

South African's endured significant social restrictions under the 750-day state of disaster brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Emerging research shows that the psycho-social implications of the pandemic are causing obstacles to positive youth development. Causal factors include the impact of high stress levels of parents, school closures and social isolation. In South Africa, the effects are further exacerbated by the pre-existing fragile socio-economic conditions for vulnerable youth who have experienced heightened poverty, increased domestic violence and widespread food insecurity (Gittings et al., 2021).

The International Labour Organisation (2020) has found that the pandemic has had a systematic, deep, and disproportionate impact on youth and that "...it has been particularly hard on young women, younger youth, and youth in lower-income countries" (p: 2). While the South African government has provided some economic relief in the form of grants there have been no formal efforts made to address the mental health needs of youth.

The objective of this study is to explore the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of youth aged 16-24 in South Africa and to explore intervention strategies and policy insights that seek to address potential adverse impacts.

This mixed-methods study will collect data across three phases, including conducting in-depth interviews with key informants as well as implementing a Photovoice Project in which youth participants will explore their perspectives by capturing the research question through photographs. A systematic review will be conducted to examine intervention strategies that may assist with mitigating any negative effects on the mental well-being of youth related to the pandemic.