior the Covid-19 pandemic learners did not have any exposure to online platforms which made this a difficult adjustment. After a month of lockdown, some of the teachers at school C started to utilise online platforms worrying that they would not complete the syllabus before the final exams. The teachers used a variety of platforms to connect to the learners who had access, but the school did not adhere their normal timetable.

The work they were giving us was on Google classrooms we used like Google Classroom, zoom for lessons and stuff (Transcript P4, lines 72-74), *We didn't at that stage (online learning) and we didn't, in the beginning, I think like two*

weeks in that's in math started, or like a month (Transcript P4, line 560), *Then towards I think may... June they started posting videos. Our teachers would like to make recorded lectures and posted it on google classroom* (Transcript P4, lines 626-628), (the teachers would) upload links to like YouTube channels that taught the topic (Transcript P4, line 630).

The newspaper clippings shared a similar process of schools having to turn to online platforms during the lockdown period in order for them to continue teaching and to complete the year's syllabus. The schools made use of the most accessible platforms by the learners which did not allow for live lessons, making it difficult for the teachers to explain the content and the learners to ask questions in real-time.

The Covid-19 outbreak has forced the education system to undergo a massive reformation due to online teaching and learning (Cape Argus: Sept 8, 2020, pg.7), *The lockdown has disturbed our plans and we had to turn to online teaching, which is not as effective compared with the traditional method of teaching* (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2), *WhatsApp became the mode of teaching for most of us* (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020), *Many learners did not understand the work we've sent via WhatsApp as they had no one to explain the work to them* (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020).

Reportedly, the shift from traditional teaching to online platforms was also a major adjustment for teachers as they had no previous training or exposure to online pedagogies.

Teachers tried to adapt to online education, but the reality is that this wasn't the core competency of many schools. Teachers had to brush up on online teaching skills and use some technology for the first time. This made for challenging times (Cape Argus: Sept 10, 2020, pg.10), *Teachers have had to move from a space in which they have years of experience to the unknown and challenging world of online, remote, correspondence, and social distanced teaching* (Pretoria News, Oct 5, 2020, pg. 6).

Muftahu's (2020) research further adds that many learners also found this adaptation too difficult and therefore did not embrace the shift to online learning. Similarly, Mutongoza (2021) reported on the challenges associated with the transition to online

learning, stating that the difficulties experienced by teachers and learners in this transition, arise from the lack of digital training and development before the pandemic.

In addition, the struggles regarding online access and resources were a major barrier that schools faced when trying to connect with their learners and continue teaching during the lockdown period. Adarwah's (2020;2021) research also revealed this barrier to online learning was also due to the lack of ICT infrastructure and tools, stating that South African government schools are ill-equipped to foster efficient online learning platforms. The two participants from school A were privileged to have access and resources at home to continue learning; however, the majority of school A's learners did not have laptops, cell phones, or data. Thus, school A decided to not offer online classes and only upload work for the learners to complete as they felt it would be unfair to offer online learning as it was not an equal opportunity for all the learners. Fortunately, school A was able to receive sponsored data from a network provider for the matric learners, allowing the learners who had laptops or cell phones on the same network to connect and download the learning content. However, many learners were still unable to access online content due to the lack of resources and signal.

> *I did have like resources such as Wi-Fi and you know a room where I could work, and I had my own laptop* (Transcript P5, lines 136-138), *people did not have laptops, people did not have phones* (Transcript P1, lines 153-154), *lots of girls don't have access to data and I think just the live sessions it would just wouldn't be fair* (Transcript P1, lines 142-143), *They went back to their grandparents' houses in KZN or the Eastern Cape or Western Cape and there they were on farms* (Transcript P5, lines 240-241), *our school ended up making a deal with Vodacom* (Transcript P1, line 147).

School B ensured that all its learners had access and were able to continue learning at home during the lockdown period. School B borrowed laptops for the matric learners who were in need. The participants who attended school B were fortunate enough to have the necessary resources at home to continue learning.

The school made sure; the school did make sure that everyone has it. So, if you didn't have access to it, just contact the school they gave out data and I think they were giving out Chromebooks to anyone (Transcript P3, lines 392-395), *But for me who it didn't really affect me, I think everyone was given an opportunity to access those lessons* (Transcript P2, lines 212-213).

Moreover, schools A and B were also fortunate to have resources like a computer centre and Wi-Fi. They allowed any learners who were struggling to connect online at home to return to school, with strict protocols in place, offering them the opportunity to continue learning.

The school started allowing girls who don't have access to laptops to come through to the school so they could use the computer centre (Transcript P1, lines 158-188), *for the people who didn't have access to Wi-Fi they would just open up the hostels and you could just go there and use the Wi-Fi at the school* (Transcript P2, lines 195-197).

However, school C was not in the same position as schools A and B. They were unable to provide resources and data to their learners. Participant 4 shared that they were not affected by this as the participant had the resources at home to connect and download any work that was provided. Nonetheless, the majority of school C's learners did not have the same opportunity at home which placed teachers in a difficult position as they could not fully continue with the syllabus due to many learners not having online access.

Obviously, you weren't getting data from school... It's a public school (Transcript P4, lines 74-75), *Not every kid has... access... Like they don't have like a laptop or like a phone that has enough storage for all of these things* (Transcript P4, lines 75-78), *The teachers try to tell us do the work it's... Like you have to do it but they also kind of made it clear like because it's a public school we are aware that everyone doesn't have data and stuff you know...* (Transcript P4, lines 88-91*), I was lucky in terms of I had wi-fi, I have the laptop, I had my phone, I have a printer, I... You know, I was able to do things* (Transcript P4, lines 118-120).

Further, many of the newspaper clippings have reported on similar situations described by Participant 4. Many of the government schools in South Africa do not have the necessary funds to build computer centres or provide resources and data to learners. This meant that prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, many government schools did not have exposure to online learning and the learners had not previously worked on computers. The divide between the upper- and lower-class government schools was made clear during the pandemic.

> *Even before the pandemic, there were challenges with the use of technology in public schools that included inadequate infrastructure, poor internet connectivity and a lack of digitally competent teachers. During the lockdown, this reality was made clear as many public school teachers who didn't have the experience, knowledge or infrastructure to facilitate online learning found it challenging* (Pretoria News, Oct 5, 2020, pg. 6), *The digital divide became abundantly clear while some struggled with the basic resources such as water and adequate sanitisation; both necessary during the coronavirus outbreak* (Daily Dispatch: Nov 2020, pg.10), *When schools had to offer online teaching, the gap between former model C schools and those in rural and townships was visible* (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5).

Furthermore, many learners did not have access or the resources at home to continue learning. The living situation in South Africa is mostly comprised of overcrowded homes, making it difficult for the learners to find a quiet place at home to work or study.

> *Very poor access to computers and unstable home internet connections have meant that online learning has not been possible for most schools* (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020), *When level 5 of the lockdown was implemented, many students were left without computers/ laptops, smartphones, internet connectivity and adequate coverage, and insufficient working spaces at home* (Cape Argus: Sept 10, 2020, pg.10), *Lockdown restrictions with many pupils not having access to online learning or other resources* (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7), *I live in a rural area and there was no money to access resources for learning online* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6).

Soudien et al. 's (2022) and Spaull and Van der Berg's (2020) research both highlight the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged schools and learners. Their research state that there is a lack of school facilities for online teaching and a lack of access and space in poorer households in South Africa. Moreover, Mutongoza's (2021) research findings corroborated with the aforementioned stating the difficulty that the learners faced trying to study or work from home when they did not have the adequate or quiet spaces to do so. Additionally, it was reported that an estimated 60% of South Africans had a cell phone which connected to the internet (Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). Further, Soudien et al. 's (2022) research stated that almost no learning took place for about three-quarters of learners in South Africa due to their poor socio-economic backgrounds. The 2018 General Household Survey (Stats SA, 2019) reported that only an estimated 10% of South African households had computers that had internet access. This research is in line with the findings of the current study which emphasised the number of students that lost valuable teaching due to the lack of connection and resources.

During this time, the South African Department of Education tried to connect as many learners as possible. However, the country's infrastructure remains poorly adept to allow individuals from rural areas to have access. The lack of connection and support at home during this period also added to the learner's stress at the time.

> *Despite The education department making available laptops, data and classes on TV and radio. In most cases, pupils in the hinterland struggled with network connections, rendering the tablet devices useless* (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5), Many learners who did not have the opportunity for remote learning or no adequate support at home may feel that they are behind the syllabus, hence they are likely to feel despondent (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8), *Not having Wi-Fi or data added to our stress because at the end of the day the work had to be done* (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020).

Additionally, this sudden shift to online learning also forced schools and their learners to quickly adapt to novel ways of learning. Many learners struggled with the change from traditional teaching to self-guided learning, which led them to find other platforms that provided some form of teaching.

Schools were forced to adapt to new ways of learning and teaching (Daily Dispatch: Nov 2020, pg.10), *Having to adapt to a new learning style, in the last year high school, that was probably the biggest problem* (Transcript P2, lines 485-486), *I had to adapt that to sort of watching a lot of YouTube videos in the content* (Transcript P5, lines 422-423), *I would um… you know go to Khan academy's it was sort of the same thing and that actually you know watch videos to see other people studied and like you know I tried to learn different methods* (Transcript P1, lines 465-468), *And I found it quite difficult as, I was on the computer every single day for like 2 months* (Transcript P5, lines 44-45)

Moreover, not all learners were able to keep up with this change which affected their academic performance.

My studies have been negatively affected by this pandemic (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6), *My learning was affected very badly because we had closed schools. We started online learning, which was too difficult for me because my family lacked the financial means to afford data* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6), *I looked forward to my matric year, but the experience was hectic. I had to adapt to online learning, which wasn't easy at first as my marks dropped. I am very fearful, but I'm trying my best to stay positive* (Daily Sun: Nov 3, 2020, pg.2).

Pokhrel and Chhetri's (2021) and Sintema's (2020) research reviewed teaching through the Covid-19 pandemic and their findings reported on the learners' academic performance being affected. It was found that the loss of teaching time and the shift to online learning meant learners were unable to consult their teachers when having difficulty in understanding the content, which likely affected learners' academic performance. According to Davy et al. (2022), many of the students in their research found that the online learning style did not suit them as it was less individualised, resulting in a decline in their grades. Moreover, students shared that the lack of engagement made it difficult to stay focused and trying to learn new skills and adjusting their style of learning also caused a lot of stress (Davy et al., 2022). However, the current study found that for learners who did mostly self-studying prior

to pandemic and subsequent lockdown, the transition to online learning was not experienced as difficult.

> *In terms of learning it didn't make too much difference, to me, because I pretty much self-study everything anyway, when I was in school* (Transcript P2, lines 89-91).

3.2.1.3 Sub-theme 3: The effects on the education system

The disruptions in the 2020 school year left many learners with the added stress of worrying if they would still have the opportunity to complete their matric year. Thus, the loss of valuable teaching time and the pressure to finish the matric syllabus made this a challenging year for 2020 matric learners.

> *The nationwide lockdown we had to impose in March to contain the spread of the coronavirus caused immense disruption to everyday life and cost valuable hours of learning and studying* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6), *Like all sectors, education has been hard hit by the scourge of Covid-19 and the Grade 12 learners who will start their examinations next week face this hurdle during the worst and wickedest of times* (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8).

Similarly, Lee's (2020) research on the closure of schools during the pandemic found that learners were anxious regarding the disruption to their school year and the possible cancellation of their exams. Despite these disruptions the Department of Education stated that they would not lower their examination standard as schools had reported that they managed to complete the syllabus in time.

> *Despite the abnormal context, the Class of 2020 will be subjected to the same high-quality examination that previous cohorts were* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6); (Pretoria News: Nov 3, 2020, pg.1), *Despite the negative impact of Covid-19, they managed to finish the syllabus and do revisions thanks to the efforts of the school's teachers* (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2), *The class of 2020, despite the disruptions of the academic year, are fully prepared for this examination, Motshekga said* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6)

The matric learners also reported that even though it was a challenging time to prepare for their exams, they did manage to complete the syllabus; however, there were mixed emotions on whether they felt fully prepared for their exams.

> *Pupils said it was difficult to prepare during lockdown but with their teacher's help, they managed to write well* (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5*), I definitely didn't feel like I'm unprepared in any way for my finals* (Transcript P1, lines 752-753), *The pupils said that despite the disruptions due to Covid-19, they were prepared for the exam* (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2*), I'm anxious about the final exams, we didn't prepare well for them because we had no time. I wasted a lot of time at home. We couldn't attend extra classes because the location of those classes is not wheelchair-friendly* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6), *I'm frightened about the final exams approaching. We are going to write a full national paper but the examiner who set the paper two years ago did not know we were going to be affected by Covid-19* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6).

Moreover, the long-term impacts of this disruptive school year for our future generations are still to come. Azevedo et al.'s (2022) research on the Covid-19 impact on student learning also described the Covid-19 pandemic as having the worst effect on the education system in the last century. The author further stated the importance of educational recovery strategies ensuring that the intergenerational consequences of the pandemic are not felt among future generations to come (Azevedo et al., 2022).

> *Reinforce inequality and have an impact on generations to come* (Weekend Post: Sept 26, 2020, pg. 4), *The 2020 academic year will have significant implications and consequences for generations to come, according to leading educational experts* (Weekend Post: Sept 26, 2020, pg. 4).

Furthermore, the closing of schools meant that all extra mural activities were cancelled. For many learners, sport and cultural activities are seen as stress relievers, as well as a means of managing their time and an enjoyable part of schooling.

They cancelled all extra murals... For our year (Transcript P4, line 856), *They were not able to participate in sporting, recreational and leisure activities that are so essential to a well-rounded life and that relieve the stress of prolonged study* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6); (Pretoria News: Nov 3, 2020, pg.1); (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7), *I do use it as a stress relief* (Transcript P1, line 269), *I use sports a lot for my time management* (Transcript P1, lines 2019-210), *when that's taken away from me I feel my time management is like so bad and that's I just can't and I feel like I have more time now so I work slower and it's not good* (Transcript P1, lines 222-224), *You couldn't do like the extra stuff, you know, like let's be real, school isn't the fun part, it's all the other stuff that makes it fun* (Transcript P4, lines 866-868).

However, for some learners' sport took up a lot of their time and the lockdown provided them with the opportunity to solely focus on their studies. In June 2020, when matric learners returned to school, extra murals were still banned due to the social distancing and mask protocols (Soudien et al., 2022). This left many learners feeling disappointed as they had trained and looked forward to all the final events in their matric year.

It (sports) takes up a lot of time so that the lockdown kind of let me have time to study a lot (Transcript P1, lines 229-230), *I think a lot of people struggled without having their sport and physical activity during the day* (Transcript P1, lines 236-238), *it was also that transition of going, doing something every afternoon to doing like nothing and just academics. That was also a quite a difficult transition* (Transcript P5, lines 163-165), *I know for a lot of people the impact was more that they couldn't do, what they had wanted to do (sport), come into the school in grade eight and something that they look forward to all the way up throughout the year,* (Transcript P2, lines 23-26), *inter-house events were taken away* (Transcript P1, lines 682-683).

In addition, Wilke et al. 's (2021) research on individuals' physical activity levels being affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, reported that two-thirds of the participants in their study were unable to maintain their level of exercise during the lockdown. The same findings are presented in the current study as the participants all shared that they played ample sport before the lockdown restrictions. Moreover, the benefits of

physical activity, besides physical health, is a valuable intervention for stress management and psychological disorders (Schuch et al., 2018; Stubbs et al., 2017). The participants in my research shared the impact they felt when not being able to play sport as it was a stress reliever for them. In addition, Draper et al. 's (2021) research on Covid-19 and physical activity reported that lockdown lowered individuals' level of physical activity which in turn affected their mental health. However, there was an increase in other behaviours like working in the garden, recreational activities, and spending time with the family which have mental health benefits (Draper, 2021).

3.2.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Returning to school during the Covid-19 pandemic

The announcement from the Department of Education that matric learners would be returning to school on the 23rd of June 2020, left many learners feeling unsettled. They were fearful of contracting the virus and possibly bringing it home to their loved ones.

> *The unknown of the new school regulations and protocols left the learner's parents feeling stressed: Returning to school can be traumatic for parents and children alike* (The Star: Jan 11, 2021, pg.3*), I was a bit stressed. I was stressed because I wasn't really sure, it's fear of the unknown, nobody really knew what was going on. So, I think that stressed everyone out quite a bit, I know I was stressed* (Transcript P3, lines 533-536), *I have one daughter; she has one life. I refuse to risk my baby girl's life when every day we hear of someone dying* (Weekend Argus, Jan 9, 2021, pg.5), *When schools started opening, there were many families who were cornered about contracting Covid-19, especially those with comorbidities or other underlying conditions* (Cape Argus: Sept 10, 2020, pg.10).

Luijten et al.'s (2021) research added that this fear of loved ones getting infected increased individuals' levels of anxiety. Fortunately, the opening of schools did not seem to increase the Covid-19 infection rate.

> *The return to school did not lead to an increase in infection rates, with less than 2% of schools reporting more than two Covid-19 cases despite the fears of parents* (Business Day: Oct 1, 2020, pg.3)

Some learners were also excited to return to school as they had missed their teachers and friends and socialising with others.

> *I think, everyone wanted to come back, mostly everyone wanted to come back, they were missing their friends, they were missing like face-to-face interactions in class* (Transcript P3, lines 564-566), *(I enjoyed) being able to talk to friends* (Transcript P2, line 758), *Returning to that kind of structure which I enjoyed* (Transcript P2, lines 760-761), *Returning to some sense of normalcy* (Transcript P2, line 767), *Definitely seeing my friends and the teachers* (Transcript P5, lines 353-354).

However, returning to school after the lockdown period also left learners feeling scared as they were unsure of all the changes that had resulted from the pandemic. They were aware that their school would be different, forcing them to adjust to a new norm or standard.

> *Initially, maybe we were scared we weren't too sure how things were going to operate* (Transcript P1, lines 644-645), *Just everything was new* (Transcript P1, lines 653-654), *It was very different* (Transcript P4, line 747).

Shepherd and Mohohlwane's (2021) research findings also expressed that parents were very worried about their children returning to school. Reassuringly, there were many protocols which the schools implemented upon their learners' return ranging from sanitisation, social distancing, wearing of masks, to the changing of venues.

> *Being in a mask all the time* (Transcript P5, line 264), *They had screening, so every morning we would go get screened and then we would be able to enter school* (Transcript P3, lines 559-560), *They put more people to one class but the put them into bigger rooms because they had to space everyone out* (Transcript P2, lines 562-564), *And then before and after every class there was hand sanitiser, sanitise the desks* (Transcript P3, lines 561-562), *At school, we had these little blocks that we had to sit in, and we couldn't like to*

go outside of those blocks during break times (Transcript P5, lines 265-2677), *Our school did fumigate every single day* (Transcript P4, line 806).

In addition, when schools first reopened not all the learners returned. Some of the learners chose to stay home due to the fear of the virus infecting family members with co-morbidities. Some of the learners also had to continue to support their families by working due to the impact of the pandemic resulting in job losses and pay cuts.

Not everyone returned (Transcript P4, line 776), *Due to the fear of Covid-19, some parents have decided to homeschool their children and some have decided not to send their children to school for the rest of the year* (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4), *Some people who chose not to come back to school* (Transcript P1, line 647), *One or two said we're not coming back to school because our parents have comorbidities* (Transcript P1, lines 648-650), *Some learners from indigent families may have found ways to help their families during the unpredictable times of Covid-19 and could have valid reasons for not going back to school, including that they are now putting bread on the table* (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8). Other learners enjoyed being at home and the new way of learning: *But I think some people didn't want to come back, I think online agreed with them and they were doing well online* (Transcript P3, lines 566-568).

Further, learners were also forced, once again, to quickly adapt to the changes of now being back at school. Some learners enjoyed having some form of a structure to follow and returning to school helped them feel like things were going back to normal. Other learners struggled with the adjustment as they had just found a routine within working from home and online and were unhappy with the change. Fontenelle-Tereshchuk's (2021) research findings on the transition and adaptation to the new ways of living and receiving education, also found that it was emotionally distressing to many families, especially learners.

It just changed a lot it wasn't like a school normal school days and you know when you have you each day is different just in terms of your interactions and assembly's and like the sport, it just felt so monotonous and that nothing was

it literally felt the same all the time (Transcript P1, lines 796-800), *The worst part about returning back… I think it was the adjustment again. So, after going from normal classes to online classes and then we went from online classes to normal classes the adjustment, especially because the way they set up the classrooms and the way they were doing the normal classes was quite different* (Transcript P3, lines 479-484).

3.2.1.5 Sub-theme 5: Support from the Education Department and schools

Providing support during a time of crisis is important to help individuals cope. The Department of Education in South Africa and various schools did provide support to learners. The participants that were interviewed shared that they were not very aware of the support their school offered as they did not need support because they felt that they were able to cope.

