

## Examining the Covid-19 Pandemic from the Perspectives of Adolescents and Existential Theory

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### Abstract

Although various studies have been carried out on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic process, which has been going on for about two years, on individuals, more studies are needed in Turkey on how individuals in adolescence are affected by this process and what they experience. In this study, it is aimed to deal with the experiences of individuals in adolescence regarding the Covid-19 pandemic according to the existential approach. In line with the purpose, the model of the study was determined as phenomenological approach. The study group consists of 36 adolescent participants who continue their education at different grade levels in a metropolitan city in Turkey in the fall semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. After obtaining the permission of the ethics committee for the research, a Semi-Structured Interview Form was used to collect data, and the interviews could be conducted face-to-face and/or online, taking into account the pandemic conditions. Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data. According to the results obtained from the research, the participants' experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic were explained according to the themes of the four dimensions of individuals' existence (physical, social, personal and social). In the physical dimension, it was seen that there were reflections in terms of family, friends, relatives and social life in the physical and environmental, social dimension of the adolescents, anxiety, risk-taking and awareness in the personal dimension, and awareness of the values in the last dimension, the spiritual dimension. Considering that a change in one dimension may affect other dimensions, suggestions have been made for guidance and psychological counseling practices and researchers, especially for individuals in adolescence, where many changes are experienced.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, Covid-19, existential approach, pandemic, phenomenology.

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## Covid-19 Pandemisinin Ergenlerin Görüşleri ile Varoluşçu Kuram Açısından İncelenmesi

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### Öz

Yaklaşık iki senedir devam etmekte olan Covid-19 pandemi sürecinin bireylerdeki etkilerine dair çeşitli çalışmalar yürütülüyor olsa da Türkiye’de ergenlik dönemindeki bireylerin bu süreçten nasıl etkilendiği ve neler deneyimlediğine dair daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç vardır. Bu çalışmada ergenlik dönemindeki bireylerin Covid-19 pandemisine ilişkin deneyimlerinin varoluşçu yaklaşıma göre ele alınması amaçlanmıştır. Amaç doğrultusunda çalışmanın modeli fenomenolojik yaklaşım olarak belirlenmiştir. Çalışma grubunu 2020-2021 eğitim-öğretim yılı güz döneminde, Türkiye’de bir büyükşehirde farklı sınıf düzeylerinde öğrenimine devam eden ergenlik dönemindeki 36 katılımcı oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma için etik kurul izni alındıktan sonra veri toplamak amacıyla Yarı Yapılandırılmış Görüşme Formu kullanılmış ve görüşmeler pandemi koşulları göz önünde bulundurularak yüz yüze ve/veya çevrimiçi yollarla yapılabilmektedir. Verilerin analizinde içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmadan elde edilen sonuçlara göre katılımcıların Covid-19 pandemisine dair deneyimleri bireylerin varoluşlarının dört boyutu (fiziksel, sosyal, kişisel ve sosyal) temalarına göre açıklanmıştır. Fiziksel boyut temasında ergenlerin bedensel ve çevresel, sosyal boyut temasında aile, arkadaş, akraba ve sosyal yaşam, kişisel boyutta kaygı, risk alma ve farkındalık ve son boyut olan tinsel boyutta ise değerlere dair farkındalık açısından yansımaların olduğu görülmüştür. Bir boyutta meydana gelebilecek değişimin diğer boyutları etkileyebileceği göz önünde bulundurularak özellikle pek çok değişimin yaşandığı ergenlik dönemindeki bireylere yönelik yapılabilecek rehberlik ve psikolojik danışma uygulamalarına ve araştırmacılara dair önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Covid-19, ergenlik, fenomenoloji, pandemi, varoluşçu yaklaşım.

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## Introduction

It is a known fact that humanity has been tested with pandemics from time to time in the historical process. The epidemic resulted from the new type of coronavirus, which emerged in China towards the end of 2019 and was named Covid-19 by the World Health Organization in February 2020, is one of them. The existence of the "Covid-19 pandemic" was declared on March 11, 2020, after the disease was seen in more than a hundred countries, the cases reached 200,000, and the deaths reached 8,000.

