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Signed: _____Joe Jennings_____   Date: _____22/04/2021_____

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Abstract

This research strives to provide an idea of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted youth perspectives on their educational and occupational prospects. The research question was built upon the hope to understand how and why third level students' mindsets are changing within the context of a pandemic. Assisted by the data and relevant sociological literature, this thesis shall propose a perceived sense of 'waithood' that is consuming young people in Ireland. To achieve this, the study shall utilise data gathered from ten in-depth semi-structured interviews. This mediated form of qualitative measurement will outline the core principles and beliefs held by young people in Ireland surrounding COVID-19's impact. Through thematic analysis the following topics were identified and shall be discussed at length; digitalisation of the workplace, 'Risk Society' post-pandemic and the concept of a youthful 'waithood'. The exploration of these themes will assist the abundance of COVID-19 related literature in understanding the impact on graduates exiting education during a pending economic downturn.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is the first of its kind throughout modern history. Its implications are vast and immeasurable. The world has come to a grinding halt as disease is spread at an unprecedented rate across every corner of the globe. International supply chains are suffering drawbacks whilst economies are stalling, resulting in mass unemployment. Countries and sectors have become disproportionately affected giving rise to a new wave of inequalities (Fernandes 2020). The impact is truly globalised as 93% of the world's workers currently operate under workplace restrictions. In addition to this there has been a loss of working hours equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs. This spiral downward has steadied out with a rebound in working hours during the later parts of the pandemic (ILO 2021). Third level education is among the hardest hit sectors of the economy. A large proportion of education has been moved online providing an entirely new landscape for learning. The closure of universities has remained in the face of secondary and primary teaching reopening. Due to these reasons Chandasiri (2020) states that undergraduates who would be graduates shorty are among the most vulnerable demographic as not only has their education been impaired, but they shall enter into a destitute economy. Evidently occupational and educational fields are undergoing drastic infrastructural change to accommodate imposing restrictions prompting extensive research into the impact these changes will have.

This research will contribute to the existing mass of COVID-19 related literature by adopting a unique viewpoint so to address gaps in the academic writing. Concentrating the focus of the study on the youth of Ireland this research will begin to provide vital insight into how the

pandemic is affecting young Irish people and how it will impact upon their aspirations. These topics shall be explored with regards to relevant sociological theory that will help contextualise their experiences. Drawing influence from Chandasiri's (2020) acknowledgment of graduates as a vulnerable population this research shall attempt to measure a shift in student perspectives regarding employment and further education. This research project will set out to measure the attitudes and beliefs of Irelands' youth surrounding aspects of life that have and will be altered drastically by the COVID-19 pandemic. To accompany this attitude measurement research, this study shall build upon Honwana's (2014) concept of 'waithood'. This thesis will propose the conceptualisation of a contemporary pandemic 'waithood' for graduates exiting third level education during the current global health crisis.

Literature Review

Introduction

The following literature review shall be structured into four sections: Firstly, Super's (1980) theory regarding the development of individual careers will assist in demonstrating how current unemployment figures will have drastic job prospect and employment downsides as a result of the current global health emergency. The literature review shall then begin to narrow down its scope to centre its attention around sociological theory and concepts relevant to suspended economic activity among youth in Ireland and the COVID-19 pandemic. To understand the pandemic through a sociological frame the following sections intend to review theory from Beck (1992) Giddens (1990,1992) and Bauman (2000,2006) relating to ideas of consequence, fear and risk in contemporary society. Such concepts shall be assessed in relation to how the COVID-19 pandemic came to exist due to a globalised state of modernity. This shall build the foundation upon which my research will be conducted. Thirdly, I shall identify key relevant statistics and information regarding the economic shortcomings and distribution of unemployment in Ireland that have occurred as a result of the imposed restrictions due to COVID-19. Finally, I will present the pivotal thesis statement of a 'suspended youth' under the conceptual idea of 'waithood' as discussed by Cuzzocrea (2019) describing the state of unemployment limbo that many youths feel entraps them following their exit from education. These topics shall be critically analysed and assessed in their significance to the overarching narrative of the thesis (Bryman 2016).

Life-span Career Development

Employment in the earlier years of our adult lives is vital in acquiring key work skills and attitudes. Johnson and Mortimerin (2002:55) assert that both adolescents and parents alike express that early employment is a positive career developing experience. Vital personal skills are learnt in addition to workplace capabilities such as self-efficacy, dependability and independence (Johnson and Mortimerin 2002:55). The on-going restrictive measures that have halted work within a variety of sectors in the Irish economy will potentially result in a significant economic downturn hindering the acquisition of such skills among young entry level employees due to the previously discussed prevalence of their presence in closed economic sectors.

To understand the potential impact of these sanctions I shall reflect upon the framework provided by Super (1980) dubbed the 'life-career rainbow' that helps to provide through a self-perceptive identity lens, a life-span career developmental approach to understanding the trajectory of individual careers. The concept visualises how a conventional career path may be formed under an ordinary setting, proposing stages of occupational growth that may or may not relate to the individual's chronological age. Similar, to Johnson and Mortimerin (2002), Super (1980:286) emphasises the importance of the early occupational experiences and positions held by an individual in forming their developmental pathway or career trajectory. This becomes particularly relevant when it comes to examining how the return to employment will look for Irish youth come the end of rolling lockdowns. However, it can be argued that due to the market-wide shutdown experienced in some sectors that all members of the workforce will be impacted equally. Thus, a post-COVID-19 inequality may occur that creates a divide between the younger members of the workforce depending on what sector

they had been invested or interested in prior to the pandemic. These sector-specific divides shall be investigated through my interview design.

Li and Toll (2021) present further up-to-date research that highlights the disparity in employment and promotion opportunities between graduate hires and established workers in an industry. Graduate employees experience increased levels of underemployment and remain in entry level positions longer than those who entered into the labour market under normal conditions. The adverse effects of entering the workforce during an economic downturn extend past occupational opportunity to physical and mental wellbeing. Unhealthy behaviours such as smoking and excessive alcohol consumption have been linked to entering the workplace during economic depression (Li and Toll 2021). Although the focus of this research thesis is on third level students and graduates, Genda, Kondo, and Ohta (2010) explain how there is an increase in loss of employment for less educated individuals who enter in similar circumstances. An additional remark aligns with the previously discussed literature that despite persistent negative effects the adverse ramifications fade with time but there is no telling how much valuable occupational and economic progression is lost on behalf of the graduates entering during the downturn (Genda, Kondo, and Ohta 2010; Li and Toll 2021).

Modernity and Risk under COVID-19

The post-industrial era of advanced modernity has brought about immense change regarding how interconnected the globalised societies of the world have become. This chaining of fates results in the sharing of risks. For Beck (1992:19) these risks occur unbeknownst to us during the rapidly developing expansion of productive capabilities due to technological innovation

or state regulation. This production of risk occurs simultaneously to the production of wealth (Beck 1992:19). These risks are an 'incidental problem of modernisation' and are happening in an 'undesirable abundance' (Beck 1992:26). This discussion of 'global hazards' as categorised by Beck (1992:13) assists in the explanation of not only the spread of COVID-19 but also its potential origin. Giddens' (1990) discussions on postmodernity echo a similar perspective to that of Beck's. Giddens (1990:3) argues that the world is not surpassing the era referred to as modernity but is instead entering an age where the consequences of modernity are substantially more noticeable and present in everyday lives. That rings true in the eyes of the public given the current atmosphere. In a similar fashion to Beck (1992), Giddens (1991:123) identifies what he describes as a 'climate of risk' involved with late modernity and partially attributes it to a constant differing of opinion among 'knowledge-claims mediated by expert systems'. Such a topic of 'risk' assessment as performed by experts is of particular importance in understanding the everchanging restrictions and advice circulating regarding COVID-19.

