

Adapting Personal Development and Growth: Opportunities and Challenges of COVID-19 Psychosocial and Educational Developmental Influences and Conceptual Frameworks

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Abstract

This research paper emphasizes discussing the different adolescent personal development contexts in Hong Kong, like reshaping psychosocial processes, peer relationships, and educational experiences. As a conscientious pre-social worker, this paper adopted a broad range of human development, which is in line with studying the ages of adolescents and impacts of COVID-19 on their learning for individual and community levels. It adopted many theoretical perspectives, including Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity vs. role confusion, Piaget's formal operational development, Maslow's hierarchy theory (like need for belongingness and self-respect), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Bandura's social learning theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (incorporating a neo-ecological perspective on digital micro-systems). This paper applied diverse research methods, like interviews and surveys, that were used to meet the requirements of validated data instruments and triangulation. Besides numerous article and journal reviews, it also involved an online survey involving the secondary student population ($n = 46$) and a semi-structured interview with a senior registered social worker. Despite the findings of reduced extracurricular activities, cooperation, and social skills among students, as well as increased likelihoods of anxiety and social withdrawal after mask mandates. Nevertheless, it becomes imperative to explore issues related to digital competencies, literacy, and sustainability of hybrid learning among educators, social workers, and students. Through teaching and social learning, it discovered and led to unequal scaffolding, divided learning attention and consciousness, and expanded more digital divides among underprivileged families. Finally, the paper provided social work and educator recommendations in relation to digital equity and social/emotional learning among students.

Keywords: developmental theories, adolescents, digital literacy, psychological problems, social learning

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Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) became a pandemic between late 2019 and early 2023 in Hong Kong (Li et al., 2025). Regarding the Centre for Health Protection (2023), there were 3,106,579 confirmed laboratory diagnoses using nucleic acid tests and rapid antigen tests in Hong Kong. The pandemic has revolutionized discussions concerning human development through the term “new normal.” It refers to persistent changes in human development concerning daily living, social engagement, and learning. In Hong Kong, the “new normal” has been evident through the growth of digital learning and technology, the adoption of hybrid working arrangements, and changes in the learning experience of adolescents (Legislative Council of Hong Kong, 2024; Manuti et al., 2022; Selvam et al., 2024; Suvakovic, 2024; The University of Hong Kong, 2020). The increasing trend of online learning was made possible by video conferencing software applications like Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Zoom. It not only promotes collaborative learning but also changes adolescents' participation in hybrid education models (Education Bureau, 2020; Li & Wang, 2024; Nawaz et al., 2024). While the pandemic increased the possibility of some students participating in learning activities flexibly in their families, secondary students, including SEN students, were negatively affected by a lack of digital access, poor digital literacy skills, and inadequate learning support (ACER, 2025; Chanda et al., 2024; Spurava & Kotilainen, 2023). Besides the education transformation, there was an increase in psychosocial stress among secondary students. They reported higher levels of family conflict, lower levels of interpersonal contacts with peers' communication and interaction, and more mental problems formed during the pandemic in different media coverage. Thus, the COVID-19 outbreak had a significant impact on the developmental paths of adolescents in Hong Kong. This article will explore the educational and psychosocial outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school students and its implications for social work (Stheadline, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Research Questions

1. What changes and impacts affect the new normal post-COVID regarding the educational and psychological experience of secondary school students?
2. What lessons can be learned from these developmental influences in preparing social workers to work with children and youth post-pandemic?

Research Methods

The current research has used a combination of mixed research methods, like using the structured literature review with practical reports using the quantitative research methods (i.e., surveys) and incorporating the use of semi-structured interview data (from senior social workers at the management level) to explore post-COVID learning and psychological effects on secondary school learners. This research used online survey and invited Hong Kong secondary school students (n = 46) in October and November 2025. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was also conducted in October 2025 with a senior registered social worker from the Society for Community Organization (SoCO). Survey results have been analyzed by using the method of descriptive statistics and a provided discussion section. Insights gained from the qualitative part of the research (interviews and literature) have been analyzed and used to draw conclusions regarding adolescents' developmental needs after the pandemic. This research paper concerns the ethical consideration and moral issue. Everyone is required to agree and participate in this research.

Details of Data Analysis

These pilot survey responses were subject to descriptive analysis. The analysis was intended to reveal commonalities in the respondents' agreement and perception of change regarding their psychosocial and educational experience. The interview (qualitative research method) was combined with those derived from the literature and correlated with the theories that formed the basis of the research.

Developmental Concepts

In order to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic's "new normal" on the development of adolescents, this study employs the three developmental perspectives of Erikson, Piaget, and Maslow.

Erikson: Identity Versus Role Confusion

According to Erikson's framework, adolescents actively engage in identifying themselves, their values, and their roles through prolonged periods of social interactions and feedback from peers and important people. Peers are secondary socialization and significant others. Identity formation is achieved by exploring areas of interest, clarifying personal goals, and experimenting with various social roles. The creation of an environment that is conducive to developing teenagers' autonomy, emotional resilience, and relational skills would contribute positively to one's wellbeing (Bishop & Keth, 2013; Cherry, 2026; McLeod, 2008, 2025a; Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). On the contrary, social learning through face-to-face interaction that was hindered during the pandemic could have affected identity formation and identity exploration among adolescents due to limited interaction with peers.

Piaget: Formal Operations Stage

The stage of formal operations according to Piaget focuses on the adolescent's ability to think in abstract ways, form hypotheses, and use logic and moral reasoning. The use of learning systems that adopt a virtual platform can result in the development of some of these cognitive abilities in the form of asking critical questions and moral reasoning in adolescents. However, when educational programs adopt a virtual format, there is a physical absence of the interactive component necessary for effective reflection. With regard to psychosocial development, the adoption of virtual learning platforms may expand one's knowledge base but limit empathic communication and interpretation.