In the context of the effects of this pandemic, after the first case was reported in our country, face-to-face education was suspended in schools and distance education was started (Ministry of Education, 2020). Then, with the publication of the Presidential decree, a partial curfew, the use of masks in public places and the obligation to comply with social distance were introduced. Curfews have started to be applied to the individuals considered to be risky who are over the age of sixty-five and under the age of eighteen on the grounds that they are carriers of the disease (Interior Affairs, 2020).

These practices and measures taken during the pandemic process have revealed many different situations in people's psychosocial life (Ekiz, Ilman and Dönmez, 2020). One of the most important consequence of these situations is that the mental health of individuals is negatively affected. The study of Hatun, Dicle and Demirci (2020) which discusses the effects of the pandemic process in our country, reported that the mental health of individuals are negatively affected in a way that feelings such as panic, fear of disease and infection, anxiety, and obsessions increased.

When the problems experienced by young people in this context in general are examined, it is noteworthy that these situations may be related to the basic concepts of the existential approach, namely death, freedom, responsibility, meaning, isolation, anxiety and value. These concepts are also thought to be particularly related to the four dimensions of existence (physical, social, personal, spiritual) in a wider framework. The concepts of death, freedom, responsibility, loneliness, anxiety, meaning and value (Corey, 2008; Murdock, 2018; Sharf, 2014), which are some of the common concepts emphasized by both these four dimensions and the existential approach, may be related to the effects of the pandemic. The aforementioned concepts and the following four dimensions are briefly explained below.

Considering its relation with the pandemic process, one of the most important of these concepts is considered to be the "death". Since the existential approach accepts death as a dimension of life (Geçtan, 1990), it does not evaluate death negatively and suggests that we can understand the meaning of every minute thanks to death (Corey, 2008). Although the fact of physical death eliminates our existence, the idea of death gives meaning to our lives (Yalom, 2008). The process experienced should be understood in terms of the concept of "meaning". According to existentialists, human beings are born without a meaning (Murdock, 2018). The main task of life is to seek meaning through ways of doing a favor or a job, experiencing something, meeting someone or creating an attitude towards inevitable pain (Frankl, 2018).

Man is free and makes choices based on his freedom. In this context, taking responsibility, which comes to mind as an existential concept, belongs to him (Norcross, 1987; Sharf, 2014; Yalom, 2008). If a person is aware of death, freedom and responsibility, he/she will understand that he/she is isolated. The concept of "loneliness", which can be seen as an extension of the limitation of freedom, also stands out at this point. People can try to cope with this inevitable loneliness either by uniting with other people as a single entity at the expense of the self, or by not making an effort to connect despite falling into the void (Murdock, 2018; Randall, 2001).

Perhaps from the point of "anxiety", which is related to all of these concepts, the existential perspective sees anxiety as a situation that everyone experiences, arising from the desire to maintain life and add meaning to life (Murdock, 2018). As the individual takes responsibility in order to add meaning to life, his/her freedom increases, and with freedom his/her anxiety increases (Altıntaş and Gültekin, 2005)

Finally, the subject of values in the context of the meaning of life is significant in terms of existentialism (Seligman, 2001). According to Corey (2018), existential therapy also attaches importance to the realization of the things that the individual values, without being overly preoccupied

with existential anxiety. Based on these explanations, when the content of these seven concepts, which are frequently emphasized in the existential literature, is taken into account in general, it was seen that they overlap with what happened during the pandemic process (Altıntaş and Gültekin, 2005).

Considering these concepts together, in the process of understanding existential needs, the existence of human beings can be generally considered in four dimensions (Figure 1); (a) physical, (b) social, (c) personal, and (d) spiritual. These four dimensions of existence are briefly explained below.