> *They targeted it more to the people who really needed it, who were really impacted by the virus, not so many people like me who were able to cope* (Transcript P2, lines 990-992), *They had maths camps and everything to help prepare for the exams* (Transcript P3, lines 659-660), *I think they made it (extra lessons) compulsory for the kids who were failing* (Transcript P4, line 897).

The bulk of the Departments' support was provided on television and radio programmes, which assisted learners in completing the syllabus and preparing for their final exams. Furthermore, when protocols allowed for small gatherings, the Department of Education encouraged schools to offer weekend classes and a matric camp to assist learners with the exam preparation.

> *For matriculants, government support came in the form of TV and radio programmes and matric camps, among other initiatives* (Daily Dispatch: Nov 2020, pg.10), *The department launched the Woza Matrics, in collaboration with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). This is an initiative designed to provide additional support to the matric class of 2020, as they prepare for the 2020 National Senior Certificate Examination* (Cape Times, Oct 2, 2022, pg. 5), *Provinces have put in place a whole range of measures to support the learners- this includes Saturday and Sunday classes* (Cape

Times, Oct 2, 2022, pg. 5), *The country provided educational programmes on television. That helped* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6).

Similar findings were reported by Spaull and Van der Berg's (2020) research on South African schools closing during the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors findings highlighted that the support offered schools and the Department of Education, amounted to less than 5% of the instructional time that the learners would have received being at school (Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). Shepherd and Mohohlwane's (2021) research findings added that further support was made available to learners from cellular service providers who declared certain educational websites and learning platforms zero-rated. This meant that learners would access learning content at no cost to them.

3.2.1.6 Theme 1 integrated discussion

This theme served to explore the secondary research question based on the matric learner's school experiences and possible challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. The first sub-theme reported on the findings of the learner's expectations for the 2020 school year, followed by the disappointment they felt due to the disruptions the pandemic brought. This disappointment led to some learners struggling to continue to be motivated during the year. This sub-theme also showcased the *personal* aspect of the participants to be explored from the PPCT model (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). Understanding how the learners perceived the start of the 2020 school year aids in understanding their attitude and possible motivation as they encounter challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic and their ability to cope with uncertainties moving forward. The second sub-theme explored the learner's experiences of having to learn through the Covid-19 pandemic. All the participants shared different experiences of their schools, and commonality across the data included the difficulty of the transition for some learners to online learning. Moreover, this transition increased the learner's stress levels as they were forced to adapt to finish the syllabus in preparation for their final exams.

The third sub-theme in the results reported on the effects on the education system due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These disruptions increased many learners' levels of stress and anxiety as they were unsure how this would affect their final year of schooling. The cancellation of extra murals also meant that some learners could

focus all their attention on preparing for their final exams, while other learners struggled as they lost a method to coping and managing stress, in addition to managing their time. The fourth sub-theme explored the learner's experiences of returning to school during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings showed a mixture of emotions expressed by the learners from fear and anxiety to excitement about returning to school. The changes at school also required the learners to adapt to new school norms which led to some learners experiencing increased levels of stress. The last sub-theme reported on the support the school and the Department of Education offered to the learners during this period. Majority of support focused on assisting learners to complete the syllabus and preparing for final exams.

Furthermore, the multidimensional PPCT model provided a framework that allowed the learner's *context* to be explored in detail. This was highlighted in this theme and the two which follow and provided an understanding of the changes that were faced in the learners' microsystems. The personal challenges they faced, as well as the changes in their home and school environment, increased their stress and brought an imbalance to their well-being. The learner's mesosystem was most affected as the relationships between their different microsystems altered. This system altered as the lockdown restricted movement resulting in the learner's home being placed at the centre of this system and all the different systems, which originally took place in a different environment, now took place at the learner's home. This included online learning or self-studying, their parent's work, extra mural activities or exercise, and religious worship. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic affected every aspect of society in terms of affecting the learner's exosystem as their parents experienced salary cuts or loss of jobs. There was also a strain on the health system which resulted in the lockdown. The restrictions and laws surrounding the pandemic are included in the macrosystem which influenced all the above-mentioned systems. Lastly, the chronosystem focused on the period during the Covid-19 pandemic between March 2020 to March 2021. The last aspect of the PPCT model is *time* which further includes the understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impacts on future generations. This aspect assisted with gathering data for the role of educational psychologists as they assist learners in the future.

Main Findings:

1. The struggle of online access and resources was a major barrier the government schools faced, also increasing the teacher's and learner's stress as they had no previous training or exposure to online platforms.

2. The cancellation of extra murals meant that some learners could focus all their attention on preparing for their final exams while other learners struggled as they lost a mechanism that helped them cope with stress and manage their time.

3. Returning to school during the pandemic revealed a mixture of emotions expressed by the learners from fear and anxiety to excitement.

3.2.2 Theme 2: The effects on the home system

Figure 3.3 provides an overview of Theme 2 including the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Figure 3. 3
Theme 2 with sub-themes and extract examples

Theme 2: The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the home system
This theme describes the home system, including the learner's experiences of staying home during the lockdown, finding a balance between work and home and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic they encountered. *We were all working from home … I think that we all had to like to find our own like find our own space around the house because we were all gonna work so that was a bit tricky* (Interview P1, line 343-345). *Many parents had to take aspects of their children's education into their own hands* (Cape Argus: Sept 10, 2020, pg.10).

Sub-theme 1: Finding a balance at home	
Inclusion Criteria All data relating to the home system including the learner's experiences during the lockdown, staying with the family and trying to find harmony in the house.	Exclusion Criteria All data not relating specifically to the home system.

Sub-theme 2: The broader effects reported	
Inclusion Criteria All the data relating to the broad effects of the Covid-19 pandemic which in turn affect the home system.	Exclusion Criteria All data not relating to the home system.

3.2.2.1. Sub-theme 1: Finding a balance at home

The national lockdown restricted all movement from one's home unless an individual's work was considered an essential service, going to the shops, or seeking medical care (Soudien et al., 2022; Zuma, 2020). Most of the learners in this study were at home with their immediate family, and some learners had grandparents move in during the lockdown period. Reportedly, staying at home during the lockdown with the entire family required an adjustment for some learners.

> *Being in lockdown with my family in Ndabakazi was something we had to get used to* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6), *I stayed with my dad and stepmom this time during lockdown. And that was also a different dynamic because I was so used to being home with my mom and stepdad in that sort of environment* (Transcript P5, lines 91-94), *I was at home. I was with my grandfather, so we moved my grandfather up from Durban for lockdown. Then I was with my mother, my brother, and my father* (Transcript P3, lines 102-104).

Moreover, Saline's (2021) research findings on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in the family context highlight the increases in psychological distress among the household due to the reorganisation of the family structure and daily routines. Saline (2021) further stated that families being forced together during the lockdown period could have served as an asset or a detriment to learners' adaptation and adjustment during this challenging time. In this study, some of the learners were fortunate enough to have their own space to complete their work while their siblings and parents were in other rooms. Other learners were trapped at home with their parents fighting and only having their room to escape to.

> *I am like really grateful that I was able to have a home that I was comfortable, and I could at least work and there was a good Wi-Fi connection and all of that* (Transcript P5, lines 103-105), *My stepdad that's the reason I stayed in my room the whole time. I didn't want to deal with him at all, it's stressful in general. Him and my mom fought a lot, and we were scared that again he was going to get abusive* (Transcript P4, lines 475-479).

Findings also revealed the devastating consequences of the lockdown on the home system as abuse and teenage pregnancy rates increased. Fouché et al.'s (2020) research on child protection during the Covid-19 pandemic reported that children who were in lockdown with abusive adults heightened the child's vulnerability to abuse. The study also highlighted the protection that the lockdown period enabled for learners in safe households and not being able to leave (Fouché et al., 2020)

> *Teenage pregnancies and abuse are some of the negative effects of worldwide lockdown responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, experts have*

argued (The Mercury, Jan 12, 2020, pg. 4), *Schools were closed for eight months during the outbreak, and according to some estimates, teenage pregnancy rates doubled* (The Mercury, Jan 12, 2020, pg. 4).

As the lockdown period resulted in learners staying at home all day, they were required to self-manage their schedule regarding self-study and try to find a balance between working and relaxing as they no longer had a set routine that schooling offered. In addition, the entire household had to work together and find harmony during this time.

You are all stuck in the same environment, you can get irritated easily (Transcript P4, lines 259-260), *We were all working from home … I think that we all had to like find our own like find our own space around the house because we were all gonna work so that was a bit tricky* (Transcript P1, lines 343-345), *But the challenge was trying to fit all these different schedules into one sort of like family plan, I guess* (Transcript P5, lines 343-346), *Everyone pulled their… everyone pulled their weight at home, everyone cooked, everyone cleaned, everyone did what they need to do* (Transcript P3, lines 188-190).

Further, learners having to complete their schooling at home placed a big responsibility onto parents and the learners to be in charge of their own learning. South Africa's low literacy rate meant that not all learners could turn to their parents for assistance during the lockdown period. Tarkar's (2020) research on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the education system found that the transition to online learning has been challenging for parents. The research further adds that many parents do not have the necessary technological skills to assist their children with online learning (Tarkar, 2020).

Last year, when schools were closed, both parents and children needed to cope with home-schooling (The Star: Jan 11, 2021, pg.3), *Many parents had to take aspects of their children's education into their own hands* (Cape Argus: Sept 10, 2020, pg.10), *My parents are illiterate so they couldn't help me when I was struggling* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6).

Another important aspect of the home system, which was mentioned by the research participants, included the changed association of their bedroom. The participants shared how their bedroom was a safe and relaxing place for them before the lockdown; however, having to work from home their bedroom became a place of stress. Having to spend more time in their bedroom also led some of the learners to overwork as they did not have a structure in place like a normal school day would provide.

> *It's (my bedroom) now stressful* (Transcript P4, line 268), *It was really weird to kind of try and adapt to it. It was almost like, like I said you're in a place where you expect to relax but you're doing work, so it was very strange* (Transcript P2, lines 1126-1129), *I kind of had to change, I was like okay maybe, maybe my room is not a place where I relax, maybe I have to do some work now* (Transcript P2, lines 1129-1131), *I think my room was more the classroom. So, I never brought my work out of my room* (Transcript P3, lines 350-353140-141), *But now for me, I was in my room, where I would usually relax and destress, I'm now stressing and trying to get work done in the same sort of setting and that was quite difficult for me to separate the two because you are like Aaah, I can just work whenever I want to and then you just start working too much and overworking yourself, which isn't very, great as well* (Transcript P5, lines 48-54).

3.2.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Broader effects reported

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have rippled into every sector of society. My findings highlighted the variety of impacts that the learners encountered or were aware of which increased their stress levels.

> *Covid-19 has disrupted the lives of many families and their children now face changes that they may not fully understand* (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5) *The impact has landed differently for different people* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15).

All participants in the study were also fortunate enough to be in positions where their parent's jobs were not affected. However, they were still aware of these impacts on others around them. Shepherd and Mohohlwane's (2021) and Saline's (2021) research regarding the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic expressed the increase in household worry and stress due to job loss and financial strain. Almost half of the adults in the research reported that in April 2020 their household had run out of money (Shepherd & Mohohlwan, 2021). A lack of basic resources, such as food, also exacerbated the household strain and tension (Masarik & Conger, 2017). Furthermore, a strong correlation is noted between learners who have missed meals for a long period and feelings of depression. This research highlights the ripple effect of the disruptions on a family's well-being (Saline, 2021; Shepherd & Mohohlwan, 2021).

> *I am sad for the learners whose parents lost their income or jobs and cannot afford to send their children to school, because they cannot pay school fees* (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4), *I know a lot of people did lose their jobs during Covid* (Transcript P5, lines 102-103), *They (parents) had, had a steady flow of income before that, so they weren't stressed like everyone else with the pandemic* (Transcript P3, lines 130-131).

In addition, the Covid-19 virus has taken over one hundred thousand lives in South Africa and this number is still increasing (SAcoronavirus, 2022). The fear of losing a loved one during this time and not having the opportunity to grieve this process due to the strict protocols in place, took a toll on many learners' mental health (Conrad et al., 2021).

> *I lost my uncle to Covid and couldn't attend his funeral because I'm disabled and had no one to assist me* (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6), *There are also reports about 14 teachers having died from Covid-19* (The Star, Dec 29, 2020, pg. 1), *The loss of any school personnel will be really sad as they will not only be leaving grieving families but also families at school* (The Star, Dec 29, 2020, pg. 1).

3.2.2.3. Theme 2 integrated discussion

Considering the learner's home system aids in understanding their *context* during the Covid-19 pandemic and assists with answering the secondary research question by exploring possible challenges they faced. The first sub-theme reported on the challenges the learners experienced being confined to their homes with their families. Some of the learners did express that they enjoyed this time with their families as they were able to live in harmony in their own spaces. Another common theme reported was the learner's increased levels of stress they experienced when in their bedrooms due to them having to use this space for their learning/work as well. The second sub-theme reported on the general impact that indirectly affected the learner's home system. These impacts included the loss of their parents' jobs and the loss of loved ones which also increased levels of stress and anxiety among the household.

Main Findings:

4. Many learners enjoyed the time spent at home with their families.
5. The Covid-19 pandemic impacts included the loss of jobs and the loss of loved ones which also increased levels of stress and anxiety in the household.

3.2.3 Theme 3: The effects on the individual

Figure 3.4 provides an overview of Theme 3 including the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Figure 3. 4
Theme 3 with sub-themes and extract examples

Theme 3: The effects on the individual
This theme is concerned with the individual, the matric learners, and their possible mental health impacts, the change in their routine and daily structure and how they coped and adapted to the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic. *The past few months have had a tremendous impact on the mental and emotional well-being of most people and young children have not escaped the effects of Covid-19 and the lockdowns* (The Star: Nov 26, 2020, pg.10). *It amplified my anxiety a lot. I think even my depression just spiralled down, which really sucks because I worked really hard to get out of that space just for lockdown to happen and I started spiralling back down again* (Interview P4, line 290-293).
Sub-theme 1: Mental Health

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
All data relating to learners' feelings of stress, anxiety, worry, depression or isolation (mental health issues) or the absence thereof and, the access to mental health services.	All data relating to change in routine, ways of coping or adapting and the general effects mentioned by the learners.

Sub-theme 2: The change in routine

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
All data relating to learners change in routine and daily structure due to the Covid-19 pandemic.	All data relating to mental health, ways of coping or adapting and the general effects mentioned by the learners.

Sub-theme 3: Coping and adapting during the Covid-19 pandemic

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
All data relating to the ways learners coped and adapted to the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring their well-being.	All data relating to mental health, change in routine and the general effects mentioned by the learners.

Sub-theme 4: Effects reported

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
All data relating to the general effects experienced due to the Covid-19 pandemic	All data relating to mental health, change in routine and ways of coping or adapting.

including, loss of jobs, death and contracting the virus.	

3.2.3.1. Sub-theme 1: Mental Health

In the context of this study, mental health refers to an individual's overall well-being including physical, emotional, and societal constructs. There is ample research worldwide on the reported mental health impacts due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Fegert et al., 2020; Lei et al., 2020; Clay, 2020; Naidu, 2020; Roy et al., 2021). My findings based on the learners' experiences expressed feelings of stress and anxiety felt during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a key theme to explore as it aids in answering the primary research question regarding the impact that the pandemic has had on learners' mental health and well-being. Each participant had a different experience with four of the five reporting that their mental health was affected to some degree. The newspaper clippings also reported a similar view on the effect of mental health. Nguse and Wassenaar (2021) and various other authors (Kim et al., 2020; Naidu, 2020; Pillay & Barnes, 2020) researched the correlation between individual mental health and Covid-19 in South Africa and reported that the pandemic has had a significant impact on individuals' mental health.

> *The past few months have had a tremendous impact on the mental and emotional well-being of most people and young children have not escaped the effects of Covid-19 and the lockdowns* (The Star: Nov 26, 2020, pg.10).

Participant 1's experience was one of stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. The fear of the unknown for the rest of the year had a major impact on her. She shares that her skin was the indicator of this stress, because at first, she had thought that her mental health was not impacted. Participant 2 shared a different experience of the Covid-19 pandemic as he felt the year was a blur and was unsure how to feel due to all the changes which kept happening.

> *I was super stressed, and I think just yeah the fear of not knowing what's going to happen and yeah but I think I like I just kept reminding myself that's good but yeah I think there was definitely stress* (Transcript P1, lines 930-933), *My skin was really bad towards the end of last year* (Transcript P1, lines

935), *my skin definitely shows yeah that I was stressed* (Transcript P1, lines 941-942). *But for me, everything just kinda happened so fast that I didn't really know to feel* (Transcript P2, lines 1088-1090).

Participant 3 also reported feeling stressed and anxious during the pandemic adding that this was due to his final exams and the worry of the Covid-19 virus affecting his family. Similarly, Participant 5 stated that her mental health was affected and felt that she was at her lowest point during the Covid-19 pandemic. She does, however, feel that this negative experience has led to her developing the tools and skills to overcome future situations where she may feel the same depressive state.

> *Think stress was the main one (emotion felt during the pandemic) but I mean it's because of the exams* (Transcript P3, lines 721-722), *I think slightly, I was slightly mainly distressed, and anxious and I think they worry about the health of my family* (Transcript P3, lines 804-805). *I do think it (my mental health) was affected but in the negative way, yes, but also in a huge positive way because I have all these tools to help me through the negative times now* (Transcript P5, lines 528-530), *I think at that time I felt at my lowest and now I have all these tools and ways to help me get out of that and know that I have gone through that now, and if there is a point where I do feel at my lowest point again, I know that I can get through it because I have had this experience* (Transcript P5, lines 532-537).

However, Participant 4 had a different experience as she had previous mental health concerns which were amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic. She shared how her anxiety and depression spiralled which affected her sleeping patterns and motivation to keep working from home. Returning to school and having to cram in all the work, as her school did not continue online learning, also heightened her anxiety. Other studies have corroborated similar findings in that individuals with pre-existing mental health issues are more susceptible to being affected by the Covid-19 pandemic related stressors (Fegert et al., 2020; Lee, 2020; Racine et al., 2020).

> *It amplified my anxiety a lot. I think even my depression just spiralled down, which really sucks because I worked really hard to get out of that space just for lockdown to happen and I started spiralling back down again* (Transcript P4, lines 290-293), *Then there were times where it would mess with my*

sleeping schedule. I just can't sleep, like I have the worst insomnia, I couldn't sleep (Transcript P4, lines 364-366), *... I kept losing motivation, like the whole of last year, so that wasn't just like motivation in school it was just like motivation to... Workout, it would be motivation to get out of bed, to like do, anything, sometimes I wouldn't even do my, my, bible plans* (Transcript P4, lines 382-386), *My anxiety was heightened a lot, that was mostly because of like the… the school you know, having to cram a lot, having to not do as much and then do a lot. Just not knowing when we were going back to school at all, especially since we were told the dates and then they postponed the dates and then you know… it was a lot* (Transcript P4, lines 1135-1139), *Depression you feel it, you just you feel like you're just drowning you know… like there's something pushing you* (Transcript P4, lines 1174-1176).

Further, an overlapping response from the participants was the aspect of isolation and limited human contact which is a consequence of poor mental health. Other studies on social interactions have indicated that inadequate social interaction could lead to mental health related problems (Lacey et al., 2014; Makinodan et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 2015). Padmanabhanunni and Pretorius's (2021) research also added to these findings of isolation and loneliness during the lockdown, stating that high levels of loneliness are concerning due to the strong correlation between loneliness and depression (Courtet et al., 2020; Tull et al., 2020).

I began to miss actual human contact (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5) *just missing friends a lot yeah just those sort of interactions* (Transcript P1, lines 357-378), *if I'm quite disconnected and I think that's where I lost most quite a bit of motivation* (Transcript P1, lines 114-115), *social interaction diminish which, even as someone who prefers to be alone and, and a little more secluded, a little more secluded, I do still like talking to people and, as… since there was locked and can't really go out, you can't really to do things and… yeah, that did… not having that social interaction* (Transcript P2, lines 81-86), *very difficult because I couldn't interact with my friends in the way that I used to, yeah, it was a very novel thing for I think, all of us* (Transcript P5, lines 55-57).

Additionally, the reported impact on the learner's mental health meant that access to mental health services became apparent to assist learners in coping during the pandemic. The newspaper clippings reported on the services that the Department of Education provided. A variety of services were provided; however, due to a shortage of resources they had to partner with other organisations to reach more communities.

> *Motshekga said the sector had placed a strong emphasis on psychosocial support for learners and teachers* (Cape Argus: Nov 3, 2020, pg.5), *The minister said provincial departments had historically employed psychologists and social workers to support learners and teachers. However, there are server shortages* (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4,) *Motshekga said her department has partnered with the National Education Collaboration Trust and Unicef to mobilise psycho-social support to pupils who were anxious to go back to school due to the pandemic* (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4), *Unicef has contracted Childline to provide services to children through their call centre.* (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4).

