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***Impact of COVID-19 on social policy:  
a literature review in the social  
and human sciences***

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## *Abstract*

COVID-19 has paralysed many countries' social and economic lives. COVID-19 has pushed the world towards drastic social distancing and sterilisation measures to limit the spread and impact of the infection. However, it remains unclear what the long-term physical, psychological, socio-economic, and political decisions will be and their consequences. Scientists today have a great responsibility to study this period. Therefore, expert data contributes to the individual and collective development of citizens. The analytical method used in this study involved a theoretical analysis of publications on social and human sciences from the Scopus database, mainly focusing on the year 2020, to develop a framework for understanding the societal repercussions of the pandemic. The study defines a wide range of social consequences and effects of COVID-19, shows the impact pandemic on education in the context of social policy, establishes the socio-political and economic consequences of COVID-19, and substantiates psychological reactions to COVID-19. A review of the literature can help determine the impact of COVID-19 on social policy. Based on the analysis of the papers, it can be concluded that COVID-19 has increased inequality, widened the gap between the rich and the poor, and threatened the stability of society in low-income countries.

**Keywords:** social consequences, COVID-19, pandemic, social and human sciences, social effects

## *Introduction*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the consequences of COVID-19 on social policy and to emphasise the significance of moving beyond the existing state of the knowledge in this subject. By examining existing literature in the social and human sciences and identifying research gaps, we can uncover new insights and propose innovative solutions to address the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The society's citizens experienced widespread panic at the start of the quarantine. There are four causes for the occurrence of mass panic: individual and psychological, physiological, socio-situational as well as political-ideological conditions (Osadchenko et al., 2020). According to Loginov's (2020) research, the majority of people recognised the COVID-19 outbreak as a hazard and changed their behaviour to reduce any risks. The preconditions for distrust during the crisis (quarantine) were the communication gap (contradictions in the information space, misunderstanding of the decisions made by the authorities); social contract crisis (a sense of social injustice; accumulated experience of unjustified expectations); as well as polarisation in social networks, and the contradiction of eyewitness experiences to the official agenda (Makusheva & Nesitik, 2020, p. 444).

In our opinion, it is very important to know the experience of combating the Ebola and Zika viruses (Southwell et al., 2020). The experience of dealing with viruses demonstrates the critical importance of addressing problems within communities directly and involving people. The similarities between COVID-19 and outbreaks of Ebo-

la and Zika viruses highlight the best practices for responding to fast-growing epidemics, closely related to the experience of fighting.

Higher education institutions are facing unprecedented difficulties as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kruse et al., 2020). The closure of sports centres and suspension of training and competitions caused by COVID-19 led to a significant decrease in physical activity (Luna et al., 2020). The spread of coronavirus has put an end to the professional and amateur football championships (Carin & Andreff, 2020). Agriculture has also suffered due to the lockdown caused by COVID-19 (Bhooshan & Kumar, 2020). For violation of the quarantine regime, criminal liability was provided (Lemeshko et al., 2020). In many countries, for violation of sanitary and epidemiological rules, punishment has been provided from a fine to a restriction of freedom.

The problems of high levels of transmission of the virus, reduction of related illnesses and deaths, and mitigation of the economic impact of a pandemic cannot be solved only by a single strategy. Evidence-based strategies are needed at the individual and community level (Honein et al., 2020). Evidence-based strategies will help overcome the obstacles caused by the pandemic and effectively build the future lives of members of society.

In a literature review, Harapan et al. (2020) examine the causative agent, pathogenesis and immune responses, epidemiology, diagnosis, treatment and management of the disease, control, and prevention strategies. Mediawati, Susanto, and Nurahmah (2020) are investigating how viruses spread based on the results of research that has been conducted. The epidemiology, clinical characteristics, diagnosis, and therapy of COVID-19 are identified through a systematic evaluation of the available information (Ghomi et al., 2020). Information on the effects of the new coronavirus infection COVID-19 on women's health is available in the review of the literature by Adamyan, Aznaurova, and Filippov (2020). In a study by Liguoro et al. (2020), the scholars conducted a systematic review of the main clinical characteristics and outcomes of infections in paediatric age groups. In a systematic review of the literature, Rajendran et al. (2020) identified threats to the human era.

In fact, COVID-19 is not only a medical research object but also a social research object (Apostolidis et al., 2020). Ruiz-Real, Nievas-Soriano, and Uribe-Toril (2020) analysed the main keywords of COVID-19 scientific research by subject area. As seen in the study, social sciences (6.07%) and arts and humanities (1.08%) played an important role in research on COVID-19.