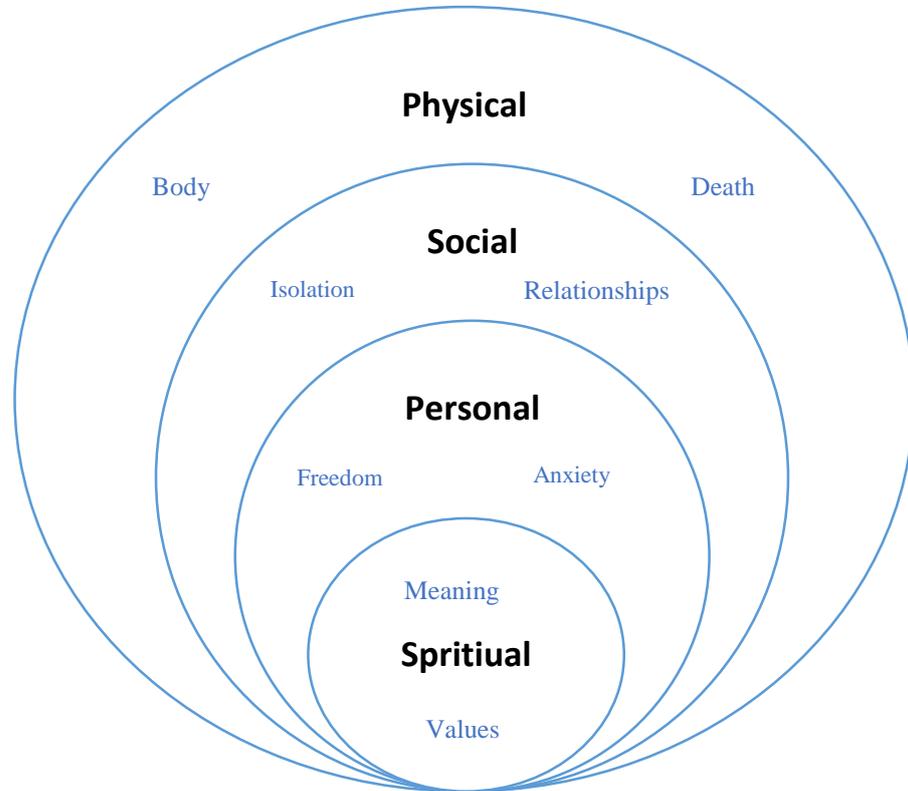


Figure 1. Four dimensions of existence and basic concepts

- (a) **Physical dimension (*umwelt*)** involves the individual's body, environment, climatic conditions, health, being sick or not, as well as how he/she is related to his own mortality (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2017). According to May (2018), the physical dimension is expressed as the world of objects around the individual or the natural world.
- (b) The relationship of the individual with others, which is integrated with the influence of the society and culture in which he/she lives, forms the **social dimension (*mitwelt*)** (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2017). The essence of the established relationship consists of the awareness of the two people who meet and the process of how this encounter affected and changed the individuals (May, 2018). In Heidegger's (1927; cited in Ökten, 2019) terms, the social dimension includes concepts such as cooperation, cooperative or competitive relations in the sense of "together-world" (Sartre, 2007; Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker, 2017).
- (c) According to the existential approach, the individual's questions about the nature of him/herself, self-understanding, and the process of realizing his/her strengths and weaknesses are related to the **personal dimension (*eigenwelt*)**. According to Heidegger (2008), this process of the individual, who is in a constant relationship and exchange with the world, is related to him/herself. The individual's view of events and situations happening around him/her belongs to him/herself and his/her

subjective interpretation. This interpretation also constitutes the personal dimension of existence (Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker, 2017).

- (d) The individual's value system and the effort to understand the events, existing situations and objects take place in the *spiritual dimension (überwelt)*. The assumptions, desires, and ideals of the world are created in this dimension (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2017; Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker, 2017). The spiritual dimension, emphasized by Van Deurzen-Smith (1998) in order to show the significance of beliefs about the world, also expresses the relationship of the individual with spiritual and religious values (cited in Sharf, 2017).

It is noteworthy that the participants views examined in this study during the pandemic process may be parallel to these four dimensions of the existence of the individual. The top themes given in the results section could be shaped according to these dimensions.

The mentioned dimensions above are considered to involve the study group of this research as well as other social groups. The question of how adolescents experience the pandemic process was considered important. Adolescence is known as a period in which there are many physical, social, emotional and cognitive changes, especially in terms of development (Eliot and Feldman, 1990; Kulaksizoglu, 1998). In addition to this alteration process, adolescents faced restrictions and distance education during the pandemic process. The change in their social environment and their alienation have been questioned in this study. Adolescent individuals were considered to be busy with reorganizing their physical environment, focusing on and maintaining their body health. In this context, it is possible that the feeling of isolation and loneliness may be increased and the sense of freedom may be decreased, because they can go out limited times, and they also worried about losing their loved ones. In addition, they face situations such as economic difficulties due to the loss and change of their parent's job, restructuring of relations with the family and forming value systems. In order to better understand how all these possibilities are reflected in the lives of adolescents, understanding their perspectives on their pandemic experiences were considered important.