The participants did not report on any of these services offered by the Department of Education, which could suggest that they were not aware of them. Two of the participants reported that their school did offer counselling services. These services were available before the pandemic at the school; however, they also experienced a shortage of these services. Participant 3 also added to these findings that the teachers at his school made themselves available to provide support. Moreover, Saline (2021) reported that the closing of schools meant that these limited support services were not available to all learners. Thus, learners were left in a vulnerable position as they were unable to access support services and report cases of harm or abuse during this time (Singh et al., 2020).

> *There was a school, school counsellor* (Transcript P3, line 866), *The counsellors are there. You can book a session with, but we have two* (Transcript P4, lines 1097-1098). *The teachers did make themselves available they said listen if you are struggling or anything, come talk to us, they were very good at making themselves available* (Transcript P3, lines 868-872).

3.2.3.2 Sub-theme 2: The change in routine

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted individuals' daily lives due to the protocols enforced and the fear and worry of contracting the virus. Learners were forced to change their daily routine of going to school, participating in sports, and returning home to work or study. A change in routine and no set structure can have a great impact on individuals' mental health. According to Davy et al. (2022), research the change in daily routines during the pandemic has had a severe impact on learners' psychological and physical health. Saline's (2021) research also reported high-stress levels due to the Covid-19 pandemic of which 74% of individuals indicated it was due to the disruption in their daily routine.

> *Factors like a change in routine, loss of safety and security and breaks in learning are some of the factors that experts have named as having an impact on children during the pandemic* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15).

Further, participants shared in their interviews that the absence of a routine was one of the hardest adjustments they had to make, whilst trying to guide and motivate themselves each day to study at home. According to Saline (2021), the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in many learners facing a significant loss in their daily routines which kept them organised and on track and required them to make major adjustments.

I think motivation was a big thing for me that that was the, yeah, the hardest is just like it, it annoyed me when I didn't have a schedule (Transcript P1, lines 370-372), *Yeah, not having that structure was the biggest problem* (Transcript P2, lines 510-511), I found it quite difficult *because* at first… there is no routine that I need to follow. And I think that was the most difficult part, not having a routine for me (Transcript P5, lines 123-127).

In addition, the lack of daily or structured routines meant that learners could sleep in, start working at any time of the day, attend class in informal attire, or do no work for the day. Having nearly the same routine for 11 years of their schooling life and then suddenly nothing, was a major adjustment. Subsequently, learners were required to take charge of their days and studies which some learners shared has helped them to become more independent, accountable, and responsible.

It was not having a structure, being able to wake up in random times every day (492-493), *But that motivation was just depleting so much. I think it was a struggle because I went through like 11 years of routine, to go through to like...* (Transcript P4, lines 31-33), Especially in winter. I would sleep and warm clothes so waking up and I must change out of warm clothes ....like I slept in sweatpants, I'm going to wake up with just wear my sweatpants anyway... So, it just became a little bit messy in terms of a routine... There was no routine (Transcript P4, lines 53-57), The routine thing, definitely harder to deal with because it's hard to like... When you're not being told ok the bell has rung, now I have to go to this class and do the work, you know it's harder, to tell yourself okay, let me do the work now (Transcript P4, lines 823-826), *you wake up in the morning and you like have a choice do I do the work, or do I sleep? A normal school day you go to school, and you don't have a choice* (Transcript P3, lines 79-82), *so I think it's just that independence that you have to adjust to* (Transcript P3, lines 83-84).

Fontenelle-Tereshchuk's (2021) research on the Covid-19 crisis also highlighted that the learners' routines were impacted in a way that promoted emotional distress for many individuals. The change in routines due to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a disruption of sleeping patterns, a decrease in levels of physical activity, and increased screen time and reported prevalence of symptoms of anxiety and depression for many learners (Davy et al., 2021). Additionally, participants shared that they felt that they needed a routine and that they enjoyed having a routine that kept them 'in check' with what needed to be done concerning their responsibilities.

Yeah, *because* I would work 12 hours one day and then an hour the next day and that's not really the best, well not the best for me. I find that I thrive and work better in a situation where there are strict routines that I can follow (Transcript P5, lines 128-131), *I quite enjoyed it (a routine) because it kind of keeps my life on track and I allows me to focus on doing things right rather than focusing on actually getting the stuff done at all. Because I was kind of forced into doing, doing stuff* (Transcript P2, lines 763-766), *I like structure, and I like things to be a specific way, we do things the same way every day, not every day, but you have a set structure for your week, and you know*

beforehand how things are going to work because I don't like change (Transcript P2, lines 500-504).

3.2.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Coping and adapting during the Covid-19 pandemic

The changes that the learners encountered due to the Covid-19 pandemic forced them to adapt and find better ways to cope with stressful environments. In the context of this study, the 2020 matric learners were forced to adapt quickly to the changes brought on by the pandemic within their final year of schooling- a year which is crucial in influencing learners' future opportunities.

> *In 2020, our matrics were forced to grow up overnight* (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020), *The Grade 12s had to adapt in real-time not just to finish the curriculum but to catch up with the learning hours lost* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6); (Pretoria News: Nov 3, 2020, pg.1), *The pandemic pushed me into a completely new environment where I would have to learn to stand on my own two feet and learn to be my very own educator* (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5).

The newspaper clippings reported on advice that was given to the learners during this challenging time in order to help them to cope. The learners were encouraged to find a new routine at home, which included a healthy balance between work and relaxation. It was also suggested that taking regular breaks between work and studying are important to avoid burnout. Parents were also encouraged to look after their children's well-being, which aided in learners feeling supported.

> *Find a rhythm that works for you, keep a balance, eat healthily, squeeze in some exercise, clear your head, take a walk or jog, get your eight hours of sleep and communicate your study needs to your family* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15), By now many pupils, if not all, would have established a study plan. However, maintaining a healthy balance during this period will be crucial. Take regular breaks and be sure to get enough sleep. Rest is just important during the exams as studying. Avoid burning the candle on both ends. Exercise or some form of physical activity will aid in maintaining stress levels (Daily Dispatch, Nov 4, 2020, pg.10), *We encourage parents to take*

care of their own well-being so they could take better care of their children (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5).

Participants also shared a variety of coping mechanisms which they tried during the pandemic. Two of the most popular ways of coping included doing some form of exercise and watching television or YouTube videos. Participant 5 shared the same useful coping mechanisms. However, she noted that her coping strategies needed to form part of her daily routine. She further relied on exercise and nutrition, as well as external support from her friends and family. Other learners shared various coping mechanisms which they used during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as Participant 3 who stated that keeping up to date with the news helped him to cope during this uncertain time.

> *Walk around the block and id actually go to physical… do so exercise or gym or something that is definitely my stress relief* (Transcript P1, lines 956-957), watched YouTube videos (Transcript P1, line 987), *I would watch TV, there wasn't much to do, I would train, do some exercising… there wasn't must we could do really* (Transcript P2, lines 151-152), *YouTube video like a ted talk and then I feel like, you... You need to get your life together* (Transcript P4, lines 396-397).

> *Like definitely a routine and getting outside and getting exercise, definitely having conversations with my friends over the phone and video calling family members* (Transcript P5, lines 323-326), *I would defiantly say nutrition, exercise, keeping those in a healthy range was also very helpful* (Transcript P5, lines 576-577).

> *Believing in Jesus Christ was my coping mechanism. I sit in his presence, I made a to-do list and he helped me get through everything I needed to do* (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5), *I used to do breathing exercises* (Transcript P4, line 352), *Then I'd listen to sleep meditations* (Transcript P4, line 366), *do like yoga in my room* (Transcript P4, line 378), *I did try journaling* (Transcript P4, line 1232). *(Being on my phone) helped me because it kept me up to date and it kept me knowledgeable on what was actually going on and what's happening* (Transcript P3, lines 160-162).

Having a strong support system was also reported by most of the learners as an important mechanism to help them cope during the pandemic. Learners mostly relied on their families, friends, partners, and teachers during this difficult time.

> *When I was stressed, I would just speak to my mum* (Transcript P1, lines 458-459), V*enting to my boyfriend* (Transcript P4, line 399), *I had a good support system, my educators, parents, siblings, friends and their belief in me when I didn't believe in myself kept me going* (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5), I appreciate that I have a supportive family that I can talk to you and stuff like, where a lot of people don't have that (Transcript P1, lines 1007-1008), My parents were my main support (Transcript P5, line 136).

3.2.3.4 Theme 3 integrated discussion

This theme served to uncover the themes in the data concerned with the individual and how they experienced the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically regarding their mental health and daily routine. The understanding of how learners perceive unprecedented times or challenges may aid in developing the educational psychologist's role and intervention plans as they select therapeutic techniques while working with clients. The first sub-theme reported on the pandemic's impact on the learners' mental health. The overall finding reported that the learners felt that their mental health was impacted to some extent. The results show that isolation and anxiety were major influences on participants' mental health. These findings also aided in answering the secondary research question of the reported mental health challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on individuals' mental health as some reported that they mentally felt at their lowest point during this period. This is a major mental health challenge as many of the learners' coping mechanisms and mental health services were not available to them, further amplifying and spiralling levels of anxiety and depression. Moreover, these mental health challenges resulted in individuals' sleeping patterns being disrupted and the depletion of their motivation to keep working and studying from home.

Further, the two biggest mental health challenges encountered by the learners were firstly, the change in their daily routine and having no set structure. The absence of a routine increased the learner's stress levels as they were left with

many unknowns during the lockdown period. Secondly, isolation and limited human contact were reported as another mental health challenge. Participants felt lonely during this period and their motivation to work, or study diminished without the support of their peers. The second sub-theme explored the changes the learners experienced in their daily routine. This was noted to be one of the most difficult adaptations that the learners experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. The learners reported that changes impacted upon their stress levels immensely. The last sub-theme reported on the learners' coping mechanisms which they adopted during the pandemic.

The most common mechanism found in the data was related to doing physical activity and watching television or YouTube. Moreover, this theme served in answering the secondary research question aiding educational psychologists in their role in addressing the continued impact of Covid-19 among matric learners. Understanding the coping mechanisms that the learners tried and utilised may aid in the possibilities that educational psychologists can explore to assist other learners.

In addition, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping provides a framework to understand the learners' increased stress levels as they encounter a novel environment with new demands (Shavaki et al., 2020). In this context, the learners evaluate the transactions in their microsystem and mesosystem- home and school environments- and the changes which they encountered which included online learning, self-studying, the new regulations when returning to school, changes in daily routines, and the lack of certain coping mechanisms which these systems provided. As the learners evaluate the threat to their system, their stress reportedly increased which indicated the potential inadequacy to cope with the challenges experience by the individual. The learner also evaluates their cognitive appraisal leading to their ability to draw on cognitive and behavioural efforts within their new environment (Shavaki et al., 2020) to cope and manage, or reduce their stress which creates a more positive environment (Trougakos et al., 2020). The learners utilised both emotion-focused strategies and problem-solving strategies to manage their stress. The problem-solving strategies involved seeking emotional support from those around them and gaining an understanding of the pandemic. The emotional-focused strategies included ways to regulate their emotions by watching television

or YouTube, exercising, or spending time with their family. All the coping strategies which the learners adopted are recorded in Theme 3, sub-theme 3.

Shavaki et al. (2020) stated that stressful events affect individuals' well-being. According to the learners' responses, they found that the Covid-19 pandemic and all the challenges it brought caused stress within their environment which assisted in answering the main research question- finding that the learners' mental health and well-being were impacted by the pandemic. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic forced learners to adapt quickly to the changes they faced. Finding a new routine at home was key, which included a healthy balance between work and relaxation. Integrating regular breaks between their work was also important to avoid burnout. During their time of relaxation, learners mostly filled their time with some form of exercise and watching television or YouTube videos. Further coping mechanisms were explored by the learners which included breathing exercises, yoga, and journaling. Some individuals mentioned the importance of their religion in keeping them relaxed and motivated during the pandemic. Lastly, the learner's support system which mostly included their family, was an important mechanism in helping them to cope during this time.

Lastly, the multidimensional PPCT model provided a framework that allowed the learners to be understood within their socio-ecological system (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). The *person* aspect directed my research to consider the participants in terms of their expectations for the year, the resources that were available to them during the lockdown, and their socio-economic status. The participants' abilities to deal with stress before the pandemic and during were also explored. The *process* aspect highlighted the participants' interaction and adaption to their new environment during the pandemic. The learners had to transition to online learning and make use of new learning methods to complete the academic syllabus. Their interaction with others was also limited due to the lockdown restrictions which hindered some learners' ability to cope with the new stressors they encountered.

> **Main Findings:**
> 6.   The findings show that isolation and lack of human contact increased anxiety having a major influence on the individual's mental health.

7. The change in daily routine was noted to be one of the most difficult adaptations that the learners experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing their stress immensely.
8. The most common coping mechanism found in the data was related to doing physical activity and watching television or YouTube.
9. The Covid-19 pandemic was tackled by the 2020 matric learners allowing them to grow and develop mentally and emotionally.

3.2.4 Theme 4: Positive Outcomes

Figure 3.5 provides an overview of Theme 4 including the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Figure 3. 5

Theme 4 with sub-themes and example extracts

Theme 4: Positive outcomes
This theme includes the positive experiences and lessons which the learners encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Looking back, I really did grow in like discipline, and adaptability, and also growth in terms of my relationships, with my parents, with my friends, with my family (Interview P5, line 411-413). *Five Joburg-based high school learners have used their time in lockdown to drive positive social change. It's a space for other people my age to explore their own feelings about issues that are affecting them. From race and sexuality to the changing nature of education* (The Star, Sept 4, 2020, pg.6).	
<u>Inclusion Criteria</u> All data relating to positive experiences and outcomes were reported by the matric learners during the Covid-19 pandemic.	<u>Exclusion Criteria</u> All data relating to the effects of the covid-19 pandemic in the home or school system as well as personally.

The majority of the research covering the Covid-19 pandemic speaks volumes of the negative impacts experienced by individuals. The topics included the impact on individuals' mental health such as depression, loneliness, and fearfulness which have increased (Nguse & Wassenaar, 2021; Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021),

the loss of jobs (Coker et al., 2020; Alexander et al., 2020) and loved ones (De Smet et al., 2020), and the possible exposure to abusive behaviour (Clay, 2020; Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). Furthermore, this led to the working assumptions that I made in section 1.5. Through my research, it has been made evident that even though many of the matric learners struggled to some degree due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were still positive outcomes that they experienced. More notably, there is limited research on the positive experiences of learners during the Covid pandemic which could call for further investigation.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced schools to close for an extended period which resulted in many schools shifting to online learning (Fouché et al., 2020; Soudien et al., 2022). The experience of online learning resulted in some learners feeling as though they were better prepared for university the following year. They felt more confident working online and gained experience in searching the internet for resources which was reported to have been helpful to them in their first year of university. Participants 1 and 2 expressed how working online during the lockdown assisted them at university level as they are now familiar with the system. Furthermore, Participant 3 and 5 similarly expressed that the online structure during the Covid-19 pandemic has assisted them in their first year at university. Participant 4 also shared how the online learning experience has assisted her and the noticeable difference between students at university who did not have this experience.

> *Especially with the whole online system because we kind of knew what we have to do and yeah and what it's going to be like… so I think that help* (with varsity) (Transcript P1, lines 311-313). *I think it did help to have those online classes in high school* (Transcript P2, lines 1413-1414). *It helped me get used to it* (online learning). *So, I wasn't as anxious about having to do these online lessons* (Transcript P2, lines 1440-1441). *I think it helped quite a bit actually because the way that they're doing varsity now, is very similar to the way we did matric last year. So, it has helped the transition quite a bit* (Transcript P3, lines 623-625). *Well considering that this year is completely online, and I have to do the same thing that I had to do in lockdown, level 5. It definitely helped me do that a lot better, so researching a topic that I don't understand and um... Yeah, it has defiantly helped me for that* (Transcript P5, lines 455-459).

> *Yes, definitely* (varsity is easier). *I think some kids are really struggling. I speak to my friends who say that they struggle because a lot of them… I told you, a lot of them didn't do the online work, they took it as a six-month holiday* (Transcript P4, lines 1042-1044).

Thus, the experience of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic exposed learners to working with new pedagogies and accessing online resources. Participant 3 shared how online learning exposed everyone to new forms of technology and being forced to learn to keep up with the class, many learners have become more technologically savvy. Additionally, Krajewski et al. (2021) reported that a positive aspect of the Covid-19 pandemic was that many individuals claimed to have the time to learn new skills and knowledge. Having online access allowed learners to explore the internet and use a variety of resources, assisting them in their studies during this time. Participant 5 also expressed how gaining the skills to research has equipped her to be in charge of her learning and discovering. Mukhtar et al.'s (2020) research findings also indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic has encouraged learners to become more self-directed in their learning.

> *I think definitely the new experiences with the technology side of it. I think everyone became a bit more technologically savvy during that time period everyone figured out how to use a computer properly and actually their way around navigates, do it on the computer* (Transcript P3, lines 786-790). *I am defiantly grateful for YouTube because it defiantly helped me* (Transcript P5, lines 438-439). *It also got me exploring for other resources a lot more* (Transcript P1, lines 315-316). *But I also think it has just helped me in general, if I do find something that I am curious about to just research the topic and you know, there are a whole lot of resources on the internet that can answer that questions you just have to find it and sort through all the information* (Transcript P5, lines 459-463).

Furthermore, Participant 4 shared how the pressure of returning to school after lockdown and having to complete the syllabus in minimal time has helped prepared her for the pressure of tight deadlines at university level.

I think all the anxiety of doing things last minute and cramming definitely helped in uni because you don't get a month before for anything, you get like two days and then suddenly something is due. So, it's like, I'm fine with that now, I'm dealing with the pressure now, it's so much easier to deal with the pressure of like deadlines being two days (Transcript P4, lines 1050-1055).

The nationwide lockdown also resulted in all individuals having to remain at their place of residence (Soudien et al., 2022; South African Government, 2020a). However, the stay-at-home order was seen as a benefit that afforded individuals extra time to spend with their family and extra time to pursue dreams or new hobbies. Participant 1 saw this as extra time to prepare for the matric final exams. Participants 3, 1 and 5 all indicated that the lockdown period allowed for them to spend extra time with their family as well. Similar findings are highlighted by Krajewski et al. (2021) who researched the positive aspects of the pandemic and found that one of the positive aspects included being able to spend more quality time with relatives and having the time to develop these valued relationships.

We had more time to study for prelims so that was a big positive for me… just time to sit down and focus on my academics (Transcript P1, lines 313-315). That's what we were thankful for (lockdown forced us to spend time with grandfather before passing), *that's what we were really thankful for* (Transcript P3, line 301-302). *Spending time with the family was great.* (Transcript P1, lines 292-293). *Yeah, those were the kind of happy moments, when you got to spend time with the family and sort of like decompress and relax with them* (Transcript P5, lines 154-158).

In addition, the *Star* newspaper reported on five Johannesburg students who pursued their dream and utilised their time during lockdown to create an online chatting platform which aimed to help individuals to connect during this time and express themselves.

Five Joburg-based high school learners have used their time in lockdown to drive positive social change. It's a space for other people my age to explore their own feelings about issues that are affecting them. From race and sexuality to the changing nature of education (The Star, Sept 4, 2020, pg.6).

The change and loss of the normal school routine have caused a lot of distress among learners (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Spaull & Van der Berg, 2020). However, Participant 1 shared the positive growth which she experienced. Therefore, a reflection of the Covid-19 pandemic has left many individuals feeling grateful, mentally empowered, and resilient for future challenges. Participant 1 shared what the Covid-19 pandemic had taught her, of which Patriciate 5 echoed a similar experience.

> *Like I learnt a lot you know just how to work out your own schedule, you learn a lot of small things you know I have to do your own schedule not that don't know how to do that* (Transcript P1, lines 297-299).

> *I think be grateful for what you have* (Transcript P1, line 1003).

> *Just be grateful for all the experiences that you had and will have I guess, you know, a lot of gratitude, a lot of being mindful and present of your situation, and about, yeah, being present with your friends and families because there was time when none of this, none of the family gatherings, or none of the friendship gatherings were even allowed so, just appreciate those moment with other people* (Transcript P5, lines 598-604).

The Covid-19 pandemic also pushed individuals to their limits forcing them to adapt to the new demands. Surviving their 2020 matric year has allowed participants to mentally grow and strengthen themselves as individuals and members of society. Based on this, Participant 5 expressed how the Covid-19 experience has shaped her generation and prepared them for future trials. Similar outlooks were shared by President Cyril Ramaphosa and various news outlets.

