Exploring the Career Decision-Making Process During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Opportunities and Challenges for Young People

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the measures taken against its spread, including quarantine, school closures, and online teaching, have affected young people’s career planning and decision-making process. This study explores their career decision-making process during the pandemic by analysing the following categories: effects the pandemic might have had on emotional, social, and professional aspects; support provided by family, school, and peers; challenges and difficulties experienced during the career planning process; and the need and opportunities for career guidance. Thirty high school students in the 12th grade were individually interviewed using Google Meet. The findings of thematic analysis revealed that the participants struggled with the career decision-making process during the pandemic. Concerns related to abrupt changes in daily routines and restrictive measures affected their emotional and social states. Participants reported feeling sufficiently supported by their families, but not their schools or peers. They indicated that career orientation information provided by their schools or other institutions would be beneficial. Our findings highlight the need for a structured, well planned, official career orientation program for schools.

Keywords

career decision-making, adolescents, well-being, social support, COVID-19

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused substantial changes in all areas of life. Measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19, including quarantine, physical and social distancing, school closures, and the displacement of the teaching process to the online format, have affected all age groups (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Young people have experienced major changes to their daily routines in both their psychosocial and academic lives, with those who are currently engaged in the career planning and decision-making process being especially susceptible (Schwartz & Cymrot, 2020). Although data exploring this topic are limited, studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that young people are experiencing certain difficulties and challenges in their career planning and decision-making processes. For example, Georgievska and Uragichi’s (2020) study included 40,000 young people from more than 150 countries with the purpose of analysing their decision-making process, and revealed that the current schooling system is not sufficiently preparing young people to decide their careers. Thus, in a period when young people are faced with making one of their most important life decisions, the COVID-19 pandemic has added to their uncertainty with respect to their career opportunities (Georgievska & Uragichi, 2020). The International Labour Organization’s (ILO, 2020) study included 112,605 young people from 112 countries and explored the effects of COVID-19 on young people’s jobs, education, rights, and mental well-being. The report found that despite schools and other training institutions’ best efforts to ensure the continuation of education through online classes, 65% of youth reported that they had learnt less since the emergence of the pandemic, 51% believed that their future studies would be delayed, and 9% reported feeling fearful that they might fail their education (ILO, 2020).

Based on these findings, it is evident that the career planning and decision-making process has been hindered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Career planning is a complex process in which numerous factors interact and affect decision-making (Jemini-Gashi, 2014). Self-esteem, knowledge of the
world of professions, the connection between oneself and the profession in order to harmonize between them, the action plan for the realization of goals, consist in the steps of a proper career planning. To properly implement these steps, personal and contextual factors are crucial. Support from family, school, peers, but also factors of the wider context, are of particular importance in the process of planning young people for careers (Mulhall, 2014). On the other hand, all the changes caused by Covid-19 and the measures taken to prevent the virus, may have hampered the planning process initially, and thus, the career decision-making process. Based on the importance of career guidance for young people, studies in this field are more than necessary. Exploring all the influential factors can provide clear information which can be the basis for providing services related to education and career guidance, to support young people and important support systems for young people throughout the planning process and career decision-making even in pandemic conditions.

According to Parsons, in choosing the right career, there are three broad factors: (1) a clear understanding of self, attitudes, skills, interests, environments, resources, (2) knowledge of requirements, conditions of success, priorities, and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities and prospects in different lines of work; (3) true reasoning for the relationship of these two sets of facts (Mulhall, 2014). Factors influencing this process are numerous. Personal factors play an important role in career decision-making, factors that are also related to contextual factors: family support, school support and peer support. All of these factors, intertwined, influence adolescents’ career planning and decision-making. The career planning process consists of the ongoing iterative process of understanding oneself, setting career goals, reviewing skills, and searching for appropriate career options (Mckay, 2019).

From the developmental point of view, young people aged 15 to 25 are in the phase of career exploration, a phase which according to Donald Super (1990), is characterized by the crystallization of career-related thoughts and plans. Young people according to Super (1990), try different ways for their career through school subjects, hobbies, and current work. So, it is important that adolescents at this stage to be oriented to a profession and not only that, to get further information about that profession, to make career planning, to explore the world of professions, to develop decision-making skills, to have knowledge on preferred professions, especially for what will decide (Super, 1990).

