



INTERNATIONAL INEQUITY PATTERNS IN YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS RELATED TO COVID-19: ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS ON WELL-BEING, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT

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Abstract: COVID-19 has threatened physical and mental health and reduced overall wellbeing. Wellbeing has declined significantly since the pandemic, particularly within younger sub-populations aged 15-29. Past disasters and current crises indicate that decreased wellbeing can have serious long-term health, social, and financial effects for the individual and society. This is particularly concerning for younger people whose lives and livelihoods are developing. Research indicates that supports put in place at younger ages typically lead to multiple gains in growth and development. Our objective was to use a scoping review spanning 2020-2021 to map the patterns of international inequity on young people in terms of education, employment, and mental health. As educators, we note the special capacity within the United Nations sustainable development goals to address these challenges. With its inherent focus on wellbeing, the sustainable development goals framework can be used to guide the strategic processes to address wellbeing, especially in these vulnerable subpopulations. The review enabled us to identify preliminary steps for strategy development related to policy and for educators to consider in supporting youth and young adults. Many universities have established processes for advancing sustainable development goals. Educators' expertise and capacity to effect change can be harnessed to improve mental health and wellbeing locally while contributing to longer-term sustainable development within society. The authors stated that wellbeing is a beacon for the future. Monitoring wellbeing and taking steps to address its decline, especially in the young, must be a priority as they are the future leaders of society. Youth and young adults will also bear the brunt of the economic and social burden due to the pandemic. By investing in the wellbeing of today's youth and young adults there are opportunities to «pay it forward» so that better outcomes may be realized in the future.

Keywords: COVID-19, education, Sustainable Development Goals, wellbeing, youth and young adults.

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Introduction. In March of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the novel coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) was a pandemic (WHO, 2022). In April, the Secretary-General to the United Nations (UN), António Guterres, launched a *Call for Action for Human Rights* when he uttered the now-ubiquitous phrase, «We are all in this together» (Guterres, 2020). While it is true that the virus spreads and infects indiscriminately, the actual impact of COVID-19 has been differential and disproportionate globally (Dowd et al., 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Helliwell et al., 2020). Unfortunately, as variants of this coronavirus continue to emerge, the mid-and long-term impacts on wellbeing have yet to unfold i.e., the outcomes of long-haul COVID-19. Furthermore, with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in the spring of 2022, the war-related direct and indirect effects compound the pandemic stressors on many.

The human toll of declining wellbeing affects the biopsychosocial aspects of one's life. Wellbeing has declined since the onset of the pandemic. The greatest decline has been among younger groups aged 15 to 29 (COVID-19 behaviour tracker, 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Helliwell et al., 2020; Serafino, 2020). Mental health deterioration has been considerable, with younger groups reporting worse mental health than older groups, both before and during the pandemic (Garriguet, 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2020). Mental health issues have also continued to rise in these sub-populations, especially for the more disadvantaged or vulnerable subgroups who may already have mental, addictive, or other challenges (Achdut and Refaeli, 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Hawke et al., 2020; Palmer and Small, 2021).

Beyond the individual level, the impacts of declining wellbeing cascade into long-term social and economic challenges as individual reactions to acute stress predict adverse health outcomes (Burström and Tao, 2020; El-Gabalawy and Sommer, 2021; Kampfen et al., 2020). In addition to disruptions to education and income goals, young people stand to inherit the substantial burden of responsibility for debt from previous generations (Helliwell et al., 2020; OECD, 2020). An even greater impact is predicted to be experienced by society in terms of reduced capacities for income, leadership, and general wellbeing (Vandecasteele et al., 2019; Yarrow, 2021).

In this paper, our objective is to draw attention to the unequal distribution of negative pandemic effects on younger age groups. The potential for long-lasting issues related to income, education, and employment are challenging, and the impacts on mental health also concerning (Gonzalez et al., 2020; Hawke et al., 2020; Helliwell et al., 2020). There is a need for more clarity and awareness about how COVID-19 has been affecting the wellbeing of youth and young adults and how mental health issues could change the trajectory of their lives and diminish their life goals and abilities to contribute to society. As society's future leaders, the investment in young people's wellbeing is not just a stopgap measure; it is a proven method of «paying it forward» so that better long-term outcomes are realized for young people and society (Bisk and Bohtuč, 2017).

However, missing within the literature are global strategies and related supports to address declining wellbeing meaningfully and equitably in the young on their forward journey (El-Gabalawy and Sommer, 2021; Kampfen et al., 2020). There is little evidence that wellbeing is appreciated globally as a serious issue with long-term consequences for these young people and society (Barouki et al., 2021). Even if wellbeing rebounds, the health-related impacts of COVID-19 are still expected to be observed in future years due to diminished medical and preventive care that could influence their general health (El-Gabalawy and Sommer, 2021; Garriguet, 2021; Helliwell et al., 2020; Kampfen et al., 2020; Tirivayi et al., 2020). This is the time to develop and promote strategies that focus on improving and sustaining wellbeing within these sub-populations (Sachs et al., 2021).

