

RESEARCH ON SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER



Within the STOP! WORDs in progress project



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INTRODUCTION

When referring to youth, they should be comfortable in their own skin, develop self-confidence, and thrive socially as they grow-up. Unfortunately, some of them develop in the exact opposite direction being, for example, painfully self-conscious, afraid of rejection or embarrassment, uncomfortable in social settings. The anxiety they experience is known as Social Anxiety Disorder, is very intense and can potentially interfere with every aspect of their life.

Social Anxiety Disorder is indeed the third most common mental health disorder after depression and substance abuse and surprisingly (even if not so much if analyzed in deep), is common in young people. Why? Negative experiences – at home due to family conflict or at school due to bullying, for example – have a damaging effect on the development of their core cognitive and emotional skills. In the WHO European Region, depression and anxiety disorders fall into the top 5 causes of overall disease burden. The consequences and the impact? Really high. Academic attainment is curtailed, with individuals at risk of leaving school early and obtaining poorer qualifications (Van Ameringen et al. 2003).

Which are the risk factors of Social Anxiety Disorder?

- Being female (Social Anxiety is more common in females than males)
- Having a close family member with social anxiety or another anxiety disorder
- Being shy, withdrawn, or hesitant to try new things
- Having any kind of noticeable physical or health issue
- Painful or traumatic experiences such as being bullied

As we can see, risks factors can be common to everyone. And if there was ever a time in history when social anxiety was a collective experience rather than a disorder of a specific group, it was the one we are currently living because of COVID-19. The pandemic has had a tremendous social impact on youth since depending on the relationship with their Peers. And even more on vulnerable.

To date there are still no answers on what people will experience on the long-term. However, there are already assumptions on the so called “social and third pandemic” characterized by post-traumatic and depressive aspects. It is from these assumptions that STOP! WORDs in PROGRESS arises with the main aim to explore the possibilities to define Educational Modules that rely the foundation on Social-Emotional Learning thus responding to need of young people to work on Social Anxiety Disorder and Social Anxiety and by integrating nON-FORMAL education, CREATIVITY and PSYCHOLOGY practices. Specifically, the project defines Educational Modules that develops through three creative stages: SOCIAL THEATRE/STORYTELLING/SUNG STORIES aiming at making young people work on the five specific abilities:

1. Emotional Awareness (How to identify and recognize emotions)
2. Emotional self-regulation (Knowing how to regulate and control one’s emotions)
3. The ability to make Responsible decisions
4. Relational skills (communicate, cooperate, negotiate, lend, and ask for help)
5. Social Awareness (empathy, respect for the others and appreciation of diversity)

The project aims at:

- enlarging the offer in EU of innovative training pathways
- enlarging dialogue and awareness in EU on youth disadvantage and mental health disorders.
- enhancing the ability of youth workers and organizations to respond, through quality services, to young people educational needs.
- enlarging dialogue and awareness in EU on mental health and recognition of non-formal education.

We started this project with investigating how social anxiety manifest itself amongst youth in our current day society and what its characteristics are. To get to know this we did additional research, but we also interviewed several young people dealing with social anxiety disorder. We also focus on how the creative methods we suggest can be applied in working with groups of youth with social anxiety disorder. We describe the benefit of working with creative methods in general and pay specific attention to the disciplines we would like to apply storytelling, sung stories and (social) theatre. These chapters were developed by the partners in this project, which are all specialist in one of the fields we cover. We believe that combining and sharing this expertise will lead to a further



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development of methods, that can be used for the benefit of our target group. The results of this investigation lays in front of you now. We described the modules we will use theoretically, as a foundation for the toolkit and the online platform we will develop in the next phases of the project.

STOP! Words in Progress is a project by Storytelling Centre from Amsterdam (Netherland), D'Antilles et D'Ailleurs from Martinique (France), NoGap from Orvieto (Italy), La Xixa from Barcelona (Spain) and Makao from Warsaw (Poland). The project is made possible by the support of the EU in the framework of the Erasmus+ program.

TERMINOLOGY

Though we've done our best to avoid it, you'll probably stumble across some specific terminology in these guidelines. Let us explain the most important and most used terms:

Workshop	A combination of exercises that contains a logic path going from team building to finding common ground. The path design depends on the context in which the workshop is given. A workshop exists of one session working with the group. This is generally around 2 hours but could range from 1-3 hours depending on the needs of your group. Sometimes people also use 'training' to refer to a workshop.
Project	When we refer to a project, we mean the entire block of workshops.
Exercise	A building block in a workshop that has a beginning and an end and usually covers one kind of action and one aim.
Toolkit	A collection of tools for any stakeholder. A toolkit generally exists of the description of exercises and activities and guidelines about how to apply them.
Facilitator	A facilitator is the person who plans, develops, and runs the sessions. They will bring material, stories, questions, games, and exercises for the group to take part in. We chose to use facilitator instead of trainer/coach, as we believe that this person should facilitate the youth in their development. He/she/they should encourage them to discover themselves in relation to the other, using the tools provided within this toolkit. As a general rule, the facilitator should avoid being overly directive.
Storyteller	The storyteller is simply the person who shares stories. The facilitator may also be a professional storyteller, who is paid to perform, but in this context both the facilitator and participants will become storytellers at different moments as they express fictional and real-life narratives.
Person Centred Practice	Person Centred describes a practice in which the needs, autonomy and wishes of the people participating are of central importance to the process and direct the direction of the work. It is associated with education and psychology. The concept is built from the thinking of therapist Carl Rogers who believed that in order for psychological healing to occur certain conditions had to present in the relationship between the therapist and the person in therapy, those of empathy, unconditional positive regard, congruence.
Strengths Based Practice	The idea of a strengths-based approach was forwarded by North American social worker Bertha Reynolds in the 1990's. It promotes a focus on individuals' strengths rather than what they lack. A strengths-based practice considers the whole person, their life experience, resilience and abilities as well as their context within social and community networks.



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2. SOCIAL PHOBIA / SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

DEFINITION

Social phobia, also known as social anxiety disorder (SAD), has been included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), within the anxiety disorder section.

Social phobia is an anxiety disorder characterized by sentiments of fear and anxiety in social situations (e.g., speaking in public, eating in public, etc.). In most cases, these social fears triggered by learned behaviours and negative social experiences such as (e.g.) having experienced humiliating public situations, being subjected to aggression, etc., as well as dysfunctional thoughts about oneself (e.g., I will not be able to say anything) and to others (e.g., I will be laughed at).

The main feature of social phobia is the intense fear or anxiety that the subject experiences in social situations in which a subject can be observed by other people.

The criteria for diagnosing social phobia according to the DSM-5 are:

- Marked fear or anxiety about one or more social situations in which the individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others. Examples include social interactions (e.g., having a conversation, meeting unfamiliar people), being observed (e.g., eating or drinking), and performing in front of others (e.g., giving a speech).
- The individual fears that he or she will act in a way or show anxiety symptoms that will be negatively evaluated (i.e., will be humiliating or embarrassing; will lead to rejection or offend others).
- The social situations almost always provoke fear or anxiety.
- The fear or anxiety is out of proportion to the actual threat posed by the social situation and are persistent (typically lasting for 6 months or more) and causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- The fear, anxiety, or avoidance is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance or another medical condition.

The physical symptoms experienced are like those of anxiety and especially those of shame:

- Rapid heartbeat
- Blushing
- Excessive sweating
- Dry throat and mouth
- Muscle tension or twitches
- Trembling
- Stomach trouble

People with social anxiety commonly experience significant worry and distress in the following situations:

- Speaking in public
- Carry out activities under the gaze of others (e.g., reading in church or playing a musical instrument; eating with other people; signing a document in front of observers);
- Using public restrooms
- Meeting new people
- Express their opinion as a group.
- Take the floor on a meeting.

These are some of the situations (experienced and / or imagined) that trigger a series of fears, and the symptoms we have previously talked about. Subjects tend to engage in behaviors with the aim of minimizing or eliminating the discomfort experienced.

The concerns that people with social phobia experience relate to the fear that:

- their performance or actions will appear to others inadequate and / or ridiculous.



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- their anxiety will be evident since they may sweat, blush, vomit due to tension, tremble or speak in a faint and uncertain voice and that everyone will notice and observe and judge them.
- they may lose the thread and no longer remember anything they had to say, or they will not be able to find the words to express themselves.
- they may appear as a weak-tempered person, excessively dependent on the judgment of others, willing to submit.
- the person is systematically committed to avoiding a bad impression (do not show signs of shame).

The behaviors most implemented, in a marked way, are:

- avoid situations, behaviors, places, contexts, people who can elicit the feared situations.
- groped to minimize and / or hide their discomfort and anxiety (protective behaviors), in order not to appear inadequate (however, often succeeding only partially or not at all).

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISORDER

People suffering from social anxiety disorder are excessively worried about doing something embarrassing or humiliating that will lead others to judge them negatively. The strategy they use to keep their anxiety at bay is to avoid doing or saying anything that could cause them humiliation. This excessive discomfort affects all areas of a person's life.

ONSET SIGNS, COURSE, PROGNOSIS

The average age of onset of social anxiety disorder is between 8 and 15 years in 75% of people. It can develop suddenly after having had a humiliating experience or it can be slow and gradual. Young subjects tend to manifest marked social anxiety but focused for certain situations, while, with advancing age, older people have lower levels of anxiety, but widespread in various contexts.

Those who suffer from social phobia experience very intense emotional reactions linked to some social contexts. High anticipatory anxiety, in the case of an imminent feared event in respect of which there is a fear of making a bad impression or strong anxiety and discomfort in the case that it is impossible to escape from the situation, creates lasting anxious symptoms and discomfort.

Moreover, those who suffer from social phobia tend to avoid places and situations to escape the anxiety symptoms, causing the increasing reduction of activities and situations, triggering a vicious circle that worsens both the phobic picture and the quality of life. The consequences can be reflected especially in the sphere of social life, but also in the workplace.

Generally, the fear associated with social phobia is that of being seen as weak, anxious, unbalanced, stupid, boring, or otherwise judged negatively.

For this reason, those suffering from social phobia may have difficulty establishing new intimate and more superficial relationships and difficulties in group situations. All of this can cause isolation and subsequent anger and secondary depression.

Social anxiety disorder has a persistent trend and tends to become chronic. In 60% of subjects, the disorder not adequately treated undergoes a course lasting year.

The symptomatology can undergo partial remission if the events that activate it are no longer present but will tend to reappear when the trigger events recur.

EPIDEMIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

Social phobia is a widespread disorder among the population. According to some studies, the percentage of people who suffer from it ranges from 3% to 13%. Also, according to these studies, it seems that social anxiety characterizes women more than men.

The 2001 European epidemiological study ESEMeD was the first study on the prevalence of mental disorders in which six European countries (Italy, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, and Spain) took part. The study relates to the one-year prevalence and lifetime prevalence of major non-psychotic mental disorders, which include anxiety disorders (generalized anxiety, panic disorder, simple phobia, social phobia, agoraphobia, obsessive-



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compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder), affective disorders (major depression and dysthymia) and alcohol abuse or addiction.

In Italy, the study was promoted and coordinated by the National Institute of Health (ISS) as part of the National Mental Health Project. Interviews were conducted for a total of 4,712 subjects, carried out between 2001 and 2002. The Italian results showed that major depression, specific phobias, and dysthymia were the most common disorders, with prevalence rates during life respectively equal to 10.1%, 5.7% and 3.4%, followed by post-traumatic stress disorder, social phobia, and generalized anxiety disorder (found in about 2% of the interviewees).

In Spain, the study was promoted and coordinated by the National Institute of Statistics (INE). From the six countries studied by ESEMeD, the highest rates recorded were in Spain (78.6%). The latest European Health Survey conducted in the country in the middle of the pandemic (ESES, 2020), from July 2019 to July 2020, showed an increase in the percentage of the population experiencing feelings of being down or depressed, having trouble to sleep, and having little interest or joy in doing things.

In Netherlands, recent national figures on the number of children with an anxiety disorder are not available. The latest figures date from 1997 (for youth up to 18 years) and 2010 (for 18–24-year-olds). Population survey in South Holland in 2003 also provides figures on the prevalence of anxiety disorders in children up to 16 years of age. More than 10 percent of Dutch young people aged 13 to 17 had an anxiety disorder in the six months prior to the survey. This amounts to approximately 114,000 young people (Verhulst et al. 1997). In the category of 18 to 24 years, the percentage of anxiety disorders is 11.7 percent over the past year. The most common anxiety disorders within both age groups are social phobia and specific phobia. These disorders are more common in girls than boys. These data come from interview studies among young people (Verhulst et al., 1997) and young adults (De Graaf et al. 2010). In 2003 population studies in South Holland, parents reported anxious/depressive symptoms in 2.5% of children aged 2-3 years. In the age group 6 – 16 years, 3.2% of the children score on the anxiety/depressive scale (Tick, et al., 2007).

In France, with a population of 65 million, an estimated 12 million inhabitants (18%) currently suffer from one or more mental disorders (Missions et organisation de la santé mentale et de la psychiatrie, 2009). The prevalence of major depression in France over the last 12 months was around 8% in the 2000s and seems to have increased to 10% in the 2010s. Studies on national bases tend to underestimate this prevalence (<2%) retaining only the most severe depressions, hospitalized, and treated with antidepressants (Fond, G., Lançon, C., Auquier, P., & Boyer, L. (2019). Prévalence de la dépression majeure en France en population générale et en populations spécifiques de 2000 à 2018: une revue systématique de la littérature. La Presse Médicale, 48(4), 365-375.). The 12 month and lifetime prevalence rates observed were respectively 6.0 % for major depressive episodes, 1.6 % for dysthymia, 2.1 % for the generalised anxiety disorders, 1.2 % for panic disorders, 0.6 % for agoraphobia, 2.2 % for post-traumatic stress disorder, 1.7 % for social phobia, 4.7 % for specific phobia, 0.5 % for alcohol abuse and 0.3 % for alcohol dependence.

In Poland, based on research from 2021:

- 25% of people suffering from depression (in 2017 it was about 4%)
- 36% of young people (18-30) suffering from depression
- 23% of teenagers' general anxiety disorder and 42% of teenagers - all kinds of anxiety disorders (including social disorders)
- 17% of adolescents aged 16-18 declared considering suicide
- 3% of adolescents had suicidal trial

How have these figures changed since the start of the pandemic?

It is since March 2020 that the whole world has been going through one of the most difficult and demanding phases in the history of humanity. All of us were used to reading the various pandemics of cholera, plague, and the Spanish flu in the history books, thinking they were something that had by now been consigned to history and very distant



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from us.

Unfortunately, all this, albeit with different clinical aspects, we have experienced directly, in the first person, with a whole series of consequences. One of these consequences is called "Cabin fever ". It is the most obvious side effect resulting from the lockdown for many, even among those who had never suffered before from psychological disorders, namely the fear of going out and leaving their home, the place that has made us for months feel safe, protected from any dangerous external agent. Symptoms include the presence of anxiety, fear and frustration, sleep disturbances, depression, and a marked tendency to irritation.

This syndrome tends to become chronic and is supported by the following fears:

- terror of the outside world
- fear of getting sick
- the fear of infecting loved ones
- the conviction of never finding the world we knew before.

However, it is paradoxical to think that these disorders mainly emerged in subjects who were psychically well. As previously mentioned, the attempted solutions to reduce anxiety symptoms that are implemented by people suffering from social phobia consist in actively avoiding situations, social relationships or facing them with intense fear and anxiety. Therefore, in the period of forced isolation, people who already suffered from these difficulties experienced quarantine with a decrease in symptoms. For this reason, if on the one hand the forced isolation has allowed them to live with greater serenity with respect to these problems, on the other hand it may have strengthened their inability to deal with social situations, enhancing phobias and insecurities, thus worsening the problem.

The current phase of health emergency has changed and is characterized both by coexistence with Covid-19 and by immunization and health prevention interventions through mass vaccination and at the same time provides for the need to go out to carry out work activities, with the protection and safety measures. This situation can generate stress, anxiety, depression, and difficulty in managing the "new normality" in people, while in people suffering from social phobias it can cause severe anxiety or intense fear and in some cases this condition can lead to panic.

In Italy, a recent study (Talevi et al., 2021) reports that the CoViD-19 pandemic, still ongoing, is having a huge psychological impact on individuals. People experienced significant psychological distress during the early stage of the Covid-19 outbreak in terms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic symptoms. Globally, the findings are relatively consistent in terms of severity: most individuals suffered from mild to moderate complaints, while subjects reporting severe symptoms were a minority. On the contrary, the

preliminary results of the research project are in line with Chinese studies. High rates of negative mental health outcomes, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress and anxiety, have been found in the general Italian population and in healthcare professionals three weeks after initiation of CoViD-19 blocking measures, associated with various factors of risk related to CoViD-19. Women and younger people were associated with a higher risk of mental health outcomes.

In Spain, a recent study (EESE, 2020) stated that, from the beginning of the pandemic, there was an increase of 3.3 % of the population in having little interest or joy in doing things, 2.8 % in feeling down or depressed, and 2 % in having trouble sleeping. However, there was a decrease of 5.1% in feeling tired and 1.7% in feeling bad about oneself. The changes in these indicators were more pronounced for women than men, also starting from higher pre-pandemic values.

In Netherlands, by 2020, nearly 4 percent of young people aged 12 to 18 say they have had depression for at least six months in the past year. Compared to 2014, this is more than twice as many young people who are struggling with depression. In 2014, this was 1.8 percent of 12 to 18-year-olds.

Depression is most common among young people aged 16 to 20 at over 7 percent. Compared to 2014, there has also been an increase in this age group. At that time, 6.5 percent said they had suffered from depression for at least six months. Although depression occurs least among 12- to 16-year-olds at 4 percent, this age group has seen the largest increase compared to 2014. In 2014, 0.7 percent of 12 to 16-year-olds reported experiencing depression. This data comes from the health survey (CBS, 2021). These figures are self-reported feelings of depression and not diagnosed depression. No Dutch figures are available on children with a diagnosed depressive disorder. Based on foreign research, it is estimated that approximately 1 percent of children under the age of five, 1.8 percent of children aged 6 to 12 and between 0.4 and 8.3 percent (depending on criteria and research method) of children



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people over the age of 12 have a depressive disorder (Trimbos Institute, 2009).

The percentage of people suffering from social anxiety in France has increased significantly during the Covid pandemic. During the first wave of the pandemic the prevalence of anxiety was 26.7%, a rate twice as high as that observed in a previous survey (13.5% in 2017). (Santé Publique France, Enquête CoviPrev). According to research conducted by Aziz Essadek and Thomas Rabeyron, during the Covid pandemic 43% of students in France suffered from depression (6.96% of severe level), 39.19% suffered from anxiety (20.7% of severe level) and 42.94% from distress (16, 09% of severe level). Female scores were significantly higher than those of males on measures of depression, anxiety, and distress. The research was conducted on a group of 8004 French students in the Eastern part of France, but the age (21.7 years), sex (67.47% women) and scholarship rate (40.8%) show that the 8,004 students who responded (13.36% of students) are representative of the overall university population in France.

In Poland, at the beginning of 2021, 37% of adolescents aged 18 had depressive symptoms, while as many as 17% declared a desire or intention to commit suicide. This highly disturbing result is confirmed by data from the Give Children Strength Foundation, according to which 9.2% of adolescents self-harmed (6% before the pandemic), and 2.9% of teens attempted suicide. Also, according to police statistics, 2020 was a record year for juvenile suicides, with 116 children taking their own lives. In a study by Babicki and Migas (Babicki, Mastalerz-Migas, 2020), 77% of respondents expressed fear of contracting COVID-19, 23% had high levels of anxiety, while 45% suffered from generalized anxiety. Another study by psychologists from the University of Lodz indicated that 53% had stress levels above 7 sten, which is high. A May 2020 study by the team of Dr. Margaret Gambin (Gambin et al., 2020) indicated that 36.6% of respondents between the ages of 18 and 34 were at pandemic risk for clinical severity of depressive symptoms. And in this case, this was more than double the pre-pandemic rate.

SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER AT VARIOUS STAGES OF LIFE

During childhood and adolescence, fluctuations in anxiety and fears are considered normal and manifest mainly as fear of strangers and separation anxiety in younger children, and in the form of performance anxiety in older children and adolescents. It is common for a child to be worried when facing a question or be reluctant to join a new class or group, just as a teenager may be hesitant in attending a party or asking for an appointment. These fears are mostly temporary and cause limited discomfort, in fact the anxiety subsides until it disappears as soon as the subject faces these experiences by becoming familiar with them.

However, a child with social phobia is different from a simply shy child.

The shy child does not take the initiative to play, but manages to be with others if supported by an adult or introduced by a friend; the child who suffers from social phobia, on the other hand, is not convinced by anything, is a child who finds it very difficult to adapt to changes and shows obvious signs of discomfort: recurrent psychosomatic symptoms such as headache or stomach ache, refusal to go out or go to school, reading in class, talking to adults, taking exams and questions or doing something in public, difficulty sleeping, tendency to isolate oneself by masking social rejection with "solitary" interests such as video games. In fact, in children or adolescents suffering from social phobia, the intensity of normal and physiological worries, which generally lessen with growth, significantly interferes with daily functioning, negatively affecting development, maturation and the achievement of full mastery of self. Some forms of shyness are generally socially accepted and clinical observation therefore occurs only in cases where the disorder is such as to compromise school activity or interfere with everyday life.

We have seen how the key symptoms of social anxiety disorder are the fear of negative judgment, social isolation, strong anxiety about social situations, avoidance of situations that can cause anxiety and fear of confrontation. These characteristics are some of the characteristics that have led to questioning the link between social phobia and the Hikikomori phenomenon.

THE HIKIKOMORI PHENOMENON

The term Hikikomori describes a particular condition present mainly in Japan. It is particularly common among adolescents and involves a real social withdrawal characterized by a rejection of school, social and working life for a period of at least 6 months. Personal relationships are also absent, except for those with close relatives. The young Hikikomori demonstrate their discomfort in different ways: they lock themselves in the house all day, they go out only in the morning or in the evening (they are sure to meet few people) or they can wander around the city pretending to go to school or work.

