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# THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE EDUCATION OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to limit its spread have negatively impacted the entire world, humanity has been subjected to severe pressure and failed to manage it, which has led to major problems on all levels: educational, relational, economic, but also physical and emotional health problems that will hardly lead to a solution.

The most affected by this pandemic were the students from pre-university education who, for a long time, were deprived of a good quality education, because, on the one hand, the teachers were not prepared to teach online, they did not have the necessary software, they didn't know how to teach online, on the other hand, students did not have the electronic devices or the necessary technology to participate in online activities and, in the absence of a digital infrastructure, there could be no unitary regulations related to teaching and interaction with students. A big problem was that teachers did not have digital skills; according to Horga, Irina (coord.). 2020, only 4% of the total training courses organized by the Houses of the Teaching Staff in the period 2013-2018 aimed to develop digital skills / the use of ICT in the teaching-learning-evaluation process.

Really affected by this pandemic were students from rural areas who, due to the precarious economic situation of their parents, could not afford to buy electronic tools to connect online to class.

One year after the first day when schools in Romania closed and education was transferred online, almost one million children enrolled in pre-university education in rural areas are still in critical situations. mentioned World Vision Romania, which underlined those important measures must be taken to overcome these accumulated learning losses during the time when the classes took place online. 40% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, most of them enrolled in rural schools, did not go to school online, for various reasons. (https://worldvision.ro/implica-te/persoane-fizice/fondul-de-urgenta/).

In this context, we conducted a comparative study to find out to what extent students in rural areas were disadvantaged by this pandemic, compared to students in urban areas.

**Keywords:** pandemic, online education, electronical devices, rural and urban area

## 1. Pandemic COVID 19 and online education

Forced online education, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, without teachers specially trained to teach online and without the necessary electronic equipment was the only solution to not freeze the school year and allow students to continue their studies.

Transition to online learning / teaching was made over the night, this is the main reason why it seems so difficult for everyone involved. Many pupils suffered in this time period, especially in the developing countries, where access to education was already limited, many children were out of school before pandemic period. So, progress has been irrelevant and negative consequences have already begun to emerge. Studies on this issue have been conducted worldwide, the conclusions being almost the same: pandemic COVID 19 had a negative role for children, for education, for their mental and emotional health. "One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, progress has gone backward across virtually every key measure of childhood," said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director. "The number of children who are hungry, isolated, abused, anxious, living in poverty and forced into marriage has increased. At the same time, their access to education, socialization and essential services including health, nutrition and protection has decreased. The signs that children will bear the scars of the pandemic for years to come are unmistakable."
(https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/across-virtually-every-key-measure-childhood-progress-has-gone-backward-unicef-says)

An immediate consequence of this pandemic was discrimination and inequity in the education system that did not allow all children, from all backgrounds, to have access to education.

The numbers are frightening (says the same UNICEF report):

- At least 1 in 3 schoolchildren has been unable to access remote learning while their schools were closed.
- Schools for more than 168 million schoolchildren globally have been closed for almost a year. Two-thirds of countries with full or partial closures are in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- At least 1 in 7 children and young people has lived under stay-at-home policies for most of the last year, leading to feelings of anxiety, depression and isolation. (https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/across-virtually-every-key-measure-childhood-progress-has-gone-backward-unicef-says)

The question remains the same: what can we do for them, how can we help them, give them a chance for a better future?

## 2. Comparative study regarding high school students regarding Pandemic COVID-19

### *2.1. Purpose and objectives*

The **purpose** of this study is to identify the perception / opinion of high school students from urban and rural area regarding the effects of pandemic COVID 19 for their education and future.

**The objectives** of the study:

- to identify the high school student's opinion regarding pandemic COVID 19 and its effects
- to see if there are differences between students from urban area and students from rural area related to forced online education
- to discover if teachers helped them in this time period
- to find out if this pandemic has affected them or not

**Hypothesis:**

1. The high school children from rural area were more affected by the pandemic COVID-19 than high students from urban area.
2. The effects of this deprivation can be noticed even by these students which will see the differences before and during pandemic COVID 19.

### *2.2. Participants*

The sampling survey was applied to a non-probability sampling group. The students were selected randomly from a group present to a conference:

- high school students from urban area: 250
- high school students from urban area: 250

### *2.3. Instrument*

We used a sampling survey with predefined answers that allowed participants to complete it more easily and not feel pressured because they do not know how to answer various questions.

### *2.4. Procedure*

The statistical method used is identifying the perception / opinion of high school students from urban and rural area regarding the effects of pandemic COVID 19 for their education and future.

The study is based on the data yielded following a sampling survey which investigates the opinion of high school students from urban and rural area about the pandemic COVID-19 and its effects.

The investigative technique used was the auto-questionnaire survey consisting in 8 questions administered in group.

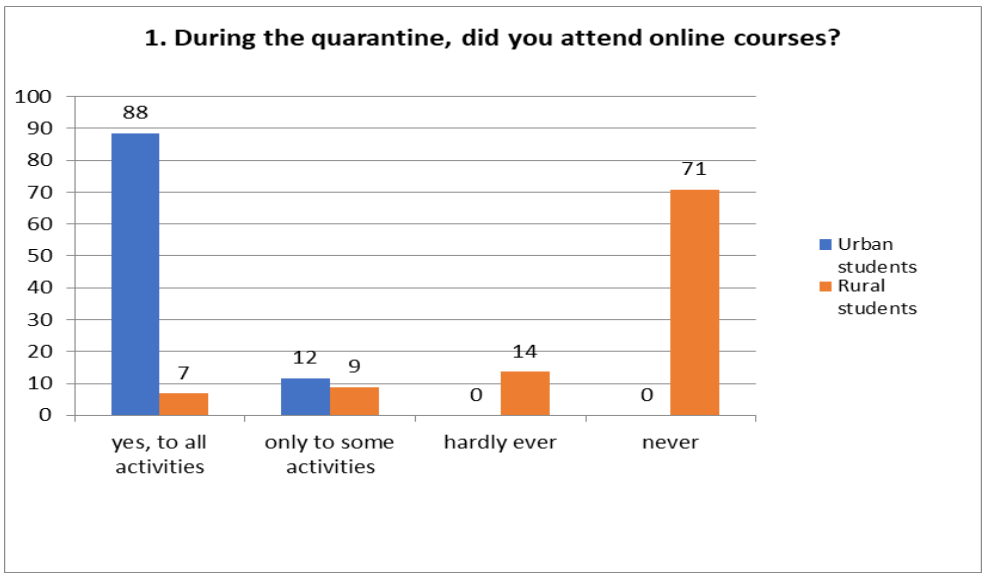
### *2.5. Data analysis*

The Statistical Package for Social Science Program (SPSS) was used to summarize and run correlation on data obtained from the survey. Frequency distribution used to mention demographics of the children and parents. Correlation technique was utilized to discuss relationship between children, parents and their need of using electronically devices.

The favored surveying technique was the individual filling in of the questionnaire in a group. (Rotariu T.,. Iluţ P, 1997, p. 54). This surveying technique was chosen because it is the easiest and the less expensive.

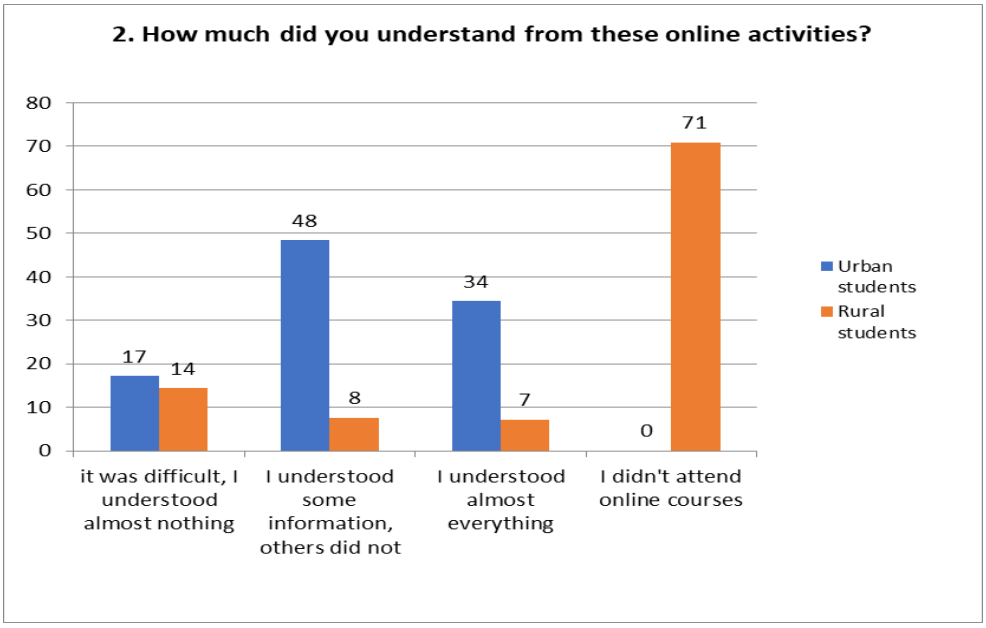
## 3. Results

Figure 1: the structure of answers at question Q1



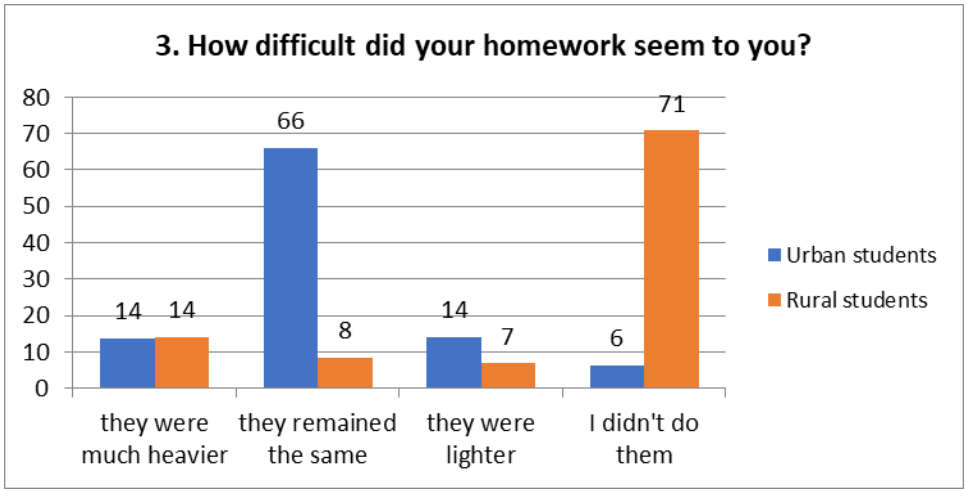

It is worrying to see that 71% of rural high school students from rural area have never attended online courses during the quarantine period, especially in the lockdown period. Instead, we can see that 88% of the high school students from urban area have attended online courses and this was good for them, for their education. So, there are significant differences between high school students from rural and urban area, from this point of view.

Figure 2: the structure of answers at question Q2



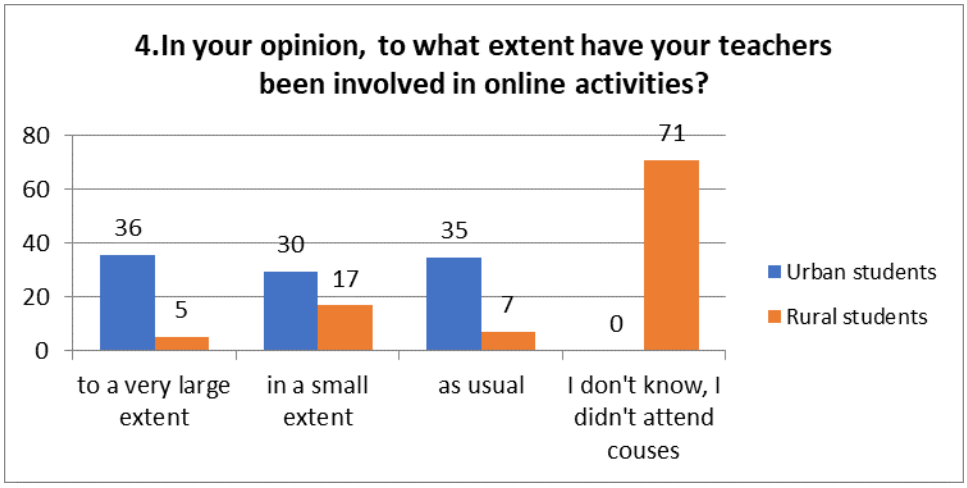

If we look closely to this figure, we can see that 14% of the high school students from rural area didn't understand anything and 8% from the same group understood some information, but, most of them (71%) didn't attend online courses, so, they were extremely affected from this point of view. But, 34% from the high school students from urban area understood almost everything and 48% from the same group understood many information.

Figure 3: the structure of answers at question Q3



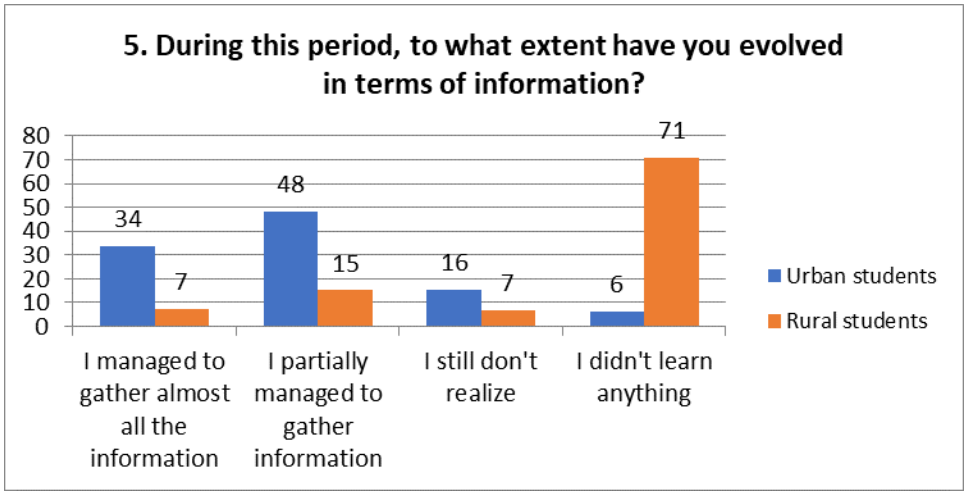

As we can see in figure 3, 66% from high students from urban area consider that the homework remained the same and 14% from high school students from rural area consider that the homework was much heavier. We have the same percent (71%) of high school students from rural areas who didn't made their homework.

Figure 4: the structure of answers at question Q4



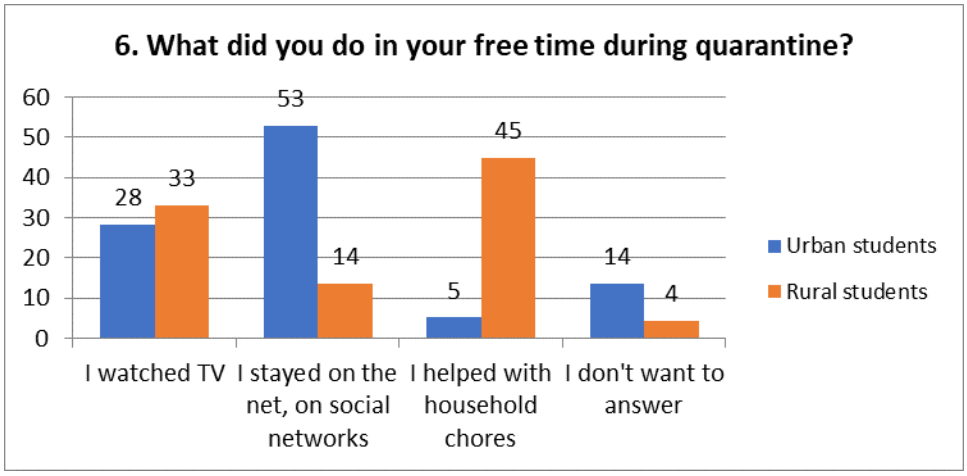

It is interesting to see that 30% of high school students from urban area and 17% of high school students from rural area consider that their teachers have become less involved in online activities, instead, 36% of high school students from urban areas consider that teacher have became very involved in online activities, which was very good for them.

Figure 5: the structure of answers at question Q5



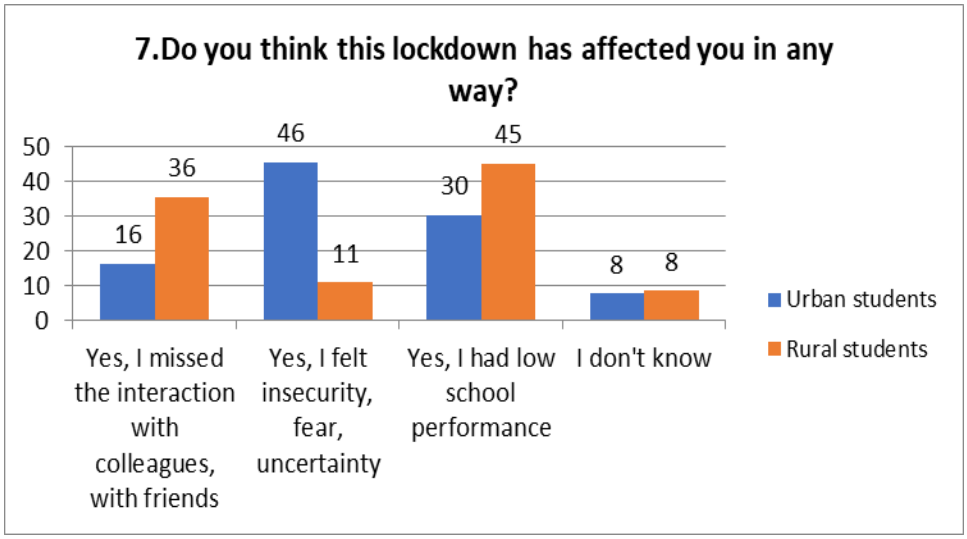

In the figure 5, we can see that 48% of high students from urban area and only 15% of high school students from rural area managed to gather some information, but 71% of the last one didn't learn anything.

Figure 6: the structure of answers at question Q6



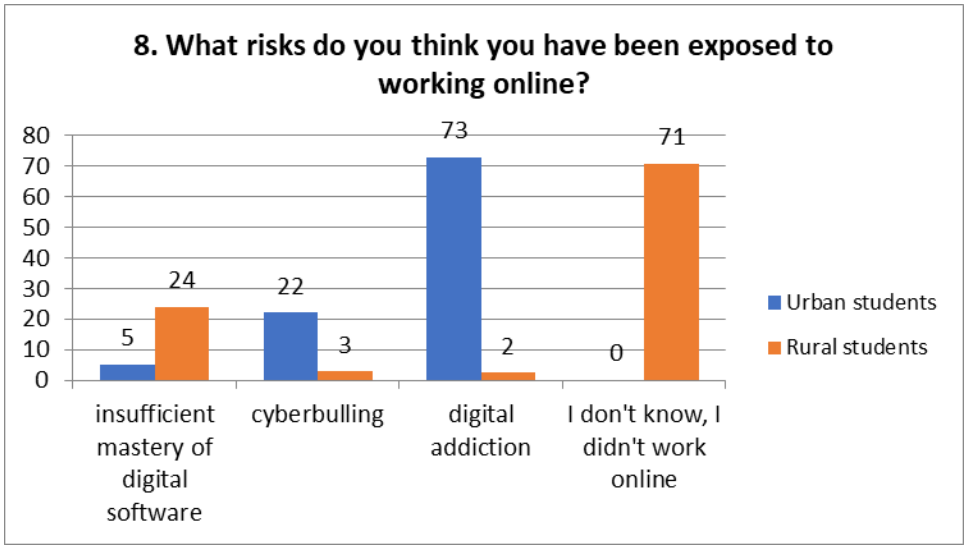

It is quite interesting to see that 53% of high school students from urban area, in the free time, they stayed on the net, on social networks, but 45% of high school students from rural area helped with household activities.

Figure 7: the structure of answers at question Q5




Looking on the numbers, many high school students declared that they were affected by the lockdown and quarantine period; so, 46% of the high school students from urban area consider that they felt insecurity, fear and uncertainty; instead, 45% of the high school students from rural area felt that they had low school performance and 36% from the same group missed the interaction with colleagues, with their friends.

Figure 8: the structure of answers at question Q6




Regarding the Question 8 “What risks do you think you have been exposed to working online”, 73% of the high school students from urban area declared that the major risks was digital addiction, instead, 24% of high school students from rural area declared that the risk was related too insufficient mastery of digital software.

**4. Validation of the hypothesis**

The first hypothesis „The high school children from rural area were more affected by the pandemic COVID-19 than high students from urban area" was **validated** by the answers offered by the high school children from rural area to the item 1 (more than 71 % of the high school children from rural area never attended the online classes).

The second hypothesis "The effects of this deprivation can be noticed even by these students which will see the differences before and during pandemic COVID 19." was **validated** by the answers offered by the high school children from rural to the item 5 (more than 71 % of the high school children from rural declared that they didn't learn anything).

**5. The main limit of the study**

Sample consists only of high school students from urban and rural area of Iasi County, so these results cannot be extended to the entire population of Romanian population. There will be no pre-testing the subjects, which means that we cannot obtain the accuracy of the results;
There is no control group.

**Discussions**

We are going through a difficult period, worldwide, due to the economic, medical and educational problems caused by the SARS-COV-2 pandemic. Unfortunately, the most affected are the students, the young generation that is going through sudden changes, for which it was not prepared.
This pandemic contributes to the aggravation of social inequities between students, leading to serious relationship problems between students, to a precarious education, especially among students from rural areas.
In this context, one of the solutions would be to create resilient education systems, able to adapt to these sudden changes, able to adapt on the fly. Another solution would be to opt for an inclusive education that addresses students from disadvantaged social backgrounds and, especially, those from rural areas, which involves different teaching strategies, depending on the target group we address.

It will not be easy to overcome this period of stagnation or regression, without opting for an inclusive education, able to respond positively to the training needs of all students, regardless of their environment.

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