Beck (1992) and Giddens' (1990) celebrated work was conceived long before the initial discovery of SARS-CoV-2 yet their work bears a striking relevance with the ramifications involved with COVID-19. The origin of the disease is understood to be linked with the sale and slaughter of bats and potentially rodents in Wuhan marketplaces (Liu, Kuo and Shih 2020). This equates perfectly to the idea of a 'risk society' where our productive capacity and desire has increased yet at the same time the scope of potential risk has also grown. The increasingly globalised state of the world as discussed by both theorists is also linked to how such a disease can be spread globally within half a year. Thus, leading to the idea of a singular 'risk society' where problems such as war and disease are no longer localised but instead emanate through all fabrics of a singular world society (Beck 1999).

Fear in a Pandemic

Degerman, Flinders and Johnson (2020:7) posit that "the links between Bauman's position and the emergence of COVID-19 as a global pandemic are as numerous as they are obvious". The writings of Bauman (2000) lie in a similar vein of theoretical literature as the previously discussed theorists. His conceptualisation of contemporary society is presented as 'Liquid Modernity', which describes a societal status where there is no definitive structure. According to Bauman the modern present moves fluidly across boundaries and obstacles in a similar fashion to the coronavirus. This becomes particularly relevant to the sociological literature surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic when referring to Bauman's (2006) sequential novel surrounding uncertain and ambiguous fear.

This section differs from the previous in that it discusses the societal reaction to the unpredictable consequences previously discussed as a part of a 'risk society'. Our cultures are predicated on the uncertainty of the future enabling actions that bear no concern for their future consequence (Vint 2009). It may be argued that there exists a remarkable likeness between such an ideology and the current government restrictions on the labour market. Restrictions put in place in order to protect lives are also impacting on the future lives of those who are more vulnerable in terms of their occupational career. Adverse labour market conditions have been shown to negatively influence employment and increase the likelihood of underemployment particularly for recent college graduates who are yet to secure an occupational trajectory (Abel and Deitz 2017). Ward (2020) remarks that Bauman's (2006) theory on "liquid fear" strikes a clear resemblance to the 'invisibility' of the COVID-19 virus. The virus perpetuates Bauman's thoughts on how fear may be around every corner and

can seep across all layers of society due to the viral nature of the COVID-19 virus. It epitomises the idea that the experience of fear is one that is not only felt individually, but also a collective phenomenon that stems from unpredictability (Degerman, Flinders and Johnson 2020).

Youth Unemployment in Ireland

The previous brief sociological discussion of the COVID-19 health crisis assists in framing my proposed research question surrounding youth careers in limbo. This section of the literature review shall organise the current and relevant statistics regarding unemployment, policy change and implications for future job prospects. Within the Irish context the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the worst monthly unemployment rate in the history of the Republic of Ireland. Of this number almost one quarter of the unemployed were younger members of the labour force. As of the latest March 2021 statistics, the COVID-19 adjusted unemployment rate states that 59.2% of those aged between 15 and 24 are unemployed. A drastic comparison exists when examining the unemployment rate of those aged 25 to 75 which is at 20.3% (CSO 2021). This is due to the concentration of closing lower skilled sectors such as construction, retail and food services (Coates et al 2020). Additionally, these grim statistics are viewed as indicators of dire employment expectation and development (Abel and Deitz 2017). Darmody et al (2020:57) notes that there is an increasing and existing body of evidence illustrating how entrance into the labour market during a recession bodes poorly for long term career development. Within the youth demographic existing disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged groups will also begin to widen. Such has been shown to happen in previous economic downturns resulting in increasing levels of inequality amongst young workers (Darmody et al 2020:63). A worrying outlook provided by Autin et

al. (2020:3) is that career development specialists should prioritise the education of social welfare benefits in the same manner as they prioritise reemployment. This data presents a stark image of the imminent economic and employment downturn for those who are most vulnerable in the work force and shall be cross-examined with my own data to ensure an accurate sample representation.

Youth in Waiting

The self-identity measures presented by Super (1980:288) have a lifespan of their own. As the identity begins to wane, a student, for example, may begin to place more importance on becoming a worker. Within the current socioeconomic climate where there is risk of economic downturn this may not be possible. This leads to the defining argument of this thesis-, are we entering an age of 'waithood' for the youth of contemporary society? To answer this question, I will record via my research how students entering the work force view this state of limbo.

This idea of 'waithood' is discussed in one instance by Cuzzocrea (2019) as the period of time in a young person's life where they have achieved educational qualification and work relevant skill attainment yet are not making or cannot make any active steps towards progressing a career. Cuzzocrea (2019:2) uses a Sardinian case study to describe the transition between education and building a career during a time of economic crisis in Italy. This suspension of the youth during such a pivotal period of time in their personal and professional lives results in hugely delayed career development. Such a phenomenon could very possibly occur in Ireland during the oncoming recession endangering our globally

recognised role as an educated workforce provider for transnational corporations (Breen et al. 1990). Honwana (2014) states that this rising feeling of 'waithood' is beginning to replace 'conventional adulthood' and stems from a lack of equity and freedom to choose. The issue of 'waithood' was already prevalent within contemporary society and will only be exacerbated further by the pending economic downturn that will follow the lift of the current restrictive measures.

Conclusion of the Literature

This literature review has demonstrated the abundance of literature surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and youth unemployment. There is evidently a significant volume of sociological theory that can be applied to both of these topics independently and in conjunction with one another. A framework from which my research shall be illuminated has been provided through the means of understanding the pandemic as a repercussion of modernity and uncertainty inciting a universal yet invisible fear. The theoretics are accompanied by raw statistics which serve to visualise the current and implicated unemployment prospects. Through combining both of these aspects the final section of this chapter discussed the concept of a youthful 'waithood' that attempts to interpret a period of occupational stagnation that students experience post education before entering the workplace. Supported by the literature this research thesis will explore a range of COVID-19 and youth employment topics in advance of measuring whether there exists an experience of 'waithood' among the youth of Ireland.

Methodology

Research Method

The formulated research question titling this study will attempt to explore if and how the youth of Ireland's attitudes towards their employment and job prospects has changed since COVID-19. The original emphasis was to explore this topic with particular interest in the context of waiting and suspension within the labour market and third-level education. The main objective of the research is to identify how the current health emergency has altered the perspective of Irish youth towards their professional lives compared to before the pandemic. My approach follows a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm that strives to understand 'the individual and their interpretation of the world around them' (Kivunja and Bawa Kuyini 2017). The data gathered by this kind of research centres around my chosen paradigm as I measure participants outlooks and interpretations of the current Irish socioeconomic state. Through this paradigm I adopted an exploratory research design which typically aims to understand how people act in a certain setting, what their actions mean to them and how they deal with their concerns (Chambliss and Schutt 2018). The context for my research is the labour market environment during and after the COVID-19 health crisis. Taking this into consideration, I decided to conduct qualitative semi-structured mediated interviews using a purposeful snowball and convenience sampling method to gather my research participants. The data was then processed through thematic analysis to understand in what ways the youth's perspective has changed.