As social cognitive career theory explains, development and career decision-making result from the combination of individual, contextual, and cognitive factors that affect them, which, as a result, produces career interests and goal development and performance (Lent et al., 2000). Social cognitive career theory combines sociological aspects with learning theories, psychological aspects, and decision-making theories, with an emphasis on psychological constructs, which are described as playing a crucial role in career decision-making (Lent et al., 2002). Lent et al. (2002) regard the social cognitive career theory as a general framework that integrates theoretical aspects as well as hypotheses that have found considerable support in the career literature. This intriguing aspect is considered a strong point of this theory. Social cognitive career theory is largely based on Bandura’s theory and links it to career choice, plans, and exploration (Bandura, 1994; Bandura et al., 1977; Lent et al., 2002). It discusses how developed and mature academic and career interests are, how professional interests develop, and how these choices translate into action. The framework for this theory is also referred to as Bandura’s Triadic Reciprocal Model of Casualty which means that a person’s outcome is based on a combination of: personal characteristics, behaviours and actions they see from other people and external factors (Bandura, 1994).

According to this theory, social support, including family, school, and peer support, plays a crucial role in personal factors during this process. Findings from the previous studies have noted the link between and predictability of career decision-making from social support from all sources. Ferry (2000) stated that youth who receive more social support, especially from their parents, have more advanced development of their careers compared to their less supported counterparts. Furthermore, youth engage in discussions regarding planning and career preferences with their parents, and, as a result, become more prepared for their future careers. The importance of social support has been stressed in a study on Kosovar youth. Their findings noted that youth who felt that they received support from their families, schools, and peers were more certain about their career choices (Jemini-Gashi et al., 2019).

Scientific evidence exploring the relationship between social support and career decision-making among youth during the COVID-19 pandemic is lacking. However, many studies have provided insight into the challenges and stress experienced by parents, teachers, and youth during this period. In a study by Lee and Ward (2020), parents reported considerable stress and difficulties in employing effective parenting techniques. Moreover, high levels of parental stress were reported by mothers in a study conducted in Kosovo (Hyseni Duraku et al., 2020). Findings from this study showed that quarantine requirements, the shift towards the online format for work and schooling, and overload contributed to increased levels of parental stress, which consequently caused parents to become stricter in their parenting practices during this period (Hyseni Duraku et al., 2020). In addition to parents, changes to the educational process due to COVID-19 have caused considerable stress among teachers and students in Kosovo (Duraku & Hoxha, 2020a).

Psychological concerns among youth have been reported in other studies conducted in Kosovo. According to Arenliu and Bërxulli (2020), in the initial weeks of the pandemic and of quarantine, students reported psychological distress,
although at moderate levels. Meanwhile, Duraku and Hoxha (2020b) found that psychological anxiety, somatic anxiety, and perceived stress were reported by university students. The effects resulting from changes in daily routines due to COVID-19 have impacted academic aspects of students, who reported being less motivated to learn and experiencing dilemmas about the future of their careers at a global level (Nell et al., 2020). These findings serve as evidence that young people face many challenges regarding the career decision-making process and may lack social support from parents, schools, and peers.

This study attempts to explore the career decision-making process among Kosovar youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it aims to explore the psychological, social, and professional well-being of youth during the COVID-19 pandemic; understand the difficulties, barriers, and challenges faced by youth during the COVID-19 pandemic; understand opportunities for social support from families, schools, and peers; and understand the opportunities perceived by youth as potentially helpful during the process of career decision-making.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Thirty students (16 female, 14 male) in the 12th grade were recruited through snowball convenient sampling, whereby participants in the initial interviews were asked to suggest other potential participants. The average age of participants was 17. With respect to their places of residence, the participants were scattered among all seven major regions of Kosovo: Prishtina, Peja, Prizren, Gjakova, Mitrovia, Gjilan, and Ferizaj. Due to the circumstances created by quarantine, establishing contact and the interviews were conducted virtually using Google Meet. Participants completed a consent form prior to the interviews. We estimated the sample size required to detect significant results to be 28, using G*Power, with the following specifications: $\alpha=0.05$, power=0.80, effect size ($d=0.5$) and a one-tailed test (Faul et al., 2009).