> *Looking back, I really did grow in like discipline, and adaptability, and also growth in terms of my relationships, with my parents, with my friends, with my family* (Transcript P4, lines 411-413). *The mental strength, everyone strengthened mentally and emotionally during that time. So, I think after that period, everyone was a bit stronger coming out of it, than going into it* (Transcript P3, lines 791-794). *It* (the Covid-19 pandemic) *made us a lot stronger* (Transcript P5, lines 549). *The Covid-19 virus has brought with it the mother of all struggles, it has been a huge teacher* (The Sunday Independent,

Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8), *growth, because through all these challenges you become a better person, you grow through these challenges* (Transcript P5, lines 409-411).

We are the generation that "we can get through anything", we got through the Covid pandemic, in our matric year… we are good! (Transcript P5, lines 540-542). *People should remember the class of 2020 for persistence and bravery* (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5). *This matric class of 2020 is perhaps one of the most resilient of all* (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15).

3.2.4.1 Theme 4 integrated discussion

The findings above highlight the positive outcomes that the learners experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is an important theme linking to the learners' ability to cope and adapt during the Covid-19 pandemic. Shavaki et al. (2020) and Abu Shosha and Kalaldeh's (2019) indicate that a changed mindset or being able to see the positive aspect of a situation is an emotion-focused coping strategy which assists individuals to cope with stressful life events. The previously stated themes highlight the changes and pressures that the learners encountered and the possible effects it had on their mental health and well-being which aided in answering the secondary research question of the reported challenges. Further, this theme provides evidence that a challenging event, such as a pandemic, was tackled sufficiently by the 2020 matric learners in a way that allowed them to grow and develop mentally and emotionally. Thus, for participants the Covid-19 pandemic has been a resilience enabler as they feel hopeful to face future adversities (Theron, 2018). Additionally, this theme's findings may help to develop the role of educational psychologists to address the continued impact of Covid-19 among matric learners by encouraging a resilience-based approach. Highlighting this perception of the Covid-19 pandemic suggests the use of positive psychology and solution-focused therapy which are goal-oriented and foster individuals' resilience by utilising their strengths and external resources (Theron, 2018).

> **Main Finding:**
>
> 10. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a resilience enabler for these learners as they feel hopeful to face future adversities.

3.4 Overall Conclusion

In this chapter the findings from newspaper clippings and interview transcripts of the 2020 matric learners' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic were explored and discussed in terms of the four identified main themes. The final chapter of this study, Chapter 4, provides a summary of the main findings from Chapter 3. Furthermore, the limitations of this study, as well as areas of possible further research, are discussed.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary of Main Findings

Conducting this research has allowed me, as a researcher and future educational psychologist, to gain insight into the 2020 matric learners' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact it has had on their mental health and well-being. <u>The main findings of my research are listed below:</u>

1. The struggle of online access and resources was a major barrier the government schools faced, also increasing the teacher's and learner's stress as they had no previous training or exposure to online platforms.

2. The cancellation of extra murals meant that some learners could focus all their attention on preparing for their final exams, while other learners struggled as they lost a mechanism that initially helped them to cope with stress and manage their time.

3. Returning to school during the pandemic revealed a mixture of emotions expressed by the learners from fear and anxiety to excitement.

4. The findings show that isolation and lack of human contact increased anxiety which had a major influence on the individual's mental health.

5. Many learners enjoyed the time spent at home with their families.

6. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic included the loss of jobs and the loss of loved ones which also increased levels of stress and anxiety in the household and among learners.

7. The change in daily routine was noted to be one of the most difficult adaptations that the learners experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing their stress immensely.

8. The most common coping mechanism found in the data was related to doing physical activity and watching television or YouTube.

9. The Covid-19 pandemic was tackled by the 2020 matric learners in a constructive manner which allowed them to grow and develop mentally and emotionally.

10. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a resilience enabler for these learners as they feel hopeful to face future adversities.

4.2 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation to consider is the sampling technique that I used. It relies on learners coming to the wellness centre and volunteering for the research. This limited the variety of participants due to the location of the wellness centre. This is evident from the participants which signed up and all of them being within a 10km radius from the centre. Furthermore, this limited the type of schools included in the study as they were all model C schools- meaning that learners from these schools were in more fortunate position compared to those reported in the newspaper clippings. The second limitation considers the skewed socio-economic class composition of the participants included in the study. The participants who were interviewed were predominantly from upper socio-economic backgrounds compared to the general population of South Africa which make up lower-to-middle classes. This could also be a result of the sampling technique as the students coming to the centre would have been receiving wellness services, which could be considered a luxury for most.

Future studies should therefore consider balancing the socio-economic classes of participants in their samples so that they are more equitable so that a more holistic view of the phenomenon is obtained with the South African context. The third limitation is that the five participants came from three different schools. Even though each learner shared different experiences, the experiences were limited to these three schools which meant that participant's experiences were contextualised to a certain education institution and may vary significantly from other South African government schools. A larger sample with a variety of schools will have to be included in the research to generalise the findings to a larger scale (Dudovskiy, 2018).

4.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on my research findings, the following recommendations are made for further research on this topic:

1. Future researchers could choose multiple sites to place the sign-up sheet, allowing for a variety of learners from different schools to volunteer. Furthermore, increasing the number of participants could promote the

transferability of the findings to matric learners in Johannesburg, South Africa (Maree, 2017).

2. A follow-up study could be undertaken to explore the mental health and well-being impacts on matric learners who had experienced mental health concerns before the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Future research can focus on the correlation between the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on learners with and without prior mental health concerns.

4. Research can be conducted on the mental health and well-being impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on private school matric learners and note the differences (if any) thereof.

5. Future researchers could re-assess this study utilising the PERMA model (Seligman, 2012) for well-being, which would provide the learners with specific aspects of well-being to rate and compare their self-reported answers which may provide more accurate findings (Blaire & Laura, 2021; Carreno et al., 2021)

6. Future research could explore how the learner's adjustment to their first year at university in 2021 as a result of the pandemic and the possible effects on their academic performance (Copeland et al., 2021; Fruehwirth et al., 2021)

4.4 Final Conclusion

The purpose of this research report was to explore the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the 2020's matric learners with regards to their mental health and well-being. Conducting the thematic analysis of the newspaper clippings and transcribed interviews allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the matric learners' experiences and the possible ways to support them and clients in similar situations as a future educational psychologist. Furthermore, I have become aware of the ways they overcame their challenges, how they adopted different coping mechanisms, and the importance that this experience was not only negative but contributed towards learners' resilience. Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic sparked the hidden resilience within matric learners and forced them to move out of their comfort zone and to adopt to their changing environment- in a way that allowed them to build a new skill set.

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ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Detailed breakdown of lockdown levels

South Africa's lockdown levels between March 2020 and March 2021 (South Africa, 2020; Haider et al., 2020).

Date	Lockdown Level	Regulations
26 March to 30 April 2020	Alert level 5	Drastic measures, only essential services permitted under sectors, stay at home, no gatherings or visitors, no alcohol or tobacco sales, no travelling outside the province, schools are closed.
1 to 31 May 2020	Alert level 4	Extreme precaution, only essential services permitted under sectors, curfew 7 pm to 5 am, no alcohol or tobacco sales, no gatherings or visitors, walking and cycling permitted
1 June to 17 August 2020	Alert level 3	Restrictions on my activities, wider range of sectors can trade, curfew 10 pm to 4 am, restricted alcohol sales, restricted gatherings with social distancing allowed and public places to close by 9 pm, schools are closed.
18 August 2020	Alert level 2	Most sectors are permitted to trade, curfew 11 pm to 4 am, normal alcohol sales, restricted gatherings with social distancing allowed, public places open and schools reopen.
21 September to 28 December 2020	Alert level 1	Normal activities resume with health guidelines in place, all sectors permitted to trade, curfew lifted, alcohol sales allowed, gatherings permitted with social distancing.
29 December 2020 to 28 February 2021	Adjusted alert level 3	Adjustment: curfew 9 pm to 6 am. beaches and parks are closed, no social gatherings and no international travel, no alcohol sales.
1 March to 30 May 2021	Adjusted alert level 1	Adjustment: curfew 12 pm to 4 am, alcohol sales permitted, restricted gathering permitted.

Annexure B: Textual Data

All textual data is stored on a password protected Google Drive.

A screenshot of the textual data saved in the drive:

Press clippings - 1 Dec ...

Press clippings - 1 Dec ...

Press Clippings - 1 Oct ...

Press Clippings - 1 Oct ...

Press clippings - 2 Nov ...

Press clippings - 2 Nov ...

Press clippings - 2 Nov ...

Press clippings - 2 Nov ...

Press clippings - 2 Nov ...

Annexure C: Interview Transcripts

All interview transcripts are stored on a password protected Google Drive.

A screenshot of the interview transcripts saved in the drive:

Participant 1 Transcript...

Participant 2 Transcript...

Participant 3 Transcrpt....

Participant 4 Transcript...

Participat 5 Transcript....
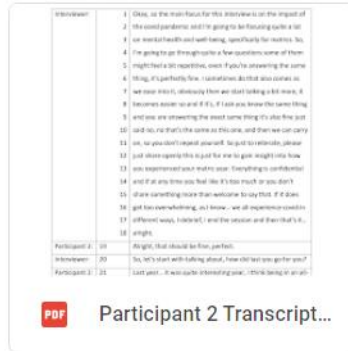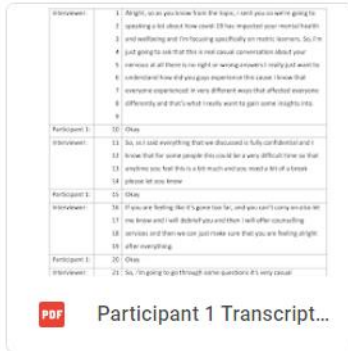
Annexure D: Research Journal

The research journal is stored on a password protected Google Drive.

A screenshot of the research journal saved in the drive:

Annexure E: Permission letter to place sign-up sheet at centre

<div align="right">Department of Educational Psychology</div>

<div align="right">19 May 2021</div>

Willow Worx Wellness

15 7th Avenue

Edenvale, 1609

<div align="center">Company Permission Letter</div>

To the manager of Willow Worx Wellness

My name is Nikita Nowicki, and I am an Educational Psychologist student at the University of Pretoria.

The research I wish to conduct is for my master's min-dissertation. This project will be conducted under the supervision of Prof. Salome Human-Vogel (UP, South Africa).

I am hereby seeking your consent to place a sign-up sheet at the reception desk at your Edenvale centre for approximately two months. This would allow for any individuals who come through your centre to volunteer to participate in my study.

The purpose of my study is to investigate the effects of Covid-19 on matric learner's mental health and well-being.

If you require any further clarification on my study, please contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Nikita Nowicki
Student Educational Psychologist
076 932 5605

Annexure F: Volunteer Sign-up Sheet

Volunteer Sign-up Sheet

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of matric learners.

My name is Nikita Nowicki, and I am an Educational Psychologist student at the University of Pretoria.

The research I wish to conduct is for my master's min-dissertation. This project will be conducted under the supervision of Prof. Salome Human-Vogel (UP, South Africa).

I am looking for **five** past 2020 matric students, who attended a government school to volunteer their time for an interview.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused chaos resulting in schools closing and matric learning having to adjust to a new form of teaching and learning in their most important academic year. I am interested in finding out how you experienced your matric year with the challenges brought on by Covid-19.

The interview will take place at a time and date later this year (2021), that best suits you. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted in English. Should face to face interviews not be possible, online interviews will be conducted given that participants have access to a smart device or computer and data. This process is completely voluntary, and you are allowed to withdraw from the process at any time.

If you would be interested in volunteering, please fill in your information below and I will contact you to set up a time and date that is most convenient for you.

My contact details: 076 932 5605 or ghisleninikita@gmail.com

Name & Surname	Contact No.	Email Address

Follow up Phone call for screening:

Date	Name & Surname	Contact No.	Email Address	Gender & Race	Year of graduation	Attended a government school in Johannesburg?		To what extent do you feel you were affected by Covid-19? Select:	Have you completed this form voluntarily?		Accepted into study?		Potential date and time for interview?
						Yes	No	Little/none → moderately OR Moderately→ severely	Yes	No	Yes	No	
						Yes	No	Little/none → moderately OR Moderately→ severely	Yes	No	Yes	No	
						Yes	No	Little/none → moderately OR Moderately→ severely	Yes	No	Yes	No	
						Yes	No	Little/none → moderately OR Moderately→ severely	Yes	No	Yes	No	
						Yes	No	Little/none → moderately OR Moderately→ severely	Yes	No	Yes	No	

Annexure G: Interview schedule

Interview schedule

Interviewer: Nikita Nowicki

Date: August 2021 (Dependant on participant's availability)

Participants: Individual interviews with 5 past matric students (2020 academic year)

Duration: 1 hour

Location: Online or at a convenient location for the participant.

Research topic: The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of matric learners.

Thank you for volunteering your time to be part of my research. Before we start with the interview I wanted to encourage you to speak openly and freely, there is no right or wrong answer. All I am wanting is to gain an understanding of the experiences during lockdown. Everything that we discuss during this time together is confidential. If you feel unsettled during the interview at any time, we can always stop and take a break. If this process is too overwhelming, I will debrief you and there is a counsellor available for you.

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. Let's talk about how last year went for you?
   ○ How did you experience the development of the pandemic?
     ● Follow - up questions can probe e.g. How did you respond? How did things change? What was difficult? What was challenging? How did you cope? Is there anything that you found to be positive about last year?
   ○ What was your experience of the lockdown?
     ■ Follow up questions can probe e.g. What was the most difficult about the lockdown? What support was available to you? How did it complicate life for you, if at all?

2. Let's talk about school and being in matric during a pandemic, what stood out to you last year?

- In what ways did school change?
    - Follow up questions can probe e.g. how did your experience of teaching change? How would you describe school in 2020? How was your matric year impacted overall? What was hard about not being in school? What did you enjoy about not being in school? What did you find most challenging? In what ways did you have to adapt your learning to deal with the impact of the pandemic?
- Can you share any experience with me that stands out to you as being particularly stressful?
    - Follow-up questions will include e.g. what was stressful about it? What were your thoughts about it? What feelings did you experience the most? How were you supported, if at all? What resources were available to you to deal with this stressful situation?

3. Lots of people have come forward to say that their mental health has been affected by the pandemic. Has this been your experience as well?

- In what ways would you say your mental health was affected?
    - Follow up questions could include e.g. how do you know that your mental health was affected? What was the worst for you to deal with? What thoughts, feelings, emotions were upsetting to you? What helped you to cope?
- In what ways were you able to ensure your own well-being?
    - Follow up questions could include e.g. What helped you to cope with the situation? What helped you to cope? What made it difficult? What did you learn from last year?

Annexure H: Codes and extracts of newspaper clippings

Codes	Extracts
Returning to school	• On my first day back, September 1, I noticed that many changes had been made, it felt like a different place. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • The premises were quieter and cleaner. When I entered the classroom, my classmates were seated according to the physical distance rule of 1.5m apart from one another. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • Being children it was, f course hard to follow the rule [social distance] (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • The classroom atmosphere was different, having done both online and school learning, the pressure many felt in having to settle down could be sensed in the air as we prepared for a new term of unexpected events. There were fewer questions, fewer movements, and fewer voices. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • The high levels of substance abuse, depression, fear, loneliness, domestic violence and child abuse will also reduce now that most of the children are back at school. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • Pupils abused the system- many decided to stay home if they were not 'feeling well' on a day when they did not feel like coming to school. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020) • The return to school did not lead to an increase in infection rates, with less than 2% of schools reporting more than two Covid-19 cases despite the fears of parents. (Business Day: Oct 1, 2020, pg.3) • Sadly, the most affected are the poorest learners for whom education is the only key out of poverty. There was also no effort from the department to encourage learners to return to school. (Daily Dispatch: Dec 1, 2020, pg.4) • We will maintain the delicate balance of health and safety in schools and also ensure that we plug gaps for curriculum recovery, which we have been able to do successfully during the 2020 academic year. (Pretoria News, Jan 5, 2021, pg. 2) • Some learners from indigent families may have found ways to help their families during the unpredictable times of Covid-19 and could have valid reasons for not going back to school, including that they are now putting bread on the table. (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8) • Quite a number of learners have bad memories about schooling this year, and they come back to school for the first time after the lengthy lockdown; some of their teachers had departed. (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8) When Grade 12 pupils returned to school, we managed to complete the outstanding work and we then moved on to revision. (Sunday Tribune, Jan 10, 2021, pg.6)
Schools reopening	• Schools are open, but Covid-19 is still with us. Looking at the decreasing number of people testing for the virus and the death reported doesn't guarantee people's safety. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • By June, a phased reopening was introduced, as emerging evidence showed that children, especially young children who appear less likely to contract Covid-19, are at particularly low risk of becoming severely ill and are not super-spreaders of the virus. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020) • School reopening had been an enormous logistic undertaking, involving the development and publication of a series of plans, guidelines, protocols and interventions. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)

	• Schools were able to apply to education authorities to open additional grades under the lockdown. Many wealthier suburban schools did so and reached an attendance of 50% for all grades; schools serving the poorest 80% of the population had rates of attendance for other grades of 15% to 20%. (Business Day: Oct 1, 2020, pg.3)
	They only partially reopened in June, despite teacher unions' concerns about the timing and lack of adequate protection for teachers and learners. (Pretoria News, Oct 5, 2020, pg. 6)
Emotions felt around returning to school	• When schools started opening, there were many families who were concerned about contracting Covid-19, especially those with comorbidities or other underlying conditions. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg.10) • This explains why my siblings and I had mixed feelings about going back to school after almost six months. We had sleepless nights, anxiety and fear during the days leading to our return. But after a week of going to school, we all seem fine. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • I had a hard time fitting in with the crowd, seeing that I've been isolated for six months. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • Due to the fear of Covid-19, some parents have decided to homeschool their children and some have decided not to send their children to school for the rest of the year. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • 72% of the respondents reported being very worried about learners returning to school. However, this varied significantly: more affluent households had a lower concern, while there was higher concern among larger households with very young children and pensioners. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020) • Parents are extremely anxious to get their children to school. (Pretoria News: Sept 2, 2020, pg.3) • I am fearful of the day I lay a loved one to rest because of this virus and that is why I'm not sure about sending my angel to school unless the department can assure us of our children's safety. (Weekend Argus, Jan 9, 2021, pg.5) • I have one daughter; she has one life. I refuse to risk my baby girl's life when every day we hear of someone dying. (Weekend Argus, Jan 9, 2021, pg.5) Returning to school can be traumatic for parents and children alike. (The Star: Jan 11, 2021, pg.3)
Positive Feelings/ motivation	• I write this article to encourage every single learner to stay positive. Parents and many adults also have to remain hopeful. Yes, there is hope post-Covid-19. For instance, I am glad that learners at public schools are getting free meals and this will reduce hunger. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • Matric of 2020, I want to remind you that you got this- you came too far to back down now! (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020) • President Cyril Ramaphosa has commented on the bravery of the class of 2020 for enduring many months of Covid-19-induced lockdown and the mental strain that came with social isolation, which meant no school and playing with friends for long periods. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6); (Pretoria News: Nov 3,2020, pg.1) • The class of 2020 matric pupils summon their reserves of courage and strength as they start their exams this week. (Pretoria News: Nov 3,2020, pg.1) • This matric class of 2020 is perhaps one of the most resilient of all. (Sowetan: Nov 3,2020, pg.15) • Confidence in pupils' resilience and ability to succeed. (Cape Times, Nov 5, 2020, pg.2) • A positive message needed to be sent to make sure pupils did not become depressed from anxiety about their results. (Cape Argus, Jan 5, 2021, pg.5) • People should remember the class of 2020 for persistence and bravery (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5)

Nutrition	• Call on Education departments to ensure that pupils who are back in the classroom on certain days, or who have permission to stay at home, are still able to get school nutrition (Cape Argus: Sept 10, 2020, pg. 3) • Monitor education departments in fulfilling their duty to uphold the right of pupils to basic nutrition (Cape Argus: Sept 10, 2020, pg. 3) • Every child on the feeding scheme, regardless of whether they are attending a school that day or not, should be afforded the opportunity to receive a meal. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg. 3) • Covid-19 pandemic continued to affect vulnerable families, and food security remained an enormous threat. (Cape Argus: Sept 10, 2020, pg. 3) • Many learners will not be at school every day…. Because of this, it is critical that departments develop innovative ways to ensure that food reaches learners, which may include fixing problems with scholar transport, providing learners with take-home meals for 'off' days on the days when learners are in school, or delivering food for learners who are not at school. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg. 4) • Concern that schools do not provide transport for pupils who stay far and need to collect food. (Cape Argus: Oct 9, 2020, pg.2) • The School nutrition programme was still not reaching pupils on the days when they stayed home because of rotating timetables. (Cape Argus: Oct 9, 2020, pg.2) • Of those who said they only attended school someday, 71% said they went without meals when they missed school. (Cape Argus: Oct 9,2020, pg.2); (The Citizen: Oct 9, 2020, pg.4) • Of the pupils surveyed, 78% said their school did not provide transport for those who stayed far away and needed to collect food from school. (Cape Argus: Oct 9, 2020, pg.2) • 53% said they know of other pupils in their community who were not getting food from their schools on days when they stayed at home. (Cape Argus: Oct 9, 2020, pg.2) • Children across the country are still going without food. (The Citizen: Oct 9, 2020, pg.4) • In July, the court ordered the department to ensure all qualifying children got meals. (The Citizen: Oct 9, 2020, pg.4) • Provinces needed a plan for the provision of food to children who had not yet returned to school full time or at all. (The Citizen: Oct 9, 2020, pg.4)
Structure/ routine	• The most challenging part of schooling this year was self-discipline as we spent most of the year studying at home. (Daily Sun: Nov 3,2020, pg.2) • Factors like a change in routine, loss of safety and security and breaks in learning are some of the factors that experts have named as having an impact on children during the pandemic. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15)
Work/School- Home Balance	• Many parents had to take aspects of their children's education into their own hands. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg.10) • My parents are illiterate so they couldn't help me when I was struggling. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6)