Qualitative research in its most general definition is regarded as descriptive information whether that be measured through people's expressions or behaviour. It is especially

concerned with the meaning behind these expressions and behaviours to draw conclusions and collect data (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2015). This process is central to my research question as I am attempting to investigate a shifting perspective of youth employment from the point of view of students. In exploring my approach, I considered multiple qualitative approaches including phenomenological and grounded theory methods. Although Worthington (2013) describes phenomenology as a foundational aspect of qualitative research there are important distinctions between the basic qualitative approach utilised by this study and phenomenological research. This research focuses on forming a general consensus of young people's attitudes towards the pandemic and its implications rather than attempting to measure how the participants feelings have been created and how meaning is formed so to understand the "essence" of a social phenomenon. Key to my decision was the distinction between what determines a qualitative research study and a phenomenological study due to the emphasis found within this study on the participants lived experiences. Thus, I would define my research approach as guided by bottom-up grounded theory methods whilst simultaneously drawing influence from relevant theory to guide the topic.

Initially alternative methodologies were explored but due to the nature of my thesis question qualitative methods of research were deemed the most appropriate approach. However, a quantitative approach such as an online cross-sectional opinion survey, may have provided my research with increased generalisability and a more representative sample population. This route was considered but I concluded that the chosen topic could not be adequately analysed through a questionnaire as the topic's content was simply too vast and interpretable. The data was simply much richer and descriptive when gathered through words as opposed to numbers on a survey. A mixed method approach whereby I could have explored both a statistical significance in attitudes through quantitative means in addition to the presently

utilised interviews may have also been a viable option (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). Unfortunately, I felt that triangulation in this instance would not corroborate my topic significantly as the dimension that is explored would not benefit from surface level engagement (Hesse-Biber 2010)**.** An additional factor to be considered was that I had reduced access to participants due to the current national restrictions in place restricting face-to-face contact. Franklin (2008) posits that the principal difference between quantitative and qualitative methods lies in the number of cases being examined further cementing the direction of the study's methodology as the restrictions were an element that I could not control under these conditions. Due to these explained circumstances and reasons I designed an in-depth semi-structured interview plan (See Appendix 2) with the intentions of gathering the experiences and perspectives by interviewing ten individuals from my sample population.

Sample Population

The research conducted follows a nonprobability purposive approach. In qualitative research statistical generalisability is not a primary goal and therefore renders probability sampling unnecessary (Merriam and Tisdell 2015:96). This was achieved through a convenience snowball sampling approach by utilising my personal contacts with young people across multiple different academic institutions and fields of study. I initially contacted my college acquaintances through email or Facebook messenger. Following the completion of the interviews I asked the participants if they could recommend any of their own acquaintances thus achieving a snowball method. The criteria determining eligible participants revolved around specific requirements so to ensure that the purposive approach would achieve an information rich sample population. This study required an in-depth understanding from a relatively small sample size of ten interviewees so to achieve representativeness (Leavy

2017:79). All participants met the following criteria: 23 years of age or younger, have

experienced and will continue to experience employment in Ireland and are in the process of

or have completed an academic degree. The original emphasis on the youth of Ireland was

constrained by my limited access to young individuals outside of third level education and in

the secondary school system. Gaining access to younger students proved difficult with the

constant opening and reclosing of secondary school facilities and forced me to change my

emphasis to focus on young residents of Ireland who are involved in third level education.

Selected Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Academic Institution
Andrew	Male	21	Maynooth University
Amy	Female	20	Carlow IT
Meredith	Female	20	Maynooth University
Ben	Male	23	Maynooth University
Timothy	Male	21	Carlow IT
Gemma	Female	21	Maynooth University
Kyle	Male	23	Maynooth University
Kayla	Female	22	Maynooth University
Daniel	Male	21	Limerick University
Patrick	Male	21	UCD

^ Italics indicate an alias

Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) remark that it is vital for a researcher who is using

convenience sampling whether that be entirely, or partially in this case, to outline how their

sample would differ from a sample that were randomly selected. The sample studied in this

research overrepresents the older portion of non-mature undergraduate students. There are no

interviews involving first year college students who may have led an interesting perspective

on COVID-19's impact on third level education. I deemed this not to be an issue as students

who are further on in their academic career are evidently closer to entering the labour market making their perspectives more valuable to the study.

Collecting the Data

The study began with two separate interviews with those participants with whom I have a personal relationship. From these interviews I received two more participants through snowball sampling. I initially chained my participants from two participants who do not know each other to ensure that I do not draw from one social group through the snowball method. An important note is that I purposefully strayed from utilising entirely convenience sampling as it was important that I maintained a distant yet somewhat personal relationship with the participants so that they could confide in me but not distort the data through bias. Generally, it is not recommended within social science research to have a sample primarily composed of peers as it can lead to oversharing and issues with validity and ethical practice (Lichtman 2013; Leavy 2017). I continued with this convenience snowball method whenever interviewees did not recommend a further participant. Before every interview I provided potential participants with an information sheet and consent form (See Appendix 1). I received emails of signed consent from each subject before commencing the interview.

The pandemic's restrictions were a notable environmental aspect that had to be considered when choosing the appropriate method of research. Due to the ongoing and past lockdowns the majority of this research was conducted online. All but one interview took place over Facebook Messenger. One interview took place in a face-to-face environment between myself and my roommate. The specific application of Facebook Messenger was used as it was the most commonplace voice chat app with which the participants were familiar. Being

confined to an online research space presented some advantages such as relative convenience for both the researcher and interviewees as physical proximity was negated. A key limitation that arose as a result of being limited to the primary use of internet mediated communication included not being able to benefit from face-to-face interviews. Vogl (2013) highlights the importance of visual cues and behaviour in face-to-face interviews that are completely absent through computer-mediated communication technologies. These observable subtleties are vital in interpreting and adapting to participant responses. Hesse-Biber and Griffin (2013) state that meanings behind expressions may be lost due to the absence of nonverbal cues.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the personal nature of the content that was explored in the interviews, I had to consider the various ethical complications that could arise. Prior to every interview, the participants were provided with a copy of an information sheet and consent form (See Appendix 1). Participants download this form and provided consent though signing and dating the form. It was made clear to those I contacted that they were under no obligation to continue their involvement with the research and could exit at any time. Upon commencing the interviews, I explicitly informed each participant that the interview would be recorded and asked if they had read and signed the consent form so as to ensure transparency and avoid deception. The recordings of the interviews were stored under randomly generated codenames on my tablet behind two layers of passcode security.

Additionally, the internet has become a virtual laboratory for social science research during the last two decades bringing rise to an increased number of ethical concerns, thus issues

specific to my virtual audio-only interviews had to be accounted for. Issues regarding the online verification of identity, anonymity and impersonation are discussed by Iacono, Symonds and Brown (2016) as being rooted in communication technologies. To combat this, sampling methods such as snowballing, and convenience sampling were used to ensure that the participants were personally known by the researcher or interviewees. Another ethical issue that arises through the use of digital environments as a research domain is that of the merging of private and public spaces. Facebook is a privately owned company, yet their digital domain promotes a public environment. James and Busher (2016) discuss how the merging of public and private spaces on the internet can result in various research implications as a researcher must determine if a public space filled with private responses is an eligible research environment. This issue arises primarily within research involved with textual content and for that reason further prompted me to limit myself to audio recorded interviews.