The UN represents 193 Member States and as its website states, it aspires to address global problems towards “peace, dignity, and equality on a healthy planet” (*United Nations*, 2021). The UN developed 17 ambitious sustainable development goals (SDGs) for all countries to work together towards ending poverty, protecting the planet, improving lives and prospects for all, and addressing the pandemic (*SDGs*, 2015). As the focus of our paper is on youth and young adults and the impacts the pandemic has had on their education and careers, we draw from the emerging trends within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Multi-disciplinary approaches to education for sustainable development are being developed and methodologies that are more student-centered and problem-based are being implemented (Sierra and Suárez-Collado, 2021). Researchers have called for these adapted forms of education to be coupled with the relevant competencies so that students are equipped to manage the complexities of sustainable development and other real-world problems. Wellbeing is not only one of the 17 goals but also a real-world problem with high relevance to students of HEIs (Risopoulos-Pichler et al., 2020). We aim to bring attention to the unequal distribution of harmful impacts on youth and young adults and the compelling need for additional global action.

We begin with the conceptual foundations and follow this with the scoping review framework used to assess literature sources. Then, in the literature review, we highlight a number of recent findings indicative of

the various ways in which wellbeing has declined for youth and young adults. Our discussion includes preliminary strategies based on the UN's framework for SDG and those of the HEIs.

Literature Review. The Organization for Economic Development (OECD) defines individuals aged 15-24 as "youth" (2020). This period towards adulthood is characterized by various transitions (e.g., from education to higher education and employment or from the parental home to renting an apartment). Those aged 25-29 are in the "young adult" stage of development, a time of active employment, career building, and starting a family (Rosenthal et al., 1981). Both groups are in transition and require support and direction to help them realize their goals and become high-functioning members of society (El-Gabalawy and Sommer, 2021). These two subpopulations were combined in this paper as they have shown the largest declines in wellbeing studies (Garriguet, 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Helliwell et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2021).

Measures of wellbeing have proliferated over the past few decades (VanderWeele et al., 2020). There are objective measures related to standards of living (e.g., education, safety, income, and life expectancy) that are typically collected by many countries and subjective measures based on how life is perceived and experienced by individuals (Stiglitz et al., 2009). Wellbeing is a largely subjective measure and provides a more comprehensive assessment than some objective measures like the Gross Domestic Product (OECD, 2013; Stiglitz et al., 2009). For example, the Human Development Index, a summary measure of a country's overall achievement in its social and economic dimensions, fell in 2020 for the first time since it was initiated in 1990 (Baumann, 2021).

Defining wellbeing is difficult as so many factors contribute to it. The OECD's (2013) guidelines list the core factors involved: physical and mental health, family, employment, personal financial situation, housing, job satisfaction, education, and leisure. Another nine secondary factors provide even fuller coverage of the concept: cultural life, discrimination, economy, government, neighborhood, personal freedom/rights, spirituality/religion, diet, and fitness (European-Commission, 2011).

Coupled with a focus on the two age groups of youth and young adults, we focus on subjective wellbeing and publications aligned with the definition and measures recommended by the OECD (2013). The concept of subjective wellbeing has been assessed reliably for the past several decades and most OECD countries collect some form of data on how citizens evaluate their wellbeing (Das et al., 2020; Helliwell et al., 2020; Stiglitz et al., 2009; VanderWeele et al., 2020). Individual measures of wellbeing are essential for creating and maintaining healthy, productive societies (Das et al., 2020). These measures help countries ensure the social conditions for leading good lives are in place for citizens (OECD, 2013).

The concept of sustainable development was first defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own" (Brundtland, 1987). The concept is based on economic, social, and environmental integrated pillars of sustainability (Abad-Segura and Gonzalez-Zamar, 2021). More than three decades later, we are still working to find a reasonable balance of economic growth while limiting the damage to our social and environmental assets. As a society, we must learn new ways of thinking and acting if we are to achieve sustainability. This requires new skills, behaviors, values, and attitudes (Kassel et al., 2016).

The UN SDG framework is the most recognized sustainable development framework with ambitious, interconnected goals and well-defined targets focused on alleviating or removing the global problems of hunger and poverty, advancing education, protecting the environment/planet, and realizing prosperity. The 17 SDGs were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015 and the end date for goal achievement is 2030, a deadline that has become more challenging with the pandemic (SDGs, 2015).

The theme of health and wellbeing (SDG 3) focuses on good health and wellbeing for all. This theme is also a major cross-cutting theme with the other 16 SDGs. Better health and wellbeing is not only a goal for sustainable development but is also regarded as being essential for achieving all three pillars of sustainable development—social, economic, and environment. Health, wellbeing, and sustainable development are intrinsically connected, with good physical and mental health regarded as both a precondition and an outcome of successful sustainable development (Nunes et al., 2016; SDGs, 2015).