In addition to the developmental difficulties of adolescents, the process of pandemic experiences seems to be handled with four dimensions of human in terms of existential philosophy and psychotherapy. Because Covid-19 is a deadly disease and it seems to be related to the physical dimension from the existential dimensions in terms of harming health. Yet, with the creation of the perception of social distance, the social aspect of existence draws attention. There may be a personal aspect of the pandemic that allows self-evaluation of the individual and includes the subjective world. This was considered to be related to the spiritual dimension in terms of highlighting the need to question values. Basically, the existential approach aims to understand and reveal the challenging experiences of the individual. In addition, the existential approach emphasizes facing difficulties and taking a determined stance to continue living despite all kinds of difficulties (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2017). Examination of the literature shows that there are limited number of studies carried out in different development groups on how the pandemic is experienced in the Turkish sample (Akoğlu and Karaaslan, 2020; Bush, 2020; Black, 2020; Karahan et al., 2021; Sayin and Bozkurt, 2020; Serim-Yildiz, 2021; Sever and Özdemir, 2020; Türk, Kul and Kılınc, 2021) Since the Covid-19 pandemic process is still ongoing, no qualitative study has been found which addresses the basis of an existential perspective on how adolescents experience and make sense of this process. During the pandemic process, adolescents' physical and social behaviours were hardly affected, especially the discovery of its reflections in the personal and spiritual dimensions may help the developmentally vulnerable populations. This kind of an approach may contribute to mental health studies in the context of guidance and psychological counseling that can be done in schools. The results of the study will help researchers and practitioners in the field of mental health during the pandemic process and contributes to others who are interested in understanding new research fields, by enriching the believed topics. With this study, a theoretical framework on an existential basis will be presented in order to understand the psychological needs of young individuals in crisis situations from a developmental and ecological perspective within the scope of psychological counseling services. In this direction, the aim of the study is to evaluate the experiences of adolescents in the Covid-19 pandemic according to the common concepts and four basic dimensions of the existential approach.

## Method

### Model of the Research

The research was structured in a phenomenological pattern, one of the qualitative research methods. In this design, the experiences and opinions of the participants are consulted, and it is aimed to confirm and explain the existing phenomena (Jasper, 1994). In this way, what a phenomenon means for individuals, how it is experienced and how it affects their lives is related to phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). In the study, how adolescents experienced the Covid-19 event was discussed. In studies in which qualitative research designs are used, techniques such as observation, interview, document/document review are used during the data collection phase (Merriam, 2013). In this study, the interview technique was used in the data collection process.

### Participants

The participants consisted of 36 adolescents who were subjected to the restrictions in the scope of the Covid-19 pandemic at the time of the interview, continuing distance education and residing in the city centre. According to Patton (2018), criterion sampling is defined as "taking all situations that meet some criteria". 24 of the participants were interviewed face to face (66.7%), and 12 of them (33.3%) were interviewed remotely using online tools. The gender distribution of the individuals participating in the study was as follows; 21 girls (58.3%) and 12 boys (33.3%), and 3 of the individuals did not specify their gender (8.4%). The mean age was 17.3. 1 participant (11.1%) were attending secondary school, 4 (11.1%) were in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 6 in 10<sup>th</sup> grade (16.7%), 6 in 11<sup>th</sup> grade (16.7%), 10 in 12<sup>th</sup> grade (27.8%), and 5 were undergraduate students (13%).

### Data Collection Tools

In the present study, an interview form developed based on the relevant literature and expert opinion was used, and three open-ended questions were asked to understand the existential physical-personal-social-spiritual dimensions of the pandemic and the effects of risky behaviors on the life of adolescents, as well as questions about some demographic information were included. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused the daily routines of adolescents to change. The change in daily routine can affect the physical, personal, social and spiritual dimensions, which are the four dimensions of existence for adolescents. In order to understand the impact of the pandemic on four existential dimensions, the questions were prepared about school life, family, friends, social relations and values. The questions used in the interview form are given below:

- a) How did the Corona pandemic, the suspension of schools due to health reasons and distance education affect your life?
- b) What are the differences in your family-friend-social life during the pandemic?
- c) Which values might come to the fore (recognition of their deficiencies, better awareness of their importance, etc.) due to the virus pandemic on the agenda?