In the East, this attitude does not cause serious concern, while in the West it does. This depends on the cultural



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differences of the countries. In Western countries, embarrassment is viewed with a negative look, exposing the person to judgments of relational incompetence. In the East, however, this emotion is viewed with great respect and demonstrates both social skills and great maturity. Moreover, in the West, self-exclusion is expressed in most cases with addiction to alcohol, drugs, and denial of basic needs (for example, food), in the East, young people instead choose the path of silence.

In both societies, social withdrawal can be favored by the parenting style. An insecure attachment can in fact cause serious difficulties in relating to others. Criticism, unavailability, rejection, and an educational style that tends to encourage competition and humiliation can foster the belief that you are a person of little value. Many of the Hikikomori cases analyzed were found to be episodes of defeat without a struggle. For example, abandoning a prepared exam or a sports team for fear of not being selected. In this way, episodes of social competition are avoided. They are thus faced with an image of themselves created by the opinions and desires of others, creating ideals born not of their own interests but of external opinion. The image created is therefore based on the idea of others and the difficulty in imposing one's goals.

This contrast between the image of themselves and that created by others leads these subjects to a single option with no possibility of alternatives: social isolation. Just like in social phobia it is clear how the involvement of families is very important. It is not only the origin but also causes the continuation of the phenomenon.

Within the Hikikomori phenomenon, the adolescent's sense of inadequacy collides with the culture in which he finds himself, causing fear, loneliness, and anguish. The subject is thus led to an extreme distrust of the reality around him. In this situation, not only the notions of time and space are altered (inversion of the day / night rhythm), but also the psychic discomfort experienced. In Hikikomori subjects, social withdrawal brings an initial feeling of relief for having escaped from the judgment of others. However, over time, depressive feelings also arise from the fear of not being able to get out of the situation in which they find themselves.

Especially during adolescence, due to future expectations, the pressures for social fulfilment are very high. The Hikikomori find themselves bridging this gap between social expectations and reality with feelings of helplessness and failure.

All these negative feelings can lead to further rejection not only towards teachers and peers, but also towards one's family. There will therefore be a tendency to push the feared situation even further away, thus leading to true isolation.



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3. APPLIED RESEARCH: INTERVIEWS WITH THE YOUTH

3.1 NETHERLANDS

Introduction

In this chapter, you will read more about our acquired results from our conducted interviews. The respondents were given the choice to remain anonymous. One respondent agreed and the other did not. Because of this, we decided to keep each respondent anonymous for the sake of form and neatness of the study. The respondents are therefore indicated with their initials.

Of the 4 interviewed respondents, all have social anxiety in a different way. The respondents are in the age range from 22 to 27 years old. The backgrounds of the respondents are very diverse and include Taiwanese (1), Surinamese (1), Dutch (1), Indonesian (1).

Respondent (1, L) had once been treated by the mental health services for his anxiety disorder. Social anxiety is something that this respondent still deals with daily. The respondent was very keen to promote this topic and to combat the stigmatisation of social anxiety.

Respondent (2, B) Had always suffered from social anxiety before the pandemic, but corona has only made it worse, so that to this day the respondent isolates himself and has difficulty making contacts outside of the home.

Respondent (3, F) is an introvert, so the respondent loves her own time, but still suffers from social anxiety in a social setting. The respondent is no longer bothered by this and has accepted it from herself. Nevertheless, she has difficulty contacting others and can hide her social anxiety well. Her body does react to her anxiety.

Respondent (4, S) never suffered from social anxiety before corona. The respondent had adapted to the new way of life and had isolated herself during the pandemic. Now that everything is starting to become 'normal' again, the respondent has difficulty adapting. She prefers to avoid places that are too busy, and she does not know how to start a conversation. She also has difficulty contacting new people.

Findings

Interviews have been divided into three sub-questions. Subsequently, these sub questions were divided into sub questions. These can be found in the appendix (Annex 1). Sub-question:

1. What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?
2. Is there enough talk about social anxiety?
3. How could you still get in touch with others?

The findings on these sub-questions that we obtained through the interviews will be explained below per sub-question.

Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

First, we asked the respondents what their social life was like before the pandemic and whether they had any social anxiety. Then we asked what it looked like during the pandemic and finally we asked what it looks like now. The reason we asked the respondents this question was because we wanted to know whether the pandemic had had any effect on the respondents' social anxiety and whether they were having less social contact as a result.

Respondent (1, L) already suffered from social anxiety before the pandemic. This was mainly because he had had anxiety disorder since childhood and had been treated for it by the mental health care services. Before the corona he had a lot of contact with people from his study programme. He had a regular group he hung out with and outside of school he has two best friends he talks to a lot on WhatsApp.

During the pandemic, his group of friends at school started to fall apart and he saw his classmates through a computer screen. He still spoke to 2 friends daily.

Now, socialising is better than it was during the lockdown, but the respondent noticed that it was more difficult than before. He had to get used to sitting in a classroom again and to physically chatting with fellow students.

Respondent (2, B) said that he had an active social life before the pandemic. He had started his career as an artist and therefore met new people regularly despite his social anxiety. He also went to events to meet new people to network.



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During the pandemic with the lockdown, all that fell away. He thought he was OK with it because he is introverted by nature, but after the pandemic he found out that it did influence him.

It was a switch that he had to make to go from seeing people all the time to not seeing them at all. And he has become so used to it that nowadays he finds it difficult to leave the house. Meeting new people makes him very nervous. He cancels appointments and makes up excuses to stay at home and work from home. He also says that he used to see his social anxiety as a challenge when talking to people, but because of the pandemic his social anxiety has grown so much that he no longer dares to do so.

Respondent (3, F) was the only respondent who indicated that not much had changed. She said that she liked to enjoy her own time and keep herself busy with various hobbies at home. She did meet up with her regular group of friends a lot and did not go out much. They prefer to stay inside and play a lot of games. This happened before the pandemic, and it still seems to be the case.

The respondent said that it was nice that she had the choice to do things outside the house again. She did not like it when there was no free choice during the pandemic and the lockdown.

The respondent also often went to places where she met new people. She does not go up to people easily, but sometimes she does if someone is holding an open door. She was lucky that people approached her, even though she did not think they looked like they were lucky. She can also easily hide her social anxiety in such situations.

Respondent (4, S) had no social anxiety at all before the pandemic, and her week was even fully booked with activities.

Because of corona, she has developed social anxiety, and this is because she has adapted to the new lifestyle. She would no longer allow herself to look forward to activities, because the lockdown only brought disappointment. It became a routine for her to go straight home from work and because of the curfew, she no longer had time to do anything with friends after work. She continued to work on location, but her life outside of home and work had diminished considerably.

As a result, she receives too many stimuli in crowded places, which makes it impossible for her to focus on conversations between herself and another person. Furthermore, she has adapted a new lifestyle to such an extent that she has now become very much on her own. So nowadays she still has the same routine of going home from work and not doing any activities after work or outside the house. She should plan an activity far in advance to prepare for it.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

In the second sub-question, we wanted to find out whether social anxiety is discussed enough. For this we asked the questions whether they themselves notice that people around them suffer from social anxiety and whether this is discussed. We wanted to paint a picture of this by asking about it in various scenarios. Is this discussed at work? At school? Is it talked about in general? We were also curious about the experiences of the respondents in understanding social anxiety and whether this has improved.

Respondent (1, L) thinks that social anxiety is not talked about enough. He said that there was a stigma attached to it and that people had a certain opinion of it. The respondent said that he himself had had experiences of people telling him 'Just go and do it' and that he did not feel understood because of this. He indicated that social anxiety is so much more than fear in a social setting. He says that it even goes home with him when he is alone and there are thousands of thoughts running through his head. He also thinks that people don't know enough about it so they can't understand the disorder because they don't go through it themselves. People around him don't find it difficult to be in social settings, while his body reacts violently to it. He also notices this at school. For example, presentations must be given and that can be very stressful for someone with social anxiety. He indicates that this should be handled with more understanding and that students should be given time to prepare for it. It was also indicated that safety must be created within the classroom. He further indicates that at schools not enough time is spent on students who have social anxiety and little awareness of this.

He indicates that it would help to talk about this subject and that he also likes it when there is awareness. He also talks about this sometimes with his close friends and the feeling of understanding brings him comfort.

Respondent (2, B) does not notice that there are people around him who have social anxiety. He thinks this is



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because nobody talks about it and hides it. Because of this he does not know whether there are people around him who suffer from it. He does think that it would help if it is talked about and understood. He talks about social anxiety with two friends who are close to him. It does help him to talk about it. The respondent said that it is difficult to talk about it if you do not know that the other person also suffers from social anxiety. Anxiety is something you feel inside and if you do not say or show that you have it, you cannot be helped. Nor did the respondent receive any information at school. He did think that this would help the problem a lot. So that young people in secondary schools would be less stressed if they did not have so many friends. He thought that young people felt a certain pressure to belong, because otherwise they would be bullied.

Respondent (3, F) believes that social anxiety used not to be talked about enough, but nowadays it is. She noticed that young people in secondary school were easily bullied if they were alone or did not have many friends. Nowadays she notices that there is more understanding towards social anxiety. She happens to know that all her friends have social anxiety, and they discuss it among themselves. Respondent (3, F) has got so used to it that she now makes jokes about it and is self-mocking. She sees it more as: introverted people and extroverted people. She also thinks it is good to talk about it at work, but it depends on the workplace. She would have no need for it at the workplace where she now works. Despite social anxiety being talked about more, she thinks there is not enough understanding of it. She says that others think you are exaggerating when you are afraid or do not dare to do something. She gave an example of this and that other would say she was exaggerating. The big picture of social anxiety is understood, but the little things are not.

The respondent did not think that there was anything that could remedy the social anxiety. She challenges herself to put herself in social situations. As a result, she notices that she is much more advanced in dealing with social anxiety than she was years ago when she was younger. It would help to know from others that they also have social anxiety. But she quickly feels intimidated when an extrovert is present. She prefers to disappear into the background.

Respondent (4,F) thinks that social anxiety is not talked about enough. She also does not notice whether others suffer from social anxiety, because they might not talk about it either to hide it. She also does not talk about it with others and must think very hard before starting a conversation with someone. She does not feel the need to talk about this at work either, but she would think it would be a good idea if this was discussed at schools. This did not happen at her secondary school. Perhaps information would be provided, and young people would be prepared for presenting, because they are now so used to presenting from a computer screen. Furthermore, the respondent did not feel that there was enough understanding of socio-psychological anxiety.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

We were curious as to what could help young people to get in touch with others despite their social anxiety and how this barrier could be lowered for them. We therefore asked the respondents whether it would be easier for them to contact others if they also knew that the others had social anxiety. We also told the participants about the STOP! Words in Progress project. Since we have a certain image of shaping the project, we are also curious about how the target group thinks about it.

Respondent (1, L) thinks that the project will help many young people who suffer from social anxiety. He thinks it would also help others if they knew about each other's social anxiety. He experiences this himself as well. He then finds it easier to contact others because there is a level of understanding. He would very much like to raise awareness about this subject and he thinks this project would be a good way of doing this. He sees his anxiety as his driving force, and it motivates him to raise awareness of this in others to counter ignorance.

Respondent (2, B) says that it would be an icebreaker to know about each other's social anxiety. He, too, indicates that there is a level of understanding that reduces tension. It is a way of opening yourself up to each other and of sharing honesty and experiences with each other. It is not something unknown to the other person, so that understanding is already present in each other's minds. He also indicated that the project we had started was a good way to raise awareness on the subject, because there seemed to be a lot of ignorance on the subject. The respondent thinks that young people who have social anxiety think they are depressed and confuse these two subjects. But by carrying out this project with the target group, they may be able to understand themselves better.

Respondent (3, F) indicates that she personally would not want to participate in the group or project because she has no need for new contact. She sees her anxiety as a personality trait. Still, it will help to contact others if the other person also has social anxiety. She also indicates that she would feel intimidated if extrovert people were



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present in the group and that she would rather disappear into the background. Nevertheless, she thought the project was a very good idea that could help others. But the respondent felt that she already knew how to deal with her social anxiety.

Respondent (4, S) also indicates that she finds it easier to contact others when she knows that others also suffer from social anxiety. She also indicates that it would help to have people in the group who are very outgoing, so that they can set an example to others and motivate them. In this way, young people with social anxiety have someone to look up to. If they all had the same thing, according to the respondent, everyone would remain stuck in their energy and would not leave their comfort zone. She also thinks that there are young people who are very outgoing, but that they also have social anxiety. So that there are different types of social anxiety and the more differences you have in the group, the more you can learn from each other.

Conclusion

What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

Three of the respondents noticed a difference in social contacts because of the pandemic. They had much more contact with people before the pandemic and had less trouble contacting strangers. Even the contacts that were close to them have also diminished and circles of friends have become smaller. All four respondents got so used to the new way of life that it still influences them today.

Nowadays, the corona measures have been removed and yet they choose not to put themselves in social situations so quickly. This applies to strangers and with friends. Respondent (3, F) does like being able to choose to meet up with friends outside or inside. It appears that respondents have stuck to this lifestyle because they feel comfortable in it now. To seek out social contact and to really go to crowded places gives too much stimulation and is experienced as overwhelming.

All four respondents experienced the same physical reactions such as: sweating, increased heart rate and trembling. These physical reactions do not only occur in social settings, but when the only thought is to make social contact. It shows that social anxiety does not only occur in social settings, but also outside of them. Social anxiety can happen at any time and can also be taken home.

Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

The answer is different for everyone. Some experience it differently than others, but in general they agree that in the past not enough was said about the subject. Some people know that someone around them has social anxiety, but most of them cannot identify it. They think that it is well hidden and that is what they do. If it is not spoken about, you cannot know about someone else. Therefore, it is difficult to notice social anxiety in a person.

Nobody had ever heard of social anxiety in secondary school. Nowadays it is talked about more and more and that is why they knew this term. So, it is talked about more nowadays, but apparently not enough. The respondents felt that they were understood, but not completely. This is because only the big picture is clear, but the small things are overlooked or considered exaggerated. This shows that people do not understand well enough what social anxiety is and what it does to someone. The respondents indicated that awareness of social anxiety is especially important at schools, because there young people come into a new environment and learn to stand in front of a class and present. There are young people who can do this very easily, but there are also young people who find it extremely difficult. They just must do it, as it were. Now that young people can go back to school after two years of studying behind a screen, it is a completely different experience for them.

It also came up a few times that young people who do not have many friends at school are easily bullied. This makes them doubt themselves and they become stressed about belonging. That is why respondents felt it was important to raise awareness of social anxiety among young people, so that they would feel understood if they were more on their own. Respondents also felt that this could be done much better at schools and that more awareness should be given.

They also felt that it was not necessary to discuss this topic in the workplace. It depends on what kind of work someone does, but in the places where the respondents were currently working it was not necessary.



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How could you still get in touch with others?

Two respondents were not sure what could help them to get in touch with others, because they had become used to the new lifestyle. Another respondent felt no need to contact new people. Most of them indicated that they did need a little push to contact others. It also helps them to know that someone else has social anxiety. There appears to be a level of understanding, and this enables them to find common ground with each other. You soon make yourself vulnerable and share something personal that helps you understand what social anxiety is like. Respondent (4, S) says she likes to be in a group with more outgoing people, so that you have different kinds of energy in the group, and it might motivate the other person, because otherwise you all stay in the same place. Respondent (3, F) says she is put off by the presence of an outgoing person, because she feels intimidated. So, this would probably differ from person to person. Respondent (3, F) is introverted and does not feel the need for new contact. Furthermore, respondents (1,2) see their social anxiety as a driving force and as a challenge to take their chances. It motivates them to do something about it.

The safety within the group is important. It was said that depth is needed to create safety within the group. If the group already knows that everyone has social anxiety, it will quickly reduce the pressure on one person.

Finally, the respondents think the project is a good idea to raise awareness on the subject. They also think that this could be used much more widely, for example in schools, to raise awareness among young people from secondary school age. They think that awareness in general could be much better in secondary schools and that it would be a good opportunity to know about this from an early age. The interview already gave them a good feeling, because they felt that they were being listened to. They generally do not feel understood. They would also like to use their voice to speak out and share their own experiences to be understood.

7.2 SPAIN

Introduction

La Xixa Teatre conducted 3 interviews in order to better comprehend the youngsters' experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic. All three people interviewed had suffered from social anxiety and they shared how they managed to deal with their situations. All three respondents are aged 23, born and raised in Spain, but one of them with Mexican and British origins.

Respondent (1, G) had been treated by mental health services for anxiety and other disorders she had before pandemic. Although she currently feels much better, she still has to deal with the daily presence of her anxiety disorder, especially avoiding crowded places. The respondent was very keen to talk about this topic and she shared the need to promote open dialogues about anxiety to reach as many different target groups as possible.

Respondent (2, D) has suffered from social anxiety since she was in early high school. After the pandemic she felt like she had unlearned how to manage social interactions and she started doing new activities or sports to reverse her social anxiety, so she quite forced herself to meet new people. Going to therapy made her realize what aspects of her personality she was scared to show and started to work to empower herself from that point on.

Respondent (3, R) had never experienced social anxiety before the pandemic. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, her social anxiety started to appear in parties or social situations that she used to really enjoy before pandemic but was no longer able to like. More specifically, she started to feel a bit of panic attacks when she had to catch the train at some point during her disorder phases. She had difficulty living a normal daily life (she had to catch the train almost every day). She points out the need for more social research about anxiety.

All 3 respondents share the fact that they did enjoy the pandemic and lockdown time, because they felt easier to make distance bigger between people without seeming weird and could spend more time by themselves or only with the ones, they had more confidence in. For this reason, all respondents shared that the first stage of the reopening of social activities was a challenging period for them, having to make a big effort to get used again to be with people, crowded places and socialize much more than expected. The respondents agreed that a turning



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point for them was to start talking to other people who also suffer from these disorders and realize it was much more common than they thought at the beginning. The three of them have been working on their difficulties with professional help, and agreed on the need for this, being also the first step to follow when you start talking about these disorders.

Findings

The structure of the interview is divided into 3 sub-questions (each one with several sub questions). The 3 main sub-questions were:

1. What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?
2. Is there enough talk about social anxiety?
3. How could you still get in touch with others?

The findings for each respondent are explained below, sorted in the 3 mentioned sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked how their social life was before, during and after the pandemic, and whether they had had social anxiety in each of these periods. Asking for each time specifically offered the possibility to evaluate whether the pandemic has been a key element for the development of their anxiety disorders.

Respondent (1, G) defines herself as a quite socially claustrophobic person before pandemic. She felt social anxiety in crowded situations, like clubs or bars, and didn't feel any anxiety when socializing in open spaces, such as the beach or in the forest.

During the pandemic, she got used to walking her dog alone and only hanging out with 2 of her friends twice, but in open spaces where nobody else could see them. The turning point for her was when the Government let inhabitants go out in between an hourly interval, because she started to see a lot of people in the street. She got physically blocked and her anxiety reappeared quickly.

Nowadays, socializing is better for her, as she is able to meet people in places where she wasn't able to before. She is still going to psychological therapy, but with her possibilities and strategies much more under control now.

Respondent (2, D) already suffered from social anxiety before the pandemic. She has lived with this disorder since the beginning of High School, she says she even can't remember her life before having social anxiety. Her closest friends remain the same (now and before the pandemic).

During the pandemic, she felt safer living with her friends and had a great time together, especially because she didn't feel the pressure of having to make the effort to relate to more people, and she felt she was doing fine.

Now, socializing is better but at the beginning it was very difficult for her to get used to relating to new people and she felt an anxiety she had never experienced before. She felt her socializing basis was totally forgotten, especially when interacting out in the street. Therapy has helped manage her anxiety disorder, above all in understanding her situation and learning strategies to deal with it.

Respondent (3, R) had a quite strong social life before the pandemic. She went out every weekend and hung out with different groups of friends. During the pandemic, she only stayed in contact with some friends, she tried to use social media, but did not get used to seeing people through a screen.

Now, she locates her situation somewhere between before and during the pandemic. She is less social than before, but the relationships she has nowadays have a better quality. She thinks the pandemic changed her mind set in



which activities she enjoys the most. Her social anxiety is related to very crowded situations, such as parties or train trips.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

This sub-question aimed to know if respondents thought the subject is discussed enough in different areas (at school, at work, with family, friends...). We also wanted to better comprehend the process respondents had passed through to raise awareness of their disorder better. All interviewees confirmed that there is not enough talk about social anxiety, but with certain nuances in their arguments.

Respondent (1, G) believes that social anxiety is not talked about enough even though she notices how there are more people around suffering from it. The pandemic made her start to talk more about the grounds of her disorder because she noticed the topic has been normalised quite a bit and she started to feel safe to do it, too. Before the pandemic she lived her situation as a secret and then she realized that she wasn't alone and that many people suffer from it, too.

The respondent shared that, even though with each day there is more talk about social anxiety, there is still a taboo in schools and work, where many people don't understand what the disorder is at all. She thinks that a clearer message is needed in order to address different target groups and to make the ones who suffer from social anxiety feel more understood and maybe make the decision to ask for help.

Respondent (2, D) also reported that there isn't enough talk about anxiety. She realized that social anxiety is also being ashamed of others finding that out. She links this social phobia to the big insecurities and the shame we all feel as teenagers. The respondent doesn't think it is talked about enough in high schools and doing it would give tools to all the teens who are experiencing anxiety. When it comes to the workplace, she thinks it is a very embarrassing topic to talk about, because the question may be "how can you be working and having social anxiety at the same time?". The respondent believes that change comes from talking about yourself, but through more awareness and good practices in schools and workplaces.