Maslow: Belongingness and Self-Esteem Needs (Psychological)

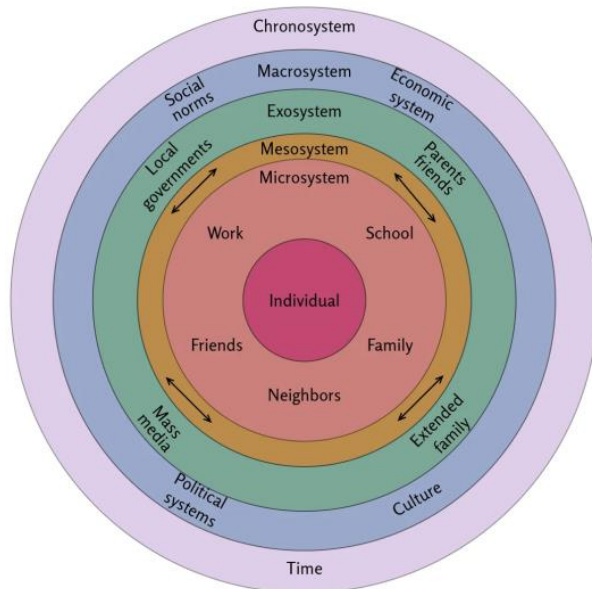
According to Maslow's perspectives, adolescents need belonging, acceptance, and recognition in order to foster feelings of self-respect and motivation. Social groups are important sites where secondary socialization takes place and relationships other than those formed within the family occur (Madero-Gómez, 2024; McLeod, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d, 2025e; Newport academy, 2024; Trivedi & Mehta, 2019). Group interactions have potential for strengthening personal identity development, providing opportunities for self-expression, and building social and collaborative skills (Ajayi, 2024; Malik & Marwaha, 2023; Pakpahan & Saragih, 2022; Rabindran & Madanagopal, 2020). Peers may have collective norms for speech, dress, and behavior (i.e., participating in different extracurricular or society activities, balls, or sports teams; having role models of classmates, etc.). Still, it forms peer pressure or self-comparison.

Adolescents may also have fewer chances to get approval of their emotional expressions and social performance and may feel less socially validated due to the pandemic and distance. All of these developmental and psychological concepts and theories are reflected in the idea that both theories allow for a developmental perspective on the changes caused by COVID-19. It affects adolescent identity formation, cognitive engagement, and belonging and skills and social competence, though some compensated with online communities.

Developmental Concepts (Visual)

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Note. From Bronfenbrenner, 1979

Figure 2

Ecological Theory

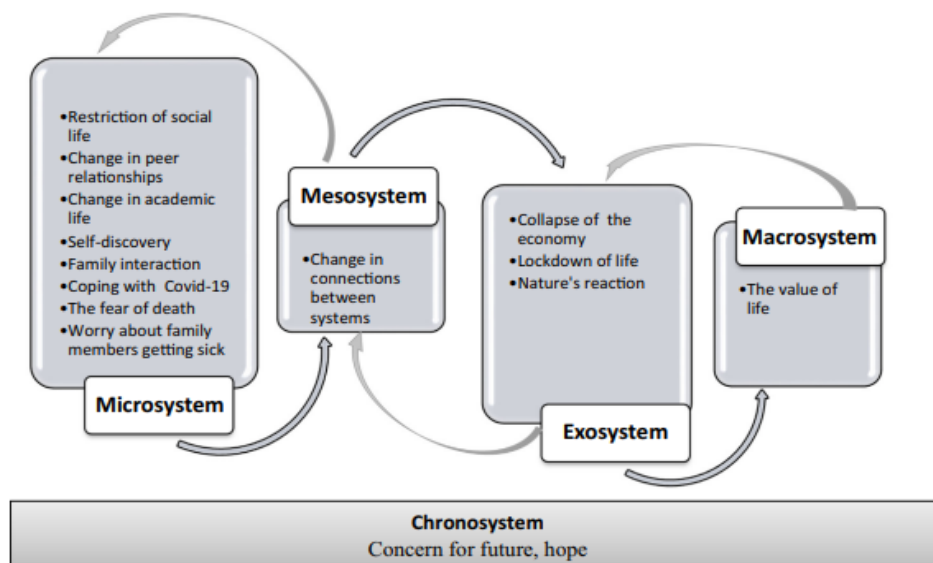


Fig. 2. Potential changes in the lives of adolescents according to Ecological Theory.

Note. From Navarro & Tudge, 2022

Figure 3

Summary of Ecological Theory

- Chronosystem-Transition: The COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak, Adolescence Change Period
- Macrosystem: Different culture, government policy changes, social norms
- Exosystem: indirect social structure, media platform, extended family
- Mesosystem: interconnection with others, like educators, parents, peers, and even others' family relatives.
- Microsystem: immediate environment, school, peers, family, etc.
- Individual Development

Ecological and Neo-Ecological Approaches for Elucidating Contextual Processes

The theoretical framework to explain contextual processes is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and neo-ecological theory. According to the former, adolescents' personal development is shaped by interactions between various systems, like family, school, peer group, and community, which affect adolescents' development both directly and indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Disruption in the social systems can be a catalyst for further developmental risk factors. Likewise, neo-ecology arouses an individual's attention to the ways in which interrelations among systems affect results regarding role shifts, resource availability, and relations (Navarro & Tudge, 2022). Finally, online education can be viewed as a system transformation of education and authentic program or activity existence. It makes changes in adolescents' or secondary school students' microsystems (like peer interaction, everyday habits, involvement from family members, and community activities). In other words, the digital world might become a part of the developmental ecology of adolescents, taking the form of a modified microsystem. In light of the above, the post-COVID developmental issue discussed herein cannot be treated as something isolated happening at the individual level. It can be social groups, academic learning groups, or even the educational transformation opportunities, challenges, or precautions.

Literature Review

Effects on Psychosocial Development (Social Competence Opportunities and Challenges)

In this section, the main effects on psychosocial development, it specifically covers how the post-COVID environment affected social competence, peer interaction, sense of belonging, emotion regulation, and identity formation among adolescents. Junge et al. (2020) (Figure 5) define social competence as adolescents' abilities to engage effectively with peers and adults. Erikson (1968) discussed adolescence as about identity and role confusion, where identity is formed through social interaction. COVID-19 pandemic's restrictions disrupted personal developmental processes because prolonged quarantine and social distancing significantly reduced opportunities for learning peer communication and genuine and face-to-face peer engagement (Chan, 2023).

Lower Participation in Extracurricular Activities and Developmental Theories for Peer Interactions

Throughout the post-COVID era, adolescents indicated the decline in extracurricular activities and constraints on social interactions had hindered their ability to build social competence and

social bonds with peers. My own form 5 experience as a campus TV journalist, interviewed Mr. Ho, an alumnus, and provided chances of hosting with other young journalists. I can demonstrate good interaction skills with alumni and young journalists. Secondary school students build social competence and relationships through informal interactions like extracurricular activities (playing & doing), leadership, and service learning activities, even discovering self-interest and self-exploration (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Hanley et al., 2022; Manis & Stewart, 2024; Pekkanen, 2024; Sawyer et al., 2023; Society for Community Organization, 2023; Ta Kung Pao, 2023). Essentially, extracurricular activity participation serves as a social environment in which adolescents can engage in conversations, negotiate, collaborate, and lead others. However, with the suspension of extracurricular activities, adolescents lacked an important channel for developing social competence. When it comes to personal development, social competence within peer groups is fostered not only through learning processes but also through constant participation, observation, imitation, and feedback. If adolescents have fewer chances to experience all these things, then it might be difficult for adolescents to return to face-to-face settings once they are made available. Secondary school students who prefer to take on roles of class representative, different teams, or society members may be understood as the collaborators, members, or liaisons; their identities are recognized within the school community, supporting identity development and achievement. Social competence and behavioral wellness of adolescents were influenced both during and following the period of disruptions caused by the pandemic, especially for the SEN students.