Participant Interviews

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. All interviews were conducted by graduate-level psychology students studying School and Counselling Psychology, as well as their professors teaching Development, Education, and Career Guidance. The interview protocol was comprised of seven themes or categories to be explored: (1) The decision making process about career that the participants went through, (2) Current activities/initiatives that participants are involved and engaged in about career, (3) The role of family members in their decision for career, (4) The role of school in career decision making, (5) The role of peers in the decision for a career, (6) Challenges faced in deciding about career, and (7). Needs and suggestions from participants about activities and initiatives necessary to facilitate effective career planning and decision making process among young people. Depending on how the interview flowed, additional/more detailed probing questions followed to obtain necessary and detailed information for all the respective themes or newly presented ones. On average, the duration of each interview was estimated to be approximately 55 minutes. The interviews were conducted during late April and early May and were audio recorded and later transcribed by the authors in Albanian. A detailed research plan, including both theoretical and practical aspects, was conducted in collaboration with career professionals during the winter semester, 2020 to 2021.

Data Processing

Data processing was conducted using the thematic analysis method, which is commonly used when analysing a set of text, such as interview transcripts. This method is frequently used in qualitative research and is regarded as a suitable means of identifying, organising, and finding meaning in the gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Independently, but within the same time frame, the authors of this study initially explored and analysed the data, and later identified the codes and themes emerging from the conducted interviews. The results of the individual analyses were then compared, resulting in a 90% match, and the authors finally proceeded to the final report of this study.

Results

Emotional, Social, and Professional Impact on Youth During the Pandemic

The limitation of physical mobility and contact as a result of COVID-19, according to the participants of this study, greatly impacted their psychological, social, and professional well-being. The lack of information, the uncertainty of one’s health, the inability to meet others physically or attend classes in the traditional manner made them feel unsafe, anxious, and stressed. Psychological well-being, as well as the inability to meet one another physically, made the participants feel isolated. According to them, despite covering their basic academic needs, distance learning was not a suitable format and did not provide any support with respect to career guidance and decision-making, as shown in the following:

“This situation has been annoying for me...I could not adapt at all. I feel tired both physically and mentally” (A. H., Male, 17).

“This situation has completely disrupted the life rhythm of all of us. I feel less energetic during the day, and I am really scared” (B. A., Female, 18).
“I am stressed all the time. . . I can’t sleep, I can’t eat, I can’t do anything besides feeling stressed” (B. N., Female, 17).

“Everything has changed. . . friendships, school, everything. School is not the same, we are only superficially doing classes online because there is no time to go into detail” (V. L., Male, 18).

“We need to talk to each other more and we need to talk to our teachers about the things that worry us . . . we don’t have time or the opportunity” (A. A., Female, 17).

Choosing and Deciding a Career: Personal Interests, Family, and Employability

According to the findings of this study, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the participants’ career decision-making process. Their concerns about their health and the health of other family members, the educational process, and other dimensions impacted by the situation complicated the process of career planning. Nonetheless, the participants who had already chosen what to study noted three facilitating factors: a passion and personal interest for a specific field, information and guidance from family members, and/or economic perspectives such as employability for a certain career/job stability.

Most of the participants reported that passion and/or personal interest for a certain academic field was among the facilitating and determining factors for them during their process of career decision-making. This can be observed from the following:

“I want to study computer science because I enjoy hands-on work, and as a child, I always wanted to create new things. . . with a computer you can create anything” (A. B., Male, 17).

“I’ve always liked psychology—how the brain functions, why people change—I’ve always been interested in this field so I am going to pursue it” (E. A., Male, 18).

“Marketing has always been my favourite. . . advertisements, fashion, and similar stuff. I want to become a marketing manager and sales for other countries” (B. F., Female, 18).

Beside passion and personal interest as determining factors for decision-making, many of the participants mentioned the role of different family members in this process. One’s family, according to participants, is the main support unit that provides them with information, guides them, and supports them in other ways during this process. For many of the participants, their family members served as a model when choosing and deciding their careers. This can be observed in the following:

“My father, sister and brother are all doctors. . . doctors of different fields, and they’ve all studied in Prishtina. I, undoubtedly, will become a doctor” (V. L., Male, 18).

“The economic aspect of a career or job opportunity/stability was also mentioned as one of the main factors that determined the choice of career. The participants highly praised professions that ensured job attainment after completion of their studies. For some, this was considered the main reason for choosing a certain field of study. The following demonstrates this very clearly:

“Currently, the most profitable profession is that of a nurse, not just in Kosovo. I will become a nurse” (A. A., Female, 17).

“I have decided I want to study computer science because that means I will have a job waiting for me, it’s guaranteed both in Kosovo and outside of Kosovo, with a very generous salary” (D. M., Male, 18).