A study undertaken by the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences can be considered thought leadership in the context of pandemics (Halamska, 2020). Many of the primary research papers carried out by Polish scientists during the pandemic are particularly important. For example, in a study in which Polish university students participated, the correlation between physical activity and fear of COVID-19 was determined (Kuśnierz et al., 2021). Kołota and Głąbska (2021) argue that e-learning supports an increase in diet and time intensification among Polish youth. Sus and Świątalska's (2021) paper investigates how the Polish Public Prosecutor's Office responded to the COVID-19 crisis, taking strategic and operational actions to halt both the virus's spread and criminal activity in Poland, while also exploring the relationship between opportunity and crisis in this emer-

gency situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted urban tourism and drastically curtailed tourist arrivals both globally and in Poland, with domestic urban tourism having the ability to play a critical part in the industry's recovery, despite infections being more common in cities than in rural areas. The study discovered that tourists' behaviour and decisions were not significantly different from those prior to the pandemic (Józefowicz, 2021). In a study that investigates how social capital influences the infection rate of COVID-19 in Poland, it is revealed that "political leaning" is negatively related to the infection rate, while structural capital has a positive effect on reducing the epidemic, and relational social capital leads to higher morbidity rates (Markowska-Przybyła & Grzeškowiak, 2022). This provides significant information for public health authorities.

According to the comments above, this study tried to structure the flow of scientific publications in the social and human sciences and identified interesting patterns in it. During the literature review, we noticed a lot of research into the diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19, the impact of COVID-19 on education, opinions on the socio-political as well as economic consequences of COVID-19, and psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic (see: Table 1). These fundamental issues, in our opinion, are crucial for social policy.

**Table 1.** Study selection and characteristics

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Main issues</b>
Diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19	social inequality social isolation restrictions in all spheres of social life harmful effects on society's most vulnerable groups anxiety, stressful situations, and fear
Impact of COVID-19 on education	distance learning adaptation of students to distance learning virtual space mental health problems of university students changing paradigms of higher education
Socio-political, economic consequences of COVID-19	inequalities, social inequality democratic capacities common features of crises funny images on the Internet and memes communication issues
Psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic	mental health anxiety, depression symptoms and post-traumatic stress disorder isolation social distancing suicides

We systematised the researched literature and divided it into the following groups by their subjects:

1. **Social issues:** social inequality, restriction in all spheres of social life, anxiety, stressful situations, and fear are considered social consequences and effects of COVID-19 (six sources), with one source drawing attention specifically to social isolation; harmful effects on the most vulnerable groups in society (three);
2. **Health and learning:** examination of mental health of university students (six studies); distance learning and adaptation of students to distance learning (four studies); virtual space (three); and changing paradigms of higher education (three);
3. **Inequality, communication, and crises:** problems of inequality (including social) (four sources); common features of crises (four); communication issues (four); democratic capacities (three); funny images on the internet and memes (two);
4. **Psychological reactions:** social distancing (seven); anxiety, depression symptoms, and post-traumatic stress (five); suicide (three); mental health from psychological perspective (two)<sup>2</sup>.

Spatial differentiation is noticed in social phenomena during COVID-19. The pandemic's social consequences are primarily felt in cities, where there is a growing socio-economic stratification. Social isolation can exacerbate the city's socioeconomic inequality and contribute to the escalation of different forms of protest. There are differences in countries, between rural and urban areas, and among different population groups in terms of the pandemic's social consequences and effects. Vulnerable communities, such as the elderly, disabled individuals, orphans, low-income individuals, and homeless citizens, have been particularly affected by the pandemic. The impact on well-being, physical health, quality of life, attitudes toward prevention, and anxiety levels can vary based on levels of education and gender inequality in diverse regions. Additionally, different countries have implemented various measures to address the pandemic's social effects, including support for small and medium-sized firms, social benefits, tax breaks, and employment assistance. These measures may have varying impacts on different segments of society. By considering multiple perspectives, common challenges, and unique social dynamics during the pandemic, the research can offer a comprehensive understanding of the global impact of COVID-19 on social life.

As mentioned above, with the advent of COVID-19, active research began in various fields of science. The body of research on COVID-19 is expanding quickly. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the number of materials discovered during the study for the keyword "COVID-19" in the Scopus abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature (2020, 2021, and 2022). Due to the large data flow for the keyword "COVID-19", we did not use the synonyms "coronavirus", "coronavirus diseases", "SARS-CoV-2", or pandemic.

Scientists widely use many authoritative databases in the scientific community. The purpose of the study, the type of material searched, and the topic of study all con-

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, the issue of isolation is considered in mental health, anxiety, depression symptoms, post-traumatic stress, and social distancing. It should also be highlighted that the reviewed sources on psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic discuss the problem from different angles, and they are interconnected.

tribute to the decision to use Scopus in this paper. Scopus has a number of benefits that make it a popular choice among researchers. First, it takes a multidisciplinary approach, making it particularly useful for researchers working in interdisciplinary fields. Secondly, Scopus offers robust search functionalities and advanced filtering options that allow researchers to refine their searches and access relevant literature more efficiently. Last but not least, the database provides visualisation and analytical tools that help researchers gain insights from the data.