Data Analysis

A vast number of topics and ideas were covered during the interview process prompted by both my interview script and naturally occurring conversation with the participants. To conceptualise these findings, I adopted a thematical analysis approach. This practice involves the categorisation of ideas and themes that arise within the data set in the attempt to visualise the content gathered. Through an in-depth examination of the verbal interviews a researcher should identify key themes that reoccur within individual accounts (Lichtman 2013). I carried out this method by combing through each interview individually and noting the reoccurring subjects. This was followed by manual coding of the data on tables utilising word processing software. Discovering themes was a straightforward process as I was guided by field notes

that I wrote concurrently with the interviews so to combine both synchronous and asynchronous methods of data analysis. Analysis throughout the research process is vital in the gathering of data as the process can shape the results (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). As the interview process continued I developed the interview scripts to refine the data collected before the content analysis even took place. The theoretical ideas that were emphasized most by the participants were as follows: the digitalisation of work and education, 'Risk Society' post pandemic, and COVID-19 as a period of occupational waithood. These topics shall all be explored as part of an overarching occupational and educational perspective shift. Selecting these areas as the principal findings was challenging as although there were many reoccurring ideas many participants provided contrasting viewpoints. I will endeavour to discuss their perspectives through an unbiased lens presenting an objective narrative of the data.

Limitations

Throughout the qualitative research process the researcher becomes an instrument through which data is collected. The researcher facilitates the communication within the interviews and is paramount in interpreting and coding the data. It is for this reason that researcher bias must be discussed (Chenail 2011; Poggenpoel and Myburgh 2003). My own experiences with COVID-19 and its economic implications cannot be avoided as I am a member of the population sample that has been drawn upon for this study. Therefore, I have strived to become consciously aware of my own perspective and bias so as to ensure impartial analysis of the data.

All participants involved in this study were Caucasian with Irish and English heritage providing an undiversified sample that is not representative of the overall youthful population

of Ireland. Due to time constraints, participant access and resource limitations I was unable to accurately produce a differential sample. This shortcoming should be considered when designing further research. Follow up studies would benefit greatly from a diverse participant pool so to provide increasingly illustrative information. In consideration of this it must be acknowledged that the significant findings from this study may not have been highly influenced by ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Atkin and Chattoo 2006). This is stated not to dimmish the importance of ethnic and cultural representativeness in qualitative research but to highlight the relevance of this study's findings.

Discussion of Findings

Overview

The following chapter outlines the three core themes that arose during the research process. These sections that have been highlighted through my research, comprise a number of perspective shifts held by the youth of Ireland. From compiling the participant's data, the following topics were uncovered and shall now be discussed under the framework of COVID-19 and youth employment. Consistent with the literature review the first section shall explore the theoretical notion of risk as envisioned by Beck (1992). This shall be followed by the presentation of findings relating to an unanticipated topic on the digitalisation of work and education and how the youth of today adjust to this rapidly proceeding development. The analysis of these findings shall culminate in the proposal of a youthful 'waithood'. By concluding this chapter with the central proposition of this thesis the data will have been connected through various theoretical perspectives providing a cohesive and rounded discussion of the findings.

'Risk Society' Post Pandemic

As outlined in the literature review the contemporary global context has given rise to the sharing of globalised risks (Beck 1992). Beck refers to these risks and hazards as a large array of social and tangible threats. Matters such as unemployment and disease are classified by Beck as the pinnacle of universally shared risks that arise due to an increased state of wealth production and distribution. The notion of "collective risks" was a dominant theme within the research interviews (Beck 1992). Participants remarked on imposing structural

ramifications in addition to social constraints that may arise due to COVID-19. Issues relating to occupational and educational hazards such as underemployment, redundancy, industry-specific obstacles and pandemic restrictions were all mentioned in relation to the risks that have arisen due to the pandemic.

Occupational risks were a frequently revisited topic throughout the interview process. Originally rising unemployment was referred to by Beck as an outcome of risk society, where existing class disparities are intensified (Elliot 2014). Within the context of this study that frame of reference has expanded so to interpret risks as occupational consequences of a global health emergency. This resonates with Beck's (1998) later writings that describe redundancy as an attribute of periods of economic uncertainty exactly like the one the world is experiencing now (Mythen 2005). Out of the ten participants, every participant who was employed prior to COVID-19 experienced some sort of redundancy. *Patrick* remarked that for some people these redundancies were not enforced by external factors but were instead conscious decisions made by the employees so to minimise risk on their life.

"My parents and I did not want me to be travelling between both work and college because of covid; the choice of choosing between them was easy for me as I have to attend college"

Under the current circumstances it is abundantly evident that Patrick made a risk assessment about where the risk in his life should exist and where he can minimise such dangers. Although Beck (1992) did little to conceptualise his theories of risk at the interpersonal level of risk assessment, his unique interpretation of risk as a component of 'individualization' is described as a broader "expansion of choice" for the individual (Elliot 2014). This evaluation of the individuals heightened awareness and available choice aligns itself with how many of the participants have reacted to circumstances under the COVID-19 pandemic. In a similar

vein *Ben* states that he believes people will "lean towards safety and take less risks"

following the pandemic. This rationalisation of the individual, wherein they perform a

quotidian cost-benefit analysis of risk was discussed by Jaeger et al. (2013) as part of the

sociological paradigm of 'Rational Actor Theory'. Jaeger et al. (2013) included the

discussion of rational human agency as a reconstructive social order with regards to an

increasingly risk driven society. This may perfectly narrate how participants will navigate the

occupational scene following the reopening of the labour market. As *Ben* described, people

will begin to live out their employment and educational aspirations like "a game of chess"

weighing the risk between each choice. Although the 'Rational Actor Paradigm' provides a

conceptually appealing and explanatory theoretical account of human agency it has been

critiqued for its inability to provide coherent reasoning for the individual analysis of the

aforementioned 'collective risks'. Renn et al. (2000) explains that the extrapolation of

assumptions surrounding individual responses cannot be applied to collective action.

Sociological perspectives on human agency may be of assistance in understanding how the

participants outlooks will and have changed following a risk event of this calibre.

Reference to educational aspirations and the participants desired career paths occurred

simultaneously during the research. The primary emphasis on education that arose through

the research centred around the forthcoming findings section on digitalisation. However,

there was a specific educational aspect surrounding Erasmus and study abroad that

highlighted theories of modernity and globalisation. Giddens (1990) describes the

contemporary section as an "international arena" where countries interact eventually

establishing an interdependent global society. This global interdependence of modernisation

has evidently become exposed during time of great risk (Beck 1992). According to *Daniel,*

who missed out on Erasmus due to the pandemic, "work and education have become state

centralised" so to manage risk at their own rate on their own terms. Mythen (2005) asserts that the international division of labour and thus education, constitute the "flexibilization of employment" which is cloaked by inherent risk according to Beck (1992). Such risks have been highlighted within the research. *Daniel* expressed that a portion of his course requirement demanded a period of study abroad yet due to the risks involved with international travel and the potentially volatile economy he chose to remain at home and drop out of his course so to return to his studies once there was minimal risk. Beck's (1992) writing on international risk relations address many of the vulnerabilities that have been exposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These uncovered hazards are forcing the youth of today to challenge their previous world views to acclimatise to this new reality.

The discussion of risk has been discussed on the micro-level of human agency. To accompany this a discourse must be established surrounding the perceived risks of participants on a macro and structural level. Throughout the interview process there was an emphasis on sector-specific consequences of COVID-19. Due to the wide range of industries covered within the sample there exists a diverse selection of assumptions surrounding how COVID will impact upon each sector. Job specific restrictions and practices were discussed by 60% of participants. Daly and Lawless (2020) discuss the sector specific impacts of Ireland's economy stating that the hospitality and accommodation sectors have been the most severely impacted sectors whilst the modern professional and technical sectors have experienced few negative impacts. The interviewees shared the same sentiments, with *Kayla* expressing that she expects little change within the law sector, and *Amy* conveying the opposite stating that the hospitality sector has been redundant for over a year. However, *Amy* did later emphasise that:

"for the hospitability sector as a whole I think it'll definitely do better whenever it all opens back up, because everybody's going to be like, Oh, like, let's go out for dinner".