Under Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning, learning occurs through the "zone of proximal development" and "scaffolding," which emphasize collaborative learning and social interactions. Since school closure and extracurricular activities were suspended, there were fewer opportunities for stress relief and social networking. This made the adolescents struggle when in-person schooling recommenced (Chan, 2023; Fang et al., 2023; Society for Community Organization, 2021, 2022, 2023). Additionally, Law (2020, 2022) have shown that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic worsened behavioral issues, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and social developmental issues among secondary school students, especially SEN students (Wenweipo, 2023a).

Specifically, Hong Kong Lutheran Social Services undertook a survey (n = 1051) among secondary school students. The results of this survey revealed that 62% of secondary school students became less willing to engage in socializing, 71% of the respondents became less involved in participating in extracurricular activities, and almost 50% experienced fear and nervousness towards social gatherings since masks had been banned. The pandemic encouraged social isolation, restricted interaction through nonverbal communication skills, and inhibited identity development and emotional resilience. According to the Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1977) and Guy-Evans (2024), teenagers acquire social skills through observing peer behavior and imitating their actions. The typical socialization process was greatly hampered. Adolescents reported feelings of being awkward (identifying faces wearing masks), anxious (social anxiety, isolation), shy (embarrassment with facial expressions, lack of confidence), or hidden upon returning to school (The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, 2023a, 2023b; Stheadline, 2021; Wenweipo, 2023a, 2023b). Ms. Ng (RSW) stressed that adolescents should be willing to get along with their peers and have a desire for different activities. Adolescents learn to take personal responsibility and make decisions independently. Self-identity strengthening and gaining diversified experiences become crucial before entering young adulthood. From a developmental perspective, it could view such experiences as interruptions in the social feedback process necessary for identity rehearsal and self-esteem

formation. If adolescents experience anxiety or social withdrawal, the probability of engaging in social rehearsals diminishes. From a developmental perspective, it could view such experiences as interruptions in the social feedback process necessary for identity rehearsal and self-esteem formation. If adolescents experience anxiety or social withdrawal, the probability of engaging in social rehearsals diminishes.

Another study by CUHK's Institute for Health Equity (Prof. Esther's Research) conducted a survey ($n = 1095$) among secondary students from twelve schools in 2021 (Ho, 2022a, 2022b). More than half of the participants showed the same emotions during and after the peak of COVID-19. 34.4% of the participants experienced increased stress/anxiety; 16.6% experienced increased despair, while 20.3% of respondents had more trouble sleeping. In contrast to their previous emotions, 21.6% of the participants were less relaxed, 31.1% had decreased confidence about the future, and 20.6% were less happy (Ho, 2022a, 2022b). Face-to-face interaction is essential to build interpersonal relationships, social skills, nuanced feedback, and relational empathy (Chiu, 2023).

However, some individuals who are shy might enjoy these interactions since they may serve as a form of escape and shield against negative social interactions and anxiety. However, this was limited for personal growth. In addition to individual social skills, there might be other impacts on the cooperation of secondary students. For example, based on the research conducted by the University of Hong Kong (2020) research group led by Professor Nancy Law, a comparison was made between secondary school students regarding their collaboration and problem-solving skills before ($n = 705$) and after the epidemic ($n = 682$). According to Law (2022) study, it was found that secondary school students' collaborative problem-solving skills. It included social skills such as supported working, partnership awareness, mutual commitment, valued partnership, and cooperation and shared goals, were decreased slightly in 2021 after the pandemic (Law, 2022). This is consistent with my observation of community education as an undergraduate student, where secondary students did not have many opportunities for informal learning under hybrid learning environments.

Issues of collaboration problems may affect students' feelings of belongingness and peer relationships, which are highly related to their emotional well-being and academic engagement (Wentzel, 2017). The impacts of such developmental issues on the acquisition of adolescent social skills require further research. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory highlights several developmental issues where the interaction of different environments, including the home, school, and community, is affected by the pandemic at once. Adolescents had to endure social isolation and peer interactions or just family dimensions (living alone in confinement). Many adolescents exhibit low social competencies, collaboration abilities, and poor peer relationships. They do not necessarily have to be conscious of body language, facial expressions, and communication skills. However, communication and social skills are necessary for further development (Epoch News HK, 2022; Ming Pao, 2022a, 2022b; Stheadline, 2020, 2022).

Moving on from socialization and social skills, PSMU and a growing amount of time spent in front of the screen emerge as factors that negatively influence students' social well-being and mental health. The first research question we proposed to answer was as follows: "My online/social media usage habits that I developed previously still influence my sleep and mood." "Compared to previous life, how much more time am I spending on social media/the internet/playing games daily without studying?" 37 respondents (65.1%) significantly increased the time of use (the score of self-assessment is 4–5 out of 5). 9 respondents (53.5%)

state that it can be difficult to regulate excessive time spent using social media or internet games (the score of self-assessment is 1–3 out of 5). As regards the total screen use time, the same situation occurs. Question: “Do I have a social media/internet game usage habit that is formed and that I am still maintaining because of the long period of distance learning?” 31 respondents (65.1%) agreed on obvious and discovery situations.

More secondary school students checked various social media accounts (Facebook/Instagram) to observe the peers' social lives, which triggered high anxiety and excitability, together with social comparison. In many cases, adolescents tried to expand their online “friends” and “Moments” (朋友圈) and created many “weak-tie” relationships with people they knew less. In this case, the pattern of communication may be changed from “strong ties” (acquaintances, family members, core friend group) to hybrid mode or relationship. Regarding Law (2022), symptoms of internet addiction were rising among secondary school students from 8% to 20% between 2019 and 2021. About 15% of the Primary 5 pupils had experienced such issues in 2021. More junior secondary school male students showed symptoms of internet addiction and game addiction (Law, 2022). Increased use of the internet intensified anxiety, social comparison, and addiction risks (Hafiz & Aljadani, 2022). Adolescents often used digital space to seek identity formation (game satisfaction). According to Erikson (1968), some important terms related to the identity issue include identity formulation and identity confusion. These phenomena reflected the fact that adolescents used maladaptive coping strategies to cope with the lack of offline relationships. Digital space becomes an important platform and encourages online identity creation and formation. Finally, it can have hybrid world, virtual communities, and online identity formation.