**Table 2.** The number of materials found for the keyword “COVID-19” in 2020 (data from December 4, 2022)

№	Subject area	Publications	№	Subject area	Publications
1	medicine	57,819	15	multidisciplinary	2,008
2	social sciences	10,869	16	mathematics	1,879
3	biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology	7,759	17	economics, econometrics, and finance	1,833
4	immunology and microbiology	4,951	18	agricultural and biological sciences	1,620
5	computer science	4,883	19	physics and astronomy	1,420
6	engineering	3,797	20	decision sciences	1,217
7	nursing	3,714	21	chemistry	1,214
8	pharmacology, toxicology, and pharmaceuticals	3,686	22	energy	1,154
9	environmental science	3,415	23	materials science	932
10	psychology	2,612	24	chemical engineering	849
11	neuroscience	2,350	25	dentistry	741
12	business, management, and accounting	2,300	26	Earth and planetary sciences	658
13	arts and humanities	2,059	27	veterinary	402
14	health professions	2,023	28	undefined	4

Here, it is clear that COVID-19 is significant not only for medical science but also for social science (10,869 publications).

**Table 3.** The number of materials found for the keyword “COVID-19” in 2021 (data from December 4, 2022)

№	Subject area	Publications	№	Subject area	Publications
1	medicine	92,734	15	arts and humanities	4,638
2	social sciences	25,289	16	health professions	4,167
3	computer science	15,792	17	decision sciences	3,877
4	biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology	14,880	18	neuroscience	3,868
5	engineering	11,460	19	physics and astronomy	3,794
6	immunology and microbiology	10,896	20	agricultural and biological sciences	3,619
7	environmental science	9,721	21	chemistry	3,196
8	nursing	7,034	22	energy	3,093
9	psychology	6,605	23	chemical engineering	2,201
10	business, management, and accounting	6,503	24	materials science	2,197
11	pharmacology, toxicology, and pharmaceuticals	6,447	25	Earth and planetary sciences	2,109
12	mathematics	5,309	26	dentistry	943
13	multidisciplinary	5,266	27	veterinary	750
14	economics, econometrics, and finance	4,924	28	undefined	0

The subject areas of the publications for 2021 have not undergone any substantial modifications. Publications have increased across all disciplines. Materials in medicine are followed by social sciences (25,289 publications).

**Table 4.** The number of materials found for the keyword “COVID-19” in 2022 (data from December 4, 2022)

№	Subject area	Publications	№	Subject area	Publications
1	medicine	79,932	15	arts and humanities	4,225
2	social sciences	25,650	16	health professions	4,190
3	computer science	14,072	17	chemistry	3,460
4	biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology	13,345	18	agricultural and biological sciences	3,357
5	engineering	11,785	19	neuroscience	3,342
6	immunology and microbiology	10,868	20	decision sciences	3,284
7	environmental science	9,882	21	physics and astronomy	2,943
8	business, management, and accounting	8,172	22	energy	2,707
9	psychology	7,967	23	chemical engineering	2,267
10	nursing	6,867	24	materials science	1,997
11	pharmacology, toxicology, and pharmaceuticals	6,389	25	Earth and planetary sciences	1,716
12	economics, econometrics, and finance	5,837	26	veterinary	917
13	mathematics	4,856	27	dentistry	797
14	multidisciplinary	4,670	28	undefined	0

Of course, everyone understands that publications for 2022 have increased even more. Additionally, Scopus is already indexing publications for 2023 and even 2024 at this time. In 2023, engineering (679 publications) and computer science (644 publications) are leading so far. Following them are medicine (275 publications) and the social sciences (252 publications). We are certain that there will be noticeable changes by the end of 2023. Indeed, all four papers from 2024 were published in the Brazilian Journal of Biology under the subject area of agricultural and biological sciences.

We acknowledge that this paper does not exhaust all possible literature in the social and human sciences. As you can see, there are a lot of literature reviews. However, there are currently no systematic reviews on social and human sciences. The purpose of the study was to summarise materials on social and human sciences in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify the various impacts of the pandemic. This



literature review aims to provide information on the COVID-19 issue from a social policy perspective.

Based on this, we propose our hypotheses and research questions:

*H1:* The diverse social consequences and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have had significant impacts on various aspects of society, including mental health, social stratification, and vulnerability among different segments of the population.

*H2:* The impact of COVID-19 on education has been seen in distance learning and the mental health of students and faculty.

*H3:* The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant socio-political and economic consequences, including the exacerbation of social inequalities, challenges to democratic institutions, shifts in global economic dynamics, and the proliferation of misinformation.

*H4:* Psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic are negatively impacting stressful experiences, and social distancing has really changed social life.

*RQ1:* What are the social consequences and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, social stratification, and vulnerability among different segments of the population?

*RQ2:* What are the impacts of COVID-19 on education in the context of the learning process and the mental health of those involved?

*RQ3:* How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted socio-political and economic aspects, including social inequality, democratic institutions, global economic dynamics, and the spread of misinformation, and what are the implications for future planning and policy-making?

*RQ4:* How have the psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly, stressful experiences and changes in social life due to social distancing, affected individuals' mental well-being and overall psychological health?