Fulfilling SDG 3 is also critical for achieving other SDGs and measures of health and wellbeing can be used to assess progress in the overall implementation of the SDG agenda (Nunes et al., 2016; SDGs, 2015). Frameworks have been developed to operationalize the interconnections between wellbeing and sustainable development. They assist local and regional groups in maximizing mutual benefits while minimizing trade-offs and interferences that may result when local and international activities are blended (Nunes et al., 2016; Sterling et al., 2020).

As global citizens, everyone has a responsibility of meeting the SDG targets and pulling the world closer to the goal of sustainability by 2030. Educational institutions, especially those at the higher levels, have had

a continuing and increasingly greater role in promoting sustainable development (Aleixo et al., 2021). As leaders of change, the commitment to scientific research, and their responsibility for educating future employers and leaders, HEIs have been involved in various programs to promote sustainable development for decades (Caputo et al., 2021). These initiatives include the current 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Transforming our world, 2016) and the 17 SDGs superseding the eight Millennium Development Goals created in 2000 (Aleixo et al., 2021). Higher Education Institutions, have a greater responsibility for implementing the goals and transferring knowledge and skills to the external world (Pizzutilo and Venezia, 2021). Universities also have a natural capacity to bring about profound social change. Universities are a source of expertise in research and education in all the SDG sectors and they are considered neutral and influential players that foster the growth of partnerships with governments and communities (Ndubuka and Rey-Marmonier, 2019). Practically, universities can effect the necessary changes by promoting strategies for wellbeing locally, while boosting the implementation of SDGs at the societal level (Nunes et al., 2016; Wildman et al., 2021).

There are benefits for HEIs that accept the challenge to improve wellbeing strategies for the sub-populations in this study. SDG progress or «impact» is now being measured via the Times Impact Ratings (De la Poza et al., 2021). The Times Higher Education Group is a global university ranking organization that began evaluating global universities' performance on the SDGs in 2019 (THE: World university rankings, 2022). Since 2020, all the goals are being addressed. However, although the infrastructure appears to be present to introduce, or in some cases, to expand upon mental health strategies for youth and young adults in various regions and performance continues to improve, resources are a significant factor for many who are not yet reporting progress (De la Poza et al., 2021). As HEI educators, our interest in this topic stems from a desire to develop awareness about student needs and strive to improve the adoption of SDGs into our curricula.

The next section outlines the approach to our methodology.

Methodology and research methods. Scoping reviews are «exploratory projects that systematically map the literature available on a topic, identifying key concepts, theories, sources of evidence and gaps in the research» (Grimshaw, 2010). Synonyms for these reviews include «mapping reviews» or «scoping studies» (Peters et al., 2015). A scoping review is a recognized approach to map literature on a topic but the focus is not to develop a specific research question or assess the quality of sources (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Scoping studies are used extensively in various fields and are recognized by the JBI International Research Organization as exploratory and descriptive techniques whereas systematic reviews are explanatory and analytical (Peters et al., 2015). Focused on evidence-based education and publications, this organization recently published updated methodological guidance on scoping studies (Peters et al., 2015). When a scoping study is used to broadly map a field (extent, range, and nature of research) or to determine the value of conducting a systematic review, the purpose is to conduct ongoing reviews towards a full systematic review. However, a scoping study can also be used to disseminate findings by summarizing the literature and identifying gaps in the literature (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Scoping studies are iterative as researchers develop an evolving understanding of the topic during the process. Scoping studies are systematic and can be replicated. A scoping framework helps guide and detail the process.

Arksey and O'Malley (2005) recommended a five-stage framework for a scoping study involving

- 1) identifying the research question,
- 2) identifying relevant sources,
- 3) study selection,
- 4) charting the data
- 5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the findings.

We used this approach in this paper.

Based on the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework, our broad research question follows: «for the 2020-2021 calendar years, what is known from the emerging literature on the pandemic (COVID-19) about wellbeing (differential/negative experiences) of youth and young adults?» Our sub-questions were to understand, from a sustainable development goal perspective, the role of higher education towards helping youth and young adults and to explore the gaps about the lack of a comprehensive response/strategic approach tailored to their needs. We began by parsing the pandemic human rights call for action phrase by the Secretary-General of the UN «We are all in this together» (Guterres, 2020) to identify the differential negative effects of the pandemic on youth and young adults. The aim was to explore patterns in the literature relating to emerging impacts of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of youth and young adults and then identify the initial components of a global mitigating strategy to respond to the negative and harmful effects.

We focused on library databases, Google Scholar, and several other sources. In their methodological guidance on scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2015) indicate that non-research sources are used in scoping reviews, for example, to access policy types of information. We used Google Scholar to «pilot the search strategy» and to provide some indication of the potential size of the response (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Then we moved to other library databases that focused on high-impact journals and offered more robust search capabilities. The indices used in this approach to the literature included Google Scholar, PubMed, and ScienceDirect. The OECD, WHO, and Statistics Canada websites that include library or data catalogues were also consulted regularly for specific data and policy information related to the coronavirus. The same search terms were used for all indices.