Thus, bringing attention to a potential perspective shift following the lifting of restrictions.

Digitalisation of Work and Education

An emerging volume of research has surfaced amongst the vast array of COVID-19 literature regarding the digitalisation of occupational and educational environments. This research project originally had not intended to measure the virtual movement that has arrived at the forefront of the pandemic literature but following its prominence during the interviews I felt that it was too culturally potent to ignore. The coronavirus pandemic has served as a perfect storm for a world that was on the precipice of a digital revolution in terms of scholastic and professional practices. This view is mirrored within the research by many participants, *Kyle* remarks that:

"we have had the technology to do it for a long time, so it was always going to go that way; Corona virus has just forced us in that direction faster"

Tsekeris and Mastrogeorgiou (2020) have titled the current global health emergency as the world's first "digital pandemic" that has triggered an online revolution that is serving as our salvation whilst also underlining concerning issues and risks involved with migration to the digital sphere.

Emerging from the research there appeared a clear consensus among the participants that the push towards the digitalisation of the workplace would radically change how the vocational

domain functions and is structured. A driving force behind this perspective shift was the notion that this drastic reconstruction of the work environment would favour younger employees due to their inherent digital prowess that some older members of the workforce may not have obtained during their tutelage. This social exclusion through virtual means has created a divide in digital participation between the old and the young in terms of opportunities and services (Olphert and Damodaran 2013). The disparity in online expertise is reflected by the participants; *Timothy* proposes that "students coming out of college with a new online degree" will potentially be favoured by the "way the world of work has changed". Recently, studies have been published that explore this "digital exclusion" during the COVID-19 pandemic. Seifert (2020) depicts that older adults are at an increased risk of exclusion from not only opportunities but social experience and digital services. The pandemic is serving as a "catalyst" for online work exclaims *Kyle.* There is an apparent conversion of attitudes towards how the rapid development of digitalisation will impact upon students' careers.

A total of three participants explicitly stated that they predict that the younger generations of workers will hold a distinct advantage over those older than them due to their familiarity and ability to adapt to rising technological practices. Despite this measurable belief, there exists a contrasting argument presented by Kick, Contacos-Sawyer and Thomas (2015). These academics posit that it is the reliance on digital media and mediums possessed by the younger generations that will actively serve to negatively impact their occupational success. This proposal maintains that millennial employees lack vital interpersonal communication skills to effectively navigate a social workplace. This train of thought is refuted by *Kayla's* discussion of a lack of interpersonal communication amongst all employees as "everyone finds zoom meetings unbearable", reciting that it would be easier for everyone involved to "go into a

meeting room for ten minutes". Demonstrating that the youth of today do not rely on internet mediated forms of communication and would instead prefer traditional means of interaction within the workplace. This research suggests that the proposed viewpoint of Kick et al. (2015) appears simplistic in nature and remains largely speculative.

It has been established that the participants are observing an apparent shift in the means of conventional workplace and educational communication. Moreover, it is equally important to understand how the interviewees view this shift in terms of where and how it is affecting their lives. Each participant had attended third level education during the initial emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus experiencing the digitalisation of learning for at least one semester of their academic lifespan. Institutions of further education have had to adapt at an unforeseeable rate to the evolving digital landscape. This has resulted in a flurry of unforeseen and immediately unsolvable issues such as a lack of digital infrastructure and internet-based skills for staff (Webb, McQuaid and Webster 2021). These problems have had to be handled with a sense of weighted urgency as graduates' degrees have been left suspended in limbo. Participants involved in this study had hugely contrasting views of whether the digital sphere would favour them over the previously established communication systems.

In a similar research project, Adnan and Anwar (2020) measured through quantitative means students' preference towards conventional or online learning. They determined that upwards of 80% of their sample population preferred conventional learning. These findings are similar to what this thesis has to offer but are not empirically comparable due to the variance in methodology and sample size. Due to the topic of digitalisation not being an initial topic the

preference for online learning was not discussed in each interview, only when it occurred organically. Despite this, each participant that discussed online learning did mention that they prefer conventional methods for multiple reasons. Social interaction and networking alongside difficulty in learning online material were the primary incentives. This was not the case for the digitalisation of the occupational environment where there existed an increasingly rounded consensus. Participants were measured to have a hesitant yet hopeful mindset surrounding the virtual workplace as *Andrew* remarked that he enjoys the "flexibility" of the digital environment yet "would prefer a mix of both down the line".

A pivotal point of discussion surrounding this topic is the concerning digital inequalities that have been vastly heightened throughout the pandemic. These issues are highlighted in one instance by *Kyle* through his class-conscious discussion of workspace in the home, stating that the current work environment:

"doesn't apply to everyone equally because not everyone has the space for an office in their home"

This issue extends past digitalisation to the sectors that cannot be turned online by the press of a button. Remote employment is not available in many sectors resulting in the exposure of certain parts of the industry to further problems. Essential sectors are still operating but risking the wellbeing of their employees whilst construction and tourism sectors have been simply gutted leaving their workers unemployed (Daly and Lawless 2020). Internationally there remains to be further risk involved as only upwards of 50% of the world's population have access to online facilities completely rendering their ability to digitalise as null and void (Zheng and Walsham 2021). Access to internet was mentioned within the interviews by a number of participants providing evidence for a perspective shift on the value that will now be placed on access to and the use of digital technologies.

The most frequent point of debate introduced by the interviews regarding this topic revolved around the value of a university degree that has been completed online. Participants were relatively split on whether employers or academic boards would view a virtually completed degree as the same, favourable or unfavourable. Positing either sides of the spectrum are *Gemma* and *Andrew*. *Gemma* stated that "it'll look good that we've gotten good grades in a global pandemic" whilst *Andrew* refutes this point in the belief that "working and learning at home is not the same quality of education". During a non-pandemic period, online degrees have been demonstrated to perform less favourably than traditionally taught university degrees (Fogle and Elliot 2013). It is currently unclear how a degree that is intended to be taught traditionally through in person methods will be appraised when it is instead taught through virtual means. There is an unclear perspective view from the participants involved in this study and thus this topic shall have to be examined sociologically and economically following the complete reopening of the labour market.

Waithood

The lives of our younger generations have stalled, suspending their dreams and aspirations in an indefinite void. Central to this thesis is the conceptual framework of a youthful 'waithood'. As discussed in the literature review, a period of 'waithood' within the context of this thesis and relevant literature describes a duration in which young individuals have completed their educational requirements yet are paralyzed in-between the education system and an established career path. Initially, Honwana (2014) addresses 'waithood' under the pressures of socioeconomic impoverishment. Cuzzocrea (2019) discusses this topic in relation to an intentional mortarium period on behalf of the student. The original intentions

behind this research study were to measure this period of postponement as an unintentional mortarium. Both of these studies assist in establishing the nomenclature surrounding the topic. However, these studies apply the concept within the context of a developing economy. The discourse guided by this thesis attempts to apply the concept of 'waithood' to western economies, culture and third level graduates. Through the research I propose that 'waithood' has been measured to exist as a period of enforced occupational suspension that is uncontrollable under the context of COVID-19. This statement is epitomised by *Ben's* perspective on the implications of COVID-19:

"Absolutely our lives have been put on hold, it's a complete state of limbo"

This section will draw influence from an exploratory approach whilst attempting to further establish the concept of 'waithood' as a consequential result of COVID-19.