### Data Collection

In order to collect the data within the scope of the study, firstly, the Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee Permission (dated 09.07.2020 and numbered 92662996-044/E.20318) was obtained from Bursa Uludağ University. Within the scope of the "Preventive Psychological Counselling and Guidance" course given in the Guidance and Psychological Counselling undergraduate program in the fall semester of the 2020-2021 academic year, data were collected from individuals in adolescence within the scope of the field preliminary study on the prevention of risky behaviours and the negative mental effects of pandemic diseases.

### Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews were analysed with content analysis. Content analysis is based on the characteristics of the evident content of existing social reality. It is one of the methods that follows the path of making inferences in order to reveal the unclear qualities of the content (Gökçe, 2006). The purpose of this analysis is to reach concepts and connections that will explain other data that

may be related based on the data obtained (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). The process followed during content analysis is stated below:

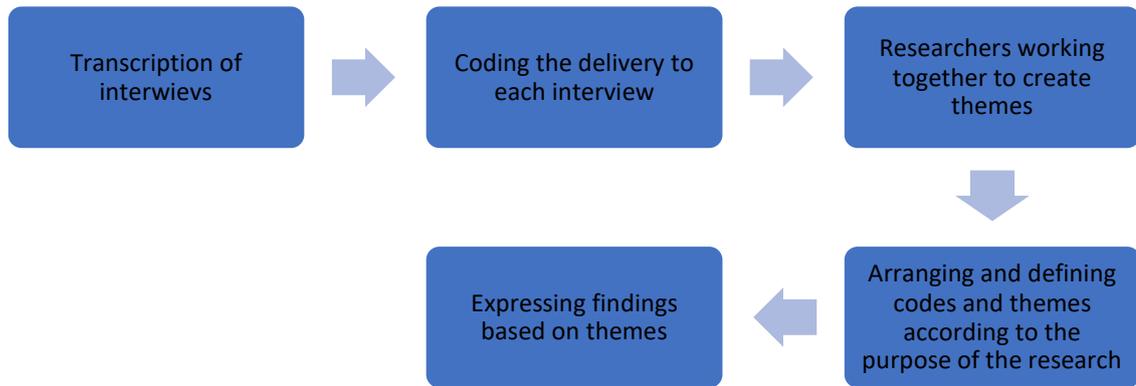


Figure 2. Content analysis steps

### Results

According to the results of the content analysis, four themes emerged and the concepts forming these themes were first presented as tables (Tables 1,2,3,4,5). Then, direct quotations from the participants were made regarding the important concepts that make up the themes in order to better understand what the concepts mean.

Table 1.

Content Analysis Results

Basic Themes	EXISTENTIAL CONCEPTS (Death-Anxiety-Freedom-Meaning- Isolation-Value-Responsibility)								
	Physical		Social		Personal			Spiritual	
Themes									
Categories	physical health	environmental boundaries	family	other social life	anxiety	risk-taking behaviours	awareness	values	spirituality
Frequencies	24	44	55	60	12	14	13	39	5

The theme of the reflections of the Covid-19 pandemic in the physical dimension of existence consists of physical health and environmental boundaries categories (Table 2).

Table 2.

Theme 1: Reflections of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Physical Dimension of Existence

Categories	f
physical health	24
environmental boundaries	44

Every individual who comes into the world has a body. Physical events that start with birth and end with death. Disease processes, efforts to live healthy and many issues related to the human body can be handled in the physical dimension.

A participant used examples about being healthy and remembering the importance of health during the pandemic process;

*“The virus, which is on the agenda, first of all reminded us once again the importance of health, hit us hard on the face of those, who forgot the importance of health in daily life conditions and did not*

*take precautions. This has been emphasized that our health conditions are poor and the importance given to health are lacking and that these needs to be improved.” (P18).*

Similarly, with the expression of another participant; “We have to understand very well that without health, nothing, not a house, a car, or money is of any importance.” (P23), it was understood that health is more important than many material factors.

In addition, the "Coronavirus, which is thought to be related to both protecting physical health and environmental limits, has highlighted the importance of hygiene all over the world. It has created awareness about being infected with simple ways.” The participant's view (P31) emphasizes paying attention to hygiene in order to protect health and reorganizing it to prevent contamination.

A participant (P22) said about living in a limited environment; “Being confined to the house for months has worn out both my body and my psychology.” by emphasizing the physical and mental effects of physical environmental restrictions.

The physical and environmental changes considered in the physical dimension brought to mind that individuals are mortal.