We began by using the keywords COVID-19, pandemic, impact(s), wellbeing, mental health, youth, young adults, and inequity(ies) or inequality(ies). Beginning with initial broad searches whereby one term or a combination of key terms, such as «COVID-19 pandemic impacts» were added first, then variations of the terms were adapted within the different databases. Google Scholar was helpful in identifying publications missing from the more specialized databases, such as PubMed and ScienceDirect. Google Scholar was consulted in the beginning and then again after the keywords were refined within the library databases; for example, results were improved by selecting the combined phrase «COVID-19 pandemic impact(s)» from the PubMed database. In the end, this database resulted in the best results. In the Science Direct database, using the words HEI and universities was better than considering a phrase such as «postsecondary institution» and the abbreviation «SD» for sustainable development did not add any further sources; therefore just «sustainable development» became part of the string of terms. In both databases, combining «youth and young adults» narrowed the scope extensively so these terms were used separately throughout. Excluding «child» or «children» removed important sources so this type of exclusion criteria was not used. The words «inequity» and «inequality» led to the same results, so inequity was selected. Wellbeing was used with and without a hyphen and demonstrated the same results, so «wellbeing' was selected». Ultimately, the following words and phrases were used throughout the two stages of the search process: «COVID-19 pandemic impact(s)», «wellbeing», «mental health», «youth», «young adults», inequity, «universities». «Higher Education Institutions» «HEIs» sustainability, sustainable development, Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs. Initially, each abstract was reviewed using the research question to guide us in the first step of inclusion or exclusion. This was followed by a more detailed review of each full text to make the final decision of whether to include or exclude it. A number of additional sources were identified by reviewing the reference lists of individual studies.

In the second stage of the source selection strategy, we focused on the concepts of sustainable development and the role of education. The following keywords were added: universities, Higher Education Institutions, HEIs, sustainable development, sustainability, Sustainable Development Goals, and SDGs. Initial searches with Google Scholar led to broad results. By using Science Direct, the results were much more focused. Initially, the words and phrases in the first stage were added separately and then tried in combination. Ultimately, using the phrase «COVID-19 pandemic» led to better results. Individual targeted reviews were conducted of the resources available on the websites of the OECD, WHO, and Statistics Canada. This provided us with a current understanding of the subject area and added a policy response perspective that increased the comprehensiveness of the review. The wealth of information these websites offer was also helpful in providing references for the adoption of definitions for key terms in this paper, for example, definitions of wellbeing, youth, young adults, and sustainability. Throughout, we maintained both manual files and an Excel spreadsheet and used Mendeley for reference management.

The above steps were followed by two independent researchers who were in regular consultation to reach consensus on the process and decisions on the inclusion and exclusion of articles. Using the 2000-2021 calendar years for this paper, our initial inclusion strategy of abstracts narrowed the focus to 98 sources. By consulting each other and using the iterative process, our review of full articles led to 55 articles for this paper.

We acknowledge that some limitations of the scoping approach are that for practical reasons and given the timing of the pandemic, we limited the search to a narrow timeframe, sources in English, a handful of databases, and keywords. Beyond our control, databases may not always be up-to-date and tend to be more heavily weighted in the Western hemisphere.

Stage 4 of the scoping review pertains to interpreting the findings in terms of issues and themes (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). This process is similar to a narrative review (Snyder, 2019) involving descriptive analyses. Stage 5 involves collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. In contrast to a systematic review where many studies are evaluated and weighted, but only a few are used in a publication, «the scoping study seeks to present an overview of all material reviewed and consequently issues of how best to present this

potentially large body of material are critical» (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). A scoping study can be presented thematically. The next section presents this assessment in terms of our results.

Results. The scoping review revealed patterns of chronic stressors in terms of the toll the pandemic has had on youth and young adults. These stressors include educational and employment disruptions and prolonged unemployment periods impacting youth and young adults economically and contributing to deteriorating mental wellbeing. It is hard enough for youth and young adults to deal with day-to-day challenges of this nature, let alone think about the future optimistically. Compounding the COVID-19 morbidity and mortality problems for these two subpopulations, the long-term effects, such as complications and disabilities, whether they be mild or severe, have yet to be determined.

The pandemic has impacted youth and young adults dramatically and differently in terms of their education, connecting with their friends, and engaging in social and athletic activities. These two groups are still maturing developmentally. Early data have demonstrated that dysfunctional health habits (e.g., substance use), clinically diagnosed anxiety, and COVID-related concerns are highest among youth and younger adults (Roy et al., 2020). These findings are relevant in understanding at-risk groups given the unpredictable nature of the pandemic and the potential for long-term implications (El-Gabalawy and Sommer, 2021).