Inside the boundaries of this research the term 'waithood' has almost become equivalent to the experience of missed opportunities. An overwhelming majority of participants stressed the extent to which they feel they have missed out on career defining experiences. *Patrick* expresses that "it's harder to get actual experience at the moment" that isn't just a virtual internship or an online study project. This absence of contact with the workplace could have damaging effects throughout the lifespan of the participants careers. Hughes and Smith (2020) discuss the importance of youthful engagement with the work environment as an indicator for a career's economic outcome. The interviewees appeared to be aware of the importance attached to prior occupational experience in increasing their chances of employment following the completion of their degrees. This is reflected by *Andrew's* belief that "employers may view degrees as lesser when completed online" due to the loss of

experience and the inability to make up for this loss within the lifespan of a third level degree.

Although the argument of this thesis pivots around an occupational lens, I must consider the loss of socially oriented opportunities. Favara et al. (2021) concluded that there has been a significant decrease in the standard of mental wellbeing for youth during COVID-19 in Asian states as a result of the withdrawal from education and the subsequent lack of social involvement. These findings correlated to negative future employment prospects. Adopting a "Durkheimian perspective" that maintains that a lack of social integration equates to poor mental health, Kim and Jung (2021) explored the negative impact of social exclusion following the loss of interpersonal connections. They established that coronavirus induced mental distress was correlated to levels of social exclusion. The potential negative implications arising from the pandemic regarding psychological wellbeing are becoming increasingly apparent and abundant through compiling the literature. This is echoed by *Kayla* who states that:

"the social aspect of work and education is really suffering, as there is no support from your peers, so that you can bounce off one another and help each other"

Economic recovery will be at the forefront of Ireland's agenda following the complete lifting of pandemic restrictions. There is clearly an additional level of concern that should be accounted for by policymakers.

The discussion so far has demonstrated a perceived period of interruption in the lives of the youth. It is the view of this research that this mortarium will be extended far past the end of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Post-pandemic, issues may only become increasingly

exacerbated. In particular the transition from third level education to the workplace could encounter numerous unforeseen problems. Parola (2020) identifies that many companies may be in economic crisis following the pandemic resulting in fewer jobs for graduates and the intentional stoppage of employing new hires. This study also found that graduates are frequently considering the economic consequences of COVID-19 on their job prospects. This claim is substantiated by my research. Each participant discussed this topic within their interviews and demonstrated unique and thoughtful perspectives and outlooks. *Meredith* stated that she reckons "it will be a lot harder to get employment for a person who prefers in person" means of communication as the online restrictions will remain for an extended period of time post COVID-19. *Gemma* replicates this view reflecting on the fact that "the majority of" her peers "are choosing to do a masters" due to the ingrained uncertainty and risk involved with the labour market post-pandemic. The research approach of this thesis lacks a longitudinal research design that would permit the cross-comparison between outlooks on career and education prospects prior to and after the pandemic. Despite this, the participants are exhibiting a measurably negative and uncertain outlook on their future prospects both occupational and educational.

A methodological position of this thesis is to measure attitude changes of the youth that have occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the provision of sufficient perspective evidence to corroborate the claim of a youthful 'waithood' I shall now explore whether an alteration in attitude and beliefs have occurred on behalf of the participants. Out of the ten participants only one participants' attitude towards their previously desired career paths changed. The perspective of this participant changed due to the vulnerability of their formerly chosen industry which was hospitality. As previously mentioned, industries such as hospitality and tourism have been impacted on severely by COVID-19 globally resulting in

the displacement of thousands of workers. Kaushal and Srivastava (2021) suggest that these industries are expected to be perpetually altered by the pandemic resulting in a huge migration of workers and graduates away from the sectors.

Incidentally, a converse effect occurred in some instances. Two participants previously held beliefs about their desired career path were reinforced by the pandemic. These participants maintained that due to the time provided for reflection by the pandemic they discovered a heightened appreciation for their chosen career path. *Kayla* reflected that the idle time provided by the pandemic "if anything has more so solidified what it is I want to do". This viewpoint is mirrored by Bakker and Wagner (2020) in their article that briefly suggests that COVID-19 has given people time to contemplate what it is in their lives that they deem the most important.

Hitherto this proposal of 'waithood' has been attached to varying negative connotations. However, Cuzzocrea (2019:10) remarks that there is a "classic moratorium" that is not to be classified as a period of waiting where the young are abandoned in a state of limbo. This moratorium is instead categorised by a period of self-reflection and introspection. Such discussion builds on the previous section to present an interpretation of COVID-19 as a time of reflection. This view is evidently blissfully ignorant of many confounding factors yet resonates with several perspectives provided by the research. *Amy* provided insight into such a phenomenon by discussing how she utilised her idle time to contemplate her college degree:

"It makes you think whether you really like what you're doing, as all there is is the work, there are no other distractions really"

This idealised version of 'waithood' is a point of further interest that may be followed up through additional research. Nonetheless there is an overwhelming bulk of evidence indicating that COVID-19 has engendered an occupational and educational 'waithood' for the youth of Ireland.

Conclusion

This research project has successfully gathered and measured the attitudes and experiences of the youth of Ireland towards the impact of COVID-19. The perceived potential and substantial threats to student's wellbeing in employment and education were shown to be vast and complex. The beliefs of the participants also enabled this study to further establish a conceptual notion of 'waithood' within a western context.

The world has been subdued by the pandemic and with this, risk has permeated into every aspect of people's lives. The findings demonstrated that many participants have begun to question their every decision pertaining to COVID-19. Choices that have an influence on the course of an individual's long-term lifespan have become engrained with an excess level of risk. It has been clearly illustrated through the discussion of such findings that there has been an unprecedented attitudinal shift in risk perception during an era of global disease. Some participants challenge these findings, yet the majority favours the side of a cautionary existence.

Digitalisation has flooded professional and educational environments since its forcible entry into people's lives at the beginning of the pandemic. Through this study's findings I have established that the youth of today generally perceive the transfer from traditional methods of communication to the online sphere as a positive. Participants maintained that this will potentially provide them with an advantageous position due to their familiarity with the virtual medium. Findings concluded alongside further research that this digitalisation will

give rise to a new realm of structural inequalities that must be addressed before they are established within the infrastructure of the digital sphere.

Through the findings a clear conception of 'waithood' has been established. This interpretation of a widely unused concept has been supported by qualitative measures of interview data. There is a clear consensus among the sample that the lives of everyone but most importantly the youth have been interrupted on a global scale because of COVID-19. This suspension of routine affairs has resulted in measurable economic and wellbeing deficits. Participants educational and occupational aspirations have been delayed through various means. Factors such as the cancellation of Erasmus, sub-optimal teaching methods, loss of employment, lack of experience and the resulting mental distress all contribute to that sensation of 'waithood' that has been felt by the youth of Ireland. 'Waithood' according to this thesis is defined as the period of time in-between education and the professional domain where, due to extraneous circumstances, the path forward is unclear as there are no advantageous opportunities to avail of both educationally and occupationally. This conceptualisation of the pandemic is not restricted to the Irish context nor is it only applicable to young people. The theoretical positioning of this thesis posits that to an extent the entire world is undergoing a feeling of 'waithood'. To understand why the concept is only applied to youth one must recognise the unique stage at which the sample population of this research study is at in their lives. The concept of 'waithood' will only be applied to them as they are at the stage of their life where doors should be beginning to open in every direction. But instead they remain closed leaving the youth of today suspended in limbo without an identity or established occupational trajectory.