Schools Closing	• Grade 12s, along with all other pupils, lost more than four months of academic time. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
	• About 12-million learners attend more than 25 700 schools in SA. On March 18 all those schools closed as part of the government's response to Covid-19(Financial Mail: Oct 1, 2020, pg.29)
	• The biggest cost of school closure- increased inequality in access and learning losses- has not received sufficient attention. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
	• Also important is that schools are not only locations for learning; they also offer social protection and support for learner well-being. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
	• School closures also contributed to child hunger. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
	• Considering both the low health risk posed by schools opening and the high risks to learning and child wellbeing posed by closures. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
	• Grade 12 lost 17% of school days. (Business Day: Oct 1, 2020, pg.3)
	• Most schoolchildren in SA will lose half their learning time this year and richer children will lose less than poorer ones. (Business Day: Oct 1, 2020, pg.3)
	• Schools were closed for several months from late March as the government enforced a lockdown to contain Covid-19 transmissions. (Cape Argus: Nov 3,2020, pg.4)
	• It has been a disruptive year with school closed for months. (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7)
	• Many missed out on critical classroom time for days, and even weeks. (Daily Dispatch: Nov ,2020, pg.10)
	• Schools provide an important safe haven for young girls. Teachers generally keep an eye on girls and con intervene if they identify signs of abuse. (The Mercury, Jan 12, 2020, pg. 4)
	• When schools close, children are often left unsupervised and, in the worst cases, can be exposed to predatory family members and neighbours. (The Mercury, Jan 12, 2020, pg. 4)
	• Confusion, anxiousness and the joy of being homeschooled. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5)
	• Panicked when schools were temporarily closed. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5)
	• Mixed emotions when schools were closed. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5)
	• As a result of the covid-19 pandemic, schools were on lockdown in South Africa from March 2020. (Pretoria News, Oct 5, 2020, pg. 6)
	• The 202 academic years were engulfed by long school breaks posed by Covid-19. That reduced the contact time between learners and teachers. (Pretoria News, Sept 16, 2020, pg. 3)
	• Experts had warned that if pupils stayed too long out of school there could be more drop-outs due to pregnancy and other social ills. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5)
Effects of the pandemic on schools/ education	• At Impaq…. Thousands of new pupils sign up for us this year in their bid to achieve more structured learning at home. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg.10)
	• Lockdown affected us a lot at times we couldn't catch up, but we are thankful to the teachers who kept pushing us (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2)
	• The 2020 academic year will have significant implications and consequences for generations to come, according to leading educational experts (Weekend Post: Sept 26, 2020, pg. 4)
	• The quality of education afforded pupils in 2020 will be sub-standard, with dire consequences for those not fortunate enough to have access to online teaching methods. (Weekend Post: Sept 26, 2020, pg. 4)

	- Before the pandemic, year marks had been determined by a weighted scale in which 25% of the pupil's final make was attributed to school-based assessments while 75% would come from year-end exams. But since the department tweaked this, final marks were calculated on 60% from school-based assessments and 40% from end-of-year exam contributions. (Weekend Post: Sept 26, 2020, pg. 4) - Reinforce inequality and have an impact on generations to come. (Weekend Post: Sept 26, 2020, pg. 4) - Covid-19 had brought with it a magnitude of implications on the right to education, especially with regard to pupils from previously disadvantaged schools. (Weekend Post: Sept 26, 2020, pg. 4) - The nationwide lockdown we had to impose in March to contain the spread of the coronavirus caused immense disruption to everyday life and cost valuable hours of learning and studying. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6) - It was always going to be that in an unequal society such as ours, the devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic would have a far-reaching impact, even more so on people living in conditions of poverty and the working class (Sowetan, Sept 4, 2020, pg. 20) - Expected the matric pass rate to be lower than in previous years, but it will be a good pass rate. (Cape Argus, Jan 5, 2021, pg.5) - Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, matriculants of 2020 were robbed of critical class time. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) - Like all sectors, education has been hard hit by the scourge of Covid-19 and the Grade 1 learners who will start their examinations next week face this hurdle during the worst and wickedest of times. (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8) - The covid-19 has presented countries with a number of challenges that may impact Grade 12 examinations preparations and results. (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8)
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Dropout rate	• The department informed parliament that it was projecting a drop out of 75 452 pupils from grades 7 and 12 because of the Covid-19 pandemic this academic year. (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4); (Pretoria News: Sept 2, 2020, pg.3) • This happened as the fear of the virus among pupils stood at 34 565 country-wide. (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • Reported that at least 75 000 grade 7 and 12 pupils are projected to drop out of school this year. (Sowetan, Sept 4, 2020, pg. 20) • Previous studies have shown that when children drop out of school, especially under difficult economic circumstances, chances of them returning to the system are slim to none. (Sowetan, Sept 4, 2020, pg. 20) • It means there is the likelihood that tens of thousands of young people may stand to lose an opportunity to study and develop in order to gain meaningful economic opportunities as adults. (Sowetan, Sept 4, 2020, pg. 20) • In terms of Grade 12, the department's figures showed there was a projected 2 362 dropout number from this academic year. (Pretoria News: Sept 2, 2020, pg.3) • It affected my studies negatively because as deaf learners we couldn't do the self-studying from home. It was difficult. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • What is terrifying about the dropout rates is that countless of those who do not reach matric are more likely to burgeon the cycle of poverty. (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8)
Support provided by school/ department during the pandemic	• BASIC Education Minister Angie Motshekga has revealed several initiatives by her department and provinces aimed at providing psycho-social support to pupils who fear going back to school due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • The department made no significant amendments for us to adapt. (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2) • Provinces have put in place a whole range of measures to support the learners- this includes Saturday and Sunday classes. (Cape Times, Oct 2, 2022, pg. 5) • The department launched the Woza Matrics, in collaboration with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT). This is an initiative designed to provide additional support to the matric class of 2020, as they prepare for the 2020 National Senior Certificate Examination. (Cape Times, Oct 2, 2022, pg. 5) • For matriculants, government support came in the form of TV and radio programmes and matric camps, among other initiatives. (Daily Dispatch: Nov ,2020, pg.10)

	• The country provided educational programmes on television. That helped. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6)
	• The education department makes available laptops, data and classes on TV and radio. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5)
Negative Feelings	• Western Cape is leading the pack among the provinces with students with Covid-19 fears. It is followed by Gauteng with 1 468. (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4)
	It was a lot to take in, focusing on school while trying to keep safe from Covid-19. (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2)
Online Learning/ teaching	• Teachers tried to adapt to online education, but the reality is that this wasn't the core competency of many schools. Teachers had to brush up on online teaching skills and use some technology for the first time. This made for challenging times. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg.10)
	• …alternatives, such as structured home education, exist and have helped fill the gap for thousands of children this year. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg.10)
	• The lockdown has disturbed our plans and we had to turn to online teaching, which is not as effective compared with the traditional method of teaching. (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2)
	• WhatsApp became the mode of teaching for most of us (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
	• Many learners did not understand the work we've sent vis WhatsApp as they had no one to explain the work to them (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
	• Some had access to online learning platforms and other resources, many had to struggle with access to learning martial and teaching. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6)
	• The Covid-19 outbreak has forced the education system to undergo a massive reformation due to online teaching and learning. (Cape Argus: Sept 8, 2020, pg.7)
	• Online learning brings in a level of awkwardness: such as when a meeting begins and microphones functions are on mute because no one wants to speak when a question is asked and there is silence; also, students attend classes in pyjamas, and miss appointments. There is a great misalignment of disciplinary conduct between in-classroom participation and online education. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg.10)
	• The digital divide became abundantly clear while some struggled with the basic resources such as water and adequate sanitisation; both necessary during the coronavirus outbreak. (Daily Dispatch: Nov ,2020, pg.10)
	• Teachers have had to move from a space in which they have years of experience to the unknown and challenging world of online, remote, correspondence and social distanced teaching. (Pretoria News, Oct 5, 2020, pg. 6)
	Teachers need to facilitate learning with the help of digital tools such as e-learning platforms, online videos and audio tutorials. (Pretoria News, Oct 5, 2020, pg. 6)
Access to Online Learning/ teaching	• Not having wifi/ data added to our stress, because at the end of the day the work had to be done (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
	• Very poor access to computers and unstable home internet connections have meant that online learning has not been possible for most schools. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
	• When level 5 of the lockdown was implemented, many students were left without computers/ laptops, smartphones, internet connectivity and adequate coverage, and insufficient working spaces at home. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg.10)
	• Lockdown restrictions with many pupils not having access to online learning or other resources (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7)

	• He said children who went to schools with resources and had unlimited access to data would fare well compared to those who did not have access to data, who would be the worst off. (Cape Argus: Jan 5, 2021, pg.5) • I had to leave what I didn't understand because I needed data to communicate with my teachers. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • I live in a rural area and there was no money to access resources for learning online (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • When schools had to offer online teaching, the gap between former model C schools and those in rural and townships was visible. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5) • Despite The education department making available laptops, data and classes on TV and radio. In most cases, pupils in the hinterland struggled with network connections, rendering the tablet devices useless (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5) • Even before the pandemic, there were challenges with the use of technology in public schools that included inadequate infrastructure, poor internet connectivity and a lack of digitally competent teachers. During the lockdown, this reality was made clear as many public school teachers who didn't have the experience, knowledge or infrastructure to facilitate online learning found it challenging. (Pretoria News, Oct 5, 2020, pg. 6) • Many learners who did not have the opportunity for remote learning or no adequate support at home may feel that they are behind the syllabus, hence they are likely to feel despondent. (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8) The majority don't have access to online learning. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5)
Mental Health-feelings of stress/ anxiety	• The remaining months are anxiety-ridden with academic stress. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • With grade 12s having had a challenging year due to Covid-19 lockdown, anxiety and panic have kicked in. (Daily Sun: Nov 3,2020, pg.2) • For those who are facing this final step in their 12-year or more schooling career, feeling stress and anxiety are normal. But for the class of 2020, the angst is understandably more amplified. (Daily Dispatch: Nov ,2020, pg.10) • My anxiety levels were quite high in the beginning but with my school working hard to finish the syllabus before prelims (trial exams), the levels have decreased exponentially. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • When I found out about the coronavirus I was so scared because I did not know anything about the virus. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • I started to become anxious and scared. But will remain positive that I will pass my matric finals and go to tertiary next year. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • This year has been very stressful. I lost my uncle to covid and couldn't attend his funeral because I'm disabled and had no one to assist me. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • Heading into 2020 as a matriculant was enough pressure because we had a whole year's work to complete in a short amount of time. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • When I heard of Covid-19 I was stressed because I thought this academic year would go to waste. I thought we wouldn't be able to go back to school. That was scary because I have goals that I want to achieve. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • The coronavirus will leave a permanent scar. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • The past few months have had a tremendous impact on the mental and emotional well-being of most people and young children have not escaped the effects of Covid-19 and the lockdowns. (The Star: Nov 26, 2020, pg.10)

	• There has definitely been an increase worldwide and in South Africa of children struggling to manage anger and anxiety- outbursts that are quite distinct from run-of-the-mill so-called tantrums that some children exhibit under normal circumstances (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15)
	• All these factors, and many others, mean that children have had to deal with a major and historical life event at a very young age when they are still learning to process feelings and emotions. Unusual behaviour may have arisen as a result. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15)
	• Children had to learn to grow up and face the fear of death, uncertainty and the fallout from their parents' fears and anxieties before they were mature enough to handle these big changes and big feelings. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15)
	• There were a lot of times when I felt like this year was a lot to handle and I felt like the work and pressure were craving in on me. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5)
	• Confused and anxious when the academic year was abruptly disrupted. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5)
	• They were a bit scared because of everything that happened this year and weren't sure what they should expect. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5)
	Important to take care of your mental health during this frustrating time. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5)
MH Services	• BASIC Education Minister Angie Motshekga has revealed several initiatives by her department and provinces aimed at providing psycho-social support to pupils who fear going back to school due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4)
	• Motshekga said her department has partnered with the National Education Collaboration Trust and Unicef to mobilise psycho-social support to pupils who were anxious to go back to school due to the pandemic. (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4)
	• Unicef has contracted Childline to provide services to children through their call centre. (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4)
	• The minister said provincial departments had historically employed psychologists and social workers to support learners and teachers. However, there are server shortages. (The Star: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4)
	• Motshekga said the sector had placed a strong emphasis on psychosocial support for learners and teachers. (Cape Argus: Nov 3,2020, pg.5)
	• The department of education has sent a team of counsellors to support schoolchildren who tested positive for Covid-19. (Dispatch, Sept 22, 2020)
	Psychological support for pupils who were affected by the virus. (Dispatch, Sept 22, 2020)
Final Exams	• For pupils in their final school years of Grade 11 or Grade 12, we saw many parents become concerned about whether their children may struggle to catch up with their studies in preparation for their final exams. (Cape Argus: Sept 10,2020, pg.10)
	• Pupils say they are excited but nervous before matric trial exams (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2)
	• The pupils said that despite the disruptions due to Covid-19, they were prepared for the exam (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2)
	• Despite the negative impact of Covid-19, they managed to finish the syllabus and do revisions thanks to the efforts of the school's teachers (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2)

	• The NSC exam papers were already set up before the pandemic. And according to the Department f Education, standards would not be lowered because of lost time. Teachers were, therefore, expected to teach the same amount of work as previously in half the time. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020) • According to the department, it is all systems go ahead of the commencement of the NSC final exams (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7) • Due to Covid-19, the department was unable to run the June examinations, which result in the combined examination for all candidates. (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7) • Despite the abnormal context, the Class of 2020 will be subjected to the same high-quality examination that previous cohorts were. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6); (Pretoria News: Nov 3,2020, pg.1) • The class of 2020, despite the disruptions of the academic year, are fully prepared for this examination, Motshekga said. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6) • Life Science final exam: "the exam was simple and the questions easy to understand. I'm sure I'm going to pass it, but I can't predict what symbol I'll get". "The exam was way easier than we expected and I'm certain everyone is going to pass it." "I enjoyed it because I was ready, I downloaded past exam papers and watched YouTube videos on how to answer questions. I am happy with myself" (Daily Sun: Dec 1, 2020, pg.6) • The pupils said they were anxious about their results as the year hadn't been an easy one. (Daily Sun: Dec 1, 2020, pg.6) • Pupils writing their matric exams from this week will be subjected to the same high standards applied to previous years, despite the disruptions. (Cape Argus: Nov 3,2020, pg.4) • When you enter the exam room in the days ahead, you will be carrying not just your own hopes for success and those of your families. You will also carry the hopes of us, the South African people. (Pretoria News: Nov 3,2020, pg.1) • To accommodate the disruptions, the June Senior Certificate exams were postponed and would now be written together with the National Senior certificate (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7) • The upcoming final exams are causing uncertainty but with prelims being so close to finals it feels like one exam with a long break in the middle, causing some relief. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • I'm anxious about the final exams, we didn't prepare well for them because we had no time. I wasted a lot of time at home. We couldn't attend extra classes because the location of those classes are not wheelchair friendly. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • I'm frightened about the final exams approaching. We are going to write a full national paper but the examiner who set the paper two years ago did not know we were going to be affected by Covid-19 (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) Pupils said it was difficult to prepare during lockdown but with their teacher's help, they managed to write well. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5)
Final Exams Protocols	• Candidates who present a temperature above 38 during the screening process will write exams in isolation and will not be allowed to associate with others after the exam. (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7) • New writing centres were identified to accommodate the large number of candidates who will be taking part in the combined examinations. (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7) • This year's exams will be written under unprecedented conditions as the country is in the midst of a global pandemic. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6) • Pupils presenting a body temperature of above 38 would be allowed to write exams in isolation and will not be allowed to associate with other learners even afterwards. (Cape Argus: Nov 3,2020, pg.4)

	· With such a large group of learners writing, it is vital that no unnecessary disruptions occur. Our matrics are already going to have to cope with some unusual safety measures because of Covid-19, and will understandably be nervous as a result. We cannot afford to cause them any additional anxiety. (Cape Times, Nov 5, 2020, pg.2)
Coping mechanisms	• For now, though, focus on what is on your plate, put in the hours, get into study groups and reach out for help. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • Don't isolate yourself. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • Look for tutor platforms or people. Find out if your teachers are willing to help you or a group of other pupils on weekends or after school. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • Find a rhythm that works for you, keep a balance, eat healthily, squeeze in some exercise, clear your head, take a walk or jog, get your eight hours of sleep and communicate your study needs to your family. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • By now many pupils, if not all, would have established a study plan. However, maintaining a healthy balance during this period will be crucial. Take regular breaks and be sure to get enough sleep. Rest is just important during the exams as studying. Avoid burning the candle on both ends. Exercise or some form of physical activity will aid in maintaining stress levels. (Daily Dispatch, Nov 4, 2020, pg.10) • Developing a close connection with the child, spending quality time and developing language around emotions are the best ways to empower a child to manage their anger effectively. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • I had a good support system, my educators, parents, siblings, friends and their belief in me when I didn't believe in myself kept me going. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5) • Believing in Jesus Christ was my coping mechanism. I sit in his presence, I made a to-do list and he helped me get through everything I needed to do. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5) • Minimise stress by having a checklist that can be followed every day. (The Star: Jan 11, 2021, pg.3) • Take care of yourself as well. Show your child that you get plenty of sleep, eat well and exercise regularly. (The Star: Jan 11, 2021, pg.3) • Given the fact that we're going through changes, it's important to understand that the emotions children feel are very real. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5) • Parents need to teach children self-regulation techniques and encourage them to ask questions and find ways to express themselves through meaningful activities. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5) • Parents need to find ways to manage their children's anxieties and difficulties, striking a balance between work and playtime while maintaining adaptive ways of social interaction. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5) Encourage parents to take care of their own well-being so they could take better care of their children. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5)
Well-being	• Covid-19…. Enormous threat to the lives and well-being of children across the country (Cape Argus: Sept 10, 2020, pg. 3) Also important is that schools are not only locations for learning; they also offer social protection and support for learner well-being. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020)
Effects of pandemic	• I am sad for the learners whose parents lost their income or jobs and cannot afford to send their children to school, because they cannot pay school fees. (The Start: Sept 10, 2020, pg.4) • Matric pupils this year had had to endure conditions their predecessors had never had to confront. (Pretoria News: Nov 3,2020, pg.1) • The impact has landed differently for different people. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15)

	• The vaccination roll-out outlined by the government has essential workers, including teachers, in the second phase of inoculations, but that is unlikely to happen before the second term. (Pretoria News, Jan 5, 2021, pg. 2) • Teenage pregnancies and abuse are some of the negative effects of worldwide lockdown responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, experts have argued. (The Mercury, Jan 12, 2020, pg. 4) • Schools were closed for eight months during the outbreak, and according to some estimates, teenage pregnancy rates doubled. (The Mercury, Jan 12, 2020, pg. 4) • Covid-19 made a big impact on my life as well as the world we live in. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • I lost my uncle to covid and couldn't attend his funeral because I'm disabled and had no one to assist me. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • There are also reports about 14 teachers having died from Covid-19. (The Star, Dec 29, 2020, pg. 1) • The grieving over these holidays is too much. Many families have been left without loved ones during these holidays, arising from social activities. (The Star, Dec 29, 2020, pg. 1) • The loss of any school personnel will be really sad as they will not only be leaving grieving families but also families at school. (The Star, Dec 29, 2020, pg. 1) • It's heartbreaking to watch someone you know go through the pain of burying a loved one. This virus has made things worse in that people are not able to comfort friends due to restrictions and how the virus spreads. (Weekend Argus, Jan 9, 2021, pg.5) • Covid-19 has changed lives, possibly forever. (The Star: Jan 11, 2021, pg.3) • 281 teachers, pupils and non-teaching staff have succumbed to Covid-19 since the start of the lockdown. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5) Covid-19 has disrupted the lives of many families and their children now face changes that they may not fully understand. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5)
Forced to adapt	• Another pupil said it had been hard adapting to the new normal and new system of learning and the department made no significant amendments for us to adapt. However, we managed with help of extra classes and the dedication of teachers (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2) • Matrics of 2020 suddenly had to adapt (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020) • In 2020, our matrics were forced to grow up overnight. (Cape Times: Nov 10, 2020) • The Grade 12s had to adapt in real-time not just to finish the curriculum but to catch up with the learning hours lost (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6); (Pretoria News: Nov 3, 2020, pg.1) • The class of 2020 has had to endure conditions their predecessors never had to confront. They had to adapt in real-time not just to finish the curriculum, but to catch up with the learning hours lost. (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7) • This year was by no means normal, some of you had to teach yourselves difficult concepts. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • It is not reasonable to expect all children to just absorb these changes and cope forthwith (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • The pandemic pushed me into a completely new environment where I would have to learn to stand on my own two feet and learn to be my very own educator. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5) Last year, when schools were closed, both parents and children needed to cope with home-schooling. (The Star: Jan 11, 2021, pg.3)