New contributions made by this paper to the study of the issue: identification of diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19; finding the impact of COVID-19 on education in the context of social policy; establishing the socio-political and economic consequences of COVID-19; and substantiating psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *Data and method*

As a research method, we used a theoretical analysis of publications on social and human sciences found in the Scopus database, mainly for 2020. Since the first studies were carried out that year, the selection of the study and its characteristics have been based on these data. The theoretical analysis of publications serves as the framework for developing the pandemic's societal repercussions. The relevance of the research subject and the scope of the investigation are established by a theoretical analysis of publications (Alsaalem et al., 2022; Sheng et al., 2021; Zollanvari et al., 2020). There are several options for theoretical analysis, including: evaluating the study's applicability, the depth of the problem's scientific study, and the scientific publications that have addressed it; assessment and evaluation of earlier studies; as well as elucidation of the

problem's conceptual framework. In addition, the purpose of the theoretical review was to systematise the data collected by scientists, establish the relationship between the issues under consideration, and summarise the results of the literature review on COVID-19 from a social policy perspective.

The bibliographic method of studying scientific literature on the topic of research was designed to study these sources and then analyse them (Hill & Shapiro, 1978; Raisig, 1960). A systematic literature review was conducted using the keyword "COVID-19". The systematic review (Campbell et al., 2018; Chapman, 2021; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008) aims to determine the social consequences and effects of the pandemic. By analysing the scientific literature, the authors also employed a descriptive approach relevant to the nature of the study problem. The descriptive research method included checking and reviewing the scientific literature without affecting publication (Pajunen & Itkonen, 2019; Pence et al., 2009; Toogood & Timlin, 1996). This technique was applied to get a broad picture of the research topic.

In the paper, the structural-logical model is used to methodically identify the discovered facts. This methodology can take into account the main provisions of the problem. Methods of systematisation and structuring follow the logic of these main conclusions (Avramenko et al., 2020; Leshchuk, 2014). Additionally, the study benefited from the concepts and tenets of system analysis (Akan, 2015; Kock, 2007; Saeed, 2019; Siau et al., 2011). System analysis aids in understanding the laws and principles of the problem under consideration and identifying relationships; it helps establish links between social consequences and the effects of the pandemic. It also provided us with insight into the nature of COVID-19.

### *Diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19*

Cities are where the pandemic's social consequences are primarily felt. The analysis of the pandemic's social effects compels the examination of social exclusion regimes, as Eckardt (2020) notes. Furthermore, he contends that life in a poor family, among people of age, emigrants, and vagrants demonstrates the city's growing socioeconomic stratification. The city's socioeconomic stratification will not be weakened by social isolation. The issue may not be money in this case, but rather a person's loneliness. After all, social isolation has a significant impact on behaviour and emotional state, as well as destroying a person's consciousness. Additionally, the socioeconomic inequality of the city may contribute to the escalation of different forms of protest. Therefore, it might be claimed that social isolation exacerbates the city's social stratification.

The results of the Ohlbrecht and Jellen (2021) study show the pandemic's detrimental effects on well-being, physical health, quality of life, attitudes toward prevention, and anxiety levels. The study was conducted in Germany during the quarantine period with an online survey in which 2,009 respondents participated. The negative effects on inhabitants with low levels of education and gender inequality in accordance with the social vector are highlighted by the writers. As a result, it is possible to say that restriction is one of the pandemic's social repercussions. Limiting freedom, for instance, during a pandemic means restricting people's ability to live happily. The im-

impact of the pandemic on life quality includes being insufficient or losing one or more crucial functions. The state of the body was impacted by the poor quality of living and expensive healthcare.

Additionally, the pandemic's social consequences and effects have a significant impact on the lives of vulnerable communities (Dey & Tripathi, 2021). The authors arrived at this viewpoint based on the utilisation of secondary data, which they incorporated into their paper. The elderly were also seen as a social group that required special consideration (Zapędowska-Kling, 2022). The research methodology employed in the study primarily involves policy analysis, which includes evaluating policy outputs and outcomes, as well as normative and evaluative analysis in Poland. Therefore, it can be argued that the main socially vulnerable or unprotected segments of the population include the elderly; disabled people; orphans and children left without parental care; low-income (poor); and homeless citizens. The vulnerability of senior adults and people with disabilities is a result of their declining health, loneliness, the loss of many social ties, and their generally low standard of life. Minors' social vulnerability may be attributed to a variety of factors, including parental absence, negligent child-rearing, etc. All of these issues contribute to difficulties in realising one's professional potential, low income, and even social loneliness.

Singh (2022), in addition to the natural, material, and social outcomes of the pandemic, points to the consequences for mental health. Being South African herself, she draws conclusions about the diverse social consequences and effects of the pandemic based on the experiences of Africa, Australia, Europe, and India, and provides valuable insights into the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. By analysing and comparing the experiences of these different regions, scientists can reach broader conclusions about the social implications of the pandemic across various contexts.