Fields of Study and Guidance and Family Support

The main social institution that had an impact on the process of career decision-making for participants was undoubtedly their families. Family members, particularly parents, were the main providers of information and guidance with respect to fields of study and different disciplines. Despite being overloaded due to current COVID-19-related issues, their support was always available. This can be observed clearly in the following excerpt:

“I’ve been very confused. . . I didn’t have much information about what I was to study. My parents, especially my dad, have invested a lot of time explaining all the study fields to me. Finally, with his assistance, I was the one who made the choice (V. L., Male, 18).

In addition, the participants’ perceived their family as the leading source of support for all aspects. Many of them proudly shared the support that a family member had given to them during the process of career decision-making, as follows:

“My family supports me morally and financially in my career choices; they are the main reason why I am driven to realise my dream” (F. M., Female, 18).

“My parents support me emotionally. . . I can always talk to them for any issue of problem I have” (A. D., Female, 17).
“My parents always help me. . . they’ve supported me in this as well. They told me that I should pursue whatever I liked” (S. G., Female, 19).

“My parents have supported me financially and morally. Thanks to their support, I’ve been able to attend some private courses so I can better prepare for my studies” (L. B., Male, 18).

Discussions, requests, questions, or propositions from parents and other family members directly or indirectly affected the choices that the participants make regarding their career. The parent–child dynamic, especially the support observed from participants, was an important element in the process of career decision-making. This can be illustrated by the following:

“I believe that family has an important role in career decision making. . . In my case, my parents have greatly affected my career choices” (E. L., Female, 17).

“Many of the questions I had about my career have been answered by my parents and other family members” (B. N., Female, 17).

“When I made the career choice and informed my parents, they were very happy and supportive” (A. B., Male, 17).

“At the beginning of this process, I talked a lot to my parents because they were against my choices and plans. . . they had something else in mind for me. . . but after all these conversations, finally, they are supporting me in a career of my choice” (A. A., Female, 17).

“At the beginning, my parents were hesitant because studying what I wanted meant me traveling a lot, but as the time passed, they’ve gradually accepted and told me to ‘pursue whatever you want to study, and we will support you’” (D. Z., Female, 18).

Insufficient Support from Schools, Teachers, and Peers

Schools, as important social institutions, were not perceived as a source of support from the participants regarding career guidance and decision-making. The lack of information, activities, and services that would facilitate decision-making were often mentioned by the participants as prototypes of their schools, as follows:

“The school hasn’t offered me anything that would help me decide about my studies. . . no one has ever talked to me about my career” (A. S., Female, 18).

“Our school, which is considered one of the best schools in the country, does not provide any support for its students with respect to career orientation” (A. A., Female, 17).

“For the field I am interested in, the school neither helps nor prepares me” (B. F., Female, 18).

“We don’t have anyone we could talk to about careers at school. . . all we talk to our teachers about is related to the educational process” (A. B., Male, 17).

In addition to their dissatisfaction with the support provided by their schools, the participants reported that they also lacked support from their teachers regarding career orientation. According to them, not many teachers had shown an interest or were willing to help them during the process of career orientation and decision-making. Teachers were only perceived as sources of academic-related information, not as sources of support for career orientation, as shown in the following:

“No one knows how to guide us and help us navigate: the professors, friends. . . nobody. We rarely talk to our teachers about this” (E. A., Male, 18).

“As students in our final year of high school, nobody has bothered to provide an extra class. . . to offer us information for specific fields—economics, computer science, and so on” (S. G., Female, 19).

“Our school environment doesn’t nurture discussion—our relationship with the teachers is formal, therefore, we cannot discuss such things. For example, I want to study medicine, but I cannot sit and talk to the chemistry teacher about this and that” (A. D., Female, 17).

“I have many teachers, yet none of them have ever offered to do a lecture about career orientation” (V. L., Male, 18).

Similar to teachers, peers were also not seen as a major source of support during the process of career orientation and decision-making. Peers lacked information and were very confused about their careers, which made reciprocal help very unlikely, if not impossible. Participants’ doubts and insecurities only increased when they were met with the uncertainties of others. This dynamic among the participants and their peers is illustrated in the following:

“I have many friends who do not have the slightest idea about what they’re going to study, or what profession they will have in the future. They are undecided and confused about their own choices, so they cannot help me” (B. N., Female, 17).

“I’ve tried talking to my friends about careers a couple of times, but whenever we talked, everyone was so unsure, so the conversations would quickly die” (D. M., Male, 18).

“When I’ve talked to my peers, it only made me doubt my choices more. . . they were also unsure about their professions” (E. M., Female, 18).