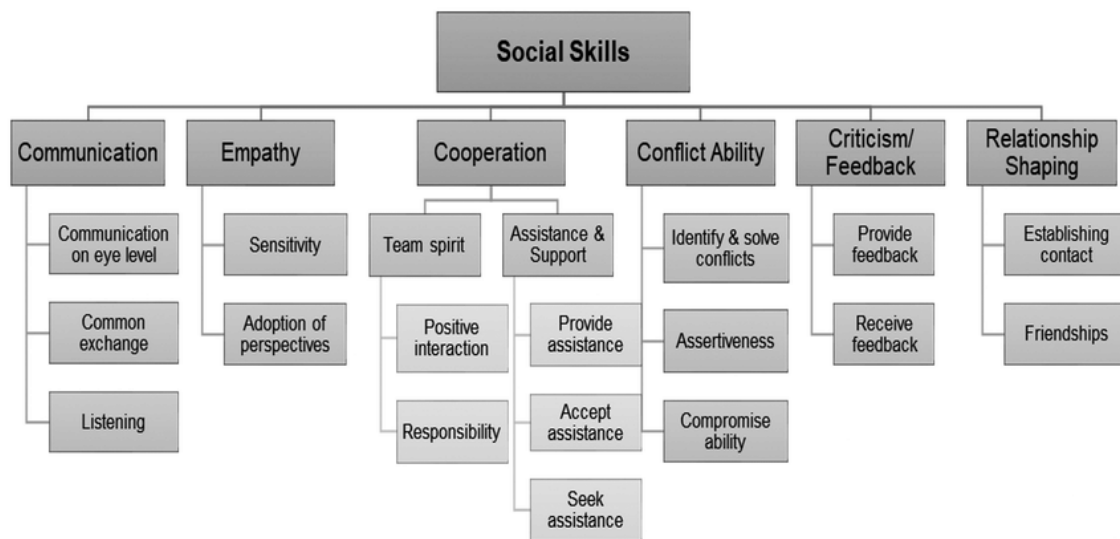
More adolescents are showing a growing interest in moving towards virtual communities as a way to preserve social relationships and opportunities (such as digital marketing, game rivals, game moderators, key opinion leaders, social media influencers, etc.). Virtual communities still provided the continuity of connection and additional opportunities for engagement (content creator and digital marketing). It could create a different type of identity exploration and expression. As far as digital identity experimentation, Steele et al. (2024) noted that adolescents can play around with various identities available on different digital platforms, such as video games and social media, getting feedback and watching people's reactions in real time. Adolescents have the opportunity to explore identities and experiment without any permanent damage. In addition, Adeane and Stasiak (2024) provide research on how adolescents learn from the role models via observation in the context of social media influencers adapting traditional mechanisms of social learning for digital reality. Besides, Nagata et al. (2025) gives examples of celebrities that disclose information related to their mental illnesses, which is crucial in order to reduce stigma in the adolescent population. When public figures disclose their problems, adolescents perceive the discussion of these issues as a normal phenomenon.

Generally, post-COVID-19 impacts secondary school students' development of physical and social competence, social skills, formation of peer relationships, and collaborative skills. However, there might be an opening for the use of social media for virtual community expression. In accordance with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), an online community would represent another microsystem in the adolescent's life system.

Figure 4
Integrated Literature Review



Figure 5
Social Competence as Adolescents' Abilities to Engage Effectively With Peers and Adults



Note. From Junge et al. (2020)

Data Analysis

Table 1
Regular Demographic/Informational Table (Participants' Age)

Participants Age	Total Participants	Percentage
9–11	0	0%
12	1	2.2%
13–15	2	4.3%
16–18	6	13%
19–22	24	52.2%
22 or above	13	28.3%
Total	46	100%

Table 2*Regular Demographic/Informational Table (Gender)*

Gender	Total Participants	Percentage
Male	20	50%
Female	23	43.5%
Others	3	6.5%
Total	46	100%

Table 3*Regular Demographic/Informational Table (Education Level)*

Education Level	Total Participants	Percentages
Secondary School Students	5	10.87%
Tertiary Education Students	5	10.87%
Undergraduate Students	28	60.87%
Postgraduate	7	15.22%
Students	1	2.17%
Others		
Total	46	100%

Table 4*Part A. Post COVID-19 Developmental Impacts (Survey)*

Question: Whether is agree with statement

	Mean	Mode	Median	Standard Derivation (SD)	Range (Min & Max)
Personal Development					
Compared to before and after the pandemic, I participate less actively in extracurricular activities or club activities (i.e., society).	2.80	3 (13 Participants)	3	1.31	4
My internet/social media usage habits developed during online learning still affect my sleep and mood.	3.35	3.5 (14 Participants)	4	1.25	4

Compared to before and after the pandemic, the school's support for digital learning (devices, networks, platforms, and teaching methods) is adequate.	3.58	4 (20 Participants)	4	1.04	4
The school's support for digital learning (device lending, network, platform usage guidance) is sufficient.	3.48	4 (22 Participants)	4	1.10	4
I think the school provides sufficient support in digital learning skills such as information searching, verifying authenticity, and cybersecurity.	2.95	4 (Participants)	3	1.23	4
I feel the school provides sufficient support for digital learning (like Zoom, Google Meet, and Google Classroom).	3.23	4 (20 Participants)	4	1.22	4
I find it more difficult to concentrate or keep up in class.	3.41	3 (13 Participants)	3.5	1.26	4
Social Interaction					
After face-to-face classes resumed, I feel uneasy or nervous about socializing with classmates face-to-face.	3.09	3 (13 Participants)	3	1.30	4
I feel my social skills (such as speaking, listening, and interpreting others' expressions) have deteriorated due to the pandemic.	3.04	3 (15 Participants)	3	1.28	4
After masks were no longer required, I worried about how others would judge my appearance or expressions.	2.76	1 (15 Participants)	3	1.47	4

Emotional Regulation					
Compared to before and after the pandemic, I find it more difficult to concentrate or keep up with the pace of learning in class.	3.15	4 (15 Participants)	3	1.27	4
My family has provided ample emotional support and communication during (and after) the pandemic.	3.20	3 & 4 (both 14 Participants)	3	1.17	4
I am willing to participate in face-to-face group sessions (social skills, emotional management, learning support, etc.) offered by the school or social workers.	2.91	3 (14 Participants)	3	1.16	4
Social Media Addiction					
I feel I have a tendency to overuse social media/online games and find it difficult to regulate myself.	3.43	4 (14 Participants)	4	1.23	4