Thus, it can be argued that anxiety, stress, and fear all have an impact on people's mental states. Anxiety is one of the most common emotions experienced by people in critical situations. Anxiety describes a sense of unease and a sense of impending doom. Pandemic-induced anxiety might arise for a variety of reasons: anxiety about getting unwell (oneself or their loved ones); fear about declining economic health (of oneself, possibly of the nation); not enough money, lack of income; stress brought on by the unpredictability of the circumstance and the carelessness of fellow citizens; as well as online learning, etc. Food, sleep, and work have all been impacted by stress as a result of the pandemic. For citizens, social isolation, in particular, was a major test. People's ability to move was restricted significantly as a result of the lockdown, which resulted in a decrease in their level of activity. More distressing than the coronavirus itself was fear during a pandemic. The most concerning fears, in our opinion, are the fear of contracting COVID-19, job loss, job opportunities, and lack of civil liberties.

The book, edited by Schweiger (2022), evaluates the pandemic's social consequences and measures to stop it. It was written by a group of scientists forming an international and interdisciplinary team, who come from Austria, Brazil, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, India, Ireland, Malaysia, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the USA. In an economic setting, this book highlights the social consequences and effects of the pandemic on the vulnerable and helpless segments of society. The authors contend that multiple social obstacles are a strategy for containing the pandemic's effects. Ad-

ditionally, the authors claim that the significant material damage and human casualties would have long-term social consequences. Different steps were taken to slow down and contain the pandemic's social effects. In many countries, particular focus was placed on: a pause in employment or transition to remote work; providing small and medium-sized firms with support and assistance; social benefits during the pandemic; short-term tax breaks; and postponing tax filing, etc. There was nothing to be done about the severe effects of the pandemic in terms of containment and slowing measures, especially the effect COVID-19 the restrictions had on critical economic sectors.

### *Impact of COVID-19 on education*

COVID-19 has affected education greatly, with all types of full-time education discontinued in a matter of days in many countries. The crisis forced a change in the attitude of schools and universities to acquire knowledge in classrooms and auditoriums. Everyone understood that they would have to change the learning algorithms. For learning, you need modern information technologies (for online classes); you need to create a workspace in the house and know a culture of remote access, tolerance, and respect for learners.

We all know that during the pandemic, lecturers and professors of universities were forced to switch to distance learning. When determining the readiness of university teachers to work in distance learning during a pandemic, Puchkova, Temnova, Sorokoumova, and Chardymova (2020) found that educators were not ready to work exclusively in a distance format, regardless of gender, age, work experience, and specialisation. This conclusion was reached after 172 educators from different Russian universities responded to an online survey. The authors stated that in addition to the situational prerequisites that determine the unpreparedness of teachers to switch to distance learning in conditions of self-isolation, there are a number of systemic subjective and objective factors: a permanent situation of uncertainty in the Russian education system, provoked by Russian reforms; insufficient prevalence of distance technologies in the daily professional activities of university teachers; and a personal lack of readiness of the teacher to use distance technologies (Puchkova et al., 2020, pp. 91–92). It is important to note that the readiness of educators for remote work can vary greatly depending on various factors, including their level of digital literacy, access to technology and Internet infrastructure, training and support provided by educational institutions, and personal adaptability to new teaching methods.

Sequeira and Dacey (2020) identified stark socio-economic disparities among students at a Catholic liberal arts institution in the mid-Atlantic, USA, in a virtual space. Although there is a surge in the use of virtual space against the backdrop of the pandemic, students are looking for “real” and “wished” space (Cahapay, 2020). The results of Okada and Sheehy's (2020) study at the Open University (United Kingdom) showed that 88.77% of their survey participants valued fun in online learning, whereas 16.66% noted that fun within online learning can divert attention from learning and lead to distraction or wasted time. The results of the study by Frolova, Rogach, and Ryabova (2020) conducted at the Russian State Social University show the successful

adaptation of students to distance learning. Nevertheless, the transition to a distance learning format was accompanied by the following difficulties for students: default of a personal computer at home (10.3%); lack of access to the Internet (15.1%); insufficient computer skills (8.2%); absence of feedback from the teacher (18.5%); technical problems and poor communication quality (2.8%), etc. (Frolova et al., 2020, p. 83). The transition to distance learning has indeed presented several challenges for students. The difficulties mentioned above are common hurdles that students have encountered during remote education.

Still, the COVID-19 pandemic is altering higher education teaching and learning paradigms (Alfiras et al., 2020). Educators and students must achieve teaching and learning goals in any way possible. The COVID-19 pandemic, with its disruptions to traditional education systems, has necessitated flexibility and creativity in the pursuit of these objectives. However, we must not forget about the impact of cyberchondria and information overload on individuals' perceptions and motivations (Farooq et al., 2020). Cyberchondria refers to excessive anxiety or distress caused by searching for health-related information online. In the context of education, students may encounter similar concerns when seeking information or resources related to their studies.