Respondent (3, R) isn't an exception: she also thinks there isn't enough talk about social anxiety. The interviewed reports there is still a taboo with all topics related to mental health. Even though now everyone seems to be talking about mental health, it's still a personal experience and not that many people open up about it. The respondent believes that maybe in schools it is a little more discussed than at work but still isn't enough. She shared the need for more investigation and research to be able to act and normalize.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

This group of questions aimed to find out the strategies and tools developed by respondents to keep their social life as normal as possible. Questions were related to how the respondents managed to get in touch with others or what qualities do they need to feel comfortable with others and better manage the challenges of anxiety. We also told participants about the STOP! Words in Progress project, so they can help with their thoughts in relation to the project.

Respondent (1, G) shares that the project is a great idea to get people to know better about social anxiety, especially for the ones who are already curious about it but don't get much information. This project will bring the opportunity for everyone to learn about social anxiety. For people who are suffering from social anxiety she thinks it could be both bad and good experience, depending on the disorder point they are now. In any case, she thinks that creating a comfortable and safe space to talk about it is totally necessary to build projects like this.

Respondent (2, D) also thinks it is a great idea. She explains that she works with teenagers through theatre and used to have a student who suffered from social anxiety. They both discovered that it was only through theatre that he managed to laugh and have fun with his classmates. As an adult and youth trainer, you can also be ashamed to relate to teens and others, and theatre is a very useful tool to work on that. In her case, being with more people



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with social anxiety wouldn't help her, but she believes it is necessary for many to know about others experiencing the same as them to better understand anxiety.

Respondent (3, R) finds the project a good idea. The interviewed reports she could be a part of it, but in previous phases of her disorder she wouldn't. The respondent believes that feeling secure and trusting other people are a must to participate in this kind of projects.

Conclusion

What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

Two of the respondents said they already had a little social life before the pandemic and noticed a difference in social contacts after the pandemic, because they had more difficulties when getting used to seeing people. However, going through therapy helps them to reach their goals about having the social life they want. The third respondent totally changed her mindset of spending time with friends, from going out every weekend and having lots of different groups of friends to only meeting a few friends occasionally and seeing them in open spaces such as the forest or doing relaxing activities.

All the respondents confess to having felt comfortable and safe when it comes to social activities during the pandemic, because they didn't feel the pressure of having to make the effort to relate to more people. But, by the end of restrictions, social anxiety came again to all of them. Challenges consisted of coming back to get used to relating to others. Despite the general effort to be able to get in touch with others, participants 1 or 3, rather prefer to avoid crowded places and hanging with a lot of people, because they feel more comfortable with the lifestyle they start having during the pandemic.

All respondents experienced very similar physical reactions, such as, increased heart rate and trembling, overthinking, body tension, and hard breathing. All of them agree that they live in constant fear that at any moment anxiety could strike them.

Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

All of the respondents answered that there isn't enough talk but had different arguments in favor of this statement. They all agree that there is now much more talk about it than before the pandemic. The consequences of the lockdown have normalized quite a bit the idea of people talking about mental health issues. The normalizing process of the topic facilitated respondents to start talking with others about their disorders, especially with young people.

Some respondents shared that they have never heard of social anxiety during their period in secondary school. Despite one of the respondents reporting, she was suffering from an early age of high school, she couldn't understand what she was passing through until she was 23. It appears that even everyday there is more talk about anxiety, there is still a taboo in schools and work, where many people don't understand what the disorder is at all. Some participants had concerns about sharing these topics at the workplace, because they feel that they can often get stigmatized and seen as a person who is no longer able to do his/her job.

It also came up that some solutions to extend the talk about social anxiety could pass through more desk research and thinking of a clearer message to address to different target groups to have a global better understanding of the phenomenon and strategies to help.

How could you still get in touch with others?



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For the group of respondents feeling secure and trusting, other participants are needed to manage a better interaction within the group, but also to social interaction in daily life to reduce the pressure and be able to create a trusting bond.

Finally, the respondents think the project is a good idea to share personal stories from a common disorder such as social anxiety, and to raise awareness on the subject, especially for trainers which work with young people susceptible to developing social anxiety. However, some respondents share that for some people it may not work participating in the project depending on the disorder phases they are at the moment.

Some respondents also find it a good idea to get to know more people who are suffering the same and probably could understand each situation better. Also, respondent (2, D) said that theatre is a very useful tool to work with insecurities and express us in a different way, so many people who suffer from social anxiety may discover an easy way to laugh and share with others.

3.3 POLAND

Introduction

Outriders Spółka conducted 2 interviews to better comprehend the experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic through youth. Both people interviewed had suffered from social anxiety and live in Warsaw.

Respondent (1, Z) attends secondary school and has been treated by mental health services for anxiety and she is still in psychotherapy. Although she currently feels a little bit better, she still has to deal with the daily presence of her anxiety disorder, especially avoiding public situations.

Respondent (2, D) is 25 and he has suffered from social anxiety. During the pandemic he has become more aware of his deficits and consequences of doing things against them. He focuses on virtual contacts, talks on zoom etc because being with others in common space quickly makes him nervous and impatient. He felt, in social situations, a great tension, when he is with people he has not met for a long time, and he would like to impress them.

Findings

The structure of the interview is divided into 3 sub-questions (each one with several sub questions):

1. What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?
2. Is there enough talk about social anxiety?
3. How could you still get in touch with others?

The findings for each respondent are explained below, sorted in the 3 mentioned sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked how their social life was before, during and after the pandemic, and whether they had had social anxiety in each of these periods. Asking for each time specifically offered the possibility to evaluate whether the pandemic has been a key element for the development of their anxiety disorders.



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Respondent (1, Z) remembers that she was afraid because of being in a new school and focused on not being seen as shy and weird. At the same time, she describes herself excited about making new acquaintances.

Thinking back to the days of the pandemic, Respondent is worried to be seen as a freak, because, in March 2020, she felt a huge relief. She could stay at home, and it was ok. She also felt free to be herself and doing things in her own way. For her, the fear of virus could be managed easily, and she didn't miss social life, also because she lived with her little brother and sister.

Nowadays, socializing is better than before for her. Many people from her school declared some kind of "social fear" after pandemic. Some guys from her class claimed that they experienced depression episodes. She felt less like a freak, because she thinks that everyone can be seen as a little bit freak. She looks at people in a different way, even if she continues to avoid parties or something like that but, sometimes, she can talk with people and find the activity pleasant and safe. It isn't so obvious before the pandemic lockdown. Anyway, spending time with other people, is an experiment for her: for example, last week she went to the pub with some friends and she describes the night spent as "not bad time", but she experiences a strong tension, the same she felt every time she is forced to speak, or someone waits her to answer. In these cases, she just wants to disappear.

Respondent (2, D) already suffered from social anxiety before the pandemic. His social life before pandemic is described as really upsetting and he didn't fit anywhere. Now, thinking to his life, he says he was in a real depression, and he thinks that this disorder could be the cause of his social phobia.

During the pandemic, he started to listen to himself, realizing many aspects of his person, like his sexual preferences which he had avoided for years. He changed his therapist and focused on his thoughts and the way they influenced him. He started to write his thesis with a person, who is actually his partner. The pandemic period has been full of positive changes, and he didn't miss social life, because he didn't use to meet people, except for family members, and had deep conversations via internet with people who helped him a lot in discovering and understanding himself.

Now, he cannot say that socialization is simple. Last year he started work in a publishing house as a corrector but doing it from home. He is still strongly afraid of being in public, forced to talk and touch other people. Crowdy places make him totally panic. He tries to go out further as least twice a month, but he treats it as a challenge, not as a pleasure.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

This sub-question aimed to know if respondents thought the subject is discussed enough in different areas (at school, at work, with family, friends...). We also wanted to better comprehend the process respondents had passed through to raise awareness of their disorder better. All interviewees confirmed that there is not enough talk about social anxiety, but with certain nuances in their arguments.

Respondent (1, Z) believes that social anxiety is not talked about enough, even though she believes there are more people around suffering from it, because during the pandemic we used to talk only by mobile or other devices. The pandemic made her start to talk more about the grounds of her disorder through Discord. The respondent shared that social anxiety is not very discussed in schools, even if, after the pandemic, in her school there are some workshops about the topic and the psychologist is working a lot about it. For her this work is very important to let people feel less alone and freaky and because it's much easier to cope the problem when people don't need to hide it. So, the pandemic has had some positive aspects for the girl, but she adds that some teachers believe students use the problem as an excuse, so there is no exhaustive comprehension of its meaning.

Respondent (2, D) reported that there isn't enough talk about anxiety, even if there are many available studies that support the idea of an increased social phobia after the pandemic. He has started to talk about his own disorder after the pandemic and, before that period, confessing his problem looked like as a terrifying experience. The



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respondent doesn't think it is talked about enough in primary schools, where we have learnt to judge each other. Many people think, for example, that people with social phobia should just try harder to stay in the public.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

This group of questions aimed to find out the strategies and tools developed by respondents to keep their social life as normal as possible. Questions were related to how the respondents managed to get in touch with others or what qualities do they need to feel comfortable with others and better manage the challenges of anxiety. We also told participants about the STOP! Words in Progress project, so they can help with their thoughts in relation to the project.

Respondent (1, Z) shares that the project let her feel impressed and even moved. She believes that sharing stories about social phobia can be a great idea to get people to know more about the topic and, even if for her it would be a huge challenge, she would try to help herself and others. Actually, she is looking for adopting strategies to manage her difficulties, through psychotherapy for example or trying to set simple goals in social relationships and practicing (even if in some moments she just think to run away).

Respondent (2, D), at first, was scared of the idea of being on a stage, and he immediately thought "No never" but, at the same time, he recognizes the need he has to share his story, to listen to stories of people like his own. He thinks that, if good trust and security were created, the activity could become easier, even if he doesn't know how to create a similar context because he rarely feels safe and trustful.

Conclusion

What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

The two respondents said they already had a little social life before the pandemic, and they didn't miss social life during the pandemic. The girl has had some advantages, because she has felt to be not alone in having social phobia when pandemic ended. However, she feels a great tension related to public situations which makes her sweat a lot, breathe with difficulty, and speak hardly. Now, she is doing psychotherapy and, even if sometimes it is frustrating, she is aware that the key is having patience for learning to speak with people and manage her anxiety. The second respondent, instead, totally changed his mindset because he has had time to reflect about his own thoughts. So, even if the tension in social situations is almost the same, with a great body's activation, he is more aware of his difficulties and of his goals.

Both the respondents confess they haven't had more difficulties in getting in touch with people than before the pandemic. The first respondent said she has felt comfortable and safe during the pandemic, because she was alone with her nearest people. The second respondent too doesn't remember the pandemic period as a terrifying experience, but he said he has had time to focus about himself and he also had many deep conversations on the internet with people who have helped him with his anxiety. The participants, rather prefer to avoid crowded places and hanging with a lot of people, because they feel stressed and nervous with a strong body activation.

All respondents experienced very similar physical reactions, such as difficult breath, muscular pain and tension etc.

Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

Both the respondents answered that there isn't enough talk about social anxiety. The first respondent believes that after the pandemic there is a more normalizing approach to the mental illness, especially for social phobia and many people have started to talk about it. The second respondent, instead, has not found a major sensibilization about the theme, because in schools teachers are continuing to teach children to compare and judge each others.



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All the respondents have started to talk about their social phobia after the pandemic and they both have found that, when they have confessed their disorder, people have started to talk about their own one. For them, it's much easier manage the anxiety when they don't have to hide it.

How could you still get in touch with others?

The two respondents have different ideas of what can help people with social phobia. The first respondent believe that patience is the key to be more aware and to find the courage to practice, step by step, to get little personal goals each day. The second respondent propose more tolerance for weakness and underlines the importance to recognize that in some moments people cannot speak, but they could use a written form of communication, because forcing them gives the opposite result.

Finally, the respondents think the project is a good idea to share personal stories from a common disorder such as social anxiety, and to raise awareness on the subject. The first respondent is less worried, and she would try to perform on the stage even if she recognizes the great challenge for people who, like her, are suffering from social phobia. The second respondent underlines many times the importance to create a safe context to let people talk on the stage and he is very worried about the realization of a trustful space, but he also recognizes he needs to share his story and listen stories like his own.

3.4 FRANCE/MARTINICA

Introduction

D'Antille et D'Ailleurs conducted 2 interviews to better comprehend the experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic through youth.

Respondent (1, A) is a 20-year-old girl. She has never been treated for social phobia but, before the pandemic, she used to spend much time alone. After the pandemic, she has noticed she needs much time for staying alone and, when she is in social situation for long times, she feels a great tension. She doesn't talk about social anxiety with her friends or classmates, but she believes that sharing this kind of topics, can be very helpful.

Respondent (2, B) is a 25-year-old girl. She has never been treated for social phobia. She had a rich social life before the pandemic, and she sometimes forgets the pandemic has happened. She uses to hang out with her friends and do many activities with them. She believes that talk about the disorder of social anxiety is very important and she has noticed an increased interest for the topic, which allow people to be free to not hide their difficulties. Regarding her personal experience, she has no difficulties in getting in touch with people, even if she prefers that others do the first step and start conversations.

Findings

The structure of the interview is divided into 3 sub-questions (each one with several sub questions). The 3 main sub-questions were:

1. What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?
2. Is there enough talk about social anxiety?
3. How could you still get in touch with others?

The findings for each respondent are explained below, sorted in the 3 mentioned sub-questions:

Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked how their social life was before, during and after the pandemic, and whether they had had social anxiety in each of these periods. Asking for each time specifically



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offered the possibility to evaluate whether the pandemic has been a key element for the development of their anxiety disorders.

Respondent (1, A) remembers that, before the pandemic, she used to see her friends at school or outside, when they went on outings. Anyway, she was alone most of the time.

Respondent spent the lockdown in her parents' house, she didn't see anyone except for her family members but, sometimes, she exchanged with friends via social networks.

Nowadays, socializing is a mix of before the pandemic and during the lockdown. She needs time to stay alone, more than before and she feels the need to disconnect from other people when she is in social situations for too long. When it happens, she also feels a great tension, with a strong desire of space and air.

Respondent (2, B) had a quite rich social life before the pandemic. She used to travel regularly, meet new people almost every day and do different activities with them like sightseeing, going to restaurants and bars, organizing karaoke nights etc.

During the pandemic, respondent (2, B) spent the first lockdown in her relatives' house with seven other family members, so she didn't really feel lonely. They used to play board games, cook together and do some gardening. However, she remembers this period as a huge challenge for her, even if she kept in touch with her friends via social networks, by texting and video calling.

Now, everything is getting back to normal for the respondent, because she can travel again, hang out with her friends, attend university in person and, sometimes, she feels like the pandemic has never happened.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

This sub-question aimed to know if respondents thought the subject is discussed enough in different areas (at school, at work, with family, friends...). We also wanted to better comprehend the process respondents had passed through to raise awareness of their disorder better.

Respondent (1, A) believes that there is not enough talk about social anxiety and comprehension of the theme, even by those who suffer from it. She also thinks that the confinements and the pandemic have clearly increased the number of people suffering from social anxiety, even if it is not the only reason, but after that period, the world around psychological disorders is becoming more and more accessible and it has allowed people to talk easier with others about their own disorders.

Respondent (2, B) doesn't use to talk with her friends about social phobia and nobody has ever talked about it with her at school or at work. She said that she hasn't really noticed that more people are suffering from social anxiety than before the pandemic.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

This group of questions aimed to find out the strategies and tools developed by respondents to keep their social life as normal as possible. Questions were related to how the respondents managed to get in touch with others or what qualities do they need to feel comfortable with others and better manage the challenges of anxiety. We also told participants about the STOP! Words in Progress project, so they can help with their thoughts in relation to the project.

Respondent (1, A) shares that she has no precise strategies to get in touch with others, but she thinks that people, because of the roles of society, are not always interesting and an idea could be to create a context that would allow people to really be who they are. She proposes to mix groups of people who suffer from anxiety, or who have experienced it, and people who know how to overcome their anxiety easily. Thinking about the project, she



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believes that standing up on a stage could be very stressful for people with social phobia, but she has also said that people could easier open up if the context is safe.

Respondent (2, B) says she has not many difficulties in getting in touch with people, especially when they make the first step and start conversations. About the project, the respondent thinks that people struggling from social anxiety would find it difficult to get on the scene and to speak in front of people they don't know. It would probably be extremely stressful and some of them wouldn't feel comfortable doing it. On the other hand, maybe it would help them to beat their anxiety and maybe after the session they would feel better knowing that they are not the only ones struggling with this issue.

Conclusion

What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

The two respondents are both girls and they are aged from 20 to 25. There are some differences in their answers. The first Respondent, before the pandemic, used to meet and stay with people in some social situations, but she has always preferred the time spent alone. After the pandemic, her social life is changed. Nowadays she needs much time to be alone and, if she is surrounded by many people, she gets tense faster. The second respondent had a rich social life before the pandemic and, even if the confinement has been a big challenge for her, she didn't feel alone because she was surrounded by her family. When the first lockdown ended, she has returned to her social life like the pandemic has never happened.

Both the respondents confess they haven't many difficulties in getting in touch with people than before the pandemic. The first respondent said she chooses to know a person when there is a good reason to do it and, when she has not that, she refuses to approach people. The second respondent, instead, says she usually meets people online or through her friends who introduce her to their friends, in fact she speaks with strangers only when they approach her and start the conversation.

Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

Both the respondents agree about the importance to talk more about social anxiety disorder, because people who suffer for this kind of disorder would feel safer in sharing their stories. However, even in this question, there are some differences. The first respondent has not noticed an increased in social phobia in people after the pandemic and nobody has talked with her about the theme. The second respondent, instead, recognize increased cases of social anxiety but, most of all, an increased interest for the topic.

How could you still get in touch with others?

The two respondents have different ideas of what can help people with social phobia. The first respondent believes that if a person could know that many people are suffering for social anxiety, they would feel understood but, at the same time, it would be nice to create mixed groups to give people tools for managing the disorder. The second respondent proposes more tolerance, education, and sensibility about the theme.

Finally, both the respondents think the project could be very stressful for people who are struggling with social phobia. They also believe that, creating a safe context for the activity, the goal could be achieved and that sharing similar stories could be very helpful.

3.5 ITALY



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Introduction

As part of the STOP Words in Progress, NoGap conducted many interviews in order to better comprehend the experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic through youth. Respondents can be divided into two main groups:

- Three young women aged between 20 and 26 who are actually having a psychotherapy with Doctor Cheti della Fazio, who is a NoGap member, and they all have an anxious symptomatology before the pandemic and, during the pandemic, they all became more aware about their conditions and, most of all, they comprehended the importance of asking help to manage it.
- A group of 17 youth, aged between 18 and 19, who all attend the secondary school, and they are all classmates. They didn't suffer of social phobia before the pandemic and they have not had many problems when it ended, even if in some of them it is possible to recognize diminished social abilities.

Findings

The structure of the interview is divided into 3 main sub-questions. Each main question has other sub-questions that NoGap has not used to encourage the free narration of each respondent's experience, without being too directive. Respondents have answered to the questions below:

1. What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?
2. Is there enough talk about social anxiety?
3. How could you still get in touch with others?

Findings are divided into students and patients, because the answers of each group are very similar through the members of the same category.

Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked how their social life was before, during and after the pandemic, and whether they had had social anxiety in each of these periods.

Students before the pandemic had all positive social life, they often used to hang out with their friends and they didn't suffer from social anxiety. Only five respondents of this group (made by seventeen people) have reported few symptoms like the fear to be judged for their emotions and opinions and the fear to speak in public.

During the pandemic, students have spent much time with their families and for many of them it has been a pleasant experience: for example, one of the students with a quiet symptomatology has talked about it with her mum and she has helped her to become more secure. They all kept in touch with their friends using social networks or other devices, except for one respondent.

After the pandemic students have easily restored the social life, they had before and, many of them, have begun to hang out more often because they missed their friends, except for one guy who had never had social phobia and he has started to avoid parties and feels a great tension when his parents force him to hang out. One of the five respondents with symptomatology has felt more secure and free, while the other four have become quieter and more insecure and they have begun to spend much time alone and to avoid social situations with many people.

Patients all had an anxious symptomatology before the pandemic with a strong difficulty to socialize with people.

During the pandemic, two of the three respondents, have perceived their symptomatology aggravated, but at the same time they have become more aware that something in their life must change and that they need to take back their life. The third respondent, instead, was quieter during this period because everyone was confined, and she didn't have to justify herself to others.



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After the pandemic, all the patients have noticed several improvements in the awareness of their social anxiety. Although it is a positive aspect, they all have had several difficulties in their social life, for example going out, being surrounded by people was not so easy.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

This sub-question aimed to know if respondents thought the subject is discussed enough in different areas (at school, at work, with family, friends...).

Students believe that there is not enough talk about social anxiety, because it is seen as a “taboo” in our society and some teachers don’t care about it, for example some of them believe that student use it as an excuse.

Patients too all agree that there is not enough talk about the theme of social phobia. People have started to approach the topic only after the pandemic but, in many cases, they don’t know or really comprehend this disorder. Anyway, people who suffer from social anxiety have begun to open up and ask for help.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

This group of questions aimed to find out the strategies and tools developed by respondents to keep their social life as normal as possible. Questions were related to how the respondents managed to get in touch with others or what qualities they need to feel comfortable with others and better manage the challenges of anxiety. We also ask about the utility to talk about their own stories on a stage.

Not all the students have answered at this question, except for three of them, the ones with the most important symptomatology of social anxiety. They all believe that if they knew that many people are suffering for social phobia it wouldn’t be helpful for them. The proposes of this group of respondents include the organization of some studying group to give to the youth tools for managing the disorder, but also a more moderate usage of technological devices.

Thinking to the project, they say they wouldn’t talk on a stage about their personal stories, but they recognize it could be useful to compare each other.

Patients have not answered at this question, but they all have chosen to start a psychotherapy to get skills and tools for managing their social phobia and they are finding several improvements.

Conclusion

What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

Patients:

All the girls already had anxious symptoms. The COVID pandemic has been a condition that has allowed greater awareness of one's condition of discomfort, but also an opportunity to ask for help. The Coronavirus pandemic has been a condition for feeling "equal" to others forced to close, isolate, and abolish social relationships.