“Me and a couple of my friends have discussed studying nursing together, but as time passes, we have doubts. We don’t know. We are incapable of helping one another” (S. G., Female, 19).
The Need for Career Orientation Services in Schools

The need for a structured, well planned, and official career orientation programme for youth is necessary, according to the participants. Furthermore, they identified two types of needs regarding career orientation and decision-making: first, the need for information and guidance. According to them, teachers and psychologists should inform them as well as facilitate and guide them in the process of career decision-making. Second, the need for practical work and exercise. According to the participants, schools, as education institutions, should offer opportunities for internships and exercises in different fields. The participants stated the following:

“They need to organise information sessions and additional courses for 12th-graders” (V. G-J., Female, 17).

“Each 12th-grader should attend career workshops and explore which field is best suited to them” (D. M., Male, 18).

“12th-graders should engage in practical work as an elective course to try” (V. L., Male, 18).

“Exercise and practical work should be compulsory in school” (B. N., Female, 17).

“Communication with field professionals should be enabled” (A. H., Male, 17).

“School psychologists, along with teachers, should give us more information regarding career orientation” (A. A., Female, 17).

“Teachers, in their weekly meetings, should offer courses on career orientation” (A. B., Male, 17).

Discussion

This study explored the youth career decision-making process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it aimed to investigate the psychological, social, and professional well-being of young people during the COVID-19 pandemic; their difficulties, barriers, and challenges during the pandemic; opportunities for social support from families, schools, and peers; and opportunities perceived to be potentially useful for the career decision-making process.

The required measures of limited mobility and physical contact, taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, have had a negative impact on the psychological, social, and professional well-being of most of the participants in this study. The majority reported feelings of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety about their own physical health and that of others. The negative psychological load resulting from quarantine was reported by most participants, since they were prevented from meeting with friends, distant family members, and teachers for a long time. These results are in line with those of other studies conducted during this period, which have demonstrated that the pandemic in general, and particularly quarantine, has had a tremendous impact on emotional and social aspects for youth (Jiao et al., 2020; Jiloha, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Human interaction through physical contact has been stopped or limited for most young people due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made them feel lonelier and less supported by others outside of their family. For adolescents, the need to interact with peers is of enormous importance, since it is during this developmental stage that they crave approval and social impact from their peers (Albert et al., 2013; De Goede et al., 2009); as such, social deprivation from their peers certainly has negative effects (Sawyer et al., 2018).

Distance learning, as one of the measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Kosovo, had a great impact on the participants in the current study. From March 2020, all educational institutions in Kosovo shifted to online/distance learning. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), in the 2019/20 academic year, there were 345,540 students; 22.5% (77,907) of whom were attending high school (MASHT, 2020).

For most of the participants in the current study, while distance learning was necessary, it only covered their basic academic needs, such as the distribution of information and knowledge for specific fields, and did not provide them with any psychological, social, or professional support. Participants reported a lack of opportunities to engage in conversations, have discussions with their teachers, or be supported by them. It is estimated that 10% of high school students lack access to distance learning or interaction with their teachers (Kasapolli-Selani, 2020).

Despite how the participants’ perceived the process of distance learning, most stated that they had made a choice with respect to their future field of study. According to them, there were three main reasons that facilitated the process of career decision making: (1) their passion and personal interest in a specific field, which is typically developed during childhood and continues to develop during one’s lifespan; (2) job opportunities regarding economic perspectives in a specific field; and (3) information, guidance, and modelling of family members—particularly parents—regarding deciding on a career. Studies have demonstrated that there are many contributing factors that affect career choice among youth, which range from the desire and satisfaction to work in a specific field (Kunnen, 2013), internal motivation, job opportunities, job security, decent salary, and so on (Edwards & Quinter, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In the current study, the participants reported that they had received substantial support from their parents during their career decision-making process. Their parents provided information and guidance on their career choices, as well as other support, such as financial support, by paying for additional courses to allow the participants to explore and prepare for a certain field of study that was
independently chosen by the participant, or that they chose together with their parents. During the period of restrictive measures, where physical contact and attending classes were not allowed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, parents’ guidance and support was significantly larger compared to any other group (teachers and/or peers). Family members, particularly parents, were considered a specific and important factor in the process of career decision-making for the participants. The parents’ offered information, guidance, and support so that their children could explore different fields of study and careers, thereby facilitating their decision-making. Often, the parents’ careers served as a model for their children to follow. Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance and role that parental engagement has in general regarding career decisions (Bregman & Killen, 1999; Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Rani, 2014; Sebald, 1989). The mother’s involvement and impact has been documented even more specifically (Hairston, 2000; O’Brien et al., 2000), as well as the father’s role (Agarwala, 2008; Huern et al., 2015) among youth faced with career decisions.

