DISORDERS IN ADOLESCENTS AS A POSSIBLE POST-PANDEMIC OUTCOME

I DISTURBI NEGLI ADOLESCENTI COME POSSIBILE ESITO POST-PANDEMICO

Diletta Chiusaroli[a]

[a]Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università degli Studi di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale, Italia

[a]Department of Humanistic Studies, University of Cassino and Lazio Meridionale, Italy

d.chiusaroli@unicas.it

Abstract

With this work we intend to analyze the most relevant disorders that have been found on the horizon of the pandemic period and, how the latter has influenced the personality, rhythms of life and cognitive sphere of adolescents in which has been recognized in various areas, including school, medical and family, a significant alteration of mood, behavior and an important drop in attention, concentration and learning difficulties.The analysis is focused in particular on the analytical exposure of the main disorders emerged, such as Vamping, Overthinking and Compulsive gambling trying to highlight the characterizing key points that trace these discomforts as real addictions.

The study also aims to identify what may be the predisposing and triggering factors of the spread of these phenomena, orienting everything in a pedagogical perspective useful to identify the direction to be taken in order to face them in an incisive and functional way. In addition, there is a reflection on the current fragile social and family context, as fertile grounds for the origin of new disorders and addictions. The exhibition carried out, is waiting for the data relating to the interviews and questionnaires on which we are working on, these data will provide valuable information relating to the aforementioned phenomena that are now expanding especially in the territory of Lazio.

Con il presente lavoro si intende analizzare i disturbi più rilevanti che sono stati riscontrati all'orizzonte del periodo pandemico e, di come quest'ultimo abbia influito sulla personalità, sui ritmi di vita e sulla sfera cognitiva degli adolescenti nei quali è stata ravvisata in diversi ambiti, tra cui quello scolastico, medico nonché familiare, una notevole alterazione dell'umore, del comportamento ed un importante calo di attenzione, concentrazione e difficoltà di apprendimento. L'analisi è intessuta in particolare sull'esposizione analitica dei principali disturbi emersi quali il Vamping, l'Overthinking e la Ludopatia, cercando di evidenziarne i punti cardine caratterizzanti che tracciano tali disagi come delle vere e proprie dipendenze. Lo studio, inoltre, volge all'individuazione di quelli che possono essere i fattori predisponenti e scatenanti della diffusione di tali fenomeni, orientando il tutto in una prospettiva pedagogica utile ad individuare la direzione da intraprendere per poterli fronteggiare in modo incisivo e funzionale. Inoltre, è presente una riflessione sull'odierno e fragile contesto societario e familiare, quali terreni fertili per l'origine di nuovi disturbi e dipendenze. L'esposizione svolta, resta in attesa dei dati relativi alle interviste e questionari sui quali stiamo lavorando, tali dati forniranno preziose informazioni relative ai suddetti fenomeni che si stanno ormai espandendo soprattutto nel territorio del Lazio.

Keywords

Introduction

The 2021 contribution "Covid-19 and adolescence. National Observatory for Childhood and Adolescence"; conducted by the National Center for Documentation and Analysis for Childhood and Adolescence, perfectly describes how adolescents have suddenly found themselves experiencing abnormal developmental conditions, in a very delicate phase of life in which exploration and social experimentation and comparison with the outside world represent fundamental elements that contribute to the acquisition of awareness and the construction of one's own personal identity.

The rapid and sudden change in habits has caused a general disorientation, depriving and distorting ordinary educational spaces.

Moreover, the health emergency has fueled among adolescents feelings of fear and frustration not only related to the disease, but also to the economic and social consequences for their family.

In the Report "Rewrite the Future – Where Are the Teenagers? The voice of unheard students in the crisis", published by Save the Children to understand the opinions, moods and expectations of high school students, a worrying scenario has emerged that has also highlighted the critical issues with respect to an increased risk of early school leaving.

In particular, 28% of students declare that at least one of their classmates since the lockdown of spring 2020 would have stopped attending classes, according to the adolescents interviewed.

Among the main causes of absences from virtual learning, there was the difficulty of connections and the concentrating while following the teaching behind a screen.

Almost four out of ten students say they have had a negative impact on their ability to study (37%).

Teens say they feel tired (31%), uncertain (17%), worried (17%), irritable (16%), anxious (15%), disoriented (14%), nervous (14%), apathetic (13%), discouraged (13%), experience negative feelings that they talk about predominantly with family (59%) and friends (38%), but that for more than 1 in 5 they remain a heavy burden to keep inside, without sharing it with anyone (22%).

Almost a quarter of adolescents (23%), quite a relevant percentage declared that, in this year of pandemic, they have understood that going out is not so important and that you can also maintain relationships online.

We are facing a sad and dramatic scenario, and certainly we cannot hide that, beyond the families, school itself has found itself faced with this crisis often unprepared on the front of distance learning, also with regard to the preparation of teachers themselves. In addition, the attempts to reach the students with distance learning were often complicated by the household and economic conditions of the kid.

We must not forget that even before the Covid emergency there were very high percentages of situations of educational, economic and social poverty and the long-term effect of this new crisis linked to the health pandemic risks further aggravating those who already lived in conditions of socio-economic disadvantage and educational fragility.

The Pandemic, therefore, has inevitably brought with it the exacerbation of problems already previously present and characterizing in particular the adolescent world, which in itself represents a particularly delicate period of the life path of each of us as it is marked by profound changes of a physical, cognitive, relational and emotional nature.

The effects of the Covid emergency on the structuring of one's personal and relational identity have been, for many adolescents, disastrous and profoundly dramatic. The current life situation has led everyone, without distinction, to review their way of living, working, communicating, "feeling others", which may have inevitably amplified already previous situations such as Overthinking, Compulsive gambling, Vamping, but also depression, binge-eating, sleep disorders, etc.

For example, the restriction of relationships, the redefinition of life contexts, have opened up wider spaces and times of thought and reflection on oneself, which may have activated processes of continuous redefinition of one's personal identity and perception of one's relationship with others.

The return to school was certainly difficult and at the same time marked by the desire to finally see One's classmates again, but can everything really be put aside? Can the school really start again without asking new questions, questions of a methodological, educational, existential nature?

A teacher can and must do much more and must also reinvent him/herself to re-emerge that motivation and above all that hope, lost in many adolescents, which constitutes the drive to act and plan the future.

The vortex of emotions experienced by the kids in this period, thrown into the "uncertainty", in the most total disorientation, which has done nothing but disorient and block the planning, the action, the desire to do. Where there is no planning there is obviously apathy, closure, anxiety and the need to take refuge in alternative ways of existence, such as the "virtual" one, which unfortunately became, in this particular historical period, increasingly present in the lives of adolescents.

There have been many works and research that have confirmed how the use of devices is growing extremely among adolescents and how it represents the first cause that leads to postpone going to sleep.

In addition, the more interactive the technological devices, the greater the difficulties in falling asleep because the observed contents increase cognitive and emotional excitement and lead to falling asleep too late. We know how much sleeping well is fundamental and that sleep deprivation brings fatigue, a reduction in cognitive functions, mood disorders, aggression, pressure, etc. resulting in poor academic performance and low motivation.

In the classroom there are often tired, fatigued, distracted students, and this tends to be immediately combined with listlessness, lack of interest, but is it really just that? Surely not, after such a difficult period it cannot be only this, for many, and the teacher, whether curricular or supportive, has the task of investigating, of questioning, of exploring more deeply the personal world of those in front of him.

Vamping, a phenomenon of vampire kids

One of the disorders that in recent times has proven to be of explosive incidence in adolescence is that of Vamping. Recent studies show how the phenomenon of "vampirism" leads adolescents to spend nights full of insomnia due to the intensive use of technological devices. The devices, as a result of the light stimulation they exert on the individual, involve an alteration of the secretion of melatonin, preventing the phase of falling asleep and affecting the circadian rhythm. This is how a dangerous upheaval is generated and an inevitable reversal of the sleep-wake rhythm with a consequent subsequent day marked by fatigue and drowsiness that forces many children to sleep on the classroom desks, as they are tired because of the night lived without sleeping. Vamping is therefore a self-destructive phenomenon of conspicuous incidence in adolescents for whom the hours of night sleep are of fundamental importance as they contribute to the development of specific brain synapses. It should be noted that, despite the massive use of technological devices that over the years has been increasing in this age group has intensified the already known tendency of adolescents to want to delay the time to fall asleep, thus entertaining themselves in the evening use of the devices because they are eager for their own personal space, there is currently an explosion of the Vamping phenomenon that appears to have drastically increased in the period of the Coronavirus pandemic, during the consequent lockdown and following the inevitable development of distance learning. This historical phase, having forced young people to spend their time at home, has undoubtedly led many of them to social withdrawal by generating or intensifying where already present, closure in themselves or on the contrary extreme need to vent their intimate need for socialization and communication with their peers through the devices. The kids confined to the house, no longer having an orderly daily rhythm as well as the habits that are of fundamental importance and constitutive of the rhythm of life itself, have thus begun to manifest their deep discomfort through the continuous and disordered search for communication at night, ending up developing a dangerous dependence on technological devices as well as a consequent alteration of mood, of the concentration and learning difficulties encountered in the school environment. The data that emerge from the 2021 survey on the lifestyles of adolescents living in Italy, conducted by the association Laboratorio Adolescenza and IARD research

institute on a national sample of over 10500 students between 13 and 19 years old, show that 76.5% of adolescents do not turn off their mobile phones at night, versus59.1% in 2019.

Compared to 60.4% in 2019, in 2021 78.1% of owners of a smartphone are under 11 Years old, it also emerges that the most used social networks among adolescents are Instagram with 90% and Tik Tok with 65% for boys, compared to 73.8% for girls. From the data collected it emerges that one in three kids does not turn off the devices before one in the morning and how one in twenty remains on the web until the morning. This data is extremely alarming as there are very few children who manage to recover lost sleep, with a consequent negative impact that is revealed on all aspects of their lives, especially in the school environment. There are many families who experience this phenomenon and parents, often unaware of what is happening, when they become aware of it have extreme difficulty in understanding the motivations of this behavior with consequent and unsuccessful attempts to face everything in a decisive direction. Faced with this situation, what is indispensable is the supervision of parents with a view to orienting their children for the correct management of the devices. It is evident and strongly emerges how communication is a fundamental and constitutive element of the growth of the individual, especially in the delicate adolescent phase; it is also outlined in an impeccable way how the Vamping disorder actually manifests a malaise substantially grafted into the pandemic period constituting in the final analysis, a cry for help of the young generation.

Overthinking, the trap of thought

Thinking is an activity that probably nowadays, caught up in the frenzy of life and the tight rhythms of society, we are no longer used to carrying out. The sudden isolation into which the pandemic has catapulted us, has left a large space to devote to reflective activity and, as if immersed in a thick fog, individuals have found themselves wrapped in the vortex of thought, an unknown world with boundless spaces. Thinking too paradoxically disorients and leads to the development of compulsive thoughts, this is precisely the Overthinking, an extremely harmful mechanism for psycho-physical well-being because it is characterized by continuous thinking and the inability to reach a conclusion. This vortex slowly leads to depressive disorders, anxiety, anger, eating disorders and self-destructive behaviors. As for Vamping, Overthinking is also a disorder that has a negative impact on sleep, generating difficulty resting, insomnia and inevitable fatigue with an important negative resonance on the next day. The more you think trying to find a solution, the more you find yourself trapped in this endless circle and, the only effective solution to adopt turns out to be the interruption of this mechanism by ceasing to think compulsively. Overthinking is therefore a real trap that generates deep insecurity and dissatisfaction with the life conducted with an extremely negative and demolishing repercussion especially in adolescence. The pandemic period, having isolated adolescents in their homes depriving them of the performance of other activities and indispensable social relationships, has given ample space to the time to devote to the activity of thought, thus generating an excessive concentration on the difficulties already present by sharpening them and generating new ones even where not present. The decision-making process, already difficult in itself, through Overthinking becomes even more so because it is hindered by the thoughts themselves, this involves a consequent unproductivity in relation to the achievement of solutions and a production of insurmountable difficulties especially in the most sensitive and insecure subjects. In addition to establishing relationships of empathy in order to help children understand how to resize their thoughts in a correct and balanced way, focusing on those that are actually important, it is essential to work to rebuild that daily normality of which children have been deprived because of the restrictions due to the pandemic, a daily life in which they carry out their activities with the right rhythm and order, satisfying their need for relationship and socialization which is essential to regain a correct relationship with their own thought activity and not to sink into Overthinking.

Compulsive gambling, when gambling becomes addiction

Compulsive gambling is an addiction that unites many people of different age groups but what emerges in this historical period is the high incidence found on adolescents who, already catapulted into the vortex of technological development and the various types of games that continue to spread, have found themselves having to spend entire days at home in search of activities to do, often in the presence of absent parents, because they are also immersed in the difficulties arising from the pandemic. This has led, where already present, an increase in the desire to play and the onset of new victims of Compulsive gambling. The survey conducted by the Assoutenti association (2021) tried to highlight the link between Covid and Compulsive gambling, from the results it emerges that in 2020 there was a significant decrease in physical play in favor of the telematic one, in fact, one in three interviewees, declares to have changed his habits by increasing online gaming. It is evident that the pandemic is rooted in the basis of this change, in fact, 11.3% of players say they started playing online during the lockdown.

The National Observatory states that in Italy there are 1.3 million patients with an established diagnosis of pathological dependence. The situation is dramatic especially among adolescents for whom higher incidence rates are detected, moreover from specific studies, it emerges that it is precisely in early adolescence that the onset of Compulsive gambling is recorded, manifesting itself first in males and later in females. This addiction poses a serious risk to the future of the population as adolescents are the future men and women of humanity.

The pandemic climate: fertile ground for the origin of new disorders

In the light of the analysis carried out on the phenomenon Vamping, Overthinking and Compulsive gambling, it is clear that the context of the pandemic, linked to restrictions and change in the daily rhythm of life in families, which have most affected the most fragile categories of the population, including children and adolescents, has contributed significantly to the aggravation of the disorders already present, favoring the onset of new addictions and difficulties of unspeakable severity. The gap that emerges in relation to the behavioral and cognitive tendency of adolescents, between the pre-pandemic period and the current one of full pandemic, testifies how in the latter there has been an unequivocal increase in the analyzed disorders and how these are substantially innervated in the pandemic climate. This highlights the need for an immediate multidisciplinary intervention and the recovery of a pedagogical gaze, that today is now considered exclusively linked to the school environment. The educational role is fundamental in every aspect of life and for a society that wants to be educating, a pedagogical approach is indispensable to be able to orient and transform every difficulty and obvious disturbance into a window that overlooks countless possibilities to draw infinite potential from every difficulty.

Educational intervention at school between empathy and listening

Inclusive teaching is the necessary condition for achieving school inclusion. We can define it as a "quality teaching for all" that aims to respect and enhance the individual differences present among students, with particular attention to situations in which these differences create substantial barriers to learning and participation in social life.

To do this, it is necessary that each teacher knows how to activate different methodologies and strategies to guarantee a customizable training offer, to develop different and more autonomous learning processes, to promote and / or consolidate the interest and motivation of students and to prepare them for this increasingly complex world.

The school must aim to enhance individual differences by adopting specific communication styles and reating certain learning spaces.

One of the fundamental tools that allow you to empathize and therefore include is certainly active listening that allows every good teacher, to be attentive and participate in the feelings and emotional experiences that accompany every type of communication becoming able to develop feelings of trust and acceptance, and reinforcing the feeling of cohesion and integrity in the class group.

It is also essential that the teacher establishes an authentic relationship that involves full and respectful listening to the other, its needs, its specific characteristics, its deepest being.

Active listening, therefore, through effective communication where the teacher communicates a profound message of interest towards the student, would make it possible to reduce their anxiety, to promote an increase in their self-esteem and therefore an improvement in academic performance.

Listening also serves to increase the self-esteem of the interlocutor as it is a recognition, it is like telling him: "You are important and I do not judge you". It is an excellent tool to reduce anxiety, stress, fear, as true listening creates a climate of trust and allows the other to open up and improve their learning skills (Dondoli, 2020).

Every student should have the good fortune but above all the right to meet, during his school career, a teacher who knows how to understand his special needs or even his moments of difficulty and to satisfy them through an adequate, effective educational and formative proposal, functional to the harmonious development of his personality (Marzano, 2003).

It is necessary, therefore, to learn to listen, to educate to listen to oneself and to the other is affirmed today as a duty of all, in order to make the being in formation capable of defining ever better the sphere of the self and of concretely identifying an authentic communicative relationship with the other.

The teacher must certainly be a good listener, he must be able to interact empathically with the learner, he must be able to read between the lines, to pay attention to any suspicious signal and above all he must be able to grasp the authenticity of his words and his gestures, of his body, which most often speaks instead of words.

The didactics of empowerment

Motivation is that drive that leads us to do, to activate, that leads us to get out of our comfort zone, to break barriers and to persevere to achieve a certain goal.

Often at the base of many difficulties there is a problem of self-esteem, a low self-esteem can in fact lead to negative expectations of oneself that trigger anxiety and poor commitment.

Being convinced of one's effectiveness is a fundamental resource in development and change. From this belief depends whether you think in a negative and pessimistic way or optimistic and self- enhancing. Individuals with a low sense of effectiveness believe that their sacrifices are useless and stop trying. On the contrary, those who have a high sense of effectiveness have confidence in their abilities and think they can face obstacles with perseverance and resilience.

In any educational system, motivation to learn must be one of the essential aspects to be taken into account, able to help students face the challenges and daily tasks, it is an indispensable element to ensure quality education.

Experiencing continuous experiences of failure and failure can lead the children to lose confidence in himself and stop believing in his self-efficacy, such as:

- Physiological and affective states: even emotional and physiological conditions can influence the sense of self-efficacy, they are really subjective, for this reason they must always be taken into account in the learning process so that they are always supported by the teacher who takes charge of the student with emotional disorders;

- Imaginative experiences: visualizing success and believing in good results can encourage the student to resist in the face of stress and moments of discouragement (Bandura, 1997).

Learning will become more effective when the student really thinks he can achieve educational success, has self-esteem and is satisfied with the contribution he makes to the class, possesses a sense of positive and solid identity, attributes success or failure to his own abilities and commitment: that is, he will be able to orient the learning process and develop his potential.

A teacher who aims to develop in the student the sense of empowerment will try to support them in the face of complex tasks, will guide him in the learning path, building day by day the perception of self-efficacy, activating positive

emotions, encouraging him to increase efforts to achieve the goal; only by feeling competent and responsible will students be able to take care of themselves and improve themselves (Rossanese, 2018).

It is therefore important to help our students to say "yes, I can do it", encouraging them to make decisions for themselves, to think and act by taking responsibility for their own choices and actions.

Social and contextual factors can support or on the contrary frustrate their growth, the social and relational environment (family, school, community, etc.) must therefore be able to encourage their self-determination to lead to a positive development of themselves, fighting together the fear of failure (Vieno,2005).

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is possible to assert with incontrovertible clarity how isolation, loneliness, boredom and misunderstanding are the elements that distinguish the new lifestyle typical of the pandemic period and how they are at the root of the phenomena analyzed. Moreover, it is evident that the difficult situation of instability in which many families find themselves today is the factor that has favored and amplified these phenomena. As a matter of fact, there are many broken families and many others are those caught up in the thousand problems in which society constantly immerses us, a society that seems to show itself eager to become strongly inclusive but that often proves hypocritically individualistic. Families can often be confused, distracted and attracted by the false models of happiness and personal fulfillment that, like mirrors for larks, seduce individuals into an unprecedented identity crisis.

Now more than ever it is essential to educate to a form of "re-birth" to make sure that we get out of that limbo in which we had entered. Adolescents, in particular, must re-learn to take care of their own life path through the synergistic support of family, school, educators, etc.

It is important for each of them to be educated to always keep open the possibility of "reborn and re-educating", facing the uncertainty and incompleteness that emerged even stronger in this period, through an educational action that leads towards an expansion of the self in a design perspective.

We need listening, sharing, resilience, a "transformative resilience" that intends to promote the realization of a common good, emphasizing once again the importance of collaboration between institutions and communities, of "living together" despite representing a complex reality that sees many people intertwined who influence each other.

References

Assoutenti, (2021), *Report COVID19 & LUDOPATIA, marzo 2021*, <https://www.assoutenti.it/ludopatia-noneungioco/>

Bandura, A. (2014). *Autoefficacia: teoria e applicazioni.* Milano, Fabbri.

Boffo, V. (2007). *Comunicare a scuola: autori e testi.* Milano, Apogeo.

Buzzi C., & Tucci M. (2021), *"Adolescenza, un anno dopo" Indagine nazionale su abitudini e stili di vita degli adolescenti in Italia*, Milano, Laboratorio Adolescenza, Istituto IARD.

Camiciotti, G., & Modugno, A. (2020). *Adolescenti senza limiti. Genitori & scuola nell'era digitale*. Milano, Edizioni Ares.

Cavalli, G. , & Gnesi, C. (2021). *La motivazione a scuola.* Brescia, La scuola.

Conti, U. (Ed.). (2019). *Vite in gioco: ludopatia e gioco d'azzardo come emergenze sociali*. Roma Carocci.

Del Gottardo, E. , Maci, & P. Scarinci, A. (2020). *Disagio scolastico, bisogni educativi e processi di inclusione*. Bari, Progedit.

Dondoli M. (2020), *L'importanza di ascoltare. Facciamo dell'ascolto una continuità di rapporto e relazione educativa*. In "SI Scuola dell'Infanzia. Zero sei". N. 1/21, settembre 2020.

Iori, V. (2020). Educazione e politica nella società dell'incertezza: uno sguardo fenomenologico. *Encyclopaideia*, 24(56), 17-26.

Maiolo, G. (2017). *Genitori 2.0: educare i figli a navigare sicuri.* Molfetta, La Meridiana.

Mancini, G. (2006). *L' intervento sul disagio scolastico in adolescenza.* Milano, FrancoAngeli.

Marescotti, E. (2014). Adultescenza: quid est?. *Ricerche di Pedagogia e Didattica–Journal of Theories and Research in Education,* 9, 2.

Marzano, R.J. (2003). *What works in schools: Transalting research into action.* Alexandria, VA, ASCD.

Nesti, R. (2013). *La corruzione del ludico: un rischio di oggi e un'emergenza educativa: riflessioni pedagogico-didattiche.* Studi sulla formazione : 16, 2, 2013, 195-209.

Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (2003). *Women who think too much: how to break free of overthinking and reclaim your life.* New York, Henry Holt and company.

Pazienza, V. , & Bastianelli, R. (2018). *Smetti di pensare!: overthinking e ruminazione mentale.* Castel San Pietro Terme, In.edit.

Polito, M. (2000). *Attivare le risorse del gruppo classe: nuove strategie per l'apprendimento reciproco e la crescita personale.* Trento, Erickson.

Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. Ministro per le politiche giovanili (2021). *Pandemia, disagio giovanile e NEET. Relazione tecnica.* Roma, ottobre 2021

Rossanese, V. (2018). Per una didattica dell'Empowerment, Counseling e Scuola < http://www.counselingescuola.it/per-una-didattica-dell%E2%80%99empowerment_d64.aspx>

Spano, I. (2009). *La condizione adolescenziale e giovanile e i rischi di disagio: esperienza scolastica, motivazioni allo studio e orientamento agli apprendimenti.* Padova, Logos.

Vicari, S. , Di Vara, S., & Lingiardi, V. (Eds.). (2021). *Bambini, adolescenti e Covid-19 : l'impatto della pandemia dal punto di vista emotivo, psicologico e scolastico.* Trento, Erickson.

Vieno, A. (2005). *Creare comunità scolastica: teorie e pratiche per migliorare il benessere psicosociale degli studenti.* Milano, UNICOPLI.

Wentzel, K. , & Comoglio, M. (2021*). Motivare gli studenti ad apprendere.* Torino, Utet Università.