Figure 6
Data Visualization on Adolescents' Social Media Addiction Issue

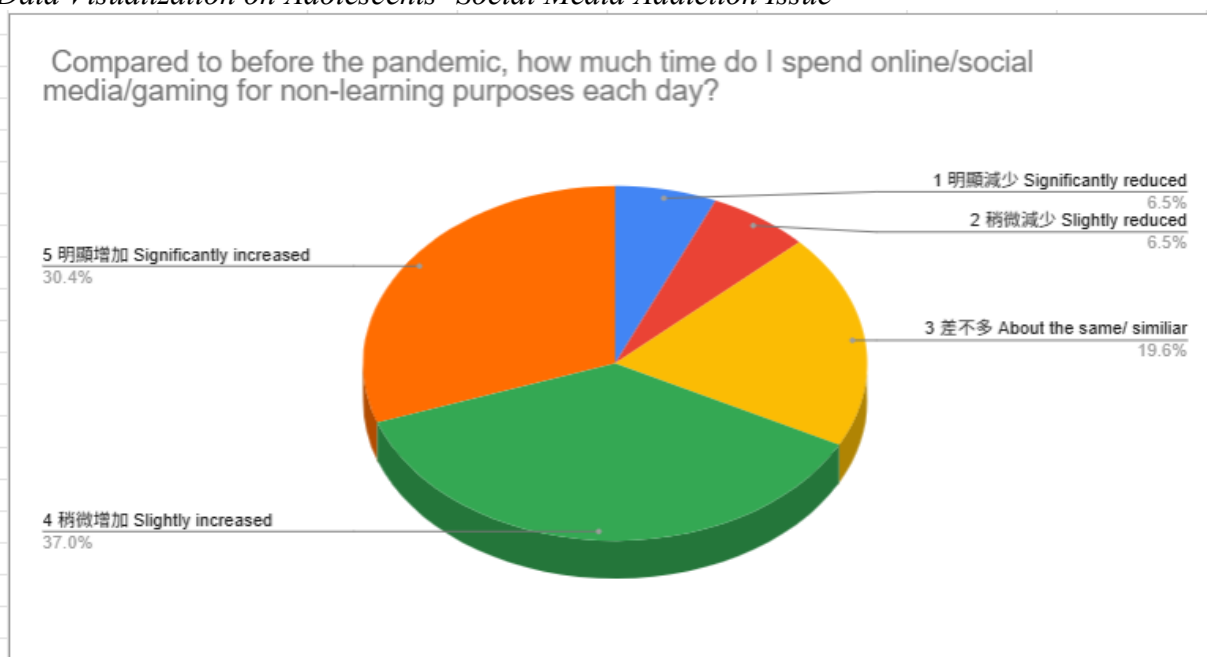


Figure 7

Data Visualization on Adolescents' Social Media Addiction Issue (2)