Ways of adapting	• Fellow matric pupil said the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown meant pupils needed more focus ad determination to cope with the workload. (The Mercury: Sept 1, 2020, pg.2) • I made new goals that focused on myself. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) Parents must help their children adjust to the so-called new normal. (Daily Sun, Nov 10, 2020, pg.5)
Sport	They were not able to participate in sporting, recreational and leisure activities that are so essential to a well-rounded life and that relieve the stress of prolonged study (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.6); (Pretoria News: Nov 3, 2020, pg.1); (The Citizen: Nov 3, 2020, pg.7)
Expectations	• Your final year in your entire school career was supposed to be fun, exciting and impactful. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • The year where you are finally in the most senior class, the class everyone looks up to, the year where you are treated like adults by your teachers. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • The matric year, with all its benefits and splendour. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • The lavish matric dance, the matric blazers and jackets, the exclusive matric lawns, the fun and final high school sports days and concerts. The pandemic nearly took all of it away. (Sowetan: Nov 3, 2020, pg.15) • I looked forward to my matric year, but the experience was hectic. I had to adapt to online learning, which wasn't easy at first as my marks dropped. I am very fearful, but I'm trying my best to stay positive. (Daily Sun: Nov 3,2020, pg.2) • I was looking forward to my matric year and having a matric dance, but it didn't go as expected. (Daily Sun: Nov 3,2020, pg.2) • The coronavirus has changed almost every single expectation I had for the year 2020. The cancellation of our matric farewell, sports tournaments, cultural evenings and all other anticipated events has led me into an incomprehensible state of mind (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) • As we all know, 2020 has not been the year we all expected it to be. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) · We were looking forward to 2020, one of the biggest of our lives. It was a year in which many of us were ready to break the poverty chain in our lives. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6)
Positive Outcomes	Five Joburg-based high school learners have used their time in lockdown to drive positive social change. It's a space for other people my age to explore their own feelings about issues that are affecting them. From race and sexuality to the changing nature of education. (The Star, Sept 4, 2020, pg.6)
Adapt teaching/ learning strategies	• Schools were forced to adapt to new ways of learning and teaching. (Daily Dispatch: Nov ,2020, pg.10) • There will be a shift, in time, as we the 21st-century educator and child adapt to the skills necessary in order to develop these relationships online. (Pretoria News, Nov 4, 2020, pg.6) • In most urban schools, e-learning is quite advanced after being introduced during lockdown last year, and blended learning models are established as the future. (Pretoria News, Jan 5, 2021, pg. 2) • My learning was affected very badly because we had closed schools. We started online learning, which was too difficult for me because my family lacked the financial means to afford data. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) My studies have been negatively affected by this pandemic (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6)
Describe school year	• This year has been unusual and unsettling (Cape Times, Nov 5, 2020, pg.2) • At the start of the year, everything was normal. We had no stress except academic stress. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6)

	At the beginning of the year, everything was just normal and exciting. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6)
Feelings- Disconnected/ Isolated/ Lonely/ Social interactions	• My life has changed in numerous ways. I stopped communicating with my friends. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) I began to miss actual human contact. (The Herald, Dec 30, 2020, pg. 5)
Lessons learnt	• Covid-19 has taught me that procrastination is the biggest obstacle to success. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6) The Covid-19 virus has brought with it the mother of all struggles, it has been a huge teacher. (The Sunday Independent, Nov 1, 2020, pg. 8)
Home/Family during Lockdown	Being in lockdown with my family in Ndabakazi was something we had to get used to. (Dispatch, Nov 5, 2020, pg. 6)

Annexure I: Codes and extracts of interview transcripts

Transcript Participant 1

Codes	Extracts
Returning to school (Regulations/ changes)	• they like painted squares on the pavement so we all had to like initially sit on the pavement, hear how this whole routine is going to change now (622-623) • 1.5m apart (636) • wearing masks were horrible (637) • some people who chose not to come back to school (647) • one or two said we're not coming back to school because our parents have comorbidities (648-650) • just everything was new (653-654) • so going to school just to learn and then go home to work and no interaction (657-658) • it was just different not at all what it used to be (675-676) • matrics went back to school by themselves initially (729) • teaching was back to normal, so we got back almost all the work that they did that we were supposed to do in lockdown they revised in the first two weeks (741-743) • they extended the days made sure we covered all the work that we needed to (749-750) • we were stressing that we weren't going to finish our syllabus and then we ended up finishing it way too early and then we would just practising the whole time (768-770) • it just changed a lot it wasn't like a school normal school days and you know when you have you each day is different just in terms of your interactions and assembly's and like the sport it just felt so monotonous and that nothing was it literally felt the same all the time (796-800)
Schools reopening	
Emotions felt around returning to school	• we are all quite hesitant (617) • initially maybe we were scared we weren't to sure how things were going to operate (644-645) • scared of catching covid (645)
Positive Feelings/ motivation	
Nutrition	
Structure/ routine	• … I think motivation was a big thing for me that that was the, yeah, the hardest is just like it, it annoyed me when I didn't have a schedule (370-372) • Not knowing what's going to happen ready frustrated me because I didn't… I didn't… you want to set up a schedule you wanna see what you need to do how you need to cover things before prelims or what not, but we didn't we had no guidance (381-384)
Work/School- Home Balance	• but I got tired of the monotony of working from home (247-248) • we were all working from home … I think that we all had to like find our own like find our own space around the house because we were all gonna work so that was a bit tricky (343-345) • we all do our own things like we are all separate in our own office and then we would come together for meals and things so my experience is fine (347-349)

	• you almost get like tired of being in the same space at the same time… all the time, so when they wouldn't allow us like to just go for runs you know that was crazy (350-353)
Schools Closing	
Effects of the pandemic on schools/ education	
Dropout rate	
Support provided by school/ department during the pandemic	
Negative Feelings	
Online Learning/ teaching	• soon as the first lockdown hits we had to figure out, you know, what platform we were going to use (35-37) • gave us PowerPoint slides and there is no follow up questions or anything like that I struggled with because I thought I don't feel motivated to work do you know all these slides (80-84) • Google classrooms (94) • the English department did really well in that they made audios and where they explained everything and so and they also allowed us to do a lot more practise where we could submit essays (101-103) • We had no online classes (109) • no live communication it was all just pre-recorded or just working through slides by ourselves in textbooks and notes (109-111) • there was no way we could ask questions (131) • save your questions for when we come back and revise the sections (132-133)
Access to Online Learning/ teaching	• lots of girls don't have access to data and I think just the live sessions it would just wouldn't be fair (142-143) • ended up making a deal with Vodacom (147) • people did not have laptops, people did not have phones (153-154) • started allowing girls who don't have access to laptops to come through to the school so they could use the computer center (158-188)
Mental Health- feelings of stress/ anxiety	• It was actually quite stressful (being head girl) because we almost wanted to try keep motivating everyone (200-201) • I wasn't that stressed at home in terms of my tests and stuff because there wasn't any… we don't know when you're going to be writing next yeah… kind of so it was it was it wasn't bad, but I think towards prelims and when we started going back that's just when the stress and I was like I actually need… I need to start doing sport now (276-280) • initially it was quite… it was quite hard but once we started seeing okay we gonna go back and once everyone started panicking… stop panicking that that that's whenever it was okay because we could see… (405-408) • it was frustrating as you can't, you can't moan at anyone it's out of everyone's control yeah so I think it was just yeah it was stressful. (432-434) • that was actually our saying… saying we are all in this together we all gonna be all… you know going through the same sort of things yes some of us may not have the resources like others but we all going through the same thing same emotions so I think just we… each of us took that as a… (456-460) • it wasn't just me… we are all going through this… I think that helps to died down the stress quite a bit knowing that… it's everyone's going through the same thing (464-466) • it's everyone, everyone was affected and it just accepting that and acknowledging that I think helped me quite a lot (453-455)

	- you know we were like we can't do anything about it we just going to have to finish this year and get yeah… and hope next year is better yeah (715-717) - there was always a worry like just there are so many unknowns and also you wanna do well in your… there are lots of stresses you wanted to get accepted to… and I think you don't know what next year was looking like for this year was looking like so I think for mental health it was just like there was always a stress you know. (916-921) - Exactly I think that uncertainty was the biggest thing you just I mean towards the end things became more clearer which is a relief (926-927) - I was super stressed, and I think just yeah the fear of not knowing what's going to happen and yeah but I think I like I just kept reminding myself that's good but yeah I think there was definitely stress (930-933) - My skin was really bad towards the end of last year. (935) - my skin definitely shows yeah that I was stressed (941-942) - then I don't think I had many breakdowns I think I may have had one or two when you just feel like there's so much happening you just like you just need to let it all go kind of thing… that's when you actually couldn't pinpoint exactly what you're upset or freaking out about it just felt like I was just too much… (942-947) - on edge, everything is uncertain (949)
MH Services	
Final Exams	- like hearing that we are going to finish our matric year in 2020 was a big relief cause it was a real (421-422) - I definitely didn't feel like I'm unprepared in any way for my finals (752-753) - I just practised as much as possible (877-878) - you know without sport I used a lot of my time then to do those others small things that I wouldn't usually do (879-881) - I found finals also quite stressful just the whole environment you know (887-888) - like the whole atmosphere was very scary (893-894)
Final Exams Protocols	
Coping mechanisms/ support	- like I just thought maybe I should break it down bit by bit you know try work out some sort of schedule on my own and then yeah just went like that about that way in practising (68-70) - do my own whatsapp calls (124) - voice notes will would send through all the time what we doing and different approaches like I would share what you know, Like how I am avoiding procrastination (204-206) - my family (458) - I was stressed I would just speak to my mum I think my mum is my closest person (458-459) - you know walk around the block and id actually go to physical… do so exercise or gym or something that is definitely my stress relief. (956-957) - when I'm really stressed about something I like to talk about it… so if anything id verbalise and speak to my family or to even to my friend you know your phone and see cause that's also a big comfort when you phone someone and they feel the same way as you so and that was often the case you would phone your friend and be like how are you feeling about this and, and then they would be exactly the same and then you'll be like ok it's not just me it's fine (960-967)

	• I did try stay away from social media times when things will especially start when things are just uncertain and people just making speculations (978-989) • watched YouTube videos (987) • I appreciate that I have a supportive family that I can talk to you and stuff like, where a lot of people don't have that (1007-1008)
Well-being	• exercise was a big thing for you and phoning friends and your mom being a big support (968-969) • just take each day as it comes (1038)
Effects of pandemic	• I always felt sorry for the other grades and stuff like that because they, they, missing out and they don't have the foundation and things like that just you know as much as we do so I thought if anyone the matrics were best off and best prepared in terms of they could work at home by themselves and you know I could I was fine working at home by myself but it's just like yeah this is all new (52-57) • I mean I think just all the misinformation about covid and stuff like that was you know just… complicated (511-512) • none of us got it, covid (515) • I haven't really been impacted by covid that much (517-518) • we couldn't do our drivers and that actually added a whole new stress for me that my drivers were the worst experience. (521-523)
adapting/ Adjusting	• the whole year was almost learning as, as, it happened (41)
Sport	• I use sports a lot for my time management (2019-210) • when that's taken away from me I feel my time management is like so bad and that's I just can't and I feel like I have more time now so I work slower and it's not good (222-224) • I also do club sport so not only like school sport but also club sport (228) • takes up a lot of time so that the lockdown kind of let me have time to study a lot (229-230) • I think a lot of people struggled without having their sport and physical activity during the day (236-238) • I do use it as a stress relief (269) • towards prelims and when we started going back that's just when the stress and I was like I actually need… I need to start doing sport now (278-279)
Expectations	• Yes (disappointing year), in that a lot of things were taken away like the matric dance (678-679) • inter house events were taken away (682-683) • really upsetting and frustrating (695) • even the way matric, matric ended I mean we couldn't sing out our school war cry, the last prize giving that was just it was small things but at the end of the day it actually was like all those memories and yeah it was yeah that was quite upsetting… (701-705) • I'll say the year was disappointing definitely in that like all those sort of memorable moments were taken away (707-708)
Adapt teaching/ learning strategies	• I would um… you know go to Khan academy's it was sort of the same thing and that actually you know watch videos to see other people studied and like you know I tried to learn different methods (465-468)
Describe school year	• we kept getting disrupted the whole way through (32-32) • We have a foundation you know Grade 11 already start building you up for matric (50-51) • last year was very new and very different everything was uncertain (1091-1092)

Feelings- Disconnected/ Isolated/ Lonely/ Social interactions	• if I'm quite disconnected and I think that's where I lost most quite a bit of motivation (114-115) • just missing friends a lot yeah just those sort of interactions (357-378)
Lessons learnt / positive outcome	• like I learnt a lot you know just how to work out your own schedule, you learn a lot of small things you know I have to do your own schedule not that don't know how to do that (297-299) • Especially with the whole online system because we kind of knew what we have to do and yeah and what it's going to be like… so I think that help (with varsity). (311-313) • we had more time to study for prelims so that was a big positive for me… just time to sit down and focus on my academics and I think just (313-315) • I also got me exploring for other resources a lot more (315-316) • I think be grateful for what you have (1003)
Home/Family during Lockdown	• spending time with the family was great (292-293) • I was mostly home I think all the time my whole family was at home so both my parents and my older sister. (340-341) • you felt quite relieved that you know my mum wasn't sitting in traffic and there was you know you wouldn't work having those stresses like I have everyone gets home safety (360-362)
Stressful situation of 2020	• prelims (828) • it was that we didn't… write many tests so when I got to prelims it was really stressful in that lots of us (829-830) • we didn't have enough practise throughout the year… so our June exams were taken away… (832-834) • prelims for me was very stressful and like my home what was happening around me at my home as well which just made it even worse so yeah I think that was technically the worst… the most stressful part… feeling worried because you know I need to fix this to have enough time to like fix my results and stuff like (863-868)

Transcript Participant 2

Codes	Extracts
Returning to school (Regulations/ changes)	• What we did do when we came back was, we wrote, we had like a test week so we still wrote tests but they weren't counted or weighted in the same way the exams were (Transcript P1, lines 222-224) • testing to see if the online learning was, was good enough for you to go into your finals, because the government didn't change the end of year exams (242-244) • They put more people to one class but the put them into bigger rooms because they had to space everyone out. (562-564) • In terms of the way the school was maintained, there was a lot more cleaning, a lot more like wiping down tables every time you entered or left a classroom (643-645) • You had to use hand sanitiser every time you walked into or out of a classroom (647-648) • You had to be within a certain distance of anyone else who also had their mask off, or even if they had their mask on you still had to be within a certain distance (651-653) • Teachers having visors and masks on at all times. (655) • (Enjoyed) being able to talk to friends (758) • Returning to that kind of structure which I enjoyed (760-761)

	• returning to some sense of normalcy (767)
Schools reopening	•
Emotions felt around returning to school	• concerned about the health implications of all things (592-593)
Positive Feelings/ motivation	
Nutrition	
Structure/ routine	• it was not having a structure, being able to wake up in random times everyday (492-493) • I like structure, and I like things to be a specific way, we do things the same way everyday, not everyday, but you have a set structure for your week, and you know beforehand how things are going to work because I don't like change. (500-504) • I think that's… the change itself… of having to now… learning, not learning in a different way but how schooling was done in different way and how you had to adapt to it, I wasn't the biggest fan of that, and then also losing that structure, that I was used for the past four years, or even technically longer, because primary school, to a certain degree is similar. (504-510) • So, Yeah, not having that structure was the biggest problem. (510-511) • I don't think I ever put together a proper structure that I would like to. (515-516) • I quite enjoyed it because it kind of keeps my life on track and I allows me to focus on doing things right rather than focusing on actually getting the stuff done at all. Because I was kind of forced into doing, doing stuff. (763-766) • not having that structure to a certain degree did worry me, so I would say I was a little bit more anxious, but because fortunately because the structure was taken away and put me into a situation where I was more comfortable, were I was at home. (772-776) • structure being taken away did make me anxious but cause of the conditions I found myself in I was able to cope (784-786)
Work/School- Home Balance	• So, when I'm in my room, I'm relaxing… well now so much cause I work in my room but before it was when I'm in my room relaxing… now all of a sudden I was in my room and going to school at the same time, so it's like well I don't really know how to feel about that. I'm supposed to be working and relaxing. (1115-1120) • Yeah, it was really weird to kind of try and adapt to it. It was almost like, like I said you're in a place where you expect to relax but you're doing work, so it was very strange. (1126-1129) • I kind of had to change, I was like okay maybe, maybe my room is not a place where I relax, maybe I have to do some work now. (1129-1131)
Schools Closing	• when the lockdowns were, when they started and when no one was allowed back in school (146-147) • a lot of schools didn't go back for six months. (148-149)
Effects of the pandemic on schools/ education	• our midyear exams were scrapped (221) • with covid I was never really concerned about the effect of covid in terms of health (396-397) • in terms of finishing the syllabus, we did a very good job of ensuring that we had everything done by prelims. (740-742)
Dropout rate	

Support provided by school/ department during the pandemic	• They targeted it more to the people who really needed it, who were really impacted by the virus, not so many people like me who were able to cope (990-992) • a psychologist at the school (998) • club gatherings (1008) • if you ever need to talk about anything, you could always do that with your friends and peers (1011-1012) • I wouldn't necessarily say they could have done anything better for me because I know I coped quiet well (1033-1034)
Negative Feelings	
Online Learning/ teaching	• my school did handle that quite well with online lessons even throughout the lockdown when no one was in. (31-33) • having to do everything, over a screen, over the phone, on a computer is very different (87-88) • everything happened online, (147-148) • My school, we had online learning, I can't remember exactly how long it was, if I had to guess probably about two months and then we were back (151-153) • While it was online it was, it was structured sort of well, it was structured like a normal class, where you know, everyone get… instead of going into to a classroom, everyone gets online to watch the teacher present in real time, so it was live, it wasn't recorded or pre-recorded and the teachers just had a normal lesson (153-157) • structure that the teachers went through, it was very similar, in different forms, they had to do it online and they could physically interactive with everyone. (159-162) • so you could ask questions, you could talk to other people in the class if you wanted to (164-166) • whether it worked for them or not, was dependent person (214)
Access to Online Learning/ teaching	• because almost, everyone has phones, the service that they used could be run on a computer or just on your phone (178-179) • data was more an issue than actual accessibility to devices. (180-181) • for the people who didn't have access to Wi-Fi they would just open up the hostels and you could just go there and use the Wi-Fi at the school (195-197) • But for me who it didn't really affect me, I think everyone was given an opportunity to access those lessons (212-213)
Mental Health- feelings of stress/ anxiety	• matric is a little bit stressful because there are your final exams and the most important exams of your entire school career (323-325) • I probably was quite stressed out but it's just, I didn't think about it (331-332) • I generally, or at least I used to be very stressed out, I would get very anxious and nervous, especially in social interactions, I wasn't very socially… (347-349) • So, I was generally very stressed out person, but like I said, by the time I got to Garde 12, I was, I had felt that so much I've basically just taught myself to do not worry about it. (355-358) • I'm stressing… me stressing isn't going to change the fact that I still have to write a test, it's not going to change what I do and don't know, it's not going to change how I perform so, well it will change how I preform it will make it worse, so, well I'm just going to try relaxing, and just get through it. (358-363)