All educational programmes underwent adjustments. Obviously, new approaches to higher medical education will be formed. For example, some neurology departments in the USA have changed their teaching methods in the COVID-19 era and have capitalised on the lessons learned by proposing new strategies to advance neurology education (Guadix et al., 2020). Turkish scientists, Ustabulut and Keskin (2020) attempt to map educational processes that need to be transformed and adapted to the "new normal" through a relational and metaphoric approach during the pandemic. Transforming and adapting educational processes during such a time requires innovative approaches that go beyond traditional methods. Relational and metaphorical strategies emphasise the connections between educators, students, and the learning environment while employing metaphors to facilitate understanding and engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the mental health of university students in China (Jiang, 2020). According to Ye et al. (2020), coping mechanisms, social support, and resilience can all help students deal with stressful situations and prevent acute stress disorder. In a study of students experiencing severe anxiety during the COVID-19 lockdown, Faize and Husain (2020) found that most students in Islamabad (Pakistan) had no anxiety, still, 8.2% experienced severe anxiety. In the study, which enrolled 891 students, the majority reported psychological, social, and physical problems. The pandemic has also affected the individual economic conditions of students for the better. In a study by Lorreta, Marango, and Chitongo (2020), some foreign students at Central China Normal University in Wuhan noted that social distancing allowed them to save money, focus on their lives, and improve their grades.

Torres-Hostench (2020) identified the benefits of being outdoors for physical health, knowledge, social relations, mental health, and attitude to learning. According to the scientist, being outdoors allows you to distance yourself from society. It has been proven by science that a person's spending time outside accelerates the metabolic processes of the body, strengthens the vessels and nerves of the skin, improves the functioning of the heart, and increases brain activity. We must also bear in mind that

the overuse of social media is highly addictive due to its psychological, social, and neurobiological basis (Singh et al., 2020).

As the study by Kislyakov (2020) showed, most students in the cities of Moscow and Ivanovo demonstrated constructive informational behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on cognitive interest (a cognitive type of behaviour) or fear and anxiety about coronavirus infection (a phobic type of behaviour). In addition, students showed destructive forms of informational behaviour: they were overly interested in unofficial information about the pandemic; they spread rumours and fake news among their loved ones (circulating behaviour, infodemic); they demonstrated distrust of the authorities and the media; they also experienced irritation from excessive information (nihilistic behaviour).

The forced transition to distance learning showed not only the level of readiness of teachers and students but also the level of digitalisation in some countries. All participants in higher education must further develop effective distance learning models. In the context of the pandemic, changes in educational programmes should correspond to the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of an amendment with an assessment of direct and side effects. The issue of maintaining the mental health of students during the pandemic, and the search for ways to maintain resilience, also remains relevant.

### *Socio-political and economic consequences of COVID-19*

The social planification crisis calls for the need to reflect on the current situation created by the pandemic. It is required to understand socio-cultural, economic and technological processes and to attempt to imagine scenarios for the future (Lusardi & Tomelleri, 2020). COVID-19 constructed the status of members of society in which new inequalities can emerge. The categorical difference between Antibody Positives and other antibodies transition to a status distinction (Evans et al., 2020). The distinction in status is determined by the fact that although avoiding COVID-19 is beneficial, becoming infected is detrimental. Fernandes, Silva, Dameda, and Bicalho, (2020) argue that the consequences of the coronavirus point to social inequality as a structuring factor in Brazilian society. various forms of death to the poorest, black communities and slum dwellers show this social inequality. Inequities are seen in public funding; infrastructure; access to health care, education, stable housing, healthy food and insurance (Arrazola et al., 2020). The communication inequalities in social media have created fertile ground for the dissemination of information, misinformation and disinformation (Viswanath et al., 2020). Addressing social inequality includes ensuring equitable access to healthcare, providing targeted support to vulnerable populations, strengthening social safety nets, and addressing systemic issues that perpetuate social disparities. By recognising and addressing these inequalities, societies can work towards a more resilient future in the post-pandemic era.

Haagh (2020) argues that COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of the democratic capacities of the state and humanist governance. Five important observations concerning the opportunities and difficulties of implementing democracy are provided in an editorial by Afsahi, Beausoleil, Dean, Ercan, and Gagnon (2020): COVID-19

weakened democratic institutions and presented alternative options for democratic politics; it made disparities and unfairness between democracies even worse; it showed that institutional infrastructure is necessary for long-term solidarity and emphasised the primacy and limitations of the nation-state. Future socio-technical transformations will depend on how robust civil society and economic organisations are (Wells et al., 2020). These key pillars of society play crucial roles in shaping social policies and determining the direction of societal changes.

The results of a research study by Itani, Azeem, and Mirza (2020) showed correlations between COVID-19 and the Arab Spring. The authors claim that these two crises produced comparable economic conditions. The trust deficit, inherited features of the economy, and fiscal and monetary policies were all highlighted as moderating factors in the study. Markard and Rosenbloom (2020) uncover the tale of COVID-19 and climate crises and suggest primary ways to improve the climate, as all crises have socio-cultural and economic consequences: harnessing the disruptive forces of the COVID-19 pandemic to accelerate the decline of carbon-intensive industries, technologies, and practices; and leveraging responses to drive low-carbon innovation. We all know that globalisation has led to the spurring of environmental devastation in the first place. A new glocalisation, or globalisation, will lead to reduced air travel, local production, smart growth, and reduced automobile trips (Goffman, 2020).