Participants’ uncertainties and doubts regarding career orientation and decision-making were shared by their peers, who similarly felt uncertain about the steps they needed to take on their journey towards a career. As a result of these doubts and uncertainties, discussion with one another was not an option and therefore rarely happened. There was collective confusion within the group of peers due to the lack of career orientation and guidance. According to the participants, the teachers only served their primary role of providing field-specific information and support and did not provide any additional information/counselling with respect to career orientation.

The difficulties of young people in career planning and decision-making during the Covid-19 Pandemic period are also supported by career theories. Any difficulties and lack of support from support systems during this period, has affected young people in their career planning.

Given the importance of combining personal and contextual factors emphasized by social cognitive career theory, career planning may have been more precarious and challenging, due to the lack of coordination of factors, which has made the decision-making process extremely difficult. Moreover, the difficulties of young people can be related to the fact of lack of support, especially from school and teaching, and then to the limitations in movement which have made it impossible to carry out any favourite activity and certain engagement. As a result, young people may not have been able to properly master the characteristics of the developmental phase of career exploration, which according to Super (1990), are important factors of this period. Considering all the changes in the new routine, young people career planning is seen as a difficult process in terms of carrying out all the steps, which according to Parson, are the crucial basis of a successful career decision, including and factors influencing the overall career planning and decision-making process (Mulhall, 2014).

The need for a structured, comprehensive plan, implemented by schools, regarding career orientation and counselling was mentioned by all participants. In addition to the advice received from their parents and family, these young people need to be advised by professionals to facilitate the process of career decision-making by providing necessary information. This would eliminate, if not at least minimise, any confusion, uncertainty, and doubts that they may have about their future professions.

Limitations

Although the current study followed strictly and systematically qualitative research guidelines and standards in data collection, analysis and reporting, there are couple of limitations that the authors would like to point out. First and foremost, the study was designed and conducted in the midst of COVID-19 with strict anti-pandemic measure of isolation and quarantine, thus, meeting in-person with responders for interviews was not possible. Thus, the interviews were conducted virtually. The lack of opportunity to conduct interviews in-person may have contributed to not noticing some of the non-verbal cues and communications that the responders could have expressed, although in all virtual interviews video camera and audio was on all the time.

In addition, due to the above-mentioned anti-COVID measurements in the country at the time of data collection, it was not possible to reach as much young people from rural areas, although the sample included young people from all seven regions of the country.

Implications and Future Directions

The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for future studies that aspire to explore the process of career decision-making in times of a pandemic and similar contexts, where every day routines change, thus affecting all aspects of life. Studies using a combined methodology would be beneficial to better understand the relationship between different factors and the effects of COVID-19 on the process of career planning and decision-making in youth. The inclusion of psychological distress as a variable may be a valuable addition for future mental health prevention or intervention programmes, with the primary goal of facilitating career decision-making among youth.

In addition to theoretical implications, the findings of this study can serve as a basis for designing support programmes for youth, parents, schools, and peers. Based on this study’s findings, youth have emphasised the importance and role of the family in the process of career decision-making. However, they also expressed the need for more support from their schools and peers.
With schools closed both in Kosovo and around the world due to COVID-19, the education system has shifted to online learning. Despite schools having adapted to these changes and attempting to reach their main objectives, youth have lacked support regarding career selection. As the restrictive measures become less severe and schools partially return to the traditional format, programmes that are supported by schools are essential for young people’s well-being and development.

Using the findings of this study, the professionals have designed several supportive activities for youth, school psychologists, teachers, and parents. Career professionals have organised webinars and compiled a guidebook with practical instructions regarding the process of career decision-making. Awareness lectures regarding the essential factors to be considered when one is faced with career decision-making have also been organised for a certain period of time. The findings from this study can be a valuable basis for designing ongoing support programmes, specifically during COVID-19, which is ongoing. Creating opportunities for support groups with the goal of enabling discussion about career orientation and challenges among peers would also be beneficial. Moreover, providing career orientation services online, via telephone, or other available means would be a good way to overcome the challenges and hardships that youth have experienced during the pandemic. Such a programme could easily be tailored to the individual needs of youth with respect to career decision-making.

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