	• But for me, everything just kinds happened so fast that I didn't really know to feel. (1088-1090) • this stuff was happening, I don't have time to focus on all of this I gotta, I gotta work. So, maybe it looked… maybe stress, because I did feel that a little bit more than usual, stress and anxiety, but… other than that it was just like… well I can't really talk to my friends in the same way I usually do, I can't interact with people how I usually do, I'm not playing sports and not in class, I'm just at home… and I think that actually also played a role in it, just always being at home. (1098-1104)
MH Services	
Final Exams	
Final Exams Protocols	
Coping mechanisms/ support	• (Family) big part of support (791) • more of a gamer (785) • watch YouTube, that was one thing I did a lot on my phone (793-794) • if I ever did need any support like I could get hours at home I felt comfortable I was in my room is most comfortable place (778-780)
Well-being	• Managing the balance between getting stuff done which is very important and having time to just relax and recharge, I guess you would say. That balance was very important (1480-1482) • just being able to manage your time and divided into getting stuff done to you not worried about work and relaxing so you not worrying about working (1489-1491)
Effects of pandemic	• There was a difference, there was defiantly a difference, but I would say it probably affects me more now and then last year (110-112) • Nothing that I specifically had a major problem, other than just maybe a little bit of extra worrying that someone would get sick in the family. (631-634) • I can't say it really affected me (707)
adapting/ Adjusting	• I didn't really do much to adapt (521) • And just that whole thing of I, I need to understand that people have it worse, so I can just be happy with the fact that I am coping, even if it's not ideal, yeah. And just that idea of I'm making it through. So, let's not try change anything, let's just get through it and if things changed we adapt again, (1141-1145)
Sport	• sports are probably more important than academics for a lot of people (23-24) • It didn't really affect me too much because I was never ready to into sports. (29-30)
Expectations	• I know for a lot of people the impact was more that they couldn't do, what they had wanted to do, come into the school in grade eight and something that they look forward to all the way up throughout the year. (23-26) • lockdown started or it was announced there was going to be a lockdown, I think a day after we had our matric dance. (46-47) • not getting what you expect from something (127) • The whole idea of not being able to do something that they look forward to doing for the past five years. I think that really affected some people and it did have an impact on how they did in school, in that last year. (611-614)

Adapt teaching/ learning strategies	• in terms of learning it didn't make too much difference, to me because I pretty much self-study everything anyway, when I was in school. (89-91) • Having to adapt to a new learning style, in the last year high school, that was probably the biggest problem. (485-486)
Describe school year	• Last year… it was quite interesting year (21) • Boring (713) • not that it was boring there was a lot of stuff that happened. It's just because of how much you expect, as opposed to what you did. Even if you're getting something out of it you still… you compared to what you should have had and you think well it wasn't as great as it could have been (713-718) • things weren't as good as they could have been, (722-723) • academics was the most important thing to me and in that regard I did fine (718-719) • I did well and I was happy with my results. (731)
Feelings- Disconnected/ Isolated/ Lonely/ Social interactions	• social interaction diminish which, even as someone who prefers to be alone and, and a little more secluded, a little more secluded, I do still like talking to people and, as… since there was locked and can't really go out, you can't really to do things and… yeah, that did… not having that social interaction (81-86) • not being able to go out in the year that you're supposed to go out and meet people is, is a bit of an impacted so just referencing this year to last year, I'd say this year was probably more difficult but it was also a challenge last year. (119-122) • I wouldn't say last year made… got those feelings of concern didn't get any worse... If anything, they probably went away because I didn't have to deal with this stuff that I normally would of (1356-1359)
Lessons learnt / positive outcome	• it's actually very similar because the way they structured the lessons in high school, when we had those two, three months of online lessons. It was actually very similar to how things work now. You don't have lessons the whole day you just like have a lecture now and one later and because… it's still a little bit different because at the university it's pre-recorded lectures (1397-1401) • I think it did help having those online classes in high school. (1413-1414) • just it helped me get used to it. So, I wasn't as anxious about having to do these online lessons (1440-1441) • you should learn how to adapt to change, cause change can come at any anytime and yeah (1449-1450) • plan for the worst-case scenario and if anything, better happens you always be happy, but worst case scenario you'll get what you expected and in that case we plan… you will be prepared for it. (1458-1462)
Home/Family during Lockdown	• my parents were there, my brother was staying at home as well at the time (776-777)
Stressful situation of 2020	• the exams (1196) • Me not getting into university would defiantly affect my life for the next 10 years. (1207-1208)

Transcript Participant 3

Codes	Extracts
Returning to school (Regulations/ changes)	• The worst part about returning back… I think it was the adjustment again. So, after going from normal classes to online classes and then we went from online classes to normal classes the adjustment, especially because the way they set up the classrooms and the way they were doing the normal classes was quite different. (479-484) • So, they set up a set up in the hall and we there would be a lot of space and one teacher at the front of the hall. So, I mean, hearing that and trying to collect all the information was a bit hard. And we would also be using our laptops in class. (484-488) • they would be working on Google classroom and will be working on Google classroom as well. So, it's like online school at actual school. (490-492) • But they had screening, so every morning we would go get screened and then we would be able to enter school. (559-560) • And then before and after every class there was hand sanitizer, sanitize the desks. (561-562) • if you do not comfortable coming back online… coming back to school just call the school every day and tell them listen I'm not coming in (571-572) • it is a lot of information to take in, but we eventually got used to it. It was a bit hot, it used to get uncomfortable. (562-564) • I wouldn't say a few days, I'd say a week or two, because it was quite a big adjustment. (586-587) • used to have separate assemblies, so they split the assemblies for grades and each grade had assemblies. (852-853)
Schools reopening	
Emotions felt around returning to school	• I was a bit stressed. I was stressed because I wasn't really sure, its fear of the unknown, nobody really knew what was going on. So, I think that stressed everyone out quite a bit, I know I was stress. (533-536) • I think there's a lot of mixed feelings about it, some people wanted return, some people didn't want to return. (556-557) • Think a lot of people were afraid of the virus, other people weren't afraid. (557-558) • I think, everyone wanted to come back, mostly everyone wanted to come back, they were missing their friends, they were missing like face-to-face interactions in class. (564-566) • But I think some people didn't want to come back, I think online agreed with them and they were doing well online. (566-568)
Positive Feelings/ motivation	
Nutrition	
Structure/ routine	
Work/School- Home Balance	• I think my room was more the classroom. So, I never brought my work out of my room. (140-141) • I kept my laptop in my room whenever, I would work, I go into my room and when I need a break, I come out. So, I kind of split it physically. (143-145) • I think managing Everything during the day. So, like keeping the house clean, cooking and like actually doing your work, so it's balancing all of that. (440-442) • Then at home you have to you have to basically juggle everything. So, it was a bit of a transition but after a week or two you get used to it. (447-449)

Schools Closing	• They gave us week, just a week to adjust and get everything sorted and then after that week we went into it. (405-406)
Effects of the pandemic on schools/ education	• there a lot of speculations and rumours about how things are going, were they going to cancel finals and all of that. So, there was a lot of unrest as well. (42-44)
Dropout rate	
Support provided by school/ department during the pandemic	• they had maths camps and everything to help prepare for the exams (659-660)
Structure/ routine	
Work/School- Home Balance	• I think my room was more the classroom. So, I never brought my work out of my room. (140-141) • I kept my laptop in my room whenever, I would work, I go into my room and when I need a break, I come out. So, I kind of split it physically. (143-145) • I think managing Everything during the day. So, like keeping the house clean, cooking and like actually doing your work, so it's balancing all of that. (440-442) • Then at home you have to you have to basically juggle everything. So, it was a bit of a transition but after a week or two you get used to it. (447-449)
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Dropout rate	
Support provided by school/ department during the pandemic	• they had maths camps and everything to help prepare for the exams (659-660)
Negative Feelings	
Online Learning/ teaching	• the school actually did quite well they introduce online schooling, and we did quite a lot of online classes because we were in the middle of term one (31-34) • they used Google Classroom (312) • They set up Google classrooms for us and we would have to separate classes for whatever our electives were like physics, maths, and all of that, and they gave us timetables so that would schedule Google meets. (312-316) • we would go on to Google meets and we have like our classes basically (316-317) • most of them were live (324) • they also did like a week before, they showed us how to use it, they told us how to use it and they made sure we knew. (337-339) • I wouldn't say there was a change because it was live lessons. You could still ask the questions and it was like being in class. (416-417) • I think the only adjustment was you couldn't like do example, physically examples in class. (417-419) • also if you needed help, you couldn't get help from the friend next to you, or the person next to you, or ask them like please explain it, reexplained it, so you couldn't really get different point of views. (424-427)

Access to Online Learning/ teaching	• The school made sure; the school did make sure that everyone has it. So, if you didn't have access to it, just contact the school they gave out data and I think they were giving out Chromebooks to anyone. (392-395)
Mental Health- feelings of stress/ anxiety	• did stress me out, that stressed me out and it worries me a bit, but then I realise there's nothing I can do about it (55-57) • I can't prevent that, so I just need to prepare for what's coming. (59-60) • I am only going to focus on the things that are in my control. (64-65) • I don't think I get stressed out quite easily. (69) • everybody used to give their own stories and I kinda just said I would take a step back and say listen this is in my control, this out of my control, just concentrate on what you doing and keep going. So, I didn't really worry about that too much. (177-181) • think stress was the main one (emotion felt) but I mean it's because of the exams (721-722) • I think there was a bit of anxiety, we didn't know what was going to come out of the exams, we didn't know how it is going to go (724-726) • I think slightly, I was slightly mainly distressed, and anxious and I think the worry about the health of my family. (804-805) • I think that was the biggest worry. And other than that, I tried to keep it as normal as possible. So, you didn't drift too far from normality, and you didn't feel like you're in ultimate universe. (807-810)
MH Services	• there was a school, school counsellor (866) • the teachers did make themselves available they said listen if you are struggling or anything, come talk to us, they were very good at making themselves available. (868-872) • No, I didn't (make use of counsellor). (888)
Final Exams	
Final Exams Protocols	
Coping mechanisms/ support	• I would watch TV, there wasn't much to do, I would train, do some exercising… there wasn't must we could do really. (151-152) • I think if anything, that (being on my phone) helped me, because it kept me up to date and it kept me knowledgeable on what was actually going on and what's happening. (160-162) • talk on WhatsApp groups (176) • I just take a step back, calm down and then just go back. (546) • just get everything in my mind in order. (549) • when you're feeling stressed, you feel, feel scrambled in your mind, so once you step back and just organise everything and you can go back and look. (549-552) • And I think having access, like the teachers making themselves available, like online even though we went back they made themselves available online, I think that helped a lot. (825-828)
Well-being	• … I think just being my family actually helped, so them being around helped. I used to study with my friends quite a bit (818-820)
Effects of pandemic	• I didn't really feel the effects that badly, as much as other students but I think it went quite well (20-22) • I coped (73) • they had, had a steady flow of income before that, so they weren't stressed like everyone else with the pandemic. (130-131) • my brother contracted it and my grandfather contracted it (271-272)

	• my grandfather contracted it that January, January/February, and he was hospitalised by it. So directly 2 were affected (275-277)
adapting/ Adjusting	• (Difficulties) adjusting from normal school to online school (76)
	• you wake up in the morning and you like have a choice do I do the work, or do I sleep? A normal school day you go to school, and you don't have a choice. (79-82)
	• so I think it's just that independence that you have to adjust to, (83-84)
	• And I think just not being surrounded by people, because you used to… from 12 years of school, you are used to being surrounded by people while doing your schoolwork and then suddenly it's just you and a computer (85-89)
	• I think, maybe it was just getting your matric, the mindset of just, I need to get this, I don't really have time to, to think about it, I just need to go do it. (525-527)
Sport	• I think the main thing was that I just couldn't play sports and stay active at school (17-19)
	• I was playing indoor soccer every week. (215)
Expectations	• We had our matric dance (755)
	• I can't really say there was anything that was disappointing like that stands out, because we did experience everything. (775-777)
Adapt teaching/ learning strategies	• No, I didn't. I stuck with the style of learning that I had. (594)
	• I stuck with that style of learning because I didn't want to change anything too immensely and then I lose track, and I'm trying to play catch up because I changed the style of learning. (595-598)
	• I actually found myself going into YouTube a bit more. (607)
Describe school year	• Different (737)
	• Exciting (740)
	• Because it was different, but it was like a new challenge, something we had to adjust to and we adjusted well and actually got through it, so I think it was exciting just try and see how everything will go (742-746)
Feelings- Disconnected/ Isolated/ Lonely/ Social interactions	• (Difficulties) not being surrounded by people (77)
	• (not seeing people) Slightly, I'd say slightly because I don't… I'm not very extroverted person… so it did affect me but not as much as I think it affected other people. (209-211)
	• 2 cricket practises or hockey or whatever it was a term during the week, then one match a week. So probably about four days a week. (217-219)
	• so that was a big adjustments, not having it. (221-222)
	• I made the decision that I'm stopping at completely and I'm focusing on academics. (232-233)
Lessons learnt / positive outcome	• that's what we were thankful for (lockdown forced us to spend time with grandfather before passing), that's what we were really thankful for. (301-302)
	• I think it helped quite a bit actually because the way that they're doing varsity now, is very similar to the way we did matric last year. So it has helped the transition quite a bit. (623-625)
	• new experiences with the technology side of it. I think everyone became a bit more technologically savvy during that time period everyone figured out how to use a computer properly and actually their way around navigate, do it on the computer. (786-790)

	• the mental strength, everyone strengthened mentally and emotionally during that time. So, I think after that period, everyone was a bit stronger coming out of it, than going into it. (791-794)
Home/Family during Lockdown	• I was at home. I was with my grandfather, so we moved my grandfather up from Durban for lockdown. Then I was with my mother, my brother, and my father. (102-104) • that also took a bit of adjusting, because I mean he was living on his own in Durban and we were living without him, but we got used to. He needed to be taken care of it quite a bit, so we were there for him, and we did everything for him. (109-112) • (Parents work from home) they tried but because of the lockdown that they couldn't really get many cliental so they… they real estate agents. (114-117) • everyone pulled their, everyone pulled their weight at home, everyone cooked, everyone cleaned, everyone did what they need to do (188-190)
Stressful situation of 2020	• I would say prelims (642) • we were just getting into everything, and I think studying for that and trying to make up for the work that we did in lockdown that we couldn't really graft because it was online (655-647) • I think going into class after, after school finished and having extra lessons on a Saturday and Sunday at school. So, I think coping… like preparing for prelim was the hardest part and the most stressful part. (649-652) • I think it's so stressful like studying and aiming to do well in the prelims because it did kind quite a large sum towards final, the final mark that we got. (697-699) • I think also the adjustment to the way we were writing exams… (704-705)

Transcript Participant 4

Codes	Extracts
Returning to school (Regulations/ changes)	• they had to cram everything in three weeks for the kids who didn't and then then we started new work after because there was still more work to be done. (120-123) • we still had a week of revision (126) • The one thing they teach you throughout high school is done cram at the last minute. Only for us to have to cram at the last minute (337-339) • I think teachers were also on edge and then you know you can sense when your teachers are on edge because now the whole classroom is on edge (346-348) • It was very different (747) • the mask thing... I was fine with the masks, I still am. The only issue is that I wear glasses (747-749) • Not everyone returned (776) • You sanitise as you enter the school, they screen you, you at school for like a normal amount (780-782) • You just wear your mask (783) • As the prefects will you check for social distancing, (785) • Then for registration when you get into your, your register class you get screened, like they take your temperature (787-789)

	• our school did fumigate every single day (806) it's a lot of work to cram in the beginning (837) • When you sit on the field with them you have to sit socially distanced from each other (871-873) • they drew blocks on the field. (874)
Schools reopening	
Emotions felt around returning to school	
Positive Feelings/ motivation	
Nutrition	
Structure/ routine	• but that motivation was just depleting so much. I think, it was a struggle because I went through like 11 years of routine, to go through to like... (31-33) • In May it was easier for me to keep the routine. I woke up everyday, had breakfast everyday, I like showered everyday, change clothes everyday you know... I was convinced that getting ready would be like the way to start the day. (43-46) • ... Especially in winter. I would sleep and warm clothes so waking up and I must change out of warm clothes ....like I slept in sweatpants, I'm going to wake up with just wear my sweatpants anyway... So, it just became a little bit messy in terms of a routine... There was no routine. (53-57) • the routine thing, definitely harder to deal with because it's hard to like... When you're not being told ok the bell has rung, now I have to go to this class and do the work, you know it's harder, to tell yourself okay, let me do the work now (823-826) • (best thing about returning to school) I think the routine. I'd say seeing people and part of it was, but I think more the routine because I didn't have much. Like I had it then, I lost it and I had it, you know, so it was more consistent when we got to school. (949-952)
Work/School- Home Balance	• It's now stressful (268) • that's one thing I've been complaining about is my room that was a nice place to relax you know... Like yes, I studied but that was more like I'd sit at my table which is a corner of my room. The rest of my room was like you know, a nice place but now because I'm there the whole time I get bored of sitting on my table, so then I sit on my bed and in my bed I have my laptop, so my bed is so stressful place too and then I sit on my couch and then my couch is also a stressful place... You know yeah... So I think if anything it just made me a lot more like anxious, just being in my room made me anxious (270-279)
Schools Closing	
Effects of the pandemic on schools/ education	• I think what also didn't help is, a lot of our teachers also... They weren't prepared for it, so a lot of them just took it as a Oh well we won't do anything with you for the first few months because you probably going to come back to school soon (57-61) • a lot of the teachers who didn't do much in the beginning started just like hitting us with like a lot of hard work... Yeah I think that's what made it a lot more stressful. (67-70) • Like I know the higher you get in high school the less teachers spoon feed you but this time they completely just hands off... Completely was up to you, but what they did do is when you went back to school, eventually went back to school they crammed everything in like 3 weeks (110-114)
Dropout rate	

Support provided by school/ department during the pandemic	• I think they made it (extra lessons) compulsory for the kids who were failing. (897)
Negative Feelings	
Online Learning/ teaching	• the work they were giving us was on Google classrooms we used like Google Classroom, zoom for lessons and stuff (72-74) • We didn't at that stage (online learning) and we didn't in the beginning I think like two weeks in that's in math started, or like a month (560) • we started with Google Classroom, but math was on zoom (608) • Then towards I think may... June they started posting videos. Our teachers would like to make recorded lectures and posted it on google classroom (626-628) • upload links to like YouTube channels that taught the topic (630)
Access to Online Learning/ teaching	• but obviously you weren't getting data from school... It's a public school (74-75) • Not every kid has... (75) access... Like they don't have like a laptop or like a phone that has enough storage for all of these things. (77-78) • Like everyone has a smartphone but like to download all the information, the storage(79-80) • The teachers try to tell us do the work it's... Like you have to do it but they also kind of made it clear like because it's a public school we are aware that everyone doesn't have data and stuff you know... (88-91) • I was lucky in terms of I had wi-fi, I have the laptop, I had my phone, I have a printer, i... You know, I was able to do things (118-120)
Mental Health- feelings of stress/ anxiety	• It amplified my anxiety a lot. I think even my depression just spiralled down, which really sucks because I worked really hard to get out of that space just for lockdown to happen and I started spiralling back down again (290-293) • I was seeing a psychologist until grade 10, grade 9 and grade 10. I was in the hospital in grade 9. (296-297) • I did start seeing the school councillor, I think until the end of the matric until before prelims. She did help me a lot I had really bad anxiety at school. (313-315) • Then there were times where it would mess with my sleeping schedule. I just can't sleep, like I have the worst insomnia, I couldn't sleep. (364-366) • ... I kept losing motivation, like the whole of last year, so that wasn't just like motivation in school it was just like motivation to... Workout, it would be motivation to get out of bed, to like do, anything, sometimes I wouldn't even do my, my, bible plans (382-386) • every year you start off school with a lot of motivation and then you know it depletes as the year, but I think because of covid because of lockdown because of everything it depleted a lot faster, than it would of (712-715) • I must say I did suffer a lot with fatigue in matric. I had to take like baraka boost every day because our school is huge and some of my classrooms were on the other side. (957-959) • My anxiety was heighted a lot, that was mostly because of like the… the school you know, having to cram a lot, having to not do as much and then do a lot. Just not knowing when we were going back to school at all, especially since we were told the dates and then they postponed the dates and then you know… it was a lot. (1135-1139) • Even kids who didn't have anxiety, ended up getting anxiety. (1141)