Younger age groups, and particularly those aged 15-29, are experiencing the crisis in unique ways (Gonzalez et al., 2020; Helliwell et al., 2020). Repeated school and university closures affected many youths, particularly the most vulnerable—those with special needs and/or those relying on social services (Cerna, 2020). Younger people, in general, have been experiencing significant psychological impacts related to social distancing and quarantine measures, showing signs of stress, anxiety, and loneliness (Etheridge and Spantig, 2020; Oliveira et al., 2020). The risk of exposure to family or partner violence is also a concern that can have long-lasting traumatic impacts on youth (Ramos, 2020).

Early in the pandemic, findings from a survey of 112 countries by the International Labor Organization found that 13% of young people had their education and training stop completely. However, there were marked regional differences as 44% of students from low-income countries, 20% of students from lower-middle-income countries, and 4% of students from high-income countries had their education stopped completely. Students from low and lower-middle-income countries were at greater risk of dropping out from school, facing fewer opportunities for growth and development, and for young women, in particular, risking being unable to return to school due to reductions in household income and pressures to work (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Despite efforts of educational institutions to deliver learning online, 65% of young people reported learning less since the pandemic began, just over 50% believed that their education would be delayed, and 9% were afraid of failing (2020).

Young people whose education or work was disrupted due to COVID-19 were almost twice as likely to be affected by anxiety or depression when compared to those whose education remained on track (Gonzalez et al., 2020). The unprecedented issues that young people have been facing affect their mental health and could lead to long-term effects (Dowd et al., 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Hawke et al., 2020; Helliwell et al., 2020).

Pandemic-related disruptions in employment opportunities are likely to affect the trajectory of young people's career paths and future income (WHO, 2020). These groups are more likely to be those with limited financial assets as they tend to be employed in temporary or part-time work and work in service sectors, such as retail and restaurants and the gig economy. They face higher risks of income and job loss than more secure members of the workforce (Gonzalez et al., 2020; OECD, 2019).

It is difficult for individuals to switch to more suitable employment and the longer they stay unemployed or are mismatched for a position, the harder it becomes. Delays in entering the labor market or changing from one mismatched job to another are likely to have longer-term life course impacts, as well. This includes the postponement in or ability to live independently, buy a house, and have a family (Dowd et al., 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2020). Due to the pandemic, both groups (youth and young adults) will experience increased intergenerational injustice and shoulder a great deal of the long-term economic and social consequences (OECD, 2019; Shahan et al., 2021; Yarrow, 2021).

These young people have the highest redundancy and unemployment rates (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Such economic consequences are likely to follow the pandemic and pose significant threats to the mental health of young people (Achdut and Refaeli, 2020). Economic forecasts suggest an elongated period for recovery (Gonzalez et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2021; OECD, 2019). Long-term unemployment is particularly problematic. As a chronic stressor, long-term unemployment has the most negative effect on mental health (Achdut and Refaeli, 2020). Young job seekers also have a lower chance of returning to their workplaces, as many of them have been employed in economic areas most affected by the restrictions (e.g., restaurants, bars, and sales).

The results of telephone surveys conducted to assess the impact of the pandemic on young people in two longitudinal cohorts (aged 19 and 26 years) in four developing countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam), showed significant adverse effects on education, work, and food security experiences, with more severe effects for poorer youth (Ellanki et al., 2021). The study also highlighted the challenges that COVID-19 is creating for meeting the UN's SDGs.

The scoping review findings also brought to light findings specific to intergenerational mental health impacts. The effects of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing are likely to be profound and long-lasting (O'Connor et al., 2021). Mental health issues had been increasing in younger age groups before the pandemic (Garriguet, 2021; Hawke et al., 2020). The prolonged effects are more likely to be more detrimental to young adults who are still in their formative years of developing their psyches, relationships, and careers (Arnold, 2020).

Indications of mental health impacts have been revealed in research across the world. Quaglieri et al. (2021) collected data at four different times during the coronavirus outbreak in Italy to assess the relationship between the lockdown and mental health dimensions—such as emotional state, perceived stress, and time perspective—for three age groups. The sample included 46 «emerging adults» (18–23 years old), 38 young adults (24–36 years old), and 39 «middle adults» (37+ years old). The 18–23-year-olds presented as the most psychologically affected by the lockdown. Similarly, a Chinese study found that younger adults (< 35 years) experienced more severe mental health impacts than older adults over 35 years of age (Oliveira et al., 2020).

University and college students seem to be particularly at risk of more significant disruptions to their living situation, work, and education, than other groups (Charles et al., 2021). An American study of college-aged students indicated that while 43% felt they were able to cope adequately with stress related to the pandemic, 71% indicated their stress/anxiety levels had increased (Xiao et al., 2021).