Students:

Among the entire group of respondents (17 people), only 5 of them reported social anxiety before the pandemic. This small group during the pandemic have had time to reflect about their condition and some of them have asked for help.

For the bigger group (12 people) pandemic has been an opportunity to rediscover family values. Many students were destabilized by the absence of physical contact, and they have declared decreased levels of empathy after the pandemic. These respondents didn’t have anxiety problems before the pandemic, so they have had mild repercussions during the pandemic, and they have restored the social life they had before easily.



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In general, the pandemic affected aspects related to shyness, to the fear of judgment and to the socialization with new people.

Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

Patients:

All three girls believe that this issue is not talked about enough, that there is ignorance on the subject and that it is not even talked about in the school environment.

Students:

All the respondents in this group believe there is not enough talk about social anxiety, because people are not interested in it and adults don't encourage social anxiety comprehension: for example, teachers often believe that students use social phobia as an excuse.

How could you still get in touch with others?

Patients:

They felt the need to seek specialist help from a psychotherapist, because they couldn't find themselves tools for managing their disorder.

Students:

Only three students have answered at this question. They all believe that if they knew that many people are suffering for social phobia it wouldn't be helpful for them. The proposes of this group of respondents include the organization of some studying group in order to give to the youth tools for managing the disorder, but also a more moderate usage of technological devices. They don't believe it was easy for them being on a stage and talk about their studies, even if they recognize the possible utility of the activity.

3.6 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The entire research includes 32 people from five different countries. Looking at the results of each national research the following general conclusions can be drawn:

1. Among the answers at the first question *"What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?"* two groups can be identified.
The first group is made by those respondents who, before the pandemic, had a poor social life and they preferred to spend the time alone. When the pandemic started, many of them feel comfortable and safe because they felt free of other's judgement and they easily accepted confinement rules, without missing any social life. The pandemic, for a major part of this people, became an opportunity to reflect on their own condition and to become more aware of it, so they have begun to ask for help. The end of the pandemic has been a big challenge for some, of them and they mostly report a great tension with strong physical symptoms of activation (sweating, increased heart rate, trembling, difficulty in breathing etc.), especially when they are surrounded by many people or imagine it. For these reasons, they have begun to avoid crowded place and spend more time alone than before. On the other hand, some people have felt better than before.
The second group is made by those people who have never suffered from social anxiety. Before the pandemic they had a rich social life with a lot of friends. With the beginning of the pandemic, they missed the social life they had before but, many of them, have found pleasure in sharing activities and moments with their family. The confinement period has been difficult, but many of them have continued to talk with their friends using social networks or other technological devices. At the end of the pandemic, they easily restored the social life they had before, some use to hang out more than before, someone else is a little bit shyer.
2. Looking at the answers at the second question *"Is there enough talk about social anxiety?"* all the respondents agree that there is not enough talk about social phobia in our societies among several contexts. Many of them have noticed that, after the pandemic, there is more interest in the topic with a more normalizing approach to the mental illnesses in general, especially for social anxiety. Although respondents noticed small improvements, they recognize that social phobia is, until today, a taboo and people don't know or comprehend



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what it really is. Only few respondents have heard about social anxiety in the secondary school, otherwise teachers often don't believe students are ill. All the participants feel it is important to raise awareness of social anxiety among young people, so that they would feel understood.

3. The answers at the third question "How could you still get in touch with others?" are more heterogeneous than those above. People have different ideas of what can help them to get in touch with others. Some of the participants believe it can be helpful to know that other people are suffering from social anxiety to perceive to not be alone, others believe it is not useful because the need of having help would remain. They have different proposal, such as:
 - The creation of mixed group made by people who suffer from social anxiety and people who don't, in order to give to the previous one's tools for managing the disorder.
 - Workshops, especially in the secondary schools, to raise awareness on the topic.
 - Creation of safe context where people with social anxiety can practice and find courage.Regarding the idea of the project, all the respondents believe that talk about their own stories and listening to other's stories can be very helpful, but many of them are scared from the idea to be on a stage and talk about themselves.



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4. WORKING WITH CREATIVE METHODS

Introducing creative methods

Generally, “creativity” can be defined as the ability to produce and detect ideas, opportunities and strategies that can be mobilised to find solutions, workarounds and apply alternatives to concrete situations or problems. On one side, it is perceived as inherent to human being in the form of “anthropological capacity” (Daskova, Poliakova, Vasilenko, Goltseva, Belyakova, Shevalie and Vasilenko, 2020), but also as an acquirable skill (Alonso-Geta, 2019, p.8) that can potentially be developed by any human being through training and learning processes. That is, creativity can be stimulated, cultivated, and explored through a series of techniques, exercises and tools that constitute the creative methods. As creativity implies thinking outside of the box and searching for new perspectives and opportunities, the role of creative methods and processes is to accompany step-by-step a person in the building of a creative attitude and the capacity to employ creativity as to generate change and innovation. Attitude itself has cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Alonso-Geta, 2019). In this sense, creative methods build a learning path addressing progressively these aspects as to gradually generate a creative attitude in a person:

1. On a cognitive level, the creative process stimulates the abandonment of preconceptions and beliefs that one has already acquired and significantly defines the way one thinks and acts. Therefore, challenging the beliefs and ideas is fundamental when using creativity, as it allows to operate on the level of the unknown thus cultivating new competences and skills to behave in this context
2. On an emotional level, a person needs to progressively become aware of the opportunity and added value to seek alternatives and build new processes, by highlighting the benefits and the real need to make a change in the specific context or situation.
3. On a behavioral level, an individual needs to detect and identify a specific positive outcome of the creative process, be it in the form of acknowledgment from others, positive self-assessment or the satisfaction of the result and the ability to complete the process.

Creative methods and processes are easily adapted and can be used in a variety of contexts, going from business environment and educational programmes to the field of psychology and mental health.

Taking all the above said into account, creative methods differ from any other work or educational method, as they simultaneously build new capacities and promote the act of change and transformation (be it on an individual or group level). Using creative methods allows one to work and “play” with a variety of perceptions and beliefs on concrete or fictional situations and enable the possibility to imagine, create and promote different outcomes and attitudes towards it. On an individual level, this fosters one’s personal capacities for problem-solving, analytical, and critical thinking and having a proactive attitude. When brought to a social context and in relation with others, creative processes encourage empathy, improve dialogue and communication, stimulate conflict resolution and foster solidarity, teamwork, and collaboration. Therefore, depending on the specific field of interest and scope of work, creative methods can successfully be mobilised as to work to reduce and prevent the generation of prejudices, discriminative or even aggressive attitudes thanks to the capacity to analyse, deconstruct and transform preconceived ideas in the search of other alternatives.

Learning with creative methods

Both learning, and creativity are complex and dynamic phenomena that are in constant interaction. According to Goiovic (2014), the learning process has four fundamental factors:

- The diverse nature of the studied, considering the characteristics of the subject and the environment.
- The configuration of diverse and contradictory elements, needing to approach knowledge from different perspectives.
- The presence of the unforeseen.
- Learning incorporates the individual-society relationship, that is, it is both an individual and shared experience.

The model of learning through creative methods focuses on the process beyond the final result, thus allowing to make use of self-assessment tools that facilitate the development of metacognitive skills (Goicovic, 2020).



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Taking this basis of the learning process into consideration, creative models allow to multiply the contents and information received as well as to closely observe the diversity of scenarios that allow to transversalise the learnings as to be used in a variety of contexts and situations. According to Capra (2008) a creative methodology is shaped by art, science, and fantasy: art fosters the development of skills, science the knowledge and fantasy the imagination, since it allows to make, analyse, self-evaluate, contrast, dialogue and create (Goicovic, 2020). In this sense, it can be deduced that different art and creative tools and techniques fundamentally stimulate personal development as they foster personal abilities and competencies that allow individuals to overcome situations in an autonomous and alternative way. Galvis (2007) proposes four basic components in the creative methodology: "methods, techniques, contents and resources" and he underlines that their goal is also to develop ideation processes, promote the application of divergent or creative thinking and create positive attitudes that allow to transform the environment with personal criteria.

It is thus intuited that, through creative methodologies, people are given the tools to have initiative and face different problems thanks to the descriptive and observational capacity that they can develop during the methodological process (Galvis, 2007), "allowing them to explore new paths, use information in another way and restructure their thinking patterns" (Bono, 1998). De la Torre (1997) "points out that by problematizing and stimulating cognitive competences are put into play, by climatizing, social competences and by stimulating and estimating, affective competences, addressing in this way, creativity as a process in which the person is projected in the totality of its cognitive dimensions (knowing), affective (being) and effective (doing)" (Galvis, 2007).

As a result, creativity and independence seem to be interconnected, constantly stimulating, and enriching one another (Daskova et. al., 2020). Consequently, the fundamental role creative methods play when used as a basis of the learning process is to foster the achievement of the independent ability to think, act, observe and react in a creative way, all this constituting what is called "creative independence". Creative independence refers not only to the capacity to reflect in an autonomous rigorous way, but also to the ability to transfer the learning outcomes and experiences in a new, unknown, and different context or situation to make a change or resolve certain issues.

Finally, learning processes which are based or feature creative methods and processes prove to strengthen the generation of practical knowledge as they stimulate the transfer of expertise and information to be used, adapted and reviewed in different contexts to generate different outcomes. That way, learning processes combining creative tools and methods ensure that new competences gained are more easily transversal and transferable.

The psychological aspect of the creative process and creativity stimulation

Creativity vs. developmental psychology

Creative potential is an integral indicator in the personality structure and based on its research identifies eight main traits: creative thinking, curiosity, originality, imagination, intuition, emotionality and empathy, sense of humor and creative approach to the profession (Guilford, 1967).

Creativity can be seen as a natural human ability, available to humans from the earliest stages of life. We cannot link the development of creativity directly to the successive phases of human development, but rather, in addition to the individual characteristics, we can speak of life stages that favor an "explosion" of creativity and those in which it is extinguished.

Social context and the issue of social expectations have a fundamental role, and the individual gradually becomes aware of it while growing up. This may appear as a contradiction in a sense that society simultaneously imposes on one the pressure to develop personal potential, and at the same time orders that this creativity be kept within a certain, socially approved, framework.

Every person (since childhood) is creative as creativity is inherent part of human behaviour shown through the desire to create. Unfortunately, this ability is very often drowned out, or individuals are told that they don't it. Most of the adults enjoyed painting as children and contact with art (including theatre, music, dance) directly develops creativity. Being creative gives the ability to deal better with problems and helps making connections and break down barriers.

Why do we need creativity?



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As a category of the creative process, some of the basic properties of creativity are:

- transitions of quantity into quality (development of spiritual values);
- shifts from the external to the internal world and from the internal to the external (inter-internal to external (interiorization and exteriorization);
- transitions from phenomenon to substance (verification of the result) (Wiszniakowa, 2016)

Creativity is an attitude that enables, on one hand, finding new aspects in what is familiar and close, and on the other, facing what is new and unfamiliar and, with the help of existing knowledge, to transform it into a new experience (Landau, 1969).

Encouraging creativity and stimulating innate inventiveness is particularly important in children up to the age of 5-6, as this period is the most decisive in determining whether we will have the desire to create in the future. Children learn to ask questions, look at the surrounding reality from different perspectives, create and implement their own innovations. Creating artwork is an opportunity to build self-confidence and self-esteem. By creating, the child develops original thinking, learns to take challenges and failures, as well as to be open to difference (Orr, 2021).

The basis of students' (aged 7-12) creativity is action or activity. It belongs to the group of psychophysical needs of the child. The comprehensive and harmonious development of the child requires own and multifaceted activity, especially one that stimulates creativity (Trempała, 2020).

At the beginning of school education, the child - according to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1936,1950) enters the period of operational thinking or more precisely, the so-called concrete operations (around 6-11 years of age) The operational stage, on the other hand, is associated with the achievement of the ability to solve logical problems by means of mental operations. Logic and concreteness are not allies of creativity, so this stage of development may contribute to the noticeable decline in originality.

What's good for enhancing creativity?

In order to amplify creativity while working with children and adolescent, teachers and professionals should take into consideration:

- enabling participants to conduct broadly as well as narrowly experimental activities,
- helping understand that generating ideas is a process that requires space free from immediate criticism,
- providing opportunities to appreciate the importance of the various stages of the creative process and time,
- helping develop an awareness of the various circumstances under which creative ideas can emerge and an appreciation of the role of intuition,
- encouraging and stimulating participants to play freely with ideas and concepts, and to make conjectures about possible solutions to various problems,
- emphasizing the role of imagination, originality, curiosity, and questioning, strengthening those qualities that support youth's creativity (Zajac, 2022)

Creativity, however, is not exclusively the domain of young people. With the passage of time, the ability to create innovative ideas or solutions is not lost, although it is somewhat different.

Most of us know creative activities are a great way to keep our brain active and alert, but they can do so much more. In fact, research shows creativity can have significant physical benefits. One of the long-term benefits of having a creative practice is its ability to prevent degenerative diseases like Alzheimer and Parkinson. Creative activities can also help lower blood pressure, alleviate anxiety, and increase levels of "happiness hormones" associated with a runner's high (Resort Lifestyle Communities, 2020).



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Examples of creative methods

As previously mentioned, creativity is an inherent part of the human being and creative processes can easily be adopted in different areas in the form of social innovation, art creation, academic research, and social integration, among many others.

Before this panorama of different creative methods being available, this chapter highlights some examples of creative methods and tools that go in alliance with the perception of the personal and social value of creativity that allows generating efficient solutions to current personal and social challenges (Alfonso-Benlliure and Bellver Moreno, 2019) improving the individual's quality of life as well as personal and social improvement.

In the context of social education and intervention, art creation appears as a methodological tool that aims at improving people's life, foster social inclusion while stimulating social cohesion, culture of peace and dialogue (Alfonos-Benlliure and Bellver, 2019).

Art is a powerful mean to foster dialogue and peace, as it is considered a universal language and a source for understanding other perspectives, beyond language, cultural and social differences. Art can directly nurture a peace process since it is able to provide a voice to marginalised or oppressed groups due to its transversality, often easy access, and production, whilst legitimising the process itself. It can create strong connections among participants through the shared (individual or collective) process. Moreover, it can serve individually to find creative alternatives to conflicts and issues that seem to have a single solution through the techniques of taking distance, review and reconsideration of the creative "product" or outcome. As for the creative aspect, art fuels and "cultivates" creativity in the way that it successfully allows gaining knowledge and abilities and stimulates the thinking and reflecting capacity and socio-emotional skills such as empathy, emotion management and awareness (Alfonso-Benlliure, 2000). Art also encourages people to communicate in an empathic manner (Pelato and Bellver, 2019), focusing on emotions, feelings, and experiences.

As a result of improving participants' abilities and skills, art and art creation appears to have a strong empowering potential which can be extremely useful while working with people with fewer opportunities and in situations of social exclusion and mariginalisation.

Art mediation

Art mediation is a tool to empower young people to express political and social opinions and, ultimately, a vehicle for social transformation. It was created with the aim of carrying out socio-educational interventions through artistic and cultural projects with people who are in a situation of social exclusion or vulnerability. That is, it employs the arts to foster social transformation and inclusion and community development (Moreno, 2016).

A fundamental aspect that characterizes Art Meditation as a creative method is the role of mediator and structure of the art mediation process. Art Mediation is a result of the combination of social education, art education and art therapy and aims with provisions of community art, community development and conflict resolution mediation. Concretely, art mediation uses art and art practices to stimulate criative thinking and perception on reality and different problems to foster social transformation. Art mediation appears as a suitable creative method to use in different social contexts as it successfully combines different disciplines and operates as a "bridge" between different social groups and their surroundings in a critical, transformative way. With this practice, necessarily carried out from neutrality, equidistance, and respect (Nató et al., 2006), the development of skills and personal growth of users is sought from empathy and empowerment, achieving self-knowledge, acceptance and human transformation (Paczkowski, 2020). Empowerment is defined as the "process that promotes and favors individuals, groups and communities with more power to achieve greater control of their lives" (Moreno, 2016). Through art mediation, people involved in projects can connect with themselves and express pain or discomfort through artistic practices and symbols and thus cope with the situations they live through empowerment and resilience development.

It is in the intersection between social and artistic education that allows art mediation to incite reflection on concepts such as

- metaphorical expression: the expression of the "traumatic" situation in a metaphorical way allows the subject



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to move from the first person to the third person and gain distance from the experience

- the symbolic function: when an idea is represented artistically, we understand it better and are able to review and revise it from different perspectives
- interdisciplinarity: it favours integral development, connects knowledge and fosters critical and creative thinking

Alongside the development of resilience, art mediation is a strong tool to promote the empowerment of affected users and, therefore, to improve their self-care. An empowered person can recall what happened, and in this sense, art mediation allows affected people to connect with their past and initiate an introspective process through creation.

Rather than focusing on concrete results and specific tangible outcomes, Art Mediation aims at providing the conditions for a safe space for people to experiment and share, incentivizing in that way their creativity. While some guidelines can be given depending on the specific activity (workshop, training, etc.), no material and information is given regarding the content of the “product” and the facilitator’s responsibility limits to resolve doubts, accompany and motivate, but in no way suggest ideas, changes or verbalize any criticism regarding the content generated. Thus, the art mediation process gives the possibility to explore, adjust, think, and review in permanence stimulating the generation of ideas and solutions regardless of the specific final outcome desired or requested.

Art Mediation process can feature different art disciplines such as music, dance, theatre, circus, among others.

Amongst other techniques are storytelling, theatre of the oppressed, theatre and sung stories. All these techniques are described in depth in the following chapters.

How can creative methods be complemented and combined with other methods?

While creative methods can easily be used alone to stimulate creative thinking skills and independence, they can be interesting to explore and can appear very useful in combination with other non creative *per se* methods.

As a result, the previously mentioned creative abilities and tools can be mobilised in addition to other methodologies that can add significant value to the desired outcome fostering creativity.

That is, in regards to complex social realities where both internal and external factors operate, for instance lack of personal motivation and self-confidence, social stigma on a given behavior and lack of support and network of organisations serving as bridges for dialogue, the combination of creative and non creative methods into a holistic methodology can be useful as to work with different target groups related improving both personal and group abilities to work on transforming the existing situations or conflicts. While creative methodologies can work, as the example below explains, on emotion management, introspection and the capacity to critically review traumatic or personally strong experience, creative tools foster the capacity to rigorously search for alternatives, solutions and strategies to improve similar or equally impacting situations. This chapter includes a short introduction of two of the possible methods used by the partners in the project, but many other non creative methods can be put in practice in combination with creative methods depending on the scope of work, outcomes desired and characteristics of the target groups.

Critical Incident Technique in combination with creative methods

One of these methodologies is the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). The basis of it is that each participant is invited to think and recover details of a specific situation where an action, attitude or behaviour has had an impact (regardless of it being positive or negative) to a specific result or outcome (reaching a given goal or result, fulfilling a task, etc.) Concretely, CIT aims to "collect direct observations of human behaviour in a way that facilitates its potential utility in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (Flanagan, 1954). Therefore, this technique enables the understanding on how cultural frame of reference influences interactionw and problems and it uses problematic experiences for learning and gaining tools to achieve solutions to these problems. Behaviours are analysed in the specific context of the incidents, which implies that they have a special



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meaning. This technique allows to express needs and expectations, to facilitate the solution of the practical problems raised (Balboa, 2008).

The fundamental methodological principles of the CIT are:

- Empowerment/development of intercultural skills.
- Reflection of the reciprocal nature of cultural differences and their role in generating conflicts.

This technique can be introduced within the Theatre of the Oppressed and Social Theatre, through the observation and representation of a problem we look for alternatives and answers to this difficulty.

Therefore, combining a concrete methodology such as CIT that seeks to work on solving concrete problems with one or more creative methods like Art Mediation or Storytelling can increase participants' capacity to search for unusual solutions and alternatives while carrying out an introspective process individually or in a group. In addition, using creative methods in combination with CIT can strengthen the capacity to identify and analyse the context, factors and beliefs that have operated in a given situation or experience and critically review available solutions or strategies for the future. In this sense, creative methods can enhance the transferability of knowledge and capacities gained that participant can interiorise and mobilise in similar complex situations in future.

Process Work or Process Oriented Psychology in combination with creative methods

Process Work or Process Oriented Psychology (POP) (Amy Mindell, 2008; Arnold Mindell, 2002) is a method that integrates and uses contributions from various disciplines to facilitate the transformation and growth of individual and collective groups. This methodology is applied in different areas: community and organizational development, diversity and leadership training, individual psychotherapy and family relations, counselling, and group facilitation. Process Work focuses mainly on developing a state of consciousness by helping individuals and groups to realize how they perceive and live their experiences, learn to change their approach, and find the information which is not noticed or marginalizing and hence limits a person's ability to respond. Much of the information we need to transform ourselves and to grow challenges our ordinary consciousness. Without realizing it, we marginalize certain aspects of our daily experience: emotions, desires, dreams, intuitions, fantasies, moods, etc., because they come into conflict with our basic belief system or with the dominant culture to which we belong. So, we do not give ourselves permission to hear or talk about experiences that are out of range of our ordinary consciousness and to receive signals and information from a non-ordinary reality. Process Work teaches us to connect with our deeper self and learn to be creative and flow amid extreme circumstances.

Process Work uses several tools such as Open Forums, Group Facilitation and Forum Oriented Processes.

Open Forums are democratic and structured meetings where everyone should feel represented. These events are facilitated following "deep" democracy, which means that it is a space to express the dreams and deepest feelings within a group since "... the conflict itself is the fastest way to create community..." They are public spaces that hold open discussions on community or social issues and provide an appropriate and safe framework for a community to know the diversity of ideas and feelings of the participants. Open Forums allow to:

- redistribute power and give importance to the mood of the groups
- talk about different unresolved or difficult to solve issues
- respond to the feelings of frustration generated due to mistrust or fear of the higher spheres of power
- challenge the hopelessness of achieving change
- rediscover the desire to train within and to experience the community

Group Facilitation is a set of technical tools and methodologies to create conditions for a successful development of processes that live in groups. Group Facilitation can contribute to:

- Improve the quality of group processes.
- Transform conflict into spaces for reflection and action.
- Reconsider the forms of organization in order to achieve group equality and ensure the fairness and balance of power.