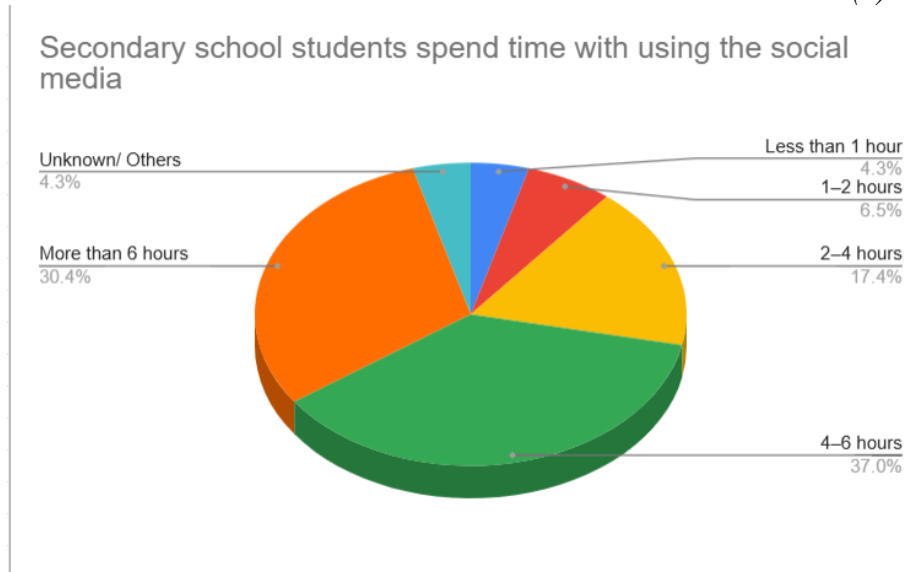


Figure 8

Social Media/Game Use

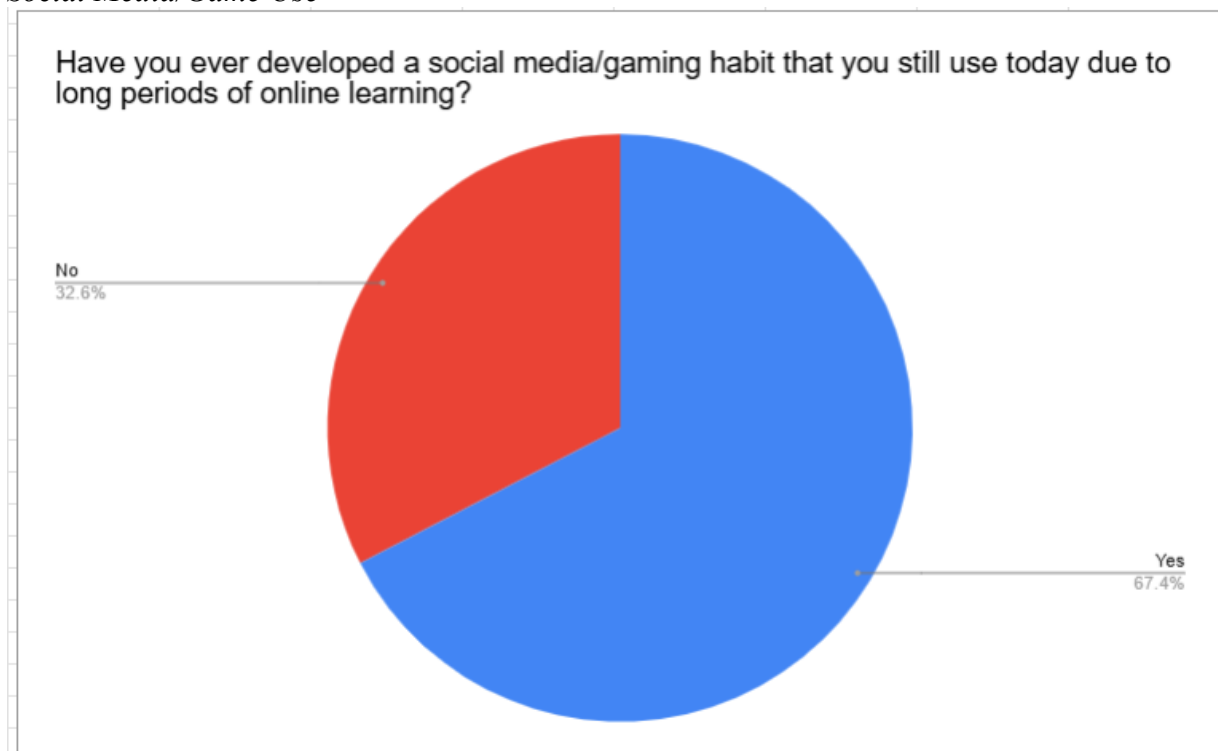


Table 5*Changes Between Pandemic and Post-pandemic*

Statement/ Situations	Yes	No
A. Difficulty falling asleep/disrupted sleep schedule	25 (54.3%)	21 (45.7%)
B. More frequent personal feelings of anxiety/tension/depression	26 (56.5%)	20 (43.5%)
C. More frequent conflicts with family members due to internet use	15 (32.6%)	31 (67.4%)
D. More easily affected by online messages	24 (52.2%)	22 (47.8%)
E. Less social interaction (including communication) with classmates	24 (52.2%)	22 (47.8%)
F. None of the above or the same as above	9 (19.6%)	37 (80.4%)
Others		

Table 6*Collaboration and Generic Skills Analysis*

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Standard Derivation (SD)</u>	<u>Range (Min & Max)</u>
Compared to before and after the pandemic, my teamwork and problem-solving abilities (division of labor, commitment, coordination) have improved.	3.11	3 (26 Participants)	3	1.00	4
Compared to before and after the pandemic, my clarity regarding my self-identity and future goals (e.g., further education/career) has improved.	2.65	3 (16 Participants)	3	1.20	4
Compared to before and after the pandemic, my learning motivation and self-discipline (time management, proactive review) have improved.	2.78	3 (15 Participants)	3	1.21	4

Note. For each statement below, please rate it on a 1–5 scale (1 = significantly decreased, 5 = significantly increased).

Table 7*Challenges and How Educators and Social Workers Support*

Primary challenge	Requested support (school / social workers)	Example responses	Count
Social / face-to-face reintegration	More extracurriculars activities, organized social activities, gradual exposure, small-group mixers, opportunities for shy students	• “要嘗試變回和同學實體相處” • “希望學校提供更多課外活動” • “增加更多課外活動” • “提升學生相處時間”	14
Communication skills decline	Workshops on conversation skills, peer-mentoring, guided social groups, one-on-one support	• “身邊後輩溝通能力下降” • “與他人溝通的技巧生疏了”	6
Academic catch-up / learning progress	Remedial/ make-up/ tutorial classes, catch-up sessions, flexible deadlines, study support, tutoring	• “課程進度追趕得很辛苦，學校增加了很多補課” • “學習進度完全更不上”	6
Mental health / emotional issues	Counselling, mental-health programs, non-clinical peer support, better outreach for students in need	• “Mental health” • “Emotional”	5
Attention / self-discipline (study habits)	Time-management workshops, focus strategies, structured study groups	• “self-discipline learning” • “Concentration to learning”	4
Practical/logistical (commute, environment)	Improve facilities (classroom comfort), timetable adjustments, transport/ logistics support	• “通勤很麻煩”	2
Resistance to formal support	Prefer organic/social approaches; some dislike formal counselling or feel forced	• “和社工交談讓我感到很痛苦…覺得很冷漠” • “不希望學校提供支援，因為會變成強迫性”	3

Primary challenge	Requested support (school / social workers)	Example responses	Count
No challenge / minimal difference	No support requested	• “沒有挑戰” • “Not much of difference”	3
Others / unclear / no response	—	“/”, “NA”, blank	3
Total Response	---	---	46

Figure 9

Education and Learning Professional Support: Online Learning Resources

After the epidemic, which of the following learning resources do you have at home?

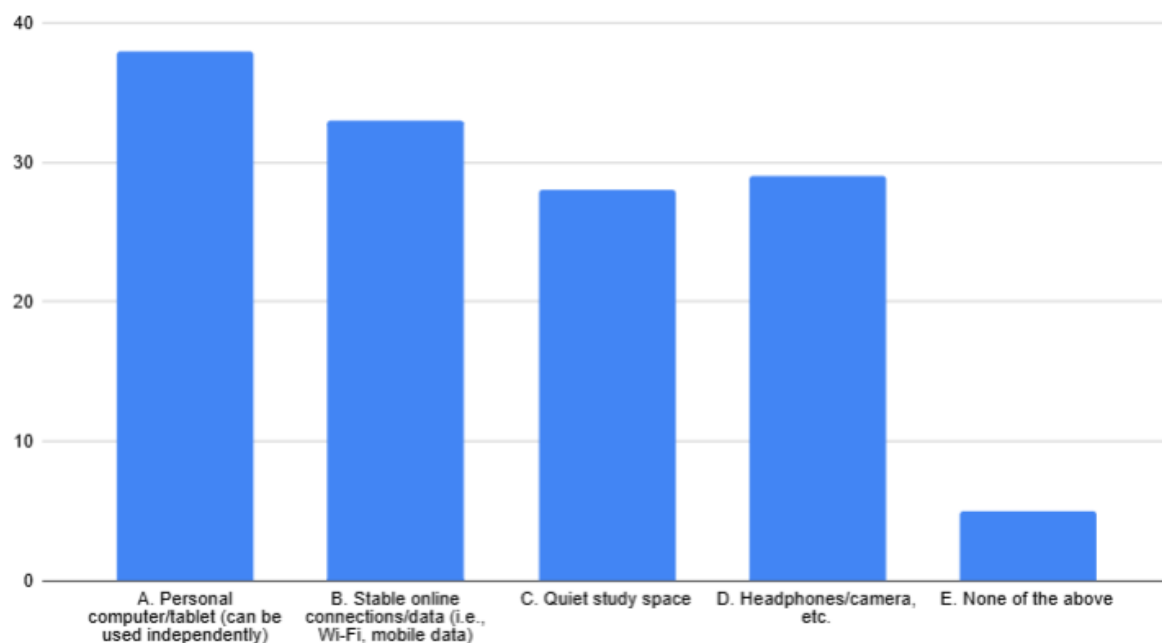


Figure 10
Other Factors Formulation

Compared to before and after the pandemic, have you experienced any of the following as a result of internet use/social media or other factors? (Items)