Internet memes and humorous visuals about various COVID-19 pandemic-related topics elicit powerful emotional reactions. The unique nature of memes created during the crisis cycle is a salient part of the COVID-19 public discourse (Pulos, 2020). Joubert and Wasserman (2020) argue that editorial cartoons provide a useful source to help understand a broader discursive context and show the socio-economic and cultural context in the country. Memes, humorous visuals, and editorial cartoons provide a unique and engaging way to grasp public opinions, concerns, and attitudes towards policies implemented during the pandemic.

Many researchers have addressed communication issues during public health crises (King & Lazard, 2020; Noar & Austin, 2020; Manganello et al., 2020). In the age of technological advancement, there are several operational tools for information gathering that simplify educating the public but also exacerbate the worry and stress condition. In addition, during the pandemic, misinformation about the COVID-19 coronavirus flooded the Internet and social media and began to spread rapidly false medical advice. By addressing misinformation effectively, we can improve public understanding of health risks, promote evidence-based practices, and foster trust in reliable sources of information during times of crisis.

To construct meaning during the pandemic, Rimal and Storey (2020) propose three mechanisms of social norm formation: through direct experience; symbolically through media; and imaginatively. In our opinion, people should always be prepared for various pandemics according to three mechanisms for the formation of social norms and direct experience helps contain the spread and strengthen the response to COVID-19. Finding out first is always the job of the media, and finding out first-hand reliable information is important to people during the pandemic. People should imaginatively understand that COVID-19 is the pandemic and its destructive power is not over yet. Therefore, these social norms are more important than ever.

### *Psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic*

Scientific papers on the public's psychological response to the coronavirus are becoming more and more common among scientists. This is understandable given that the disease's quick global spread makes the subject relevant. While some people are simply tired of this problem, others are panicky about the virus. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that this disease should not be taken lightly and should not give in to mass psychosis. While reviewing the literature on the behavioural and psychosocial aspects of the pandemic, we noticed that it dominated research on stress or distress (Freedland et al., 2020). While these were significant topics in the literature on the behavioural and psychosocial elements of the pandemic, research also covered a wide range of other critical areas, providing vital insights into the psychological human response to this global calamity.

COVID-19 has negatively impacted the mental health of the entire society. Patients with coronavirus have gone through a stressful experience, which may endanger their mental health. In a psychological evaluation, Bonazza et al. (2020) discovered that a significant proportion of patients at a big public health agency in Milan expressed anxiety (28%), depression symptoms (17%), and post-traumatic stress (36.4%). In addition, healthcare workers from Spanish communities also reported psychological symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorder, and compassion fatigue (Dosil et al., 2020). Also, Peng et al. (2020) argue that during the pandemic, a significant proportion of the Chinese population had depressive symptoms. In a study by Chao, Xue, Liu, Yang, and Hall, (2020), the use of new media is significantly associated with more negative effects, including depression, anxiety, and stress.

According to Knight's (2020) research, loneliness lowers self-esteem and causes the creation of new worries including the preoccupation with the process of dying; existential anxiety; breakdown in communication with family and friends; current family relationships; loss of the object; threat of Internet disconnection; and fear connected to body health. COVID-19-related worries and social isolation have been important mediators of the relationship between perceived vulnerability to COVID-19 and traumatic stress (Boyras et al., 2020). Remote working has positive results during social distancing, but there is also a negative aspect to it, namely, technostress (Spagnoli et al., 2020). Taylor et al. (2020) argue that society has a poor response to COVID-19 and nonadherence to social distancing. Still, it should be noted that social distancing as a measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus had been one of the greatest impacts (de Souza, 2020).

In psychology, it is also very important to study the influence of social distancing on loneliness. Faustino, Vasco, Delgado, Farinha-Fernandes, and Guerreiro (2020) claim that loneliness is associated with the regulation of psychological needs. Studies have shown that it is positively correlated with symptomatology and difficulties in regulating psychological needs. Nevertheless, loneliness negatively affects a person's mental health and may lead to depression, paranoid feelings, suicidal thoughts, and sleep disorders. Therefore, to combat loneliness during the pandemic, many have used television and social media (Borman et al., 2022).

The pandemic's impact on mental health, including increased stress, anxiety, and social isolation, raised awareness of the need for robust social policies to address



mental health challenges and prevent suicides. Mamun, Bhuiyan, and Manzar (2020) argue that fear of infection, financial crisis, loneliness, social boycott and other problems that have emerged with the pandemic have contributed to suicide. There have been cases of suicide in hospitals due to the refusal of treatment by medical personnel fearing COVID-19 infection (Mamun et.al., 2020). According to Que et al. (2020), vulnerable populations that may be at increased risk of suicide are those with individuals suspected of confirmed COVID-19 infection, healthcare workers, bereaved families, the elderly, children, and adolescents. The authors put forward recommendations for preventing suicide associated with the pandemic: preserving social connections via a website or mobile app; decreasing in unemployment; eradicating false information and rumours as soon as possible; and keeping up with psychiatric symptom therapy.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been clear adherence to COVID-19 precautionary measures. As shown by the results of the study by Tong, Chen, Yu, and Wu (2020), which took place in Macau (China), people strongly adhere to wearing a face mask (96.4%), but not social distancing (42.3%). Research by Raza, Haq, and Sajjad (2020), held in Pakistan facilitated an understanding of the factors that affect people's mental health during pandemics.