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- Encourage the participation and commitment of all people involved taking into account group diversity.

Process Work is an interesting and powerful tool that, in combination with creative methods, can both strengthen one's resilience, creativity and capacity to connect with the unconscious in a way that can be useful and explored in different areas of life.

Concretely, creative methods such as storytelling, art mediation or Theatre of the Oppressed's creative process can stimulate the detection, exploration and experimentation with one's desires, fantasies, moods in a conscient way and potentially mobilise them in a variety of contexts and situations. Process Work allows one to review one's behavior critically and systematically in relation to different social conventions and expectations and consciously build an introspective path that enables receiving stimulation by external non-ordinary experiences and therefore liberates the creative potential.

Other creative methods in the treatment of social anxiety disorder

Excessive stress and anxiety have been shown to compromise physical and mental health (Morey et al., 2015). Furthermore, prolonged exposure to stress during childhood and adolescence can lead to permanent morphological changes in brain development, with the potential to negatively affect social behaviors and increase risk for the development of future psychopathology (Giedd, 2004). Recent clinical research has focused on the development of interventions to help these people.

There are many studies about elements of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)—such as graded exposure, regulation strategies or cognitive restructuring—to diminish symptoms of social anxiety. Still, the results of these interventions are variable, and though many include social competency components, interventions aimed at increasing social competence have not been thoroughly explored in relation to anxiety. For this reason, new studies have been focused on “creative methods and its benefits.

In the previous chapters we already focused on different techniques from the realm of performing arts. Find below two other possible approaches.

1.2 PAINTING

The power of painting activities among people with SAD is shown in many studies; one of the most important research projects in this field is the one of Drexel University of Philadelphia (College of Nursing and Health Professions).

This study shows that painting can treat typical symptoms of anxiety, but also the most extreme ones, such as heart beating, nausea, and dizziness. Almost 75% of the participants have referred to an increased mood tone and less anxiety symptoms. This result does not depend on the beauty of the object/paper painted, but by the process itself. In particular, the actions of taking the brush, putting it into the water and moving it on the paper, but also the choice of the colours, have a positive impact on patients.

1.3 WRITING

In psychotherapy there are two main writing forms: the diary and the sporadic writing.

The diary consists in a sort of “life script”, a mirror, through which the patient can see its typical way of acting or responding to different life events and, in many cases, the strategies adopted are responsible for its deficits or symptoms.

Sporadic writing is very useful in anxiety disorder because it allows to build a thought, a reflection about those situations in which, otherwise, the person could have experienced a loss of control. By giving a written form to emotions, one can remain anchored to the present moment, better managing the anguish felt.

In both cases, whether within a daily diary or occasional forms of writing, thanks to narration, things and events can acquire meaning and find their place in the world. The person in the narrative process develops and refines



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awareness and self-knowledge, progressively recognizes the dysfunctional scripts that one implements recursively, elaborates events and places them in their evolutionary line, reformulates the sense of self by integrating the complexity of experiences, filling the fractures, and gradually clarifying the overall scene of its relationships, of the representations of itself, of its emotions.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1

Interview questions respondents

Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

- What was your social life like before the pandemic?
- What did it look like during the pandemic?
- And how does it look now?
- Do you find it more difficult to get in touch with people? Did you have to get used to meeting people?
- How do you feel when you experience tension? What goes through you? How does your body react to it?
- When do you feel the most tension?
- How do you manage to get in touch with people if you choose to be in a social setting anyway?

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

- Have you noticed that more people around you suffer from social anxiety?
- Do you ever talk to people about this?
- Is this being discussed at work or at schools?
- Do you think it helps to talk more about this topic?
- Is there enough understanding of anxiety?
- What do you think could be better?

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

- What would help you to connect with others?
- Would you feel more at ease if you knew that others also suffer from social anxiety?
- For this project, we want to offer youth workers a toolkit, so that they can offer young people with social anxiety disorder a stage and their story will be heard. What do you think when I tell you this?
- Would you find it scary to tell your story here on stage?
- Do you think if good trust and security were created it would be easier?
- Do you think it is a nice idea for others? Also, to get together with other people who also suffer from anxiety. Do you think it is better to do it among ourselves?



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Annex 2

NETHERLANDS

Interview 1

R: I am (x) I am 22 years old, soon to be 23 and I live in Amsterdam

I: What was your social life like before corona?

R: Pretty good, because I had started my first year of training. Social Work course at the HvA. And I have a group of friends, so that's nice. A lot of contact and meeting up after lessons. I also have a lot of contact through WhatsApp for example. Also with other friends, but not very much. But it is okay.

I: Okay and how did it look during the pandemic?

R: Well, very little. I think I had two people I really talked to a lot. My group of friends fell apart because everyone went in a different direction and corona. So, I don't really see them anymore and they were all in different classes. I have one person I talked to a lot during corona. He is really my buddy, and I did everything with him. We were also in the same class, and I have a lot of contact with them. And there is another person, but he has flown away, so to speak.

I: And what does it look like now?

R: Better than during the pandemic! I think. Still not very good. I don't do very many social activities. I did more before the pandemic, but I find it difficult and I'm not very good at social contact. I also find it difficult via WhatsApp.

I: Do you currently have more difficulty contacting people after the corona compared to before the corona? Is there a difference?

R: Yes and no. Yes, I think so. I find it harder now. I find it difficult to be in a classroom again. To start conversations again and to make small talk. That causes more tension.

I: And how do you feel when you experience that tension?

R: How do I experience this tension?

I: What goes through you? How does your body react to it?

R: I often get stomach-ache and I always describe it as an elephant sitting on my stomach. I feel that. A whole pressure on my belly. I often start to sweat a lot especially in social situations. As if there's a waterfall going on at my back. I get very hot and sometimes very cold. I also fidget a lot with things.

I: And when do you feel the most tension?

R: When I have to say something, often in class or the feeling that I have done something wrong in a social context.

I: And how do you manage to get in touch with people if you choose to be in a social setting where you must speak out anyway?

R: If I know people in a group, it's easier and if I can trust them. If I already know one person, that is also very nice.

I: Do you think security is important?

R: Yes, safety is very important to me. That I can feel safe. Sometimes when I want to say something, I can do it, but it depends on the atmosphere and the group. If people are already talking a lot, it's not easy for me to get in.



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I: Do you feel that you prefer to stay in the background then?

R: Yes, or that if I say something then I say something wrong.

I: Okay, so that's what goes through you. And does it often stop you from saying something?

R: Sometimes I do. In class, for example, I have a good example. But that the teacher asks a question and I've had the feeling to say something for a long time. And my classmate pushes me to say it. But I wait until someone in the group answers, because soon it won't be right. But eventually I do say it and then it turns out to be right. Other people must have been there first.

I: Do you need a push from others then?

R: Sometimes, but sometimes when there is a long silence, and nobody says anything. But if someone else started, I would stop immediately.

I: No, I understand. Do you think there is enough talk about social anxiety?

R: No, I think it's not talked about enough, and when it is, I notice the stigmatisation. There is a lot of stigmas about anxiety, mental health, and mental illness.

But with social anxiety, people just think oh, you find it hard to talk to people or oh you find it hard to be in the middle. Yes, that is what is known, but it is so much more. It's not just for a moment or for that moment. No, it goes with you much longer. It goes home with you or in bed, you name it, wherever you are. Anything you must do that involves social interaction can create tension. And people say, "You're faking it, come on let's just do it." Why, "You're not going to die anyway." I think it's often not talked about because it's one of the least severe forms of anxiety disorder. Yes, you do have a severe form, but it's not considered a super severe anxiety disorder that it affects your daily activities. For example, depression, PTSD, or bipolar disorder. There is more understanding for that because it is declared as annoying and bad. Whereas an anxiety disorder is seen as a matter of doing. That's what goes wrong with social anxiety disorder, and I think that the education system is not geared to it either. I sometimes have the feeling in our study programme that we must do a lot of presenting. That's great because I love presenting. I really do. But it is the way of: "Okay now you are going to do that". Fine, but take your time. Look and ask if anyone finds it difficult, fine, go and talk about it. Don't make someone do it like that because they must, because it's good. I'm not like that either: I find it difficult, so I won't do it. Spend time on it and let someone know that it's OK if they find it difficult and provide a safe environment. Because that's often not done. You are immediately sent saying: "Now go stand in front of the class and present your research."

I: OK, so I hear you say indeed that you think safety is important in this and that indeed more time is spent on it and more listening to each other on the subject. I also think a lot of people think it's 'normal' because everyone has it.

R: Everyone finds it difficult to give a good talk, but so much goes through someone. There is a very easy definition of a 'disorder'. And that is: if it affects you in your daily life, then you are suffering from it.

I: Have you noticed that many people around you suffer from social anxiety? But they don't talk about it?

R: Yes, but I always find it difficult. Because I think there is a fine line between being shy and having social anxiety. Being shy is part of it, but it is different. If you are shy for a moment and then you can talk normally, okay. But I think people are not very self-conscious anyway. Or they don't know that they have 'something'. But I think more people around you can have it. For example, if something strikes you in class during the lesson. Then you think: there might be more to it than that. I also notice that it has increased a lot recently.

I: Yes, especially during corona. People who had it a bit less then, or maybe not at all.

R: Yes, they are less social now. I now know people who were always social and quite talkative. But they are much more cautious now. And then I think: hmm weird!

I: Do you ever talk to these people about it?



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R: Yes, but not very much. But I did talk about this often with someone I was in class with last year. We were both sensitive to it and so we could support each other and give each other a set.

I: Does it help you to discuss it?

R: Certainly.

I: Do you also think it would help if they made it discussable here at schools?

R: Definitely. It certainly needs to be discussed. I think also to create awareness that instead of it being a problem, it can also be an opportunity. Say okay, you have an education or work where you must stand up in front of groups. I have an internship and I also do voluntary work where I must stand in front of groups and then people wonder how I can do this when I don't like speaking in front of a group. But then I have a professional role and I'm terrified too, but then it's easier to do. There needs to be more attention that social anxiety is not a bad thing and that it's not a problem. You can just work on it. It can be remedied. It's not a matter of doing it, but it's a process that would have thousands of tools if you wanted to. But I think that if someone already gets the recognition and can find himself in it, it can help someone a lot and then you're already there. The best thing that I find is that if you can talk to someone about it, it's very nice.

I: Do you think there is enough understanding towards social anxiety? In general?

R: No, often people see a mental illness as something negative or something that is not true. You're crazy, you're weird, you're mentally disturbed, you're violent. All those kinds of things. People think you're crazy.

I: Just because you function differently?

R: Yes, what I'm saying now sounds very rude. But for example, if someone's leg is cut off, it is very sad, because his leg is cut off and that is very sad. You can literally see what's going on. But you can't look inside my head and see what's going on. If you wanted to, you would run away in four seconds, I can tell you. That's the problem. People can't see it so it's not true for them. The way the news talks about mental illness is already terrible because everything is bad. There's no room to talk about it. It's a negative thing of: "oh it's just stress, oh you find it hard. It will be all right, won't it?". Or: "Why are you acting like this?". I was almost expelled from this course because I have an anxiety disorder. I was literally told that I am not welcome here, because I have an anxiety disorder. What makes me unable to do this course because of my anxiety disorder? I did voluntary work for three years before this, so why shouldn't I be able to do this? Yes, I sometimes find it difficult to talk to people. But if I am passionate about working with people, why should I not be able to do this?

I: You are also an expert.

R: Yes, what's the problem with that? They even offer a profession at this school as an experience expert. What is the big problem?

I: Yes, learning with experience.

R: I've also heard from other people who also had a condition and say, "Don't be so upset, just be normal. ". And then I think: what?

It's just disrespectful, because if you have someone here in a wheelchair, which is also very bad, they are also excluded in another way. But they do get different respect when it comes to their clinical picture. And that's something that frustrates me and that needs to be addressed. More attention needs to be paid to it.

I: What do you think could be better?

R: The attention paid to it and the fact that it is receiving broad attention. That there are many more teachers at the HvA about social anxiety disorder. I gave it to someone who has social anxiety. I think giving presentations is the most fun. Teachers said: OK, now we know how to deal with this target group when we have someone like this in the classroom. By knowing something, you understand it and you know how to deal with it. It is not necessarily the case that you have to hold someone's hand or a whole other project. But recognition, talking together and discussing it can help someone a lot.



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I: For this project, we want to provide youth workers with a toolkit, so that they can get to work with the target work. We also want to offer them a stage, so that they can tell their story and raise awareness about this, and young people can come together. What do you think when I tell it like this?

R: I just like it and I just want to help!

I: As you say, only when you know someone's story and when you have heard about them can you understand them. As long as they are ignorant, they don't know. We want to break that and bring these young people together. What is it like for you to meet other young people who also have social anxiety?

R: I like it very much because I can share some things.

I: Do you think it will help young people to get together?

R: Yes, I think so. You know, everything in secondary school is about the social life. But it's not about yourself. You don't reflect much on yourself and therefore you may find it more difficult later in life. If you are already working on this from secondary school onwards, then you can work on it very quickly and make it negotiable.

I: Would you like to do your story on stage?

R: Yes, I want to do that! I want people to know more about it. It is my driving force. I know how annoying it is that people don't know anything about it. And how annoying it can be to have to explain things a thousand times.

I: Do you think it is also a good idea for others who have social anxiety?

R: I think you can use it as widely as possible.

Interview 2

R: I'm (x), I'm 27 years old and I am a musician and a trader mainly working at home.

I: And how did your social life look like before the pandemic?

R: It was very active. As a musician I would meet artists every month and organize events to meet fans, so it was very active.

I: And how did it look like during the pandemic?

R: During the pandemic it felt like everything shut down like instantly without any transition. It started to become very empty with no activity at all.

I: So how did your social life look at that moment during the pandemic?

R: Well, it felt empty without any activities.

I: And did it do something to you as a person or your mental health?

R: To me I didn't realize that it did something to me. Only later when I started reflecting. I realized that it did affect me. I used to see my friends very often and meet new people all the time and make a lot of connections. When all of that stopped, it really affected me, and it made me realize that I need more social interaction than I thought I would.

I: And how is it looking like right now? Your social interaction, your social life

R: I tried to get it back as it was before and even better. But I feel like I got used to the situation I was in during the pandemic. And it feels like it is ongoing. When I can start to meet people again and organize events. It just feels like I'm still in a pandemic anyway when I'm not.

I: Could it be that you developed social anxiety during the pandemic?

R: I think I did because I used to have a little bit of social anxiety. But it would not be a bother to me back then



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before the pandemic. Because I would see it as a challenge. I would use this anxiety to challenge myself to talk to people. But now it has grown so big that I can't even face it. My heart beats very fast and the instant I think of "oh meeting new people" or going to an event with people I don't know. I get shaky hands and I just open a random video or game to numb that feeling.

I: So, do you have more trouble to be in contact with new people? To socialize lately.

R: Yeah, I haven't met new people ever since. So

I: What do you experience when you try to talk to people?

R: My experience?

I: What do you feel? What goes through your head? Through your mind?

R: I haven't gotten the courage to do so because I'm not at that step yet. Because I am stuck in the anxiety that blocks me from meeting people. I can't even know. But I do know that my heart beats very fast when I think of it.

I: So even by just thinking of it, makes your body respond.

R: Even now when I talk about it, it makes me think of it. I feel very vulnerable, and I feel very weak. I never thought I would be like that in my life that I lack so much social interaction that I would be anxious about it. I never thought it would be that bad.

I: When do you feel the most anxious? At what moment?

R: I guess there is like this app for making new friends. They organize events and stuff. I freak out every time I open it. It is a very cute app like people are going to the movie alone and they offer a free movie ticket for whoever wants to join. It is a very nice app for socializing and making new friends. When people are going to a restaurant and invite people through the app. When I look at it, I just stress so much and I think "Oh not today, maybe tomorrow. But I've been saying maybe tomorrow for like two weeks now. So that's when I get the most stress.

I: When you're about to meet new people.

R: When I'm thinking. I have the app in front of me. I'm going to make the decision to, and I actually cannot, and I stay at home instead.

I: What makes you conquer that feeling?

R: Little by little. It's the envy to become a better version of myself. I have a vision of who I want to become and that gives me strength. It makes me want to make the step to join the event. So, every day I kind of like open the app and look at the stuff. I journal how it makes me feel. If it feels differently from yesterday, I just write it down. Because I really want to go. My current goal is to fight the social anxiety and grow. I don't want to stay a hermit. I don't want to be like a man in a cave like that my whole life.

I: Do you think that people talk enough about social anxiety?

R: I mean if people have social anxiety they don't talk. So, no.

I: Do you see that people around you have it?

R: They won't tell, they won't say.

I: Aren't you noticing something?

R: I can't even notice anything because I'm not talking to anybody and I'm not seeing anybody so I can't notice anything.

I: Do you talk to other people about social anxiety?

R: Yeah, I talk about it to two people that I'm closest to. But that's all. They cheer me up. They encourage me to



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go out and meet people.

I: Did they ever talked about social anxiety when you went to school? By workshop? Or training?

R: Nothing to raise awareness about it.

I: No awareness?

R: Not in the school I've been. Not in France. Many people they talk about school, but they never mentioned about social anxiety.

I: Do you think it would help to talk about it?

R: I think it would help a lot. Because if we cannot see a problem, then we don't know that there is no problem so we can't fix it. But if we talk about it at school then people will start to realize that they are living this. Reason why I think nobody talks about it here is because I think that they don't know it's a thing, they don't know the subject.

I: Is it a taboo?

R: I don't think so.

I: Is it just uncommon?

R: I think its ignorance. They don't talk so they don't know.

I: Do you think there is enough empathy for anxiety?

R: I think yes. I think as soon as someone would open about it, another person could feel it because they could be living the same thing. They could listen to each other and reflect.

I: What do you think that society could do better about it?

R: I think it's maybe educating at school like having a class to raise awareness about it. Or just an intervention about it maybe? Once a year. It doesn't cost too much to do that for our education. I know that at school you get bullied at easily if you don't have friends. If you don't have friends, kids are going to say that you're a loner and have no friends. They make fun of it, so everybody wants to have friends, but they end up stressed. Because they end up around people that they don't even like to please others and to not be mocked at. And I guess later it will develop to social anxiety, because you don't hang out with people you want to hang out with and like when you are young. When you grow up you see everybody as fake and scared to meet other people. You are not surrounded with people that you get along with. It's like oh so much pressure that anybody needs to have friends and stuff. But you end up feeling scared of feeling lonely and hanging out with the wrong people. I think raising awareness about this subject would be nice. It would help lots of kids and then adults. Because that what kids become.

I: I agree with you. Would you feel more comfortable to get in contact with other people if you know that they also have social anxiety?

R: I think it would break the ice instantly. It would be a good common ground. I think yeah because then the bond begins with honesty about something. They are both being vulnerable. I don't see anything bad about that.

I: For this project we want to bring together the youth who have social anxiety so they could connect with each other and social. It helps them to be in contact with new people and make friends. We plan for this project to give them a stage a voice to tell their story and to listen to each other. So that other people can relate, and people outside could understand them. That they are more than just their anxiety. Do you think that would be a nice idea?

R: I think it is a great idea to have a project like that. First it raises awareness and people don't even know they have social anxiety. They think they are depressed. They associate this with depression or other things. They don't know about it, so they put the problem on another subject.

I: That's why we want to give them a stage so they can tell their story and be understood and raise awareness. So



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that people will know more about it.

Interview 3

I: What was your social life like before the pandemic?

R: Well, I always joked that my life hadn't changed, because I'm the kind of person who likes to be at home. And I have lots of hobbies that I can do at home. And I did go out with my friends, but when I go out with my friends, we go to one of our houses and play board games and play the Nintendo switch. So, I'm not really into going out and stuff like that. And my friends have kind of lost it too because we're a bit older. So, I didn't necessarily have a very wildlife before the pandemic. And during the pandemic, not much changed. The only thing was going to festivals in the summer, but that wasn't possible. But that's really the only thing that was different. Other than that, it just wasn't that different for me.

I: And how does it look now? Is it still the same?

R: Yes. Yes, now all things are opening again a bit, of course. So, you can do more. And I must say that I like the fact that the choice is now back. Do I want to do something fun outside? Because that is the only thing, I had during the pandemic that was annoying. That it was annoying that you didn't have the choice to do something if you wanted to do something outside the house. But yeah, no what I'm saying: basically, just the same.

I: Did you always have trouble getting in touch with people or meeting new ones?

R: I do come to places where I can get to know new people easily. I do get into situations where I can get to know new people. But I'm someone who doesn't go up to others easily and I don't need a lot of people around me either. But I do like to be alone. At home with myself and my hobbies. Me and my peace and quiet around me. And when I feel like social contact, I look for it. But the question was: Can I make contacts easily? Yes, I don't think so because someone must approach me. And if that person approaches me with a very good vibe, then I can talk your ear off, but if a person doesn't approach me, then I'm not the first to come up and say "Hey, let me introduce myself. It really must come from someone else, but not from me.

I: Have you ever experienced tension in social situations?

R: Oh always! Always!

I: How do you feel then? What goes through you?

R: For example, if I must go to a party, then I already think: OK, I only must stay for half an hour, then I can go home. Or when I'm at a party or I don't know anyone, or one person and that one person walks away for a moment, or you want to get a drink when you go out and then you must order that drink from the bar. I find that scary.

I: How does your body react to the tension here?

R: My heart is beating so fast, and my hands are shaking so much. My hands are shaking badly. My hands are always shaking because I am always nervous. But then even worse and I get sweaty hands and my heart is racing. You can usually hear it in my voice. It really sounds like I'm about to cry. I get a lump in my throat. Then I think "Shit, everybody hears that." And I get so stressed out. I really have a lot of anxiety.

I: How do you manage to get in touch with people when you are in such a social setting? How do you manage?