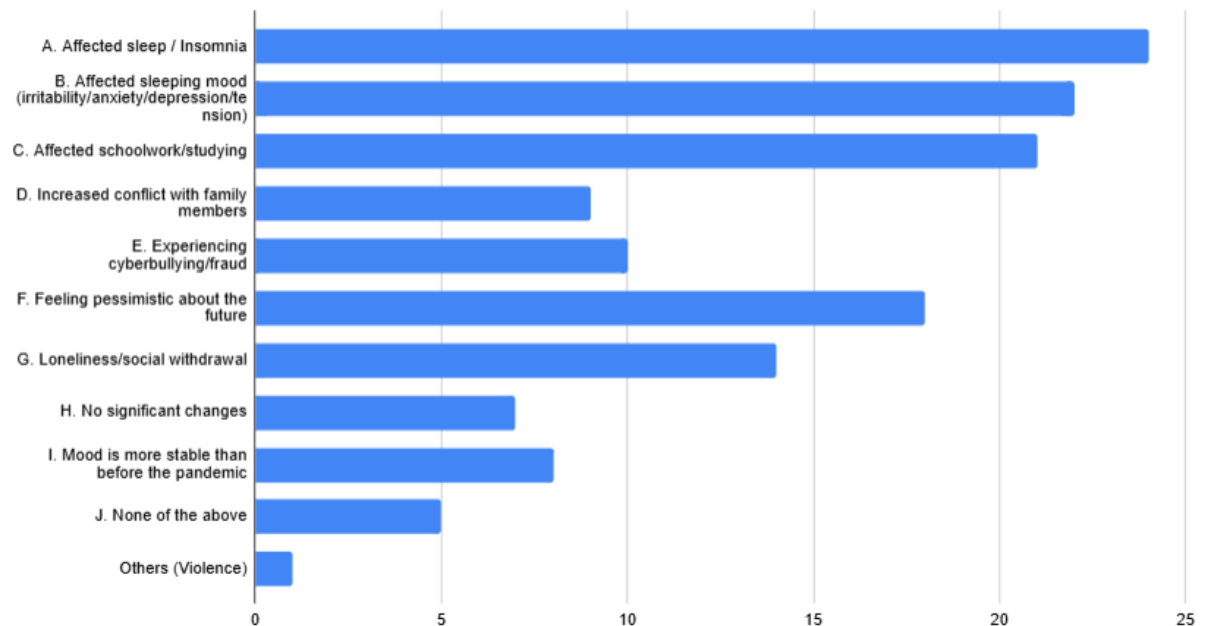
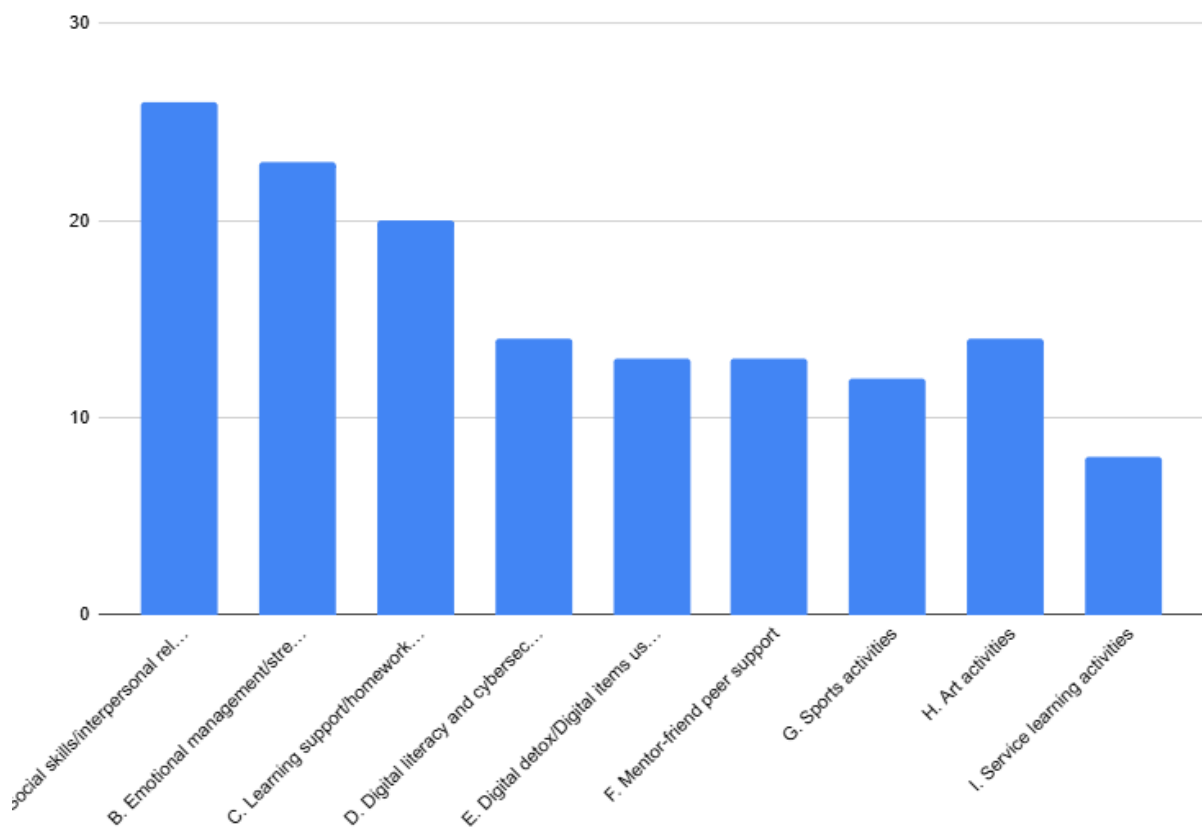


Figure 11
Educational and Social Worker Professional Support

School or social worker support



Secondary school students also require help in improving their social skills, stress management, and anxiety reduction together with their overall psychological needs. Small group activities can be used in a face-to-face manner to restore social confidence, improve inter-personal skills and create a sense of safety and security. It is also advisable that social workers should work together with the parents to encourage authoritative rather than authoritarian parenting by listening and validating the concerns, interests, and views of the adolescents. Also, the government of HKSAR has developed the 12 Three-Tier School-Based Emergency Mechanism (with contributions from the Health Bureau, EDB, and SWD). For example, in terms of the needs regarding mental health, schools may identify students with increased suicide risk. It is recommended that the multidisciplinary team of the school should prioritize to arrange counseling to those who are considered being more likely to commit suicide and those with psychological health problems (HKSAR Government, 2023; The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 2022; Yu, 2022).

Group and team work exercises (also increasing additional activities like service learning and leadership programs) to incorporate additional mental health activities (like the Education Bureau and Mental Health 4R strategy approach framework, which includes Rest, Relationship, Relaxation, and Resilience). Adolescents should identify pressure signals. Social workers can add additional individual, personalized, and tailor-made counseling leaders that help secondary school students to cope with pressure and stress through peer support; managing emotions and bearing the pressure positively; developing friendship among peers and feeling connected with peers while developing their sense of responsibility and contribution; and many others. Overall, it will help parents to provide warmth and a secure environment for their children.