We believe that the data on the increase or decrease in the rates of daily infection in healthy people in the daily statistics also affects the human psyche. Additionally, a surge of condolences in the media and on social networks had a detrimental impact on people's psychology. Therefore, for a psychological victory over the coronavirus, everyone must remain completely emotionally calm and peaceful.

## ***Conclusions***

This paper aims at defining the diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19, the impact of COVID-19 on education, the socio-political, economic consequences of COVID-19, and psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is due to the reaction of social policy to COVID-19 in different countries at the level of strategic planning and transformation (Ramia & Perrone, 2021) and a lack of equality (Pincock et al., 2022). Also, many scientists claim that the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the social aspects of society (Alghamdi, 2021), and the colossal isolation affected the saturation of human activity (Jiang & Liu, 2023). The repulsive solutions to new problems should not be the old ones as old solutions will not help new problems (Cook & Ulriksen, 2021). Human care during the COVID-19 pandemic imposed a complex set of actions and consequences on social policy (Daly, 2022). Furthermore, several Polish experts underline the impact of COVID-19 on social policy (Bieszk-Stolorz & Markowicz, 2022; Chłoń-Domińczak et al., 2021; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021; Łaszek, 2020). Despite the relevance of these scientific works, they do not seek answers to the questions of our study. Therefore, this paper goes beyond the state of the knowledge as it aims to comprehensively examine and analyse the existing body of literature related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on social policy within the broader fields of social and human sciences. By conducting a literature review, this

research provides a holistic understanding of the diverse ways the pandemic has influenced social policies and interventions, contributing to the knowledge base and identifying gaps for future research and policy development.

The urgency of countering, containing, spreading, and strengthening measures to combat society is extremely high due to the prevalence of the virus. Due to the danger of COVID-19 to human lives, it requires a comprehensive and consistent study, in particular, by researchers in social and human sciences. In addition, in connection with social demand, research in social and human sciences is being actively pursued in different countries. The search continues for theoretical and practical justifications for the virus, as well as mechanisms, prerequisites, and factors that may impact the spread of COVID-19.

The severe consequences of social limitations have been felt by citizens. The effects of the pandemic include disruption of society's norms, instability in global political and economic ties, unemployment, and social upheavals. All nations must, therefore, take action to control the pandemic's diverse social consequences and effects. To achieve this, it is vital to highlight the value of social policy research in order to foresee the effects of future changes and enhance the state planning system, which establishes the course for society's future growth.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has been mostly seen as a health issue, it also has serious societal consequences and effects. Our COVID-19-related literature review highlighted the social consequences and effects of the pandemic on the basis of the thorough analysis completed, outlined the significance of a qualitative improvement in social relations in the context, and, based on the outcomes, formulated the main directions for the advancement of social policy. From the standpoint of social policy, this study can be helpful in understanding the relationship between the social consequences and effects of a pandemic and the degree of human society's development. The authors noted the cumulative social changes and the unfavourable responses to COVID-19. Therefore, this study proves the social experience of the pandemic in order to further make adjustments in social policy.

As mentioned previously, this paper made numerous new contributions to the study of issue, including the identification of diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19; finding the pandemic's impact on education in the context of social policy; establishing its socio-political and economic consequences; and substantiating psychological reactions to the pandemic. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic can differentiate spatially and among social groups. The impact of the pandemic can vary significantly depending on geographical locations, economic conditions, and social demographics. The bibliographic method of study and the use of Scopus helped to find these differences. Here are some ways in which pandemic consequences can differentiate spatially and among social groups:

- **Geographical variation:** the spread and severity of the pandemic can vary across different regions and countries. Some areas may experience higher infection rates and healthcare burdens than others, leading to differing social and economic consequences.
- **Socioeconomic disparities:** social groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds may experience varying impacts of the pandemic. Lower-income individu-

als and marginalised communities may face greater challenges in accessing healthcare, education, and financial resources, exacerbating existing inequalities.

- **Access to healthcare:** spatial differences can impact access to healthcare facilities and resources. Rural areas, for example, may have limited healthcare infrastructure, leading to disparities in testing, treatment, and vaccination rates compared to urban centres.
- **Educational disparities: students from different social groups may have** varying access to remote learning resources, technology, and support systems. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds may struggle more with remote education, leading to potential learning gaps.
- **Mental health and well-being:** isolation and lack of social support can impact mental well-being, and certain social groups may be more susceptible to these challenges.

Thus, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are not uniform across spatial locations or social groups. There are significant disparities in the impact of the pandemic, which necessitates targeted interventions and support to address the unique challenges faced by different communities and regions. Understanding these variations is crucial for effective policymaking and resource allocation to mitigate the pandemic's adverse effects on vulnerable populations and locations.

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