R: Well, I don't do anything, but people come up to me. So that's my luck. People come up to me to talk. Even though I look at people with a look like don't talk to me, I don't exist, don't look at me you know. But most of the time people come to me. The joke is that when I tell people I'm an introvert, they tell me they don't notice it. So, I'm good at hiding it. Even though I don't think so myself. At that moment I die inside, but I do manage to start a conversation if I must. I do it if I must. I once took a course in fear of failure and learned that it's best to speak out about how you feel. Then the other person knows how you feel and there are no thoughts in your head. I have taught myself to bullshit.



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I: If I must. But I'd rather not.

I: I understand.

R: It's a coping mechanism that develops when you have social anxiety.

I: Yes, I do that too, I always mention it straight away. It's nice if the other person knows in any case.

R: It takes the whole pressure off.

I: Exactly! Do you think there is enough talk about social anxiety?

R: I didn't used to, but nowadays I do. When I was younger, it was in my time in high school. I was one of the quieter people in school. But my advantage was everyone thought I was sweet and could draw well and people looked up to that. So, I was the quiet kid who could draw well, and I was sweet. But you also had other quieter kids who got caught and bullied. And if you had social anxiety, it was never talked about. They think very strangely of others when a child is just alone. Nowadays it's a term and people understand social anxiety. It's talked about so much that I think "Wow did I have this in my day."

I: Have you noticed that there are people around you who suffer from social anxiety? More than for corona?

R: The good friends I have the most social anxiety. Yes, most of them do. R: Yes.

I: Do you ever talk about this with people? Do you discuss it?

R: Well, I do discuss it, but mostly I make jokes about it. So, it's never serious. So, I do have self-mockery. I can laugh about being like that. I'm at a point where I've really accepted that I am like that and so I'm comfortable with myself. And I wasn't necessarily like that before, but now I have accepted that I am like that. So, I don't necessarily have to discuss it. It's not so hard for me anymore. You just have extroverts and introverts.

I: That's true and that's totally fine. You mentioned that this was not made discussible at schools at the time. Is it discussed at work?

R: As you know, I work at the Albert Heijn with a very nice group of people. But anyway, AH is not the place where you talk about these things. You fill boxes and you go home. The only thing you talk about is the filling.

I: Do you think it would help to talk about it at work?

R: Yes, at work in general it would be good. But at AH it wouldn't be necessary. It's not the place to do that, because we have a very different mindset there. Everyone who wants to grow is a completely different group of people.

I: Do you think there is enough understanding of anxiety in general?

R: No, not quite. As I said, it's being talked about more now, so that's good. So, you get more understanding anyway because it is spoken about. But people still often think you're exaggerating when you don't dare to do something. I went to the pharmacy the other day, because my sister asked me to get some allergy pills. I walked to the pharmacy and in my head, I was thinking that I had to pronounce her name correctly and give her date of birth. I was really repeating it in my head. I got there and I was so nervous. When you tell people that, they think: What are you worried about? You're just going to pick up a medicine at the pharmacy. Act normal? A lot of people think you're exaggerating. They just don't get it. They just find it weird. So yes, but it is a real thing and for some it is really very difficult. On the one hand, because it is discussed more, it is understood more. But the little things that are part of anxiety are not understood.

I: What do you think could be better in this?

R: Yes, I'm not really into information, because I think it's so academic. I think people should read up on themselves. I think that if you don't understand something, but you are critical of it, you should read something first before you make a pronouncement on it. That is what I think. Just go and find out for yourself. Most people don't do that anyway. I do. But yes.



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I: What do you think could help you to connect with others?

R: I don't think there's anything that's going to help me, because it's a personality trait, so it doesn't go away completely. People say that you must start doing things like that and the more you do it, the easier it becomes. And I must say, compared to 10 years ago, I'm 100 steps further on. So, 10 years ago you would have seen that I was an introvert. Now you don't see that anymore. I have made steps. You just must challenge yourself by trying things outside your comfort zone, especially in a social setting.

I: Would you feel more comfortable if you knew the other person also had social anxiety?

R: Yes.

I: Imagine you are in a group and the whole group has social anxiety. Would you feel comfortable?

R: Anyway! 100 percent. When I go to a festival with my group of girlfriends, I'm always intimidated by light skin people who start making stories and walking around like they own the whole festival. I'm just intimidated by that. I don't think I could cope with people like that. If you just have people who are chill like you and not necessarily very exuberant in personality, that helps a lot. If I just see that someone is very present, then I am easily intimidated. Then I disappear into the background.

I: We want to develop a toolkit for the project for youth workers, so that they can start working with this target group. (... explanation of project) What do you think?

R: I think it's a good idea. Personally, I wouldn't join such a group, but purely because I'm like: I don't need new friends. And look, your brother didn't even realise that I have social anxiety. Most people don't really get it either. I'm 97% introverted.

I: Do you think that if a good trust and safety was created within the group, it would be easier to make contacts with others?

R: In the first year, I was in a working group, and we were discussing how to make the study programme more attractive and personal for students. My opinion and criticism were: When you come into a new class, you're going to do your standard getting-to-know-you think. It is superficial. Where is the depth? You don't have to tell your whole life story right away, but just make it a little more personal than saying "I like cheese". If you create a safe environment in which people dare to talk, something will be released in the group. So that you share something more, it would certainly help.

Interview 4

I: What was your social life like before corona.

R: How long is Corona now? 3 years?

I: 2 years.

R: It looked better than what I have now. Let me put it this way, I often went out after work to do things. Have dinner with someone and go into town. I made my week. It also depended on the weather. In the summer I often went out for a drink and at the weekend I did something fun. I mainly had full days and my social contacts were much more than what I have now.

I: What did it look like during the pandemic?

R: It became less and less, but it was also because there was a lockdown during the pandemic that you couldn't even go outside at a certain time. Then I just isolated myself. I didn't want to look forward to doing fun things anymore because it limited me.

I: What does it look like now?



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R: Much less than usual. Even though everything is getting back on track. I also do it myself because I have got used to the way of life. That you just go to work because I had to be on location. I didn't have to work at home either. It became a routine to go straight home from work. You get so used to doing nothing afterwards. I feel like I've become lazy. I get too many stimuli if I do something after work. Days in advance, I really must prepare myself to get myself to do something after work.

I: Spontaneous is no longer possible.

R: The spontaneity is gone with me, too.

I: Does this make it more difficult for you to get in touch with people? New people?

R: Yes.

I: Do you have to get used to that?

R: Yes, it's just because you're not used to it anymore. You're not used to a smooth talk. If you haven't been in contact with people for such a long time, you just don't know what to talk about with others.

I: Do you also feel a certain tension when you meet new people?

R: Yes, I feel a pressure, because I don't know what to say. I had a moment last week when I went to dinner with some colleagues. And I got too many stimuli around me, so I couldn't stay focused during the conversation between me and my colleagues. I am not at all used to eating out and having people around me. As a result, I couldn't listen to my colleagues because there was too much going on around me. Is that strange?

I: I certainly don't find that strange. How do you feel when you experience that tension? How does your body react to it?

R: I am absorbed in my own bubble. Everything that is said does not enter me at all. Maybe 50% of it comes in. It's not that I don't want to listen to them.

I: Does your body react to that tension?

R: I also quickly feel a certain pressure.

I: Do you also have that, for example, when you walk through the city, and you walk through all the people.

R: Yes, for example, if it is very busy and I must go into a shop where it is busy. So, if there are a lot of people in the way and it's too noisy, I want to get out of the shop as quickly as possible. I didn't have this at all before Corona.

I: When do you feel the most tension?

R: When I experience too many stimuli. I can't really explain it. If I have many people around me who can distract me while I'm focused on one thing. If there are too many stimuli around me, I also indicate that conversations are not coming into me. Because there are too many stimuli coming in, I get distracted. I didn't have that before. It gives me tension.

I: And how do you manage to get in touch with people when you are in a social setting?

R: By making myself do it.

I: What gives you that push?

R: The silence. When no one is speaking, I take my chance to take the space to seek contact with someone else. But I am also not outgoing. I expect someone to approach me and if someone has a certain impression on me with an open attitude, then I can approach that person.

I: Do you think corona has made your social anxiety worse?

R: Yes.



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I: Do you think social anxiety is talked about enough?

R: Honestly, no.

I: Do you notice that there are people around you who suffer from it?

R: No, not really. But that's because I don't talk about it myself. I don't know whether it bothers others, because maybe they don't talk about it either.

I: Are there people you can talk to about this?

R: Not really, but I do notice that when I feel like this, my hands start sweating and I start biting my lips. I don't feel at ease then. I don't look at people and now I find it hard to look at others because I'm not used to it. I must think very hard before I say something.

I: These are indeed minor characteristics of social anxiety.

R: I also get a cold shiver. I often get that too. I don't know, but that happens very often when I'm with someone as if I feel uncomfortable. Maybe I do feel uncomfortable, but I don't want to give that person that impression.

I: Have they ever discussed this at school?

R: No, never.

I: And at work?

R: Neither.

I: Do you think it would help to talk about this topic?

R: Not at work as such. Because we are a very small and close-knit group. It's not like we get new colleagues quickly. We must get used to new people because it brings a change within the group. We also do standard work.

I: Do you think it would have helped if they had made this a subject for discussion in schools?

R: Maybe yes.

I: Do you think there is enough understanding of social anxiety in general?

R: I don't think so. Also, in the generation we live in.

I: What do you think could be better?

R: I think you can start with schools. At secondary school perhaps. Because those children are in puberty and so much is asked of them. It's important for the children who already feel uncomfortable in social settings that they receive lesson to make it easier for them to interact with each other. Also, to make it easier to speak, so that young people feel safe enough to do so rather than just doing it.

I: Yes, I understand that there are many young people who find it scary to stand in front of the class and who also find it very scary to present. But they just must do it because it's important for later. They are not really considered.

R: Yes, especially now with corona, some children have not even met and seen their classmates. If you have only been taught through a computer screen and zoom, I can imagine that it is so difficult for them to suddenly go back to school and present. You've been living inside yourself all this time and haven't had many people around you. That's why I think it's important to pay attention to these things at school. Also, to create awareness that it's not crazy to feel this way. Then you are prepared for it.

I: What would help you to connect with others?

R: I find that a difficult question. Even though everything is open again and back to normal a bit, I am still very much on my own. I don't do many activities anymore. Only I can help myself. I've become so used to being alone



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and having my own time.

I: Would you like to meet new people?

R: Yes, but I would find it difficult, because it takes a lot of energy.

I: So, it's building up again. Would you feel more comfortable if you knew that others also suffer from social anxiety?

R: Yes, but then again, not really. I also don't think it would be good to have contact only with the people who are suffering from it, because you need to have someone around you who can drag you out of it. And if you're all in the same boat, that might not happen so quickly.

I: That is indeed a good one! (Explanation project)

R: But keep in mind that it is also important that there is also outgoing and not bothered by it, so that the other person can learn from that.

I: That's a good one! I have heard from someone that they are just intimidated by it.

R: I would only like it if I knew that someone also has social anxiety. But it's also nice to be with someone who doesn't have it at all, because they can really help you out by motivating you. Otherwise, you stay in the same bubble together, so there might not be any progress. Understanding, but no progress,

I: I understand completely. (Explanation)

R: Yes, it seems like a very good idea. I also think that the subject can be brought out more. Corona has ruined it for many people. If you already suffer from it before corona, I really think corona has made it worse. I developed it during corona.

SPAIN

Interview 1

R: I'm 23 and I work as a publicist and rhythmic gymnastics coach.

I: What was your social life like before the pandemic?

R: Before the pandemic, especially in terms of social life, I was quite a socially claustrophobic person. For example, as I am a very short person, when I went to discos, I felt I had much less air and space to see than other people, and it caused me a lot of social anxiety. On the other hand, in more open and outdoor spaces, I did not feel that caused me any problem before the pandemic.

I: What did it look like during the pandemic?

R: I have a dog, so during the quarantine I got used to walking him and being alone in the street. I think the turning point for me was the moment the Government said we could go out in between an hourly interval. From one day to the next, I went out into the street with my dog and found my neighborhood full of people in the streets. I had never seen that crowd. I started to feel anxiety, I was physically blocked, and breathing was so difficult. I saw people everywhere I looked. I started to think to run away, I did not want to be there. There were a lot of people all over the venue where I lived, that was the turning point. I mean, by the time everyone could start to leave, I found that I just wanted to wax and not see anyone.



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I: And how was it with your closest friends?

R: I saw two of my friends a couple of times, but we met in hidden places in the neighborhood, completely alone.

I: Do you find it more difficult to get in touch with people? Did you have to get used to meeting people?

R: Yes. At that moment, I was already having psychological therapy, nowadays I still am. At that moment I was describing you, I had to go to my psychologist and ask for specific help for managing situations of many people in the street. She gave me some guidelines to get back, gradually, into the habit of being with people around. But getting used to being with people in my neighborhood was only the first phase. When I had to go to the city centre again, the anxiety came back. It took me a long time to be able to walk through the main square, where youngsters meet and spend time together. I was very blocked.

I: How do you feel when you experience tension? What goes through you? How does your body react to it?

R: I think my whole-body tenses up, my chest hurts, I choke, I find it hard to breathe. In extreme situations, I also get a headache, especially if there is a lot of noise, as if they were whistling in my ears. Above all, I wanted to run away, the impulse of my body that asks me to escape

I: When do you feel the most tension?

R: When I am in a crowded place, like at the main square I told you before, or the shopping centre at rush hour.

I: How do you manage to get in touch with people if you choose to be in a social setting anyway?

R: Asking for alternatives plans, the more far from the city centre the better. Places where I was able to hang with friends but in an open space where I felt able to run away, if necessary. For instance, Walking the beach or at a park.

I: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

R: I don't think so.

I: Have you noticed that more people around you suffer from social anxiety?

R: Yes, I do.

I: Do you ever talk to people about this?

R: In general, I think I started to talk more about anxiety and their grounds since the pandemic. Because I see the topic has normalised a quite bit, people started to talk more about it, and I felt safe to be able to do it, so. Especially because I realized I wasn't alone. Before the pandemic I lived my situation as a secret. I rather prefer to say I was feeling bad rather than confess I suffer from social anxiety. I did know that not everybody would understand. By Covid-19 arrival, many people took different stances, about meeting others or not, keeping distances, etc. and that made the situation easier for me. I would say for me it has been easier to talk about it since the pandemic.

I: Is this being discussed at work or at schools?

R: No

I: Do you think it helps to talk more about this topic?

R: It does help but it depends. I will put an example with my family. Each time I see an advert at home, about social anxiety, or suicide, which is also talked about a lot now, I say to my father "look, it's a quite important subject to talk about". And he thinks it's a stupidity, that we young people are ungrateful. I think that to young people it is helping us a lot to talk about it, that we are very clear about the existence of these disorders and that we have to continue to talk. But I think that the message would need a different focus for other older generations. For the ones that have lived through very hard situations such as the World Wild War and consider that what happens to us are small issues. That we have way more facilities than they have, and for this, we don't have the right to complain. I think we should focus on a message that reaches different generations.

I: Is there enough understanding of anxiety?

R: No.

I: What do you think could be better?

R: I think to give a clearer message or adapt it to the target to whom it is addressed. Speaking as an advertiser, I think it is very important.



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I: What would help you to connect with others?

R: In general, we all need to pull out our fear to talk. That's why it's necessary to know about other people who are going through similar situations.

I: Would you feel more at ease if you knew that others also suffer from social anxiety?

R: Yes, because if you don't feel understood, you don't know who to ask for help. Especially with friends, who can't always help you no matter how much you tell them what is happening to you.

I: For this project, we want to offer youth workers a toolkit, so that they can offer young people with social anxiety disorder a stage and their story will be heard. What do you think when I tell you this?

R: I think it's a very good idea. especially for those who want to listen to it, they will learn a lot.

I: Would you find it scary to tell your story here on stage?

R: No.

I: Do you think if good trust and security were created it would be easier?

R: Yes, especially depending on how people with anxiety are coping at the time. Because now I feel better, but in other phases of my discomfort I wouldn't have been able to do so without a good link by my side.

I: Do you think it is a nice idea for others? Also, to get together with other people who also suffer from anxiety. Do you think it is better to do it among ourselves?

R: It depends.

Interview 2

R: I'm 23 and I am finishing my studies of social integration, but also work at it.

I: What was your social life like before the pandemic?

R: I would say normal, I have never had a large social circle. I used to have relationships with Pablo, my boyfriend, and with Elena and the other guy with whom I shared my flat. And well, that was it, it is scarce.

I: What did it look like during the pandemic?

R: The truth is, for me it was very healthy. I felt safe because I was staying at home with Pablo (my boyfriend) and Elena and a guy (my flatmates). We had a great time together, and for me it was like a relief. Especially because I did not feel the pressure of having to make the effort to relate to more people. As far as I could see, everyone was in the same situation as me or worse, so I felt like I was doing fine.

I: And how does it look now?

R: Now it's good for me. I socialise with more people. Also, this pandemic situation made me start skating, with rollers. This allowed me to meet more people, I could also skate with Pablo, to meet people I didn't know at all... it helped me to want to go out. And from then on, my friends have changed and now there are others, but in short, it helped me to dare to meet people more naturally.

I: Do you find it more difficult to get in touch with people? Did you have to get used to meeting people?

R: Not now, I've got used to it. But at the beginning, yes. I'd go down to Sants and I'd find a lot of people, because everyone was euphoric about being able to go out. There were a lot of people. On one hand I was freaking out while I thought how great it was to see myself with people and to know how it went for them. But at the same time, I felt an anxiety that I had never experienced before. I couldn't make eye contact with people; I hardly spoke at all or very quietly. I didn't know how to interact, when to talk and when not to. Socializing basis were forgotten for me. And I lived with people, I mean, I wasn't alone, but at the beginning I had a lot of difficulty in interacting in the street.

I: How do you feel when you experience tension? What goes through you? How does your body react to it?

R: It feels overthinking. I was talking about this yesterday with a friend. It's like I get on the subway, and I think I have to take a tissue out of my bag. Then I think everyone is going to stare at me holding the tissue. I blow my nose and suddenly, everybody is going to stare at me, I wonder what they are going to think. It's like I think about all the possibilities that exist on the planet, it is like I have already thought about them. And beyond breathing,



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which at that moment I don't think about, my body feels soft, trembling, tingling, vulnerable... At least I feel judged by a lot of things that don't really matter.

I: When do you feel the most tension?

R: I don't know, maybe when you realise that you're having a lot of anxiety. You think about how to stop it, what to do. It's not just the anxiety but trying to find a solution. And sometimes the best solution is to let it go. Because you think that other people are going to notice, you get into a paranoia, it's hard to get out of.

I: How do you manage to get in touch with people if you choose to be in a social setting anyway?

R: By going to therapy made me realise that social anxiety is also being ashamed of others finding out that you are X. In my case, it was the thought of people thinking I was ridiculous. From going to therapy I discover that everyone can be ridiculous, and that ridiculousness can be something fun, and even something that can be empowering. And from there, I started to relate to others admitting that, saying "yes, I'm awkward, I'm shy, sometimes my voice trembled"... it's not just accepting, but embracing it a little bit. From there you go...

I: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

R: No, and I think anxiety develops very early, in teens. Because social anxiety is still shameful. I'm not talking about social anxiety, but about the phobia itself. Shame, insecurity, etc. and I think this is something very general, that can happen to anyone. Maybe it's just a certain moment in your life, that you're afraid to meet other people and hang out. And I don't think there is enough talk about this. I think it's when you're older and you can talk about it with people. But for me, for example, it's been years since I feel this way, if I can remember.

I: Have you noticed that more people around you suffer from social anxiety?

R: Yes, I think so too, by the moment you start to say it. When my therapist told me "Look, this is called social anxiety, this is what's wrong with you" it helped me a lot. It may only seem like a diagnosis, but then people say, "oh well, I have that too", and even if it's not a diagnosis it allows you to start talking about it and see that you're not alone. And, that it's a normal thing not to be ashamed of.

I: Do you ever talk to people about this?

R: Yes, if I see an opportunity, which I usually do.

I: Is this being discussed at work or at schools?

R: No. I think that at work it is very embarrassing to talk about social anxiety, because the question may be "how can you be working and having social anxiety", when at the same time, of course it is compatible, we all have problems and we overcome them. I think it's something very normal, but at the same time it's very embarrassing to talk about it at work because it seems that you have less capacity. And sometimes you think that they are going to think you have fewer abilities or skills.

I: Is there enough understanding of anxiety?

R: Yes, although people don't want to talk about it, I think so, because we all had at some point a moment of panic. But people diagnosed with anxiety have to live with it constantly.

I: What do you think could be better?

R: I think change starts from within. From the moment you can talk about and normalise it. Without putting yourself in the victim position... but at least saying that you have social anxiety, that you are going through it and that's it. There will be people who understand and people who don't, but you have already taken the step of saying it. The change comes from talking about it yourself. And obviously there should be workshops on anxiety and education about it.

I: How could you still get in touch with others?

R: I don't know, I think more accessible meeting points should be created. There are in an association or have a group of friends... But for example, I'm from abroad and I came here 5 years ago without knowing anyone. And I know a lot of people who are lifelong friends. And sometimes it's difficult to reach them. So, if there were meeting places where people could get together every week to do something, it would help. For example, "let's meet together every Tuesday to talk, or to do graffiti " for example, because the world would be less individualised from me with my friends, and it would be more to go and see what other people are doing as well. That would help me. I also know that there are existing places that do this, and I don't go, but maybe could be encouraged more



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I: Would you feel more at ease if you knew that others also suffer from social anxiety?

R: Yes

I: For this project, we want to offer youth workers a toolkit, so that they can offer young people with social anxiety disorder a stage and their story will be heard. What do you think when I tell you this?

R: I think it's great, cool. I work with teenagers, and I've also worked with them through theatre. In fact, one of the teenagers had anxiety, maybe social anxiety too, and he was very shy. And it was only through theatre that he managed to laugh and have fun with his classmates. It moved me a lot. Because as an adult and youth trainer who is there, you are also ashamed to relate to teenagers and others. And I think theatre is a good way for everybody.

I: Would you find it scary to tell your story here on stage?

R: Yes, a lot.

I: Do you think if good trust and security were created it would be easier?

R: Definitely, yes. In fact, it happens in my class. We are 3 mates who suffer from social anxiety, and through some dynamics, we have managed to make oral presentations in front of the group and speak calmly.

I: Do you think it is a nice idea for others? Also, to get together with other people who also suffer from anxiety. Do you think it is better to do it among ourselves?

It doesn't help me, because maybe it makes me even more anxious to be with more anxious people. But sometimes you are with a person who understands anxiety, with whom you can sit on a bench and talk, with whom you look at the landscape and calm down. But I also know that some people find it helpful to be with other people with anxiety. But it doesn't help me.

Interview 3

R: I'm 23 and I am finishing my studies of sociology, and work.

I: What was your social life like before the pandemic?

R: Well, I used to have a quite strong social life. Because I used to go out every weekend and every Friday, with different groups of friends. And, at University, I was always in contact with lots of different people... and yes, I think I had a quite strong social life.

I: What did it look like during the pandemic?

R: during the pandemic I only stayed in contact with some friends. I used social media a lot, maybe too much. And sometimes we did video calls. But they don't really work, so we only did like 3 or 4. We didn't do that many. Because it wasn't the same. Something that we did do, was doing yoga together, in front of the camera. It was a bit strange; I didn't get used to seeing people through a screen.

I: And how does it look now?

R: Now, maybe somewhere between. I am less social than before. But I would like to think... During quarantine I realised that most of my friends, we only saw each other in parties. So probably I would say that now I have less friends but maybe the quality is better. I mean, I would go out with them more for coffee, or xat, or walking in the forest... which I really like much more now. So, things like this. But not so much big social events. Not big groups, or big parties. I've been in 3 or 4 parties after the pandemic, and it is not like before. I don't enjoy them. It's a different mindset.

I: Do you find it more difficult to get in touch with people? Did you have to get used to meeting people?

R: Yes, I think maybe it's a bit more difficult because you don't have to make social interactions as big. I don't feel like having too many opportunities to get to know people.

I: How do you feel when you experience tension? What goes through you? How does your body react to it?

R: In my case, sometimes I would go to a party which I know many people or with people and if the people I am not very friendly and I don't feel a natural connection I will try to be in more moments by my own to say, "everything it's ok" and then get back into the house. And then, I would try to find another person with whom I enjoy spending time with. Or with who I trust, and then try to keep sticking with them. And the answer to how I



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feel, would be that I can see my own face. Like I can see my own face and I can think “why am I doing this face?” like I am very self-conscious.

I: Do you start to overthink, you mean?

R: Yes, but the other part is, I was talking about situations like a social party or a social interaction. I don’t know if what I am going to explain counts as social interaction but, I had a lot of phobias during a period, of going on train. And this was very different. This was much more difficult to control, and I couldn’t control it. And I had to get off the train many times each time travelling. Maybe if I caught a train leading to “Plaça Catalunya ” I would get off the train maybe 3 or 4 times minimum. And my body felt soft, trembling... I would feel the basic panic attack.

I: How do you manage to get in touch with people if you choose to be in a social setting anyway?

R: As I said, try to be myself, maybe go outside or go to the bathroom and say, “everything it’s ok”. Try to focus... and what else? And if I am with a person I trust, go with them and stick, and try to spend more time with them and see what they are doing. Maybe sometimes I will be ambivalent and think “maybe we don’t have a lot in common but let’s see”. But sometimes, if I feel a little bit anxious, I think “well, ok, maybe I don’t have to talk that much”, so let’s keep aside.

I: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

R: No, I don’t think so. I think everything that’s mental health related is still taboo. Even though now everyone seems to be talking about mental health, when it’s a personal experience, not that many people open about it. For example, I, with the train thing, it took a long time to tell people. I felt like it was stupid. So, I don’t think there’s much talk.

I: Have you noticed that more people around you suffer from social anxiety?

R: Yes, I had a really strange situation one time. Because one day, I went to the college for something, and I talked about the train thing and now I am kind about ok with trains. But I had a strange situation where I went with a girl that I met at university, who isn’t really a close friend, but someone that I know quite a few. And we were going to Barcelona. We went on the train, and she started to have an anxiety attack, because she feared going on the train. And she felt so embarrassed, she was like “this seems so stupid, you would not understand”, and for me, it was so strange, because I felt so bad for her, having to say she was stupid, but it was the same reaction I had when I caused it. And it was so cute to see that maybe other people also have these types of issues. Yes, lots of people have it, but I didn’t realize.

I: Do you ever talk to people about this?

R: Now yes.

I: Is this being discussed at work or at schools?

R: No, definitely not. I mean, maybe at school, maybe a little bit more than at work but I think it’s not.

I: Do you think it helps to talk more about this topic?

R: Yes, of course. Because then it’s easier to receive and accept help. If you can talk to people and don’t feel you are going crazy.

I: Is there enough understanding of anxiety?

R: Yes and no. I mean, I think lots of people know that there’s more investigation and more research when it comes to anxiety but, I think that also it’s something very difficult to describe and that is very difficult to say for people “i have anxiety”. Because anxiety can be so different in many people, so I think this needs formal research.

I: What do you think could be better?

R: Research.

I: What would help you to connect with others?

R: I think the same as everyone else. I mean, I don’t know. I think there’s nothing different, like, the same as everyone else.

I: Yes, but I mean in your case, what does it mean the same as everyone?

R: Ah, confidence, I suppose, curiosity, I don’t know...



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I: Would you feel more at ease if you knew that others also suffer from social anxiety?

R: Yes, of course. Because the more people know and understand the better.

I: For this project, we want to offer youth workers a toolkit, so that they can offer young people with social anxiety disorder a stage and their story will be heard. What do you think when I tell you this?

R: I think it's a good idea, yes.

I: Would you find it scary to tell your story here on stage?

R: Not now, but before yes.

I: Do you think if good trust and security were created it would be easier?

R: Yes, that would make it easier.

I: Do you think it is a nice idea for others? Also, to get together with other people who also suffer from anxiety. Do you think it is better to do it among ourselves?

R: Yes, but I think it's difficult.

POLAND

Interview 1

Z: I'm X. I live in Warsaw and go to the secondary school. It's my third year here.

I: What was your social life like before pandemic?

Z: Hmm... I don't know, don't remember it very well. Maybe I was afraid because of being in new school, but also a bit excited about making new acquaintances. I was focused on not being seen as shy and weird.

I: Ok, and how did it look during pandemic?

Z: You will think I am complete freak, don't you?

I: I don't judge. Whatever you'll say it's ok for me.

Z: So... When everyone around was terrified and panic this time, in March 2020... I felt a huge relief. I could stay at home, and it was ok. Even more, everyone forbade me going out and meeting people. I felt like free from one important task. I could be myself and do things on my own. Of course, I was afraid also, but I could manage it.

I: And didn't you miss any social life?

Z: In fact, not so much. I have one close friend, Marie. And younger brother and sister. I wasn't alone.

I: And what does it look like now?

Z: Maybe better than before. Many people from my school declared some kind of "social fear" after pandemic and remote education. We used to be separate. And, in general, more people talk about issue of mental health. We have a few workshops with psychologist. Some guys from my class claimed that they experienced depression episode. I feel less like a freak, because everyone is a freak, we can say. I look at people in different way. Of course, I avoid parties or something like that but sometimes I find talking with people pleasant and safe. It isn't so obvious.

I: Do you find it more difficult to get in touch with people? Or conversely?

Z: Not more difficult, rather still difficult. I realized I don't really need so called 'social life'. It often makes me tired and feel like 'critical low battery'. I treat it as experiment. Last month I even went with some friends to the pub and try tequila (don't tell it to my mother, I'm still 17). It wasn't so bad time. But I felt tension almost all the time.

I: You talk about tension... How do you feel when you experience this tension.

Z: Hmm. sometimes I feel like my body would be made of wood or even stone. I hardly speak, I sweat a lot, in bad moments I feel I cannot breathe. It's probably only my fear and imagination. But on the other hand, I really feel it.



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I: And when do you feel the strongest tension?

Z: In some public situations. When I'm forced to speak, and everyone looks at me and waits. It makes me totally terrified. I just want to disappear.

I: How do you manage to get in touch with people if you choose to be in a social setting anyway?

Z: I rather avoid being in such public situation. I'm still in my therapy and know it is to be exhausting for me. I don't need to prove I'm so strong and determined. I'm not, but I learn to be, to speak to people I like and manage my anxiety. Step by step. I really need a lot of time and patience.

I: And how do you feel - is there enough talk about social anxiety?

Z: I cannot say that it's enough, but more than before pandemic. We all had a kind of social phobia for a few months. Behavior typical for this disorder came to our everyday life. And adults, even in the school, seem more aware of all this stuff we struggle with.

I: Have you noticed that more people around you suffer from social anxiety?

Z: I think so. We were closed in our homes, talking only with our computers and mobiles. It's not so easy to go out, meet others and feel comfortable. Many people started to consider if they don't have social anxiety. There are some statistics... how pandemic influenced our mental health... We were isolated and accepted it to some extent. We used to be alone, without this social pressure.

I: Do you ever talk to people about it?

Z: About my own social anxiety? I started when I went to the therapy. For the first time I felt totally accepted. I mentioned this topic to my friend via discord. She claimed that she assumed that. I learn to talk about social anxiety. It's a serious topic for sure, especially for young people.

I: Is this being discussed at schools?

Z: Maybe not at every school. In mine – yes. We had these workshops in the topic of mental health prevention. Our school psychologist also pays attention to the topic. Fortunately, it becomes more and more, normal to be abnormal'.

I: Do you think it helps?

Z: Yes. We don't feel so freaky and alone. It's much easier to cope the problem when we don't need to hide it all the time. Sometimes I'm even worried that social anxiety becomes a kind of trend. But in fact, it's not a choice.

I: Is there enough understanding of anxiety?

Z: I'm not sure. For example, some teachers say we figure out this problem and use it as an excuse. For me it's harmful. Maybe teachers need some workshops in this topic more than students?! Especially the older ones...

I: And what would help you to connect with the others?

Z: I think therapy helps me a lot. Maybe also the awareness that I'm not the only one with such problems. And when a relationship is important for me, I try just to set simple goals for myself and practice (even if in some moments I think about running away). People are good in general; I strongly believe it. It also helps.

I: For this project, we want to offer youth workers a toolkit, so that they can offer young people with social anxiety disorder a stage and their story will be heard. What do you think when I tell you this?

Z: I'm impressed and even... moved? That so many people see it as important problem? We should tell our stories, even when trying to do this sometimes can be a huge challenge. I think I'm still trying.

Interview 2

M: I'm X. I live in Warsaw. I'm 25 and almost graduated polish philology on the University of Warsaw.

I: Thank you. Can I ask, what was your social life like before pandemic?

M: It was really upsetting. I felt I just don't fit anywhere. I feel tired explaining so many times some basic topics. As I see this time – last two years before pandemic – I was depressed. I say it like a REAL depression, REAL disorder. Maybe it one of the reasons of the social phobia? Or maybe it was the consequence? Does it matter?

I: Ok, and how did it look during pandemic? Something changed?



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M: Not immediately. But I didn't have to focus on surviving in society, in student community. I started to listen to myself, realizing more and more. Not only social phobia – this was obvious. But also, my sexual preferences? I was denying them so many years. And then I started to accept, getting to know similar people – of course via internet.

I: And what else did change during the lockdown?

M: I changed my therapist and focused more on my thoughts and the way they influence me, not only on the tasks and eliminating fear. I changed the topic of my thesis. The final one concentrates on the forms of excluding women in the middle war polish literature. I also started to write with Maja, who is my partner now. As you know, we even live together. It's really a big... a huge change!

I: I believe. You seem happy now. And how it was during pandemic? Didn't you miss any social life?

M: I don't think so. I didn't meet people, except of my parents, sister and her husband. But I had many real, deep conversations via internet. These people helped me a lot with discovering and understanding myself.

I: And what does it look like now?

M: I cannot say it is simple. Last year I started a work in the publishing house as a corrector but doing it from my home. I get used to be alone, then also with Maja. But I'm still strongly afraid of being in public, forced to talk and touch other people. Crowdy places make me totally panic. I try to go out further as least twice a month. But I treat it as a challenge, not pleasure.

I: Do you find it more difficult to get in touch with people than before?

M: I cannot say it's more difficult. Probably rather similar, but now I'm just more aware of my deficits and consequences of doing things against myself. I focus on virtual contacts, talks on zoom etc. Being with others in common space quickly makes me nervous and impatient. And my aim is to give people rather empathy and attention, not my frustration. I don't want to force them to deal with my own 'demons'.

I: You talk about your experience of social phobia... How do you feel when you experience this tension connected with social life?

M: Regarding to my mind, I feel frustration. The tension in my body, my muscles – for sure. Suddenly it becomes a challenge to breathe 'normally' or to speak without shivering. I just feel I lose a control of my body. It makes me powerless, miserable. I hate this feeling.

I: And when do you feel the most tension? In which situations?

M: In the situations I meet people I haven't seen for long time. Especially when they're important for me and I want to impress them somehow. I'm trying to show the best side of me and usually I don't manage this inner pression. The strong tension also appears when the situation matters. For other people it can be motivating, for me rather paralyzing.

I: You often mention 'other people'. Don't you think that more and more people around suffer from social anxiety?

M: I don't meet people so often, but... Probably you are right. They even are some data about increase of social phobia during pandemic time. Sometimes when I confess, I have this disorder somebody else starts to talk about similar feelings or fears. Probably it isn't so rare. But you are cooler, if you are extravert easy-going. It simplifies many things.

I: But, as I understood, you talk to people about your social anxiety?

M: Yes... I'm learning to do this. A few years ago, it seemed to me the most terrifying experience. But first time I claimed to my classmate that I suffer from social phobia, I felt a huge relief. Maybe because of the fact, I don't need to hide it any longer.

I: Do you think it's enough understanding of social anxiety?

M: In our society? I don't think so. Nobody teaches us about such things as we are children. And then we get used to compare to each other, judging people. I suppose most of teenagers (but also adults, like teachers) that it's a matter of not enough motivation. We should just try harder, do our best and we'll just 'survive' the situation of being in the public. I wish it was so easy...

I: So, what do you think could be better?



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M: I don't have a clear receipt. I don't know for sure. But... maybe showing to small children, like in the kindergarten that it's ok to differ, to be odd person. Don't force children or students to perform in public if they don't feel they want to. I imagine some lessons about different kind of mental disorders. Maybe instead of some physics or chemistry lessons. Not everybody wants to develop his or her chemical talent and mental health regards to everyone.

I: And let's come back to your personal experience... what would help you to connect with others?

M: Maybe tolerance for my weakness. Understanding that in some moments I just cannot speak. That the written communication is the only form I can stand for some time. It isn't my 'bad will', rather a strong blockade in myself. Forcing me gives the opposite results.

I: For this project, we want to offer youth workers a toolkit, so that they can offer young people with social anxiety disorder a stage and their story will be heard. When do you think when I tell you this?

M: When I hear about being on the stage, I feel tension and want to say: NO, NEVER! But on the other hand, I have a need to share my stories, to listen stories of people like me. I can imagine that somehow, somewhere is a safe space we can share our stories, without getting panic.

I: Do you think if good trust and security were created it would be easier?

M: For sure. But how to do this? I rarely feel safe and trustful. With my girlfriend or relatives yes, but not in some group of people. It would be a challenge.

I: But do you think it's a good idea for others? To try?

M: We can always try, but without too big pressure. With the thought it is fine to fail or to try again and again, step by step. I believe that it will come the day I will stand in front of twenty people, smiling and cheerful, not shivering.

FRANCE

Interview 1

Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

I: What was your social life like before the pandemic?

R: I saw my friends at school or outside when we went on outings. But I was still alone most of the time.

I: What did it look like during the pandemic?

R: During the lockdown, I went back to live with my parents, I didn't see anyone but my family. I sometimes exchanged with friends via social networks

I: And how does it look now?

R: A bit of a mix of before the pandemic and during the lockdown. I need time alone, more than before. If I'm in society for too long, I need to disconnect and be alone. Otherwise, I'm too stressed

I: Do you find it more difficult to get in touch with people? Did you have to get used to meeting people?

R: At first, I did. Now I'm used to it.

I: How do you feel when you experience tension? What goes through you? How does your body react to it?

R: I am tense and very abrupt; I need space and air.



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I : When do you feel the most tension?

R : When I am surrounded by people. When there are too many people around me, I get tense faster. Sometimes I'm just upset I don't know why.

I : How do you manage to get in touch with people if you choose to be in a social setting anyway?

R : If I get in touch with a person, it's because there's a good reason, so that's why I do it and I go and approach the person. If I don't have a good reason, I don't go and wait.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

I : Have you noticed that more people around you suffer from social anxiety?

R : I think that the confinements and the pandemic have clearly increased the number of people suffering from social anxiety. However, this is not the only reason, I also think that the word around psychological disorders is becoming more and more free in recent years and therefore we talk more easily with others.

I : Is this being discussed at work or at schools?

R : We mainly talk about it on social networks and on youtube channels. A little bit at school but mainly with my friends.

I : Do you think it helps to talk more about this topic?

R : Yes, I think many people can suffer from this and not know it.

I : Is there enough understanding of anxiety?

R : Not really, even by those who suffer from it.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

I : What would help you to connect with others?

R : I don't know. People are not always interesting; they play a role in society. Maybe getting to know people in a context that allows people to really be who they are.

I : Would you feel more at ease if you knew that others also suffer from social anxiety?

R : Yes because I would feel understood. But no, because being only between people who suffer from the same thing does not allow to be encouraged by the others. Mixing groups of people who suffer from anxiety or who have experienced it and people who know how to overcome their anxiety easily. Every person that feels «close » to the topic.

I : For this project, we want to offer youth workers a toolkit, so that they can offer young people with social anxiety disorder a stage and their story will be heard. What do you think when I tell you this?

R : A lot of stress. But it could be nice for people who want to share.

I : Would you find it scary to tell your story here on stage?

R : A little bit, yes

I : Do you think if good trust and security were created it would be easier?

R : Surely, if you feel comfortable it is easier to open.

I : Do you think it is a nice idea for others? Also, to get together with other people who also suffer from anxiety. Do you think it is better to do it among ourselves?

R : I'm not sure

Interview 2 Fille

Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

I : What was your social life like before the pandemic?



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R: Before the pandemic I travelled regularly. My social life was quite rich – I used to meet new people almost every day and do different activities with them like sightseeing, going to restaurants and bars, organizing karaoke nights etc.

I: What did it look like during the pandemic?

R: I spent the first lockdown in my relatives' house. There were 7 of us staying there so I didn't really feel lonely. We played board games, cooked together, and did some gardening. However, this period of time was very challenging for me even though I wasn't all by myself. I kept in touch with my friends via social media, by texting and video calling.

I: And how does it look now?

R: Everything is getting back to normal. I can travel, hang out with my friends, attend university in person. Sometimes I feel like the pandemic never happened.

I: Do you find it more difficult to get in touch with people? Did you have to get used to meeting people?

R: During the pandemic it was quite difficult to make friends, I had to use different online platforms to meet new people. Now everything is getting back to normal and meeting people is just as simple as before the pandemic.

I: How do you feel when you experience tension? What goes through you? How does your body react to it?

R: I feel irritated. I find it difficult to fall asleep.

I: When do you feel the most tension?

R: I feel tense when I'm under pressure, for example when I'm about to take an exam that I'm not prepared for. I also feel anxious when I'm surrounded by people I have never met before and when I'm in a completely new environment.

I: How do you manage to get in touch with people if you choose to be in a social setting anyway?

R : I usually meet people online or through my friends who introduce me to their friends. If I talk to strangers, it's only when they approach me and start the conversation.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

I: Have you noticed that more people around you suffer from social anxiety?

R: I haven't really noticed that more people are suffering from social anxiety than before the pandemic. It's not really something that I talk about with my friends.

I: Do you ever talk to people about this?

R: I think that nobody has ever talked about it with me at school or at work.

I: Do you think it helps to talk more about this topic?

R: Definitely. Many people don't know how to deal with social anxiety. In my opinion we should talk about this problem more and try to find ways to help people struggling with anxiety.

I: Is there enough understanding of anxiety?

R : I don't think so.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

I: What would help you to connect with others?

R: It's always easier for me when the other person makes the first step and starts the conversation.

I: Would you feel more at ease if you knew that others also suffer from social anxiety?

R: Yes, probably. I would feel like it's something normal and like it's nothing to be ashamed for. I would feel less "weird" during social events.



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I: For this project, we want to offer youth workers a toolkit, so that they can offer young people with social anxiety disorder a stage and their story will be heard. What do you think when I tell you this?

R: I think that people struggling from social anxiety would find it difficult to get on the scene and to speak in front of people they don't know. It would probably be extremely stressful and some of them wouldn't feel comfortable doing it. On the other hand, maybe it would help them to beat their anxiety and maybe after the session they would feel better knowing that they are not the only ones struggling with this issue.

I: Would you find it scary to tell your story here on stage?

R: Yes.

I: Do you think if good trust and security were created it would be easier?

R: Yes, definitely.

I: Do you think it is a nice idea for others? Also, to get together with other people who also suffer from anxiety. Do you think it is better to do it among ourselves?

R : It might be helpful for some people.

ITALY

Interview 1

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Prima ero più empatica, durante lo stesso, ora molto meno

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Sì, a volte troppo

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo? Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Sono molto più menefreghista

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?



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R: Sì

Interview 2

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Non è cambiato niente, sono molto socievole

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Troppo poco

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: No.

Interview 3

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: La mia vita sociale prima della pandemia era molto movimentata. Durante la settimana uscivo con le amiche e molte volte andavamo a fare aperitivo, al cinema. Però con la pandemia, purtroppo, molte cose che facevamo nella normalità sono state rimosse perché c'era "paura" di stare a contatto con le persone e questo mi è dispiaciuto molto. Trascorsi questi due anni di pandemia sto vivendo le mie giornate con leggerezza.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Secondo me no perché non è ben vista nella società.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Le mie ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale, scolastico sono principalmente caratterizzate dal fatto che sono timida a manifestare emozioni e sentimenti.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Sì, il corona virus ha aggravato le mie condizioni di ansia sociale soprattutto in ambito scolastico.

Interview 4

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Prima della pandemia ero molto attiva, durante la pandemia mi è crollato tutto e dopo la pandemia non mi sono ripresa ancora del tutto.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: No, non ne viene discusso abbastanza.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Le mie ripercussioni a livello sociale non sono cambiate di molto, sono sempre stata timida a parlare in pubblico e non mi sento a mio agio.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Sì, perché non vedendo più nessuno era difficile relazionarsi

Interview 5

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Prima della pandemia uscivo spesso con i miei amici e tutt'ora. Invece durante la pandemia ero sempre chiusa in casa.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Per me non viene discusso a sufficienza dell'ansia sociale.



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I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Le mie ripercussioni non sono cambiate di molto perchè sono abbastanza timida a primo impatto.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Penso che non abbia aggravato ulteriormente le mie condizioni di ansia sociale perchè ho sempre avuto un po di ansia a esprimermi in pubblico

Interview 6

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Prima: non avevo problemi a livello di relazioni

Durante: non parlavo molto con i miei amici

Dopo: all'inizio è stato strano incontrare tante persone ma dopo è diventato tutto normale

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Secondo me non viene discussa abbastanza spesso

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Dopo la pandemia la mia sicurezza è diminuita molto e stanto tanto tempo in casa, senza la possibilità di stare con i coetanei, fare amicizia con persone nuove è diventato più difficile e è aumentata la timidezza.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Sì, a livello di insicurezza.

Interview 7

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Non ho sofferto particolarmente di ansia sociale, diciamo che è molto nel mio carattere non uscire o comunque prendere iniziativa nelle uscite. Prima della pandemia non uscivo molto, meno rispetto a quanto esco ora, durante la pandemia invece ho riscoperto la gioia di stare in famiglia.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Di solito non si parla molto di ansia sociale poichè è considerata come tabù nella nostra società. Di solito si tende a confondere l'ansia sociale con la svogliatezza o il menefreghismo, quando invece è una cosa molto complessa e diffusa nella nostra generazione. Dovremmo parlarne di più.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Le ripercussioni probabilmente sono state: ho perso molte opportunità, non solo in ambito sociale, ma anche in ambito lavorativo. Oggi ho imparato a gestire molto meglio la mia ansia; quindi, riesco a vivere anche in modo più sereno la vita scolastica.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Penso che il coronavirus abbia migliorato le mie condizioni di ansia sociale, ho avuto l'occasione di passare molto più tempo con la mia famiglia, così facendo ho anche migliorato il rapporto con essa. In più adesso esco molto di più e sono migliorata anche nelle interazioni sociali.

Interview 8

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Durante la pandemia la mia esperienza di ansia sociale è che non potevo abbracciare nessuno e la cosa mi ha molto destabilizzato; mentre prima della pandemia la mia "paura" era quella di parlare in pubblico o davanti a tanta gente.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: A scuola secondo me non se ne parla abbastanza perché per molti la cosa non gli interessa o non se ne fanno un problema



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I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: La mia vita sociale prima del Covid era che io uscivo poco e durante la pandemia è cambiata. Ora esco molto di più

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Sinceramente no, perché comunque tuttora ho ansia sociale e non riesco a parlare in pubblico.

Interview 9

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Prima della pandemia tenevo dentro tutte le mie emozioni, avevo paura di aprirmi o esprimere la mia opinione e mi ripetevo sempre "se mi giudicano?" o "cosa penseranno?", paura del giudizio degli altri. Arrivata la pandemia in realtà mi sentivo tranquilla perché non si poteva vedere nessuno però questa tranquillità è durata poco perché mi sono accorta che mi manca di stare con la gente, socializzare e grazie all'aiuto di mia mamma ho capito che non devo pensare agli altri e infatti dopo la pandemia mi sentivo libera, in un certo senso. Ora sono contenta di essere sicura anche di me stessa.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Secondo me se ne parla poco poiché nessuno sa cosa sia e come affrontarla.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Ho imparato a fregarmene degli altri, di quello che pensano nei miei confronti. Dopo la pandemia ho imparato ad andare avanti e raggiungere i miei obiettivi, quindi anche a livello sociale, scolastico e lavorativo sono soddisfatta.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: No, anzi mi ha migliorato. C'è voluto tempo però ne è valsa la pena.

Interview 10

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: No, di ansia sociale se ne parla veramente poco poiché nessuno sa cosa sia e di cosa si sta parlando.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi

R: Le ripercussioni a carattere personale durante la pandemia ero sempre ansiosa e spaventata di avere il covid; invece, a carattere scolastico mi sono trovata meglio a studiare

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: No, la mia ansia è sempre uguale e si manifesta solo quando devo parlare con altre persone.

Interview 11

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Non ho mai sofferto di ansia sociale, ma durante la pandemia la vita sociale di tutti è venuta a mancare, per fortuna però adesso le cose sono migliorate ed è quasi tutto tornato alla normalità.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Se ne parla troppo poco, secondo me dovrebbero discuterne di più.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Non ho avuto ansia sociale.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: No, non ha aggravato nulla.

Interview 12

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?



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R: Non ho mai sofferto di ansia sociale, sono sempre stata una persona socievole ed espansiva, solo nel periodo della pandemia sono stata bloccata perché non potevo uscire, ma ciò non ha rovinato le mie amicizie/vita sociale.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Secondo me non viene discussa abbastanza, io ne ho sentito parlare perché a scuola studio psicologia quindi c'è come argomento, ma se non avessi frequentato questa scuola non ne avrei sentito parlare.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Le mie condizioni di ansia sociale non sono mai cambiate, non ne ho mai sofferto.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Nel mio caso non hanno aggravato le mie condizioni di ansia sociale. Conosco delle persone che per via della pandemia hanno rovinato le loro relazioni sociali; molti non escono più perché hanno paura delle persone; quindi, preferiscono starsene in casa e stare al pc o studiare

Interview 13

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Mi sono sempre divertita e sono sempre stata in compagnia. Durante la pandemia ero sempre in contatto con i miei amici e adesso sono un po' cambiata e tendo a stare per le mie e ad essere molto più silenziosa e insicura.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Per me non viene menzionata abbastanza e invece si dovrebbe parlare molto di più, soprattutto a scuola.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Sono molto più insicura di quello che faccio e di come mi comporto; infatti, mi rendo spesso conto che a volte esagero, mentre prima ero sicura di quello che facevo mentre adesso, anche prima di dire qualcosa o fare qualcosa, ci penso molto di più per paura di essere giudicata.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Io sono sempre stata molto ansiosa quindi non ho notato un gran cambiamento, però l'ho notato molto nella gente intorno a me.

Interview 14

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: L'ansia sociale secondo me è un fattore che colpisce tutti, chi più chi meno. Nel mio caso però la mia vita sociale non è cambiata di molto, esco quasi più adesso che prima forse proprio per la voglia di non stare più in casa dato che abbiamo passato quasi due anni chiusi in casa.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: No, secondo il mio punto di vista è un argomento che non viene discusso abbastanza.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Le mie ripercussioni a livello sociale non sono molto cambiate sono una persona a cui piace stare con gli altri ma allo stesso tempo sono molto timida e ho difficoltà a relazionarmi con altre persone che non conosco.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Io in generale sono una persona abbastanza ansiosa proprio per questo nel mio caso le condizioni sono quasi le stesse.

Interview 15

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Uscivo per andare a scuola e per uscire con gli amici e per fare danza ritmica. Non sono più uscita e ho dovuto rinunciare alla danza. La scuola è stata svolta a distanza.



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I: E come è ora?

R: Ora ho molta difficoltà a stare in stanze con più persone e ad uscire di casa, ho un senso di nausea quando devo uscire.

I: Come ti senti quando provi uno stato di tensione? Cosa ti attraversa? Come reagisce il tuo corpo in tensione?

R: Mi irrigidisco quando so che devo incontrare persone e mi viene un senso di giramento di testa.

I: Quando ti senti maggiormente teso?

R: Soprattutto quando sono costretta ad uscire e quando so che devo incontrare persone con cui devo relazionarmi.

I: Come riesci a entrare in contatto con le persone se scegli comunque di essere in un ambiente sociale?

R: Non ci entro in contatto. Evito di parlare con gli altri. Riesco solo attraverso i social.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Hai notato che più persone intorno a te soffrono di ansia sociale?

R: No, non vedo altri soffrirne

I: Ne hai mai parlato con altre persone?

R: Sono con la mia famiglia, dopo molto tempo.

I: È un argomento abbastanza discusso a scuola?

R: A scuola è stato affrontato durante una lezione di educazione civica.

I: Credi che possa aiutare parlarne di più di questo argomento?

R: Credo di sì.

I: C'è una comprensione adeguata dell'ansia sociale?

R: Non credo sia un argomento molto conosciuto.

I: Cosa credi possa migliorare?

R: Credo che sia importante informare le persone e fornire un supporto a chi soffre di questa problematica.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, persona, scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione fino ad oggi.

R: Da quando è iniziato il problema covid, ho dovuto lasciare tutto quello che facevo. L'impossibilità di poter fare sport mi ha fatto sentire sbagliata ed ho iniziato ad essere molto attenta a ciò che mangiavo, questo mi ha portato a pensare di non uscire di nuovo con gli amici quando le cose si sono sbloccate perché fuori non potevo tenere sotto controllo le calorie che assumevo e mi sono chiusa in casa senza avere contatti esterni. Ad oggi quando devo uscire mi sento a disagio e ho forti giramenti di testa.

I: Pensi che il coronavirus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Penso che le abbia sviluppate. Prima ero una persona completamente differente.

I: Come potresti entrare ancora in contatto con gli altri? Cosa ti aiuterebbe a connetterti con altre persone?

R: Non so cosa potrebbe aiutarmi.

I: Ti sentiresti più a tuo agio se sapessi che anche altri soffrono di un disturbo di ansia sociale? Per questo progetto noi vorremmo offrire un kit di strumenti ai giovani lavoratori, in modo da poter offrire uno stage ai giovani con un disturbo di ansia sociale e permettere alla loro storia di essere ascoltata. Cosa ne pensi?

R: Sapere che altri ne soffrono non mi aiuterebbe perché avrei comunque bisogno io stessa di un supporto.

I: Ti spaventerebbe raccontare la tua storia su un palco?

R: Sì non ce la farei

I: Pensi che se venissero creati adeguati livelli di fiducia e sicurezza potrebbe essere più facile?

R: Non ce la farei

Interview 16



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I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Prima della pandemia uscivo con amici nel fine settimana. Durante il primo anno di pandemia non sono mai uscito di casa e stavo le mie giornate prevalentemente in camera.

I: E come è ora?

R: Oggi vedo meno persone perché ho un po' paura del virus.

I: Come ti senti quando provi uno stato di tensione? Cosa ti attraversa? Come reagisce il tuo corpo in tensione?

R: Mi sento soprattutto in tensione quando i miei genitori mi spingono ad uscire.

I: Quando ti senti maggiormente teso?

R: Quando sono tornato a scuola in presenza e nelle feste e nei locali.

I: Come riesci a entrare in contatto con le persone se scegli comunque di essere in un ambiente sociale?

R: Ho difficoltà a parlare molto, preferisco attraverso i social.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Hai notato che più persone intorno a te soffrono di ansia sociale?

R: Non saprei, credo che le mie difficoltà siano per molti miei coetanei.

I: Ne hai mai parlato con altre persone?

R: No.

I: È un argomento abbastanza discusso a scuola?

R: Nella mia scuola non se ne è parlato molto.

I: Credi che possa aiutare parlarne di più di questo argomento?

R: Penso che possa essere di aiuto affrontare questi temi.

I: C'è una comprensione adeguata dell'ansia sociale?

R: Non credo si sappia molto.

I: Cosa credi possa migliorare?

R: Credo che la cosa migliore sarebbe essere informati ed essere aiutati da professionisti.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, persona, scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione fino ad oggi.

R: Da quando è iniziata la DAD è diminuito l'interesse per le lezioni, e le ore di studio sono aumentate, ma i voti sono scesi. Ho smesso di fare nuoto e passavo le mie giornate in camera al pc.

I: Pensi che il coronavirus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Non so. Credo che il virus abbia allontanato le persone.

I: Come potresti entrare ancora in contatto con gli altri? Cosa ti aiuterebbe a connetterti con altre persone?

R: Penso possa essere di aiuto avere la possibilità di fare dei gruppi di studio e gruppi vacanze.

I: Ti sentiresti più a tuo agio se sapessi che anche altri soffrono di un disturbo di ansia sociale? Per questo progetto noi vorremmo offrire un kit di strumenti ai giovani lavoratori, in modo da poter offrire uno stage ai giovani con un disturbo di ansia sociale e permettere alla loro storia di essere ascoltata. Cosa ne pensi?

R: Penso che possa aiutare avere degli strumenti per comprendere il problema e sapere come risolverlo.

I: Ti spaventerebbe raccontare la tua storia su un palco?

R: Sì, non mi piace raccontare cose molto personali.

I: Pensi che se venissero creati adeguati livelli di fiducia e sicurezza potrebbe essere più facile?

R: Non so.

I: Credi che possa essere una buona idea per altri? Anche per stare insieme ad altre persone che soffrono di ansia. O pensi che sia meglio farlo tra di noi?



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R: Preferirei fare un percorso individuale, perché con gli altri non riuscirei ad essere me stesso.

Interview 17

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Prima la mia vita si svolgeva tra scuola, famiglia, amici e svago. Poi sono rimasto molto tempo in casa a causa della chiusura.

I: E come è ora?

R: Non incontro nessuno, le uniche persone che incontro sono online.

I: Come ti senti quando provi uno stato di tensione? Cosa ti attraversa? Come reagisce il tuo corpo in tensione?

R: Quando devo uscire mi sento svenire e accuso forti mal di testa.

I: Quando ti senti maggiormente teso?

R: Soprattutto quando sono costretta ad uscire.

I: Come riesci a entrare in contatto con le persone se scegli comunque di essere in un ambiente sociale?

R: I miei contatti non avvengono mai di persona ma tutti in rete.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Hai notato che più persone intorno a te soffrono di ansia sociale?

R: Non le ho notate.

I: Ne hai mai parlato con altre persone?

R: Non ne ho mai parlato con nessuno.

I: È un argomento abbastanza discusso a scuola?

R: Non ne ho mai sentito parlare.

I: Credi che possa aiutare parlarne di più di questo argomento?

R: Non lo so.

I: C'è una comprensione adeguata dell'ansia sociale?

R: Non credo.

I: Cosa credi possa migliorare?

R: Non lo so.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, persona, scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione fino ad oggi.

R: Ho lasciato a marzo la scuola perché non riuscivo ad uscire di casa, le mie giornate sono senza orari precisi, passo la maggior parte delle ore a giocare online.

I: Pensi che il coronavirus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Credo che mi abbia allontanato dai miei amici e dalla vita fuori casa.

I: Come potresti entrare ancora in contatto con gli altri? Cosa ti aiuterebbe a connetterti con altre persone?

R: Dovrei allontanarmi dagli oggetti tecnologici e dalle comodità che mi permettono di restare a casa.

I: Ti sentiresti più a tuo agio se sapessi che anche altri soffrono di un disturbo di ansia sociale? Per questo progetto noi vorremmo offrire un kit di strumenti ai giovani lavoratori, in modo da poter offrire uno stage ai giovani con un disturbo di ansia sociale e permettere alla loro storia di essere ascoltata. Cosa ne pensi?

R: So che molti hanno le mie stesse problematiche ma non mi è di conforto.

I: Ti spaventerebbe raccontare la tua storia su un palco?

R: Non lo so.

I: Pensi che se venissero creati adeguati livelli di fiducia e sicurezza potrebbe essere più facile?

R: Forse sì.



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I: Credi che possa essere una buona idea per altri? Anche per stare insieme ad altre persone che soffrono di ansia. O pensi che sia meglio farlo tra di noi?

R: Penso che potrebbe aiutare molte persone confrontarsi su questi problemi.

Interview 18

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Per me la pandemia, non è stato un problema, anche se le mie insicurezze sono riemerse nello stesso periodo, portandomi a chiudermi in me ancora di più. Ad oggi, sono contenta, perché mi ha fatto aprire gli occhi, mi ha fatto rendere conto che mi ero persa, che avevo bisogno di ritrovarmi, riscoprirmi, c'era qualcosa in me che non andava già da prima della pandemia, perché è stato solo un qualcosa in più per farmi capire che mi dovevo fermare e riprendere in mano la mia vita. La mia ansia, insicurezza, credo che sia sempre stata la stessa, prima, durante e dopo, solo che in alcuni momenti sento il bisogno di riprendermi per mano, perché troppe volte ho messo davanti gli altri scordandomi di me. Le mie ansie, alcune sono le stesse di quando ero piccola, molte cose non sono state superate, che per quanto uno può passarci sopra, far finta di nulla, dire che sono momenti passati, questi in un modo o in un altro riaffiorano tutti. Quello che posso dire che ho notato di diverso con la pandemia è che per me è stato difficile riuscire, essere circondata da persone, ci ho impiegato parecchio tempo ad uscire, a sentirmi tranquilla anche a stare all'aperto con persone a cui tengo e che reputo importanti per me.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Per me non viene menzionata abbastanza e invece si dovrebbe parlare molto di più, soprattutto a scuola.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Personalmente ciò mi ha fermato molte volte, in qualsiasi ambito, rallentandomi, creando anche delle ferite. La mia esperienza più bella è stata intraprendere il percorso di crescita con la mia terapeuta che mi ha permesso di scoprire piano piano la donna che sono e che sto diventando.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Sì, ma questo credo come lo è stato per tutti, credo che abbia fermato il Corso naturale della vita, perchè nessuno si aspettava tutto ciò, è stato una sorta di cyclone che ha travolto molte, molte persone. Ha portato dei cambiamenti in generale, partendo dal fatto che ci ha fatto ritrovare chiusi in casa per un lungo tempo, nel mio caso con la famiglia, non che non sia una cosa non bella, ma appunto nessuno era abituato ad un'abitudine completamente nuova; per il fatto che non si potesse più socializzare con le persone vicine a noi e poi sconosciute; il prendere un semplice caffè, una passeggiata, il recarsi all'università. Io mi sono ritrovata a dovere condividere costantemente uno spazio piccolo, io mi sono letteralmente fermata con il covid, come per esempio non avevo più voglia di sentire le persone, o l'essermi fermata con gli studi, aver perso la mia autostima, il non comprendere la famiglia, con la quale ho trascorso questo lungo periodo di quarantena.

Interview 19

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Prima avevo vita sociale quasi nulla, circostanziata alle necessità. Durante l'ansia sociale era moderata, favorita dal fatto che le misure di contenimento mi hanno fatto sentire meno strana, come se non dovessi giustificarmi. Ora, l'ansia ha tuttora un impatto importante, ma noto di star facendo diversi miglioramenti, seppur lenti.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Personalmente ritengo che in generale se ne potrebbe parlare di più.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Fino alle medie la mia situazione era perfettamente nella norma, ma è stato verso l'inizio del liceo che è iniziata questa spirale che mi ha portato a divenire sociofobica. A livello scolastico non ho avuto un impatto così negativo. Non sono però stata in grado di formare nuove amicizie né in classe né fuori (cinque anni fa ci sono riuscita ma solo perché questa mia amica mi ha parlato per prima). Ad oggi posso dire di avere solo due amiche. Di relazioni neanche a parlarne. Finora ho avuto solo una manciata di lavori, ma sono convinta che mai farò lavori come, ad esempio, la cameriera per il forte stress che accumulerei. A dire il vero non so se riuscirò a trovare un lavoro, per come sono fatta. Certe volte, seppure abbia ormai 26 anni, mentalmente me ne sento 10.



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I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Non credo, semmai il contrario.

Interview 20

I: Qual è l'esperienza di ansia sociale PRIMA, DURANTE e DOPO LA PANDEMIA?

R: Già prima della pandemia avevo grandi difficoltà a socializzare con le persone, mi sentivo diversa, inadeguata e avevo paura del giudizio degli altri. Questo mi ha portata ad avere poca autostima e grande nervosismo e ansia, ma non volevo accettare di essere così e questo mi ha provocato ulteriore angoscia e paura del cambiamento. Con la pandemia i sintomi sono peggiorati gravemente però questo mi ha messo di fronte ad una consapevolezza di questi ultimi e all'esigenza di cambiare qualcosa nella mia vita.

I: Si parla abbastanza di ansia sociale? Viene discussa a sufficienza? A lavoro, a scuola, in generale?

R: Non se ne discute abbastanza, però rispetto agli anni precedenti sembra essere considerata una cosa più comune e dunque si fa meno fatica a parlarne con qualcuno e chiedere aiuto.

I: Quali sono state le ripercussioni a livello sociale, personale e scolastico e/o lavorativo?

Racconta la tua esperienza e l'evoluzione sino ad oggi.

R: Con la pandemia la mia ipocondria era diventata eccessiva, ho iniziato a chiudermi in casa anche quando era finita, a vivere al buio, ad evirare il più possibile il contatto con le altre persone e prendere precauzioni eccessive quando il contatto con gli altri era inevitabile anche per la paura continua di attaccare qualcosa alle persone per me più care. La mia eccessiva ansia e paranoia mi ha portato ad avere sintomi fisici e da qui ho iniziato a capire di avere dei problemi da risolvere e di dover chiedere aiuto. Oggi, grazie all'aiuto della psicologa, ho fatto grandi passi e sto continuando a farli.

I: Pensi che il corona virus abbia aggravato ulteriormente le tue condizioni di ansia sociale? Se sì in che modo?

R: Sì, penso che abbia aggravato i miei sintomi però mi ha anche messo di fronte a dei cambiamenti.



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