Moreover, adaptation implies change; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can increase the effect on students who have to speak (Primary 6 and Secondary 6 students with DSE candidates). Simultaneously, it will also affect university students. Some learning outcomes for the groups mentioned above were discovered through the survey. Besides, more SEN issues could be explored within this paper. Secondary school students need to pay attention to their efficiency (The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 2022; Palancı, 2023; Tso et al., 2023). In the future, social work should go beyond case management responsibilities and attempt to expand its perspective by combining human development theories (like investigating development trends and adaptive developments).

Resilience Development, Mental Health, and Community Service Planning Management

More specifically, neo-ecological theory mentioned that individual development is influenced by the interaction of several systems, including the family, school, peer group, and community services. In addition, an intervention would have greater chances of success if it incorporates both individual characteristics and contexts (Navarro & Tudge, 2022). Therefore, social work practice implications can be explained in (a) individual, (b) family, (c) school, and (d) community aspects. As for Children and Youth (C&Y) and social work fields, post-COVID-19 general objectives involve promoting healthy mental states, restoring social competence, and improving academic engagement. It obviously faces certain challenges. Promotion of community, psychological resilience, and adaptive coping strategies among adolescents. Resilience is seen as a developmental task supported by individual resilience and protective factors within the environment (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). For adolescents after the pandemic, their resilience can be developed through helping them regulate emotions, engage constructively with peers, and undertake activities aimed at regaining confidence when engaging socially and academically. It also raises social worker disciplines about adolescent

mental health and early interventions. The changes brought about by the pandemic led to increased anxiety, social avoidance, and difficulty in managing stress. It is essential for social workers to help schools become better prepared to identify adolescents with mental problems.

Conclusion

Summary

The influence of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) is very adaptive and has implications for the social work practice. We can understand that the impacts of COVID-19 on human development are complicated. It is discovered developmental challenges faced by adolescents are often due to factors other than their personal inadequacies: the social environment and systems changes in which they operate. Adolescents experience self-exploration, peer approval, and autonomy regarding psychology. During the pandemic and end of the pandemic time, it decreased extracurricular activity participation, social withdrawal (shyness with others), and difficulty in collaboration with others. It indicates that the developmental requirements of adolescents cannot be achieved by academic work. Adolescents should have opportunities to interact with peers, have emotional regulation, and develop interpersonal communication skills. But what this paper demonstrates is the problems experienced during the post-pandemic period may not all be because of the virus itself. Indeed, those social problems are actually exacerbated versions of existing inequities like digital divides and unequal learning resources and psychosocial support at the community and school levels. It seems to me the coronavirus period becomes a catalyst for pre-existing issues within society. Although COVID-19 provides more challenges, it still provides sufficient opportunities. Indeed, the pandemic presented other opportunities as well. Through online and digital learning, young people's digital literacy sufficiently increased. Zoom, Google Meet (video conference tools), Google Classroom, Google Documents, Kahoot!, and Mentimeter become useful tools for the educator and social worker to support students' needs. Digital media cannot be a replacement for the social learning that takes place through face-to-face contact. It provides a foundation for connection and identity development, provided that young people have sufficient supervision and balance in their use of digital media (The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 2020; Tse & Lau, 2023; Zarifsanaiey et al., 2024).

This research paper explored consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the psychosocial development of secondary education students in Hong Kong. In this regard, it was possible to understand the post-pandemic consequences of adolescents using developmental theories. By applying Erikson's perspective on identity development (identity role and confusion), Piaget's view on cognitive development, and Maslow's belonging and self-respect needs, it is possible to understand the effects of the pandemic on the social competence, peer affiliation, emotional resilience, and academic engagement of adolescents. The research findings provided dual consequences associated with the post-pandemic period. Firstly, it provides limitations imposed by the post-pandemic period. It made it difficult for adolescents to utilize peers in their efforts to improve their social skills and develop a sense of belongingness and identity. Or, how to reconstruct adolescents' identity and role and reshape social skills is essential. Secondly, it had consequences that had to do with the acceleration of digital/hybrid learning during the post-pandemic period. Both findings have major implications for social work practice.

Implications

Firstly, supportive interventions involve restoring protective factors at multiple ecological levels. At the individual level, adolescents require structure and social-emotional regulation supports. At the family level, clear communication and parenting advice could help establish healthy routines and avoid relational tension. Peer-building opportunities and referrals to learning and mental health services become imperative. Finally, at the community level, digital access programs and youth engagement projects help alleviate structural barriers. This article further discusses that the post-COVID era should not merely be seen as a brief “learning loss” phase. This is a time and period to enhance developmental support and service readiness among children and youth. In catering to artificial intelligence, virtual learning, digital transformation, and sustainable education learning practices, it is essential to have new “adaptations.” The importance of mental, psychological, and emotional health and social interactions are pivotal.

Research Study

This paper applied different research methods, including qualitative research regarding literature reviews, scholars, Hong Kong NGO research reports, news coverage, participant interviews, and personal experiences, and quantitative research methods like surveys. This research provides a useful overview of post-COVID-19 developmental impacts and implications for social work. This paper completed the pilot study and has prepared for journal submission in the future. It is recommended to provide larger sample sizes, research effective research concepts and questionnaires, and improve research direction for the assessment of digital engagement quality and comparison of yearly research methods to track the changes in adolescent development as schooling and digital activities evolve.

Limitations

The pilot research results were the small sample size of the survey questionnaire and the small size of the qualitative data. But, specifically, professional interview and secondary school students are valuable. Also, this research study's outcomes may fail to reflect the experience of all student categories, including those with diverse SEN requirements and varying family backgrounds. It still provides references to the trend through literature review sections.

How to adapt to a “new-normal”: from mental health perspectives: This research paper anticipates some recommendations regarding social work levels of engagement, involvement and perspectives. It includes restructuring of peer learning groups (to train social learning groups), experiential learning groups, social skills development groups and emotion regulation groups, digital literacy and digital detox programs, etc. The intervention can be next steps and find more data to see how changes adolescents’ mental health and psychological issues. Ultimately, through the application of psychosocial and educational aspects finding in developmental theories, this paper justifies the use of a proactive and developmental social work model. Especially, adolescents adapt to the “new normal” era post-pandemic.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that this paper used Grammarly, Grammar-checking writing softwares/functions (like EDUHK ChatGPT, Grok AI, POE, perplexity.ai, and QuillBot) to have proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical, spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-generated technologies were used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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