	• my anxiety heightened, and I think my depression definitely just made me spiral because of like, the home situation, which was caused by lockdown (1142-1144) • I can't sleep. I constantly feel anxious, (1166) • In my chest. Like sometimes I get so anxious, I feel like throwing up so, then I'd feel it and I know. Like I didn't eat anything weird (1169-1170) • Depression you feel it, you just you feel like you're just drowning you know… like there's something pushing you. (1174-1176)
MH Services	• the counsellors are there. You can book a session with, but we have two (1097-1098) • I think they did prioritise the matrics, but they never made it like super clear. Like they did, I think a few times like announce it on the… the communicator. (1102-1104) • Like if you guys need help, you can talk to the councillors and stuff, it was never addressed to the matrics, it was addressed to the whole school. (1104-1106)
Final Exams	
Final Exams Protocols	
Coping mechanisms/ support	• I try everything. I used to do breathing exercises...they don't always help (352-353) • Then id listen to sleep meditations (366) • so I can do like yoga in my room (378) • YouTube video like a ted talk and then I feel like, you... You need to get your life together (396-397) • venting to my boyfriend (399) • No one (Support). My mom is not the supportive type. (544) • Shame bless his soul, he (boyfriend) is so supportive (560) • my friends I have I think they would definitely be there for me if I spoke to them about it (576-577) • I did try journaling (1232) • Like I enjoy yoga I still do yoga, so there. Sometimes it's just talking about it, sometimes I like write poems (1237-1238)
Well-being	
Effects of pandemic	• I think covid itself didn't impact like... I didn't feel as badly impacted by covid itself... I think the consequences of it (125-126) • Some of my teachers did get it (Covid) (173) • impacts more this year (254) • I think another reason I wasn't as impacted was a part of him (step-father) because he is on the wealthy side (508-509)
adapting/ Adjusting	
Sport	• I didn't do sports, I did public speaking (853) • they cancelled all extra murals... For our year (856) • You couldn't do like the extra stuff, you know, like let's be real, school isn't the fun part, it's all the other stuff that makes it fun. (866-868)
Expectations	• We don't have a farewell which sucks (697) • No, we did (have matric dance). But we usually have a matric farewell where we go to Bella Bella for the day. (700-701) • we did have our matric dance before finals (706) • there's just like a curfew...you know... You had to leave, I think it ended at 9:30 and wear masks (707-708) • very disappointing (710) • I could have done so much better with like my marks, if that motivation (710-711)

Adapt teaching/ learning strategies	• Slightly, I'm a visual learner but I also... I make notes and my notes have to be colourful. I do calligraphy to make them look pretty, I don't draw pictures though, couldn't be bothered, that's a lot of effort. I write out everything, like my notes are a lot and then I highlight everything, I colour coded it, it's a lot of colour and then I walk around while I read my notes to learn it. I feel like I learn faster when I'm walking and reading. (917-923)
Describe school year	• Being the beginning of matric I was overwhelmed in general because you know everyone goes on about oh matric, last year high school (16-18) • disappointing, it wasn't the worst was pretty disappointing. I think we all excited for it we expected more like, we knew the stress, but we also need the parks, which we didn't get. (1258-1260)
Feelings- Disconnected/ Isolated/ Lonely/ Social interactions	
Lessons learnt / positive outcome	• Yes, definitely (varsity is easier). I think some kids are really struggling. I speak to my friends who say that they struggle because a lot of them… I told you, a lot of them didn't do the online work, they took it as a six month holiday. (1042-1044) • I think all the anxiety of doing things last minute and cramming definitely helped in uni because you don't get a month before for anything, you get like two days and then suddenly something is due. So, it's like, I'm fine with that now, I'm dealing with the pressure now, it's so much easier to deal with the pressure of like deadlines being two days. (1050-1055) • that I can depend on my relationship a lot (1273-1274) • he was just there, and I think, I definitely relearned what love is supposed to be. (1278-1279)
Home/Family during Lockdown	• lockdown meant that my parents have to stay at home also which... Yeah means we had to stay at home, deal with my step dad it was just it was a lot like that, but it wasn't exactly that covid itself hit me. (154-157) • my mom works from home from the time covid started as she has diabetes, hypertension, cholesterol issues, she's asthmatic so her workplace obviously gave her the option to work from home (193-196) • she got the vaccine obviously her immune system dropped and just didn't work out, she was hospitalised in ICU on a ventilator. (213-215) • My step dad was also put in hospital at the same time my mom was in hospital (221-223) • last year my biggest issue was like oh I don't wanna stay at home now because now we have to deal with my stepdad (254-256) • You are all stuck in the same environment, you can get irritated easily (259-260) • My helper lives on the property, so she was also there. My uncle also lives on the property but we don't see him. (420-421) • we had a dog but we have to give him back to SPCA cause of my step dad (427-428) • My step dad that's the reason I stayed in my room the whole time. I didn't wanna deal with him at all it's stressful in general. Him and my mom fought a lot, and we were scared that again he was gonna get abusive. (475-479) • I think the environment (difficulty during lockdown) at home you know it's like I was the only one at home. So even if I did try to work, my mom works from home she's on the phone a lot, she's really loud. My sister had to do school work, you know, if she screamed we all heard it, she didn't like it if she cried, our house echoes a lot. (827-832)
Stressful situation of 2020	• Prelims (992)

| | • I think in general, I'm the type of person who… I tend to blank out and little bit when it comes to writing a test. If you look at all of my workbooks, I will have everything correct and then I write a test and I forget how to do things. (994-997) |
| | • he lack of sleep, the extra studying, I think just the year in general was stressful, so you just under more stress, like a lot more stress. Like prelims are stressful we know that, but now had prelim stress, the year stress, you had cramming stress (1005-1009) |

Transcript Participant 5

Codes	Extracts
Returning to school (Regulations/ changes)	• But as soon as we got to… back to school and we were in person, the classes were really manageable. They tried to like to make sure we covered all the work again. So, you basically did it all in lockdown and them just reexplained it briefly when we got back to school to make sure we understood. And I would say that was helpful. (210-215)
	• be in a mask all the time (264)
	• At school we had these little blocks that we had to sit in, and we couldn't like to go outside of those blocks during break times. (265-2677)
	• (Best part) Definitely seeing my friends and the teachers really helps um…because I sort of learn the best way, for me, is to like listen to what other people have to say about the content, I'm a very like auditory learner, so when they explaining I understand the work a lot better than if I was just on my own, so that was definitely the best part. (353-358)
Schools reopening	
Emotions felt around returning to school	• It was scary (260)
	• strange and unconfutable (264)
	• I was (scared), because my mom has an auto immune condition, so it was well... Freighting for me to think, o if I get covid and bring it home, you know… what is going to happen to my mom (277-279)
Positive Feelings/ motivation	
Nutrition	
Structure/ routine	• I think September came around when Prelims started coming up, that wasn't too bad I started getting back into a routine and getting used to the new sort of teaching style that was given to us. (61-64)
	• I found it quite difficult because at first (123)
	• there is no routine that I need to follow. And I think that was the most difficult part, not having a routine for me. (126-127)
	• Yeah, because I would work 12 hours one day and then an hour the next day and that's not really the best, well not the best for me. I find that I thrive and work better in a situation where there are strict routines that I can follow (128-131)
	• And by the time I got to school and had sort of adapted to a new routine at home and having to adapted at school. I think I never really like to proceed the work in between, it was sort of just like; new routine, new rules, and guidelines that we have to, follow so let me just make sure I am following those as they are the most important ones at the moment, and I will think about academic work a bit later. (293-300)
Work/School- Home Balance	• But now for me, I was in my room, where I would usually relax and destress, I'm now stressing and trying to get work done in the same sort of setting and that was quite difficult for me to separate the two, because you are like aaah,

	I can just work whenever I want to and then you just start working too much and overworking yourself, which isn't very, great as well. (48-54) • I am like really grateful that I was able to have a home that I was comfortable, and I could at least work and there was a good Wi-Fi connection and all of that. (103-105) • we sort of had an agreement that we were going to eat dinner together every night and which was really helpful in creating that break. (151-153) • But the challenge was trying to fit all these different schedules into one sort of like family plan, I guess. (343-346)
Schools Closing	• I was a bit shocked, I think also a bit of denial, just I couldn't believe like that was actually happening. I was like… okay maybe its just an extra holiday that we can have, and you can sort of relax. I didn't really think much of it, I thought it was just going to be 2 weeks and then we would be back to normal, but obviously that wasn't the case. (78-83)
Effects of the pandemic on schools/ education	
Dropout rate	
Support provided by school/ department during the pandemic	
Negative Feelings	
Online Learning/ teaching	• And I found it quite difficult as, I was on the computer every single day for like 2 months. (44-45) • in the beginning we were all still trying to find out ways to make online work for us. We used like Google classroom to sort of get going. (189-200) • This was bran new for us. (220) • It was basically just you go on Google classroom, and they give you the work you need to do and you basically just work through it yourself using the textbook. (224-226)
Access to Online Learning/ teaching	• I did have like resources such as Wi-Fi and you know a room where I could work, and I had my own laptop (136-138) • There were a few that just didn't, just didn't have the time or the Wi-Fi to actually access the work. (238-239) • them went back to their grandparents' houses in KZN or the Eastern cape or Western cape and there they were on farms (240-241)
Mental Health- feelings of stress/ anxiety	• I also got the sense of being trapped, I guess everyone felt that was of being confined to the space (176-177) • I would say, when it was lockdown, level 5 I think it was June… May… that time, that was really difficult for me mentally just because I was just, I didn't know what to do, and how to experience and how process all of this, so I kind of just went into this episode of like, nothing is going to get better and its gana, you know… be like this forever. (307-312) • But, then when we went to school it was kind of like okay, this is a new sort of thing that's, its showing its going to get better. And that's like sort of how my mental health improved but also through like making routines and keeping contact with my friends and family, that defiantly helped. (312-317) • I am generally an anxious person (493) • I definitely do think that there was an increase of anxiety (499-500) • It was mainly the pressure because since Grade 11 everyone is telling me final exams are… you need to make sure you ace those final exams in order to get into university and in order to get into the degree you want. (503-506) • I do think it (my mental health) was affected but in the negative way, yes, but also in a huge positive way because I have all these tools to help me through the negative times now. (528-530)

	• I think at that time I felt at my lowest and now I have all these tools and ways to help me get out of that and know that I have gone through that now, and if there is a point where, I do feel at my lowest point again, I know that I can get through it because I have had this experience. (532-537) • (emotions felt most the time) stress and excitement. It was difficult to differentiate the two. You are excited that you are going back to school, but you are also stressed that you know, there is this pandemic that is still happening while you are going back to school. And excited that you are finishing matric but stressed that you have to write all these exams, so it was kind of hand in hand. (553-559)
MH Services	
Final Exams	
Final Exams Protocols	
Coping mechanisms/ support	• my parents were my main support (136) • I spoke to a lot of my friends. I tried to read a lot of books to get used to the idea of being in this room all the time. (139-140) • I was like, ok let me plant some vegetables and get active in the garden because I am going to be spending a lot of time here so I might as well just make it ideal and a place that I want to be. So that was also what I used to cope. (184-187) • like definitely a routine and getting outside and getting exercise, definitely having conversations with my friends over the phone and video calling family members. (323-326) • And just speaking to people about their experiences as well and how they felt over that period, I think it definitely made me feel less alone, in like to hear this isn't going to get better (327-330) • And looking for little millstones, like oh, if I finish this chapter, you know, then that work is less and then I'll have more time to do things that I really enjoy. (330-332) • I mainly just made sure that I studies and took a lot of breaks in between, to just keep focused (514-515)
Well-being	• those were the kind of happy moments, when you got to spend time with the family and sort of like decompress and relax with them. (156-158) • I would defiantly say nutrition, exercise, keeping those in a healthy range was also very helpful. (576-577) • defiantly focusing on friends and family and making sure that I maintained those relationships (577-579) • focusing on what I could control which was how I felt and what I was doing every day, that defiantly helped (579-581) • just being very careful and cautious about how much media and social media I ingested because, yeah… if you are always just sitting on your phone you know, reading all these doomsday news articles, it can be quite daunting. (581-584)
Effects of pandemic	• initially I thought oh what a nice long holiday it's going to be to relax and watch Netflix and all of that, but then as you get into it you start realising like, I have to be in charge of my own learning and my own schoolwork and that was very scary for me. (38-41) • I know a lot of people did lose their jobs during Covid (102-103) • we all didn't have covid, yeah, we didn't get covid and luckily all my parents still kept their jobs. (144-145)
adapting/ Adjusting	• there was not really… like time, well for me, there wasn't really time to sort of… respond to, well not respond, I'd rather say actually process, all the

	information that was, you know happening all the time, well with covid everything was always constantly changing. (289-293)
Sport	• I played a lot of hockey (161) • I did cultural actives as well as sporting activities (162) • it was also that transition of going, doing something every afternoon to doing like nothing and just academics. That was also a quite a difficult transition. (163-165)
Expectations	• Um... So, in the beginning it was very exciting (26) • I am glad that I got to experience those things before lockdown happened. (32-33) • we didn't have a matric farewell and a matric dance (360-361) • disappointing in a way that it didn't meet my expectation (562-563) • overall I would say that I enjoyed my matric year. (566-567)
Adapt teaching/ learning strategies	• I am a very like auditory learner so when people explain things to me, I understand it a lot better, if I read it. (420-422) • I had to adapt that to sort of watching a lot of YouTube videos in the content. (422-423) • a lot of YouTube videos, a lot of meetings, like zoom meetings with my friends where they would explain stuff to me (425-426) • but I am defiantly grateful for YouTube because it defiantly helped me (438-439)
Describe school year	• Challenging and growth (403) • Well challenging because there is this big obstacle in the middle of your matric year, when you are facing a pandemic and you still have to get this, get through this obstacle in order to get your matric certificate (406-409) • And growth, because through all these challenges you become a better person, you grow through these challenges. (409-411)
Feelings- Disconnected/ Isolated/ Lonely/ Social interactions	• If you compare that to Grade 11 or even the beginning of matric where… there was a lot of social interaction involved with learning and it was a very specific, setting where you learnt. (45-48) • very difficult because I couldn't interact with my friends in the way that I used to, yeah, it was a very novel thing for I think, all of us,(55-57)
Lessons learnt / positive outcome	• looking back, I really did grow in like discipline, and adaptability, and also growth in terms of my relationships, with my parents, with my friends, with my family. (411-413) • (online learning benefits you this year?) Well considering that this year is completely online, and I have to do the same thing that I had to do in lockdown, level 5. It definitely helped me do that a lot better, so researching a topic that I don't understand and um... Yeah it has defiantly helped me for that. But I also think it has just helped me in general, if I do find something that I am curious about to just research the topic and you know, there are a whole lot of resources on the internet that can answer that questions you just have to find it and sort through all the information. (455-463) • the generation that "we can get through anything", we got through the covid pandemic, in our matric year… we are good! (540-542) • it made us a lot stronger (549) • Just be grateful for all the experiences that you had and will have I guess, you know, a lot of gratitude, a lot of being mindful and present of your situation, and about, yeah, being present with your friends and families because there was time when none of this, none of the family gatherings, or none of the friendship gatherings were even allowed so, just appreciate those moment with other people. (598-604)

Home/Family during Lockdown	• so I was with my dad and stepmom, which was different because during like the semester and school times I usually stayed with my mom and step dad. (87-89)
	• I stayed with my dad and stepmom this time during lockdown. And that was also a different dynamic because I was so used to being home with my mom and stepdad in that sort of environment. (91-94)
	• Earlier we were all locked down in the home together and my stepmom, so she is an optometrist and she found it also difficult to just be at home because like she didn't know if like her business is going to be okay and all of that and my dad was also working from home. (94-98)
	• And we didn't really spend much time together as I thought we would, we were just kind of like in our own corners of the house (98-100)
	• it was defiantly different just being with my dad and stepmom verses being at home with my mom and stepdad. (105-107)
	• I think we also did like a lot of outdoor activities together. So, We would like exercise in the garden and take walks, walk our dogs. Yeah, those were the kind of happy moments, when you got to spend time with the family and sort of like decompress and relax with them. (154-158)
	• Definitely, the moments when I got to spend time with my family, those were sort of my highlights. Also being outdoors and I think speaking to my friends about, like their days and what they were getting up to. (335-338)
Stressful situation of 2020	• Final exams were really stressful (468)
	• There was also, the part of covid where, if you had covid you couldn't write that exam and you had to have a delayed exam I think, by 2 weeks, I'm not sure what the date was. So that was scary because if I had covid during that time, I wouldn't get my matric certificate because of something that's out of my control and that is very difficult. (468-474)
	• It was very stressful as well because you were sort of extra cautious when it came to everything or any social gathering, you just made sure you were so… very, very careful. (474-476)
	• it was also difficult because my stepmother was in her third trimester of pregnancy. (476-478)

Annexure J: Ethical clearance letter

Ethics Committee

12 August 2021

Mrs NF Nowicki

Dear Mrs NF Nowicki

REFERENCE: EDU060/21

We received proof that you have met the conditions outlined. Your application is thus **approved**, and you may start with your fieldwork. The decision covers the entire research process, until completion of the study report, and not only the days that data will be collected. The approval is valid for two years for a Masters and three for Doctorate.

The approval by the Ethics Committee is subject to the following conditions being met:
1. The research will be conducted as stipulated on the application form submitted to the Ethics Committee with the supporting documents.
2. Proof of how you adhered to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy for research must be submitted where relevant.
3. In the event that the research protocol changed for whatever reason the Ethics Committee must be notified thereof by submitting an amendment to the application (Section E), together with all the supporting documentation that will be used for data collection namely; questionnaires, interview schedules and observation schedules, for further approval before data can be collected. Non-compliance implies that the Committee's approval is null and void. The changes may include the following but are not limited to:
   - Change of investigator,
   - Research methods any other aspect therefore and,
   - Participants.

The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education does not accept any liability for research misconduct, of whatsoever nature, committed by the researcher(s) in the implementation of the approved protocol.
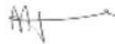
Upon completion of your research you will need to submit the following documentations to the Ethics Committee for your

Clearance Certificate:
   - Integrated Declaration Form (Form D08),
   - Initial Ethics Approval letter and,
   - Approval of Title.

Please quote the reference number EDU060/21 in any communication with the Ethics Committee.

Best wishes

Prof Funke Omidire
Chair: Ethics Committee
Faculty of Education

Annexure K: Participants' Informed Consent Letter

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PARTICIPANT'S INFORMATION & INFORMED

CONSENT DOCUMENT

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STUDY TITLE: The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of matric learners

Principal Investigator: Nikita Nowicki

Institution: University of Pretoria

DAYTIME AND AFTER-HOURS TELEPHONE NUMBER(S):

Daytime and after hours number: 076 932 5605

DATE AND TIME OF FIRST INFORMED CONSENT DISCUSSION:

	October	2021		
Date	**month**	**year**		**Time**

Dear Prospective Participant

1) INTRODUCTION

This research study is a requirement of the master's degree program at the University of Pretoria. The information in this document is to help you to decide if you would like to participate. Before you agree to take part in this study you should fully understand what is involved. If you have any questions, which are not fully explained in this document, do not hesitate to ask the researcher. You should not agree to take part unless you are completely happy about all the procedures involved.

2) THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

This study aims to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of matric learners. The results of this study will provide information on the effects of Covid-19 and the support that educational psychologists could provide.

3) EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES AND WHAT WILL BE EXPECTED FROM PARTICIPANTS.

This study involves an interview where you will answer questions regarding your experience during the Covid-19 lockdown. The interview will be between 45mintues and an hour.

4) POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED

There are no medical risks associated with the study. The only possible discomfort involved could be sharing your experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. If any discomfort arises, free counselling services will be provided.

5) POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY

Although you may not benefit directly, the study results may help us to improve the support for individuals who have had a similar experience to you. It will also assist educational psychologists with information and guidance to provide to caregivers and teachers for their children and students.

6) COMPENSATION

You will not be paid to take part in the study. There are no costs involved for you to be part of the study.

7) YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or stop at any time without stating any reason. Your withdrawal will not affect your access to other medical care.

8) ETHICS APPROVAL

This Protocol was submitted to the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, the University of Pretoria, telephone numbers 012 356 3084 / 012 356 3085 and written approval has been granted by that committee. The study has been structured in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (last update: October 2013), which deals with the recommendations guiding doctors in biomedical research involving humans/subjects. A copy of the Declaration may be obtained from the investigator should you wish to review it.

9) INFORMATION

If you have any questions concerning this study, you should contact:

Nikita Nowicki   Cell: 076 932 5605 Email: ghisleninikita@gmail.com

10) CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained during the course of this study will be regarded as confidential. Each participant that is taking part will be provided with an alphanumeric coded number e.g. A001. This will ensure the confidentiality of the information so collected. Only the researcher will be able to identify you as a participant. Results will be published or presented in such a fashion that patients remain unidentifiable. The hard copies of all your records will be kept in a locked facility in Prof. Salome Human-Vogel's office at The University of Pretoria.

11) DATA USAGE

We also would like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria and, where relevant, project funders. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

12)   CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

• I confirm that the person requesting my consent to take part in this study has told me about the nature, the process, any risks or discomforts, and the benefits of the study.

• I have also received, read, and understood the above-written information about the study.

• have had adequate time to ask questions and I have no objections to participating in this study.

• I am aware that the information obtained in the study, including personal details, will be anonymously processed, and presented in the reporting of results.

• I understand that I will not be penalised in any way should I wish to discontinue the study and that withdrawal will not affect my further treatments.

• I am participating willingly.

• I have received a signed copy of this informed consent agreement.

_____   _____

Participant's name (Please print)   Date

_____   _____

Participant's signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's name (Please print)   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's signature   Date