If I were to redesign and reconduct this research project again under ideal circumstances there are several alterations I would make to the methodology. In a perfect world this study would have adopted a longitudinal cohort study model enabling the cross-comparison of post-COVID-19 and pre-COVID-19 attitudes. This would have permitted the exact measurement of shifting beliefs as a result of COVID-19 and its consequences. Additionally, the sample population would have expanded to include a much larger cohort with a larger variance in ages. A unique perspective would have also been provided through the examination of perspectives from those who did not pursue third level education but are within the age demographic. Although I previously established that a mixed-methods approach would result in the over-saturation of data, utilising both questionnaires and interview methods would facilitate the assessment of a larger sample population. Further studies into this topic should adopt these recommendations to provide ample evidential support in aid of the concept of waithood.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1:

Information Sheet and Consent Form

Special Topics Consent Form 2020-2021

The Suspended Youth: How has COVID-19 affected the youth of Irelands employment and
future job prospects post education?

Purpose of the Study. I am Joe Jennings a third-year student in the Department of Sociology
Maynooth University.

As part of the requirements for studying sociology as a part of MH101, I am undertaking a
research study under the supervision of *Dr Nuala Whelan*.

The study is concerned with exploring how the youth of Ireland's attitudes towards their
employment and job prospects have changed since COVID-19

What will the study involve? The study will involve several qualitative semi-structured and
mediated interviews that will take approximately 30 minutes.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed by my supervisor at Maynooth University Research.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because you are an individual aged between 18-25, an Irish resident and have experienced and will continue to experience employment.

Please read and sign this form if you would like to participate in this study

I understand the following:

- This research study will be carried out by Joe Jennings at the Department of Sociology, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

- Participation is voluntary. It is my choice whether to participate or not. I may change my mind at any stage and withdraw from the process. Should this occur, all of my personal data will be destroyed.

- I may be required to participate on more than one occasion as a follow-up interview may be conducted. I will be contacted in advance of the follow-up and consent will be sought.

- My participation in the study will be kept confidential and anonymous. No identifying information will be included within the transcripts/questionnaires nor will any information be included in the final write-up of the research. Any extracts from what I say that are quoted in the research report, will be entirely anonymous. The identities of participants/ interviewees will be concealed in all documents resulting from the research ensuring anonymity. However, it must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by

courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

- I understand that I may be asked to be involved in: An interview with the researcher that may last approximately 30 minutes.

- All participants will be allocated a code at the point of consent (to participate) so as to anonymise the data from the outset. A document containing the coding key will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office at MU and accessible only by the researcher. All coded data will be stored on the researcher's laptop and protected by encryption software.

- All Interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded (with my consent), but no-one will be identified by name on the tape. The audio files will be kept in a password protected computer protected by encryption software. Questionnaires will be completed on paper copy, with my unique code as the identifier. These data will then be entered into a database on the researcher's computer and the paper copies stored securely in the researcher's office at MU until the point of final publication/10years. All of the information recorded is confidential.

- The results will be seen by the researcher. The results will be presented in a report and may also be presented at relevant conferences and published in academic journals and, where applicable, in other outlets.

- There are no anticipated risks or negative consequences envisaged for participants taking part. There is no conditionality related to this study, no penalties for non–participation apply.

- I have been provided with an information sheet related to this research.

- I will receive a copy of this signed consent form for my own records.

- I may contact the researcher at point if I have any questions or concerns regarding my participation in this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and consent form

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me:

Researcher:

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Dr Nuala Whelan, Department of Sociology, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare

Email: nuala.whelan@mu.ie

I have read and understand the information provided on the Information Sheet and the

Consent form and agree to voluntarily participate in this research.

Signed: _____Date: _____

Appendix 2:

Interview Plan

<u>Interview Questions</u>

Framing Questions.

Were you employed before the COVID-19 pandemic?

- If so, in what sector?

- How has this sector been affected by COVID-19?

- Do you still have this job?

- Did you lose your previous employment or experience redundancy as a result of
  COVID-19?

Were you/ Are you in full time education?

- Has the academic institution you attend provided any services regarding further
  education or employment during or post COVID-19?

Did you have a desired career/career path before COVID-19?

- Has it changed since the pandemic?

- If so, was this due to the potential implications of COVID-19?

Have you attempted to find a job during the pandemic?

- How did this job hunt differ to those you've pursued in the past?

'Waithood' and Perspective Questions.

How do you feel the current public health crisis will affect the labour market?

Specifically, for young people entering the workforce?

- In what ways do you feel that the experience will differ to those who have previously

  established careers?

What do you expect your occupational experience to be like following COVID-19?

- How would you like it to be?

Describe how the pandemic and its ensuing lockdowns have made you feel towards your own

employment prospects?

We have mentioned many ways in which COVID has and will negatively impact on your

career prospects, are there any negatives that you feel we haven't covered yet?

Explain in what ways you feel the pandemic could positively impact on your employment?

Appendix 3:

Interview no. 2 Transcript

Interviewer: Are you aware that you're being recorded? And have you signed the consent

form?

Amy: Yes, I am aware. And yes.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. All right. So, we're going to begin with some questions surrounding your past and current employment. Em, were you employed before the pandemic?

Amy: Yes.

Interviewer: In what sector were you employed?

Amy: In the hospitality sector

Interviewer: Okay. How has this sector been affected by COVID?

Amy: Because of the pandemic, I have been out of work for almost a year because of it I haven't been working at all.

Interviewer: So, you lost, did you lose this job?

Amy: Em no, but I have spent the majority of the year at home and then we open for a couple of months, a couple weeks just to close down again.

Interviewer: So okay, right. And are you in? Or were you in full time education when the pandemic began?

Amy: Em yes, I was. And now I'm still in it as well.

Interviewer: You're still in it. Okay. And has the institution you're currently attending for education. Has that provided any services regarding employment during or post COVID?

Amy: Em no, they've never mentioned employment. They're just concerned about classes. Yeah.

Interviewer: Have all your classes moved online and everything?

Amy: Yeah, I, this was my first year in college. And I think I was in the college for three days.

Interviewer: When were those three days?

Amy: Em, it was induction, orientation that day, And then there was like, two Wednesdays after that. And that was it for the year.

Interviewer: And now all of your education has been online since then. Yeah. Okay. Right. And before COVID-19, did you have a desired career path?

Amy: Kind of I was planning on being an event planner, but with the pandemic. And people not having events. I was like, well, that industry is gone.

Interviewer: Since the pandemic would you say your career path has changed. Are you hopeful that you could still do that after the pandemic?

Amy: it's changed and more focused on just being a manager now.

Interviewer: And have you attempted to find another job? During the pandemic?

Amy: Yes, I have. I've started searching recently, but nowhere is hiring.

Interviewer: How, So how has this job hunt differed to job once you've gone on in the past?

Amy: Well, it's more difficult because while Nowhere is hiring, because they're unsure with their businesses and stuff and what's going to happen. Em a lot of businesses are closed. And as well, you can't just go around and drop it in CVS, because they're not allowed take them. So, I can't just apply for jobs being like, if anything comes up. I have to wait for an advertisement online.

Interviewer: So, everything's online, then. Yeah. Okay. Right. So now I'm gonna move on to sort of like, perspective, questions about how you feel COVID is impacting on students mostly. So how do you feel the pandemic is going to affect the labour market as a whole?

Amy: I mean, with so many businesses out of money, a lot of businesses probably close, which means they'll be less job opportunities for literally everybody coming out of college.

Interviewer: Specifically, for students? How do you think it will go?

Amy: And I don't know, they probably the students that have been on the COVID payment for the year, probably don't want to go back to work, but want the money. And I know some people who were like working on the site and getting the payment because of it. So, it might like, make them not want to go back to work because they've been getting free money for over a year.