*“Since this virus emerged, I think people have started to realize that they are mortal. Many of us broke each other's hearts when we weren't even sure we would survive tomorrow. Things turned around after that. Most of us were blinded by a veil of greed. When our lives are in even more danger with this virus, that veil has been lifted from everyone's eyes.”* The participant’s (P6) statement can be given as an example for this.

In the theme of the reflections of the Covid-19 pandemic on the social dimension of existence, the emphasis on family came to the fore. This was followed by the "other social life" categories of friends and relatives (Table 3).

Table 3.

Theme 2: Reflections of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Social Dimension of Existence

Categories	f
family	55
other social life	60

Considering the social dimension of existence, although there is a desire to get away from people from time to time, there is also the need to be in a relationship with others. During the pandemic, the concept of social distance was emphasized more in the lives of individuals, compulsory isolation and the desire to be in contact with others were reflected in the views of the participants.

During the pandemic process, family-related comments of the participants; “But because we were crowded and busy with my family members, we could not see each other very often, we are together more often, which was good for me.” (P14), “I spend more time with my family and I feel that our tolerance for each other has increased.” (P9), “There are arguments within families because of being in the same house.” (P19),

*“Thanks to this, me and my family started to spend more time. I think our family relations are getting stronger... Suicide may have also increased partially. Because people who have problems with their family may have more problems during this period and engage in this risky behaviour.”* (P20),

It was observed that they had exemplary expressions such as;

*“We couldn't hug our family member who came home from outside, we couldn't meet our friends, we couldn't spend time, we were deprived of travel activities and various social activities, we couldn't see our loved ones for weeks, maybe months. Although we have become conscious of various issues, such separations and distances have worn us out and saddened us to a great extent.”* (P25).

During the pandemic process, other social life-related participants, consisting of friends and relatives;

*“During this period, we were separated while we were studying, and our friends and social circle suddenly changed. There were times when we had a hard time adapting at first, but human beings have adapted to the pandemic just as they have adapted to everything.”*(P33),

“I can't see my friends. My parents are also getting angry with me more, I want to go to school now.”(P12), “Likewise, most young people don't like visiting relatives, and I think we understood the value of family and relatives as well.” (P1),

They used expressions such as; “We learned how nice the visits were during the holidays, but we didn't know their value. Everyone ran away from each other. Mother, father, brother, friend, grandfather, grandmother, everyone looked at each other with fearful eyes.” (P23) emphasizing the importance of relationships within the scope of friends and relatives.

The theme of the reflections of the Covid-19 pandemic on the personal dimension of existence includes anxiety, risk taking and awareness categories (Table 4).

Table 4.

Theme 3: Reflections of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Personal Dimension of Existence

Categories	<i>f</i>
anxiety	12
risk taking	14
awareness	13

Considering the developmental periods of the participants in the study group, the characteristics of the period are observed to be reflected especially in terms of risk-taking behaviours. In addition, for students who are in the process of preparing for the exam during the pandemic process, this situation also takes place in the opinions of the participants as a factor that increases anxiety.

Participants who experienced the anxiety during the pandemic process: “But as a student preparing for university, I had some concerns and these concerns still continue.”(P27), “Because it was my exam year, it affected a lot, I don't know what to do, I have a lot of fears and worries.” (P30), “Because we were always at home, the activities we could do were limited, I felt more restrained spiritually.”(P2), “The stress of the youth who are in the exam period (such as YKS, KPSS- exams for university/study in Turkey) has increased, and they have no environment where they can relieve stress.” They used exemplary expressions such as (P23).

Within the scope of risk-taking behaviour during the pandemic process, participants; “directs the person to stay away from harmful behaviours” (P11), “I think everyone is more peaceful with their family. And where there is peace, risky behavior is reduced.” (P31), it was noteworthy that they used expressions such as; “Since social life has stopped, habits such as alcohol, cigarettes and drugs decrease, while technology addiction, nervousness, stress and physical bullying increase.” (P35).

Participants who expressed opinions related to awareness in the pandemic process; “Now we are all trying to help my mother with the housework. Now we understand how difficult it is to clean the whole house.” (P17), “I realized how the flow of life stops when our daily work and what we call ordinary are interrupted. I understood the value of health in general” (P2), “For the society, we can say that we realized how valuable health and family are.” (P10),

*“I realized the value of my loved ones. We understand how important the seemingly small things (hiking, meeting a friend) are. I think hoarding is unnecessary and strains the economy. We saw that we needed to be more conscious. We understood how to spend free time.”* (P21) can be given as an example.