Worldwide, suicide is the second leading cause of death for college-aged individuals aged 18-29 (Mortier et al., 2018). In the United States, one-fifth of college students surveyed reported suicidal ideation, and 9% reported suicide attempts (Liu et al., 2019). In a United States Centers for Disease Control survey (N = 5,470), young adults aged 18-24 years reported significantly higher rates of suicidal ideation than the general population during the pandemic (26% for young adults versus 11% for the general population) (Czeisler et al., 2020). The mental health of Canadians (aged 15 to 30) has been in decline for the last two decades, hitting its lowest point during the pandemic (Garriguet, 2021). More recently females have demonstrated an accelerated decline compared with males (Helliwell et al., 2020). In 2019, fewer Canadian youth than older Canadians reported excellent or very good mental health. The difference was largely driven by young females as 49% of males reported excellent or very good mental health while 32% of females reported excellent or very good mental health. Canadian youth and young adults also were more likely to report suicidal ideation. The suicide rate of young males was 2.5 times higher than that of young females (Garriguet, 2021).

Bono (2020) conducted a longitudinal study with urban college freshmen in the United States to examine whether pandemic-related stress and wellbeing were related to socioeconomic status. The findings help inform strategies to better support students' mental health and wellbeing during adversities like the pandemic as this study found that young adults in the lower socioeconomic status group were at greater risk of building resilience when faced with adversity.

A six-country survey (China, South Korea, Japan, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States) documented how different age groups (18–25, 26–45, 46–65, and above 65) and incomes were affected early in the pandemic (Belot et al., 2021). A large fraction of both low- and high-income groups reported negative effects on wellbeing. Across all countries, younger people (under 45) were more negatively affected, both economically and psychologically.

Achdut (2020) surveyed 390 young Israelis (20-35 years old) to explore associations between coronavirus-related unemployment and psychological distress. Financial strain due to lost income and loneliness during the pandemic increased distress and it did not depend on participants' resources and risk factor levels. The authors called for the development of recovery initiatives to alleviate the mental health impacts of COVID-19-related unemployment challenges for these young adults and measures that promoted wellbeing in alignment with the UN's SDGs (Achdut and Refaeli, 2020).

The scoping review highlighted pandemic-related educational, employment, and mental health disparities between youth and young adults in different countries and the toll that these chronic stressors have taken. Few sources related their findings to the United Nations SDGs (Achdut and Refaeli, 2020; Ellanki et al., 2021). This is relevant because our research question was to understand «for the 2020-2021 calendar years, what is known from the emerging literature on the pandemic (COVID-19) about well-being (differential/negative experiences) of youth and young adults?». Our sub-questions were to understand, from a sustainable

development goal perspective, the role of higher education towards helping youth and young adults and to explore the gaps about the lack of a comprehensive response/strategic approach tailored to their needs. Collectively, we need to develop global strategies and related supports to address declining well-being meaningfully and equitably in youth and young adults. We need to appreciate how damaging the pandemic has been to these two groups. And we need to develop and promote strategies that focus on improving and sustaining their well-being. In the discussion, we outline some preliminary steps to move forward collectively.

Conclusions. In 2021, Dr. Frieden, the former head of the United States Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention, indicated that, based on prior pandemic experiences, there was a need for developed countries to move beyond a «panic and neglect» mindset (Frieden, 2021). In saying this, Dr. Frieden was referring to the need for leadership towards global investments, vaccine equity, and improved healthcare for all.

Studies have demonstrated how SDG 3 can be integrated across the SDGs as both a precondition and outcome of sustainable development (Nunes et al., 2016; Sterling et al., 2020). Sterling et al. (2020) developed a set of wellbeing dimensions that can be applied in local and cultural contexts to advance the measurement of wellbeing while monitoring societal progress towards sustainable development. They systematically compared the SDG indicators with a list of regionally derived wellbeing factors for the Pacific Islands (i.e., factors were developed by biological and social scientists who collaborated with local communities). The factors were grouped into eight dimensions to encompass a list of the critical components of wellbeing and social-ecological resilience across this region. The framework exemplifies how communities and organizations working to achieve SDG progress can also contribute to local priorities and plans. This study highlights opportunities to achieve progress toward SDGs in culturally and locally relevant ways.

While the pandemic has had impacts across populations and demographics, understanding the unique combination of psychological impacts on subpopulations is critical in developing targeted interventions. Furthermore, few preventive and mitigating efforts have targeted these groups, making the need even more salient. Some examples for these groups include more active engagement to elevate their voice, a workforce pipeline, and equitable access to youth development (Arnold, 2020; Hawke et al., 2020). The studies reviewed highlight the impacts on youth and young adults and intensify the need for timely and effective strategies that may be different from traditional recovery efforts currently underway in various countries. The strategies for young people's wellbeing require an equity-focused approach that will point to ways to address the various issues and how they are being experienced. Moreover, employing the UN's SDG framework presents an appropriate and efficient approach to strategy development for improving wellbeing in youth and young adults.

While the most urgent priority during the pandemic has been to minimize the loss of life and protect health, concurrent economic and social issues must also be addressed. As vaccination rates increase and restrictions ease, initial short-term responses must be rolled into longer-term strategies to rebuild for the future. Many governments are adept at preparing recovery programs to aid citizens in managing crises but these efforts are typically broad-based and few are focused on targeting the more at-risk groups or mitigating intergenerational issues (Wildman et al., 2021).

To build back in a way that addresses the inequalities identified by this review, the approach must include a clear focus on restoring young people's wellbeing and preparing them for the future. Our experiences with sustainable development education and the UN's framework for SDGs led us to tap this instrument for its capacity to not just address wellbeing, but also to promote a sustainable society.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Transforming our world, 2016) includes 17 interconnected SDGs and targets on alleviating or removing the global problems of hunger and poverty, advancing education, protecting the environment/planet, and realizing prosperity for all. With the capacity for research, teaching, and effecting change, HEIs have a significant role in helping advance the SDG agenda and in assisting with the progression of sustainability for all. Universities and colleges are equipped to conduct engagement and outreach with the community and key stakeholders that can advance wellbeing in their sectors. In this context, the educational sector has been a catalyst for sustainable development and in the promotion of the SDGs (Leal Filho et al., 2021), for example, by implementing these goals and through knowledge and skills transfer (Pizzutilo and Venezia, 2021). Higher education institutions have a leadership role in coordinating wellbeing strategies for youth and young adults within their regional/local areas. As HEI academics, we have a role in helping to advance these goals and foster youth and young adults in their development.

Based on this scoping review and to outline sample strategies and exemplify how HEIs can support youth and young adults, we selected six SDGs that are either directly focused on wellbeing or connected to aspects of wellbeing, particularly for youth and young adults. This approach offers various benefits, such as increased

wellbeing for youth and young adults through the strategies developed within local or specific cultural areas, contributions to improved wellbeing and sustainable development on a societal level, and opportunities for universities to achieve global acknowledgment for their efforts in advancing SDG progress as assessed through the global university rankings (THE: World university rankings, 2022).

Sustainable Development Goal 3 is titled Good Health and Wellbeing. Ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing at all ages is essential to sustainable development (WHO, 2021). Global evidence indicates that youth and young adults have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, manifesting for many as mental health issues that may alter the trajectory of their lives. Interventions and supports should be made available to them today so they may be equipped to become the citizens and leaders needed for the future. For example, HEIs could review their student support, health, and wellness services and augment them accordingly as well as review their accommodation policies and procedures. Highlighting wellbeing throughout the curricula and improving access to mental health supports would help to address issues in the student population. Designing more programs and projects that involve community outreach and networking with business and community organisations would help to raise the level of understanding of mental health and the importance of wellbeing in younger age groups.

Sustainable Development Goal 10 is titled Reduced Inequalities. Declining wellbeing in key sub-populations requires a targeted response to help mitigate the impacts on those who are more vulnerable. This goal has been geared towards more global inequalities yet also acknowledges that vulnerable populations and places may need assistance when other factors (e.g., employment, education, and mental health) become an issue for them. The disproportionate impacts can be mitigated through HEI strategies that include new programs and services to target the issues with which young people are struggling. Existing strategies can be retooled to focus more directly on those most affected.

Sustainable Development Goal 5 is titled Gender Equality. Within the 15-29-year-old age group, girls and women have also experienced gender inequalities (Etheridge and Spantig, 2020). Most of them have lost part-time or full-time jobs, due mainly to their participation in the service industry where lockdowns led to many lay-offs or reduced hours and wages. There has been some recovery in 2021, like restaurants and other service-oriented employers have reopened but lost income can cause hardship and stymied plans for attending university and fulfilling other life goals (Garriguet, 2021). Ensuring that adequate flexibility exists within new HEI programs and services can help to address inequities that may exist across genders i.e., through the development of gender equality bursaries and scholarships.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 is titled Quality Education. The literature reviewed using surveys and other studies in various countries indicated that the interruptions and changeable format for schools and universities/colleges have affected some students more negatively than others. Some university students have skipped a year or opted out of a university education altogether because of the pandemic (Gonzalez et al., 2020). These are lost opportunities for youth and can have consequences for future earning capacity. Wellbeing strategies must include innovative ways to identify those who need some extra guidance and assistance to get back on track, for example, by offering self-directed course options.

Sustainable Development Goal 8 is titled Decent Work and Economic Growth. COVID-19 has not only disproportionately affected people but also has impacted certain sectors and industries far more than others (Jones and Comfort, 2020). For example, the services sector (e.g., retail trade, leisure and hospitality, recreation, and transportation services) has been deeply impacted by lockdowns and by the need to stem the spread of the virus (World Social Report, 2020). This sector is important for full- and part-time employment, particularly for younger people. These industries demonstrated a concerted commitment to sustainable development before the pandemic (Jones and Comfort, 2020) but their sustainability gains are at risk of being put on hold as capital resources focus on economic recovery. Future strategies could include links to government assistance and incentives to assist not just young workers, but also to help these industries to continue their sustainability efforts as they build back. From an HEI perspective, collaborative strategies with community organizations (e.g., public health) and business could focus on increasing ways to include intervention and prevention programs and services for youth and young adults so that mental health issues can be addressed in a timely manner.

Sustainable Development Goal 17 is titled Partnerships for the Goals. Advocates for the SDGs have consistently claimed that recovery is best accomplished through shared responsibility. Partnering with HEIs, governments, businesses, and other sectors is considered the best way to help to foster a more diverse and comprehensive response (Sachs et al., 2021). For example, strategies done in partnership with business that promote employment in the services sector can enhance employment conditions and promote better practices.

Greater accessibility to programs that support mental health in this industry could be highlighted to help build acceptance and capacity for assistance programs that may become standardized within the service industry.

Addressing wellbeing involves connecting with individuals and communities and understanding the needs and concerns of diverse groups of people (Cloutier et al., 2019). In this instance, it is necessary to focus on youth and young adults. Strategies must anticipate the impacts on this age group, ensuring an understanding of their particular needs and goals (OECD, 2020).

A decline in wellbeing is worthy of policy action to address the pandemic harms to young lives and livelihoods. Moreover, lower levels of wellbeing experienced by these sub-populations today can interfere with career paths and income levels for decades to come. Their lived experience with risk and trauma is also associated with mental health effects that may persevere into adulthood. There is also the potential for long-term societal impacts, both social and economic.

Wellbeing is inter-connected with sustainable development. Ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all individuals and populations is central to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development, in turn, is critical to achieving health and wellbeing. There is a need to ensure that strategies are targeted to younger people in the sub-populations most affected as discussed in this paper and that these strategies be administered by those who understand sustainable development and have both capacity and experience in sustainable development education.

Universities are charged with advancing the SDG agenda and leading the change necessary to achieve a sustainable society. They have the power to incorporate wellbeing strategies for youth and young adults in current research, outreach, and teachings. Working within the post-secondary sector, educators can effect changes that are locally applied while contributing to sustainability goals in the broader society.

Finally, wellbeing is a beacon for the future. Monitoring wellbeing and taking steps to address its decline, especially in the young, must be a priority as they are the future leaders of society. Youth and young adults will also bear the brunt of the economic and social burden due to the pandemic. By investing in the wellbeing of today's youth and young adults there are opportunities to «pay it forward» so that better outcomes may be realized in the future.

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Міжнародні моделі нерівності серед молоді, спричинені COVID-19: просування цілей сталого розвитку щодо добробуту, освіти та зайнятості

COVID-19 становить загрозу фізичному та психічному здоров'ю та погіршує загальний добробут населення. Рівень добробуту значно знизився після пандемії, особливо серед молодих груп населення у віці 15-29 років. Минулі лиха та поточні кризи вказують на те, що погіршення добробуту може мати серйозні довгострокові наслідки для здоров'я, соціальної та фінансової сфери окремої людини та суспільства в цілому. Це особливо хвилює молодих людей, чие життя та засоби до існування знаходяться в процесі розвитку. Дослідження показують, що наявність додаткової підтримки, яка встановлюється в молодшому віці, як правило, призводить до значного зростання якості життя молоді. Мета дослідження полягає в тому, щоб проаналізувати рівень розвитку суспільства в 2020-2021 рр., щоб скласти карту моделей міжнародної нерівності щодо молодих людей з точки зору освіти, зайнятості та психічного здоров'я. Автори відзначають особливий потенціал у рамках цілей сталого розвитку ООН для вирішення зазначених проблем. Цілі сталого розвитку можна використовувати для спрямування стратегічних процесів, спрямованих на забезпечення добробуту, особливо в таких уразливих групах населення, як молодь. Такий аналіз дав змогу авторам визначити попередні кроки для розроблення стратегії, пов'язаної з освітньою політикою щодо підтримки молоді. Багато університетів уже запровадили процеси для досягнення цілей сталого розвитку. Досвід і здатність педагогів вносити зміни можна використати для покращення психічного здоров'я та добробуту на місцевому рівні, одночасно сприяючи довгостроковому сталому розвитку суспільства. Автори констатують, що добробут є індикатором майбутнього розвитку. Моніторинг добробуту та життя заходів щодо його покращання, особливо серед молоді, має бути пріоритетом, оскільки вони є майбутніми лідерами суспільства. Автори наголошують у своєму дослідженні, що саме молодь означає особливо негативного впливу під час пандемії, який має соціально-економічні наслідки. Інвестуючи в благополуччя сучасної молоді, є можливість «оплачувати це вперед», щоб у майбутньому можна було досягти кращих результатів.

Ключові слова: COVID-19, освіта, цілі сталого розвитку, добробут, молодь.