Interviewer: Do you think the PUP payment which is the COVID payment? Do you think that's serving as an incentive to not get work during the pandemic?

Amy: Yes, nobody is going to give up free money to go and work at a job and put themselves at risk of getting the virus.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a good point. And for in terms of finding the job, how do you feel that the experience will differ? for people who are, so after the pandemic, how do you feel that applying for jobs will differ between people who are coming out of college or education and those who were who were previously employed before the pandemic?

Amy: So, if they are coming out with their final year,

Interviewer: so yeah, the so how do you think So people who were already like they had jobs and established careers before the pandemic, how do you think their job hunt will differ, compared to students who are now only entering the workforce after the pandemic?

Amy: I mean, the workforce, the workforce is probably really different now, because obviously everybody's working at home and online stuff, it'll probably be harder for students

to find jobs, because there's nobody actually in the buildings like there's no businesses really operating fully. Because everybody's just sitting at home doing their minimum requirement.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. And what do you expect your occupational experience to be like, following the pandemic?

Amy: I am expecting that whenever I do get back to work, because it's a restaurant, it'll still would be a while Yeah. And it will still be very different to what I was before the pandemic, the hours are different during open hours. And I'm expecting it to be really, really busy. Because since they haven't been open, when they do open, yeah

Interviewer: What sort of restrictions do you think will be in place that have that have come about because of the pandemic?

Amy: And I think masks will have to stay around for a while. Like we could take in tables out the restaurant because we can't have as many people in it. Just those ones, hand sanitizer and all that. disinfecting areas are probably all saved because it'll just be common, like,

Interviewer: It'll be common practice. Yeah. Em so that's how you think your occupational experience will be following the pandemic? How would you How would you have liked it? What's the ideal scenario that will happen after a pandemic?

Amy: I mean, ideally, personally, masks, and if I stay working wearing masks will be gone. Because when it's so busy, and you're running around the case, and it's in a restaurant, and it's really warm, like you just, it's really hard to breathe.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, the masks, so the main thing is you don't want the masks to stay around

Amy: Yea I don't mind wearing them into a shop and everything but when I'm working a 10-hour shift, running up and down the restaurant near a hot kitchen. It just takes it out. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, you think that when it gets back, do you think you'll get more hours? Because it's busy?

Amy: Yes, em probably I, when we did open last summer for those few months. I was working 42-hour weeks.

Interviewer: Wow. Okay. Holy moly. So, do you when the when the last block then lifts? I'm not sure when that will be? You think it will return to that? How long do you think it will return to that foot?

Amy: I know because I'd say when everywhere does open backup everybody's going to kind of take advantage of it for a while. But then as well probably stay going for I'd say easily a year because everybody's going to be like oh no, like we have to go out now that we can be they're not gonna stay home because they were home for so long.

Interviewer: So, you think that when the pandemics lifted, we're gonna have like a year of constant spending constant working?

Amy: Yeah, like a boost. Basically. It'll take time people might lose their jobs and stuff because business businesses have been closed. So

Interviewer: It's hard to tell. Yeah, it is hard to tell which way it will go. I was gonna ask, I'll move on. How have the lockdowns made you feel about your own employment prospects following it? Do you think they've positively impacted or negatively impacted on your prospects?

Amy: I mean, after the pandemic even when the lockdown does lift sitting at home like I do kind of dread going back to work because I don't like my job. Thinking about going back I don't like it, but at the same time I'm looking for a new job now because sitting at home is

driving me insane. Okay. Yeah. So, I think that like, even when everywhere does open back up, I'll continue to look for a new job because it's made me realize how much I hate my job.

Interviewer: So, the pandemics have sort of given you time to reflect on what your preferred job would be.

Amy: Yeah, completely.

Interviewer: And what would you try get into following the pandemic?

Amy: Since I was student like I do have qualifications to be an officer minister, but I can't do that when I'm a student. One second So, since I forgot what it is, since I'm a student in September, I can't look for like office work, really, I probably just look for something where I don't have, like the long hour shift where close isn't until 1am in the morning on a Saturday night and stuff like that, I'd like to get out with the hospitality sector, especially if there is another lockdown after that, again, I don't want to be put out of work.

Interviewer: Would you like to move into sort of just general business then or?

Amy: I think while I'm in college, I'll just try find like, just a shop or a job or a shop like say, Dunnes and stuff. Like they obviously have opportunities for growth. I am doing business now and I can do business management in college. So, like, obviously, they do have opportunities for job creation there. But I don't know.

Interviewer: That's a good idea. Yeah, I should definitely ask what you're doing at college. I'll put that in my notes. So, we've mentioned lots of ways in which COVID has, has and will negatively impact on your employment prospects. Do you think there are any negatives that we haven't covered? You can take your time with this one. This is quite a reflective question.

Amy: Well, with my course this year as it's like my first year in college, and it was all online. Like I don't even know right now if I like my course, I'm just kind of doing the assignments

and doing the exams. But I don't really know. If I want to be, I don't even know if want to be in this sector. Because we're all online. It's so different.

Interviewer: Okay, so you think that not only is COVID, sort of negatively impacting prospects in the current sector that you're in, but it's also skewing how you view your current course and what you, may be making you think, like what you actually want to do?

Amy: Yeah, exactly. Because I think as well, with a lot of students, since it is all online, and you don't have like, not the advantages of college, but like, you're not going out, you're not like making new friends on that. The only thing you have is your course. So, it really makes you think like if you really even like it or not, because all you have to do is the work. You don't have any other distractions really.

Interviewer: Okay, so the emphasis is of education, and has just centred on the education. It's no longer an overall experience. It's just, it's just learn what we give you. Okay. And finally, what do you think, we've talked about loads of negatives? Do you think the pandemic could impact positively in any way and your employment? I know, overall, it won't be a positive impact. But do you think there are some sort of positive views you can take on its impact?

Amy: Lemme think for a second.

Interviewer: Take your time.

Amy: Positive, positives?

Interviewer: No, no, you don't think there'll any? You don't think there are any positives you mentioned.. You mentioned that there could be more, It is it is hard to tell. But you mentioned that when it came back for a bit that it was very busy in the hospitality sector. Do you think that's going to be positive or negative?

Amy: Well, no, I do think it would be positive for like the hospitality sector as a whole. But for me, personally there are no positives of me being unemployed for the last year, like I've just lost out on experience, basically. But for the hospitability sector as a whole I think it'll definitely do better whenever it all opens back up, because everybody's going to be like, Oh, like, let's go out for dinner. Or no, we'll go out tonight. Let's go away for a weekend. And even if we can't travel abroad, people are still going to go around the country. And this is everywhere. I'll kind of benefit from that. But me, personally as just a student. No, there's no positives.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you feel that you've lost out on experience?

Amy: Yeah, like say now, if I am going to go find a new job. On my CV. Yeah, it says I've been working in Teach Dolman for over a year, but I've only worked for four months of it. So, it's just lost experience, like I know how to do my job. But still, if I was working there for the full year, I'd be a lot more qualified as such to go get a new job in that industry kind of,

Interviewer: do you think it will make it harder for you to gain opportunity once you're out because you've sort of been waiting to get out or waiting to get experience?

Amy: Yeah, I don't know what we businesses will kind of look at my CV because obviously I've just been sitting at home getting the COVID payment. They might be like, Oh, Why wasn't she out looking for a job kind of thing. I don't know what way they're going to look at it at the same time. It just looks like I've had a job for the last year.

Interviewer: Okay, right. Yeah, that's perfect. Right I'm going to stop the recording.