In terms of the spiritual dimension, when the views of the participants who experienced the Covid-19 process are examined, it is noteworthy that the awareness about the values is more prominent (Table 5.)

Table 5.

## Theme 4: Reflections of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Spiritual Dimension of Existence

Categories	<i>f</i>
Values (love, help-sacrifice, aesthetic, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude)	39
spirituality	5

It was observed that the value characteristics emerged are expressed as love, help-sacrifice, appreciation of beauty and excellence, and gratitude and spirituality.

As an example of understanding the importance of values in general during the pandemic and distance education process;

These participant opinions draw attention; “The virus pandemic has changed people's cooperation, love, empathy and perspective. It made us realize that the life we complain about is actually valuable.” (P19) and “If distance education is not beneficial for young people, it has disadvantages. Raising students involves extracurricular morality, discipline, responsibility, life lesson, helping to communicate and socializing.” (P16). The expressed views refer to the understanding of the importance of different value characteristics.

In terms of prominent value characteristics, for example, while a participant's love value was expressed as;

“People understood the value of each other. I think there has been a slight increase in love and respect in our society.” (P6), as an example, in terms of the value of help/sacrifice, another participant said; “People have moved away from selfishness a little bit. Because I always tried so that my family wouldn't get caught even if I got the virus. I also made sacrifices for this.” (P32).

Different participant expressions were as follows;

One participant appreciated beauty and excellence in the form of; “Life has shown us that we should appreciate a breath and every moment and live accordingly.” (P33), it was understood that the value of gratitude was emphasized in the form; “Actually, it was a period a year ago when we realized how precious our life, family and health were, when we complained or were not satisfied.” (P27).

In terms of spirituality value, the emphasis on spirituality in participant views, can be seen in this example expression; “People gave more importance to spirituality, that the worldly life was empty” (P24).

There is also attention to concepts such as meaning, freedom, death in terms of spirituality. As an example in terms of existential meaning,

*“The perspective of young people who have reached the consciousness of how precious everything is, may have changed. Those who do not have a purpose for the future may have had a branch to which they can hold a purpose, thanks to this period.”* (P23).

While the concept of freedom is prominent in the example expression; “I understand how good it is to be free after the virus event and the value of small inconspicuous human interactions during the day.” (P9), the concept of death was observed in these example expressions; “I witnessed the death of many of my relatives due to Corona.” (P29) and “Since this virus emerged, I think people have realized that they are mortal.” (P6). It was noteworthy that the participants emphasized these existential concepts by detailing the spirituality value in their sample statements.

### Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic is emerging as one of the greatest threats to human health and is already a global problem. The result of the research revealed that the source of the problems experienced in the process for individuals who have been exposed to many innovations and changes inevitably since the first case in our country is existential. This qualitative study attempted to understand and describe the experiences of adolescents in the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the analysis results of the interviews with the participants, the pandemic experience was explained in four themes.

People encounter many positive/negative experiences in their life journey between birth and death. The experiences of the participants (P18, P23) related to the changes in the physical dimension are shaped around the concepts of being healthy, the importance of health, hygiene, fear of contagion and awareness of death. Physical dimension is most fundamentally and essentially related to life and death (Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker, 2017). Among the many events experienced in the life process, especially those threatening the health, remind the individual's mortality. Being able to continue living with awareness of death is something that can only be achieved by determining our stance in life. According to Greening (1992), our awareness of death brings various reactions, although these reactions differ from individual to individual, they can be in the form of denying and challenging death, neglecting one's health, or focusing on the present moment. Based on the statements of the participants (P6), it was seen that the Covid-19 pandemic is a threat to health and also awareness about death is provided during pandemic. According to the results obtained, it is understood that the reaction that follows this awareness in the participants is to protect health and to try to maintain hygiene by arranging the physical environment while doing this. It is noteworthy that there is a tendency not to withdraw from life, but to own one's life.

It was observed that the themes that emerged in terms of social dimension consisted of family as well as other social life relations such as friends and relatives. The relationships and interactions they have established with others throughout their life express their existence in the social dimension (Lawrence, 1960; Murdock, 2018). In this dimension, there are themes of sharing, competition, power and conflict that emerge with relationships (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2017). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the participants experienced these themes mostly with their families and stayed away from their friends, because they could go out at certain and limited hours and continue their education remotely. As a matter of fact, in this study, the participants (P33, P25) expressed opinions about their social life with their relatives and friends in the social dimension.

Based on the opinions of the participants (P14, P9, P25), it can be concluded that the family relations are positively affected by the adolescents while spending more time with the family, but they miss their friends because they cannot meet them, and they understood the value of their relatives. Çakar and Uzun (2021), in a study in which they collected the opinions of adolescent parents, stated that they also understand the importance of family. In the same study, parents added that their adolescent children's social lives were disrupted and that they missed their friends. It is inevitable that people will experience changes in their outlook, control, binding and finding meaning in life during pandemic periods (Akcan, 2018; Duman, 2019). Similar to this situation, in another study, it was stated that maintaining social relations in the covid-19 pandemic is a factor that makes adolescents less affected by the pandemic (Magson et al, 2021). Adolescents' statements about the changes they experience in the social dimension also seem to be consistent with this information. Similarly, in another study, students expressed their experiences about their social life as "I think that my life activities have been greatly restricted and changed." (Kara, 2020). When the change in question through the findings of this study, demonstrated that while the decrease in friend support is a risk factor for adolescents, the strengthening of family ties is a protective factor for them in their lives. However, it was also emphasized that curfews applied during the pandemic period may increase the possibility of exposure to domestic violence for adolescents (Guessoum et al., 2020).

On the personal dimension, the participants expressed opinions about anxiety, risk taking and awareness. According to the existential perspective, the personal dimension is defined as the subjective world of the person and the self-awareness that the individual perceives the world (Sharf, 2017). Anxiety, which is the first of the categories determined based on the opinions of the participants, arose from the individual's need to survive, add meaning to their existence and maintain their life (May and Yalom, 2005). Based on the participant's views, awareness, which is the second concept of the personal dimension, was seen as a capacity that an individual can have in terms of existential psychology, and they emphasized that the individual's freedom include increasing the awareness. In the study, the awareness stated by the participants (P2, P10, P17, P21) in parallel emphasized that in order to make sense of events, it is necessary to investigate what it means for the person. It has been stated that exposure to loneliness, meaninglessness and emptiness will increase awareness capacity (Corey, 2015). Based on

participant views, risky behaviours, which is the last concept of the personal dimension, have been defined as factors that increase individuals' problem causing behaviour (Özdemir, 2020).

In a study conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding anxiety in the personal dimension, it was concluded that 24% of the participants had sleep problems due to their anxiety and that the psychological resilience levels of these people were significantly lower than those who did not have such a problem (Yazıcı-Çebi, 2020). In a related study, it was observed that the psychological well-being of individuals were increased for those who comprehended meaning of life and had an increased death anxiety due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Özyürek and Atalay, 2020). In other words, the behaviour of attributing meaning to life, which comes with death anxiety, positively affected the psychological well-being of individuals. Another study concluded that as the fear of Covid-19 increases, the anxiety increases in individuals (Yalçın, 2020). In a study performed with children, anxiety and behaviours such as fear appeared in children after the pandemic (Tarkoçin, Alagöz, and Bull, 2020). According to a study conducted with 745 adolescents in Turkey, the closure of schools and home quarantine due to the Covid-19 pandemic caused anxiety and loneliness in adolescents (Kılınçel et al., 2020). In another study examining anxiety in the Covid-19 pandemic from an existential perspective, it was emphasized that the anxiety experienced with the Covid-19 pandemic may lead to the problem of loss of freedom, which is seen as a requirement for the existence of individuals (Çelebi and İnal, 2020). All these studies demonstrates that the Covid-19 pandemic creates a personal anxiety in individuals. This situation coincides with the statements of the participants (P2, P23, P27, P30) in the present study.

The studies on awareness in the personal dimension showed that there are negative significant relationships between mindfulness and fear of Covid-19 (Yalçın, 2020). In addition, the studies on risk-taking at the personal level indicated that problematic behaviours such as aggressive/angry/aggressive behaviours, hyperactivity and sibling jealousy are observed in children with the Covid-19 pandemic (Tarkoçin, Alagöz and Bull, 2020). The studies that deal with the conditions brought by the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of causing suicide reported that stigma, economic difficulties and information pollution in social media can cause suicide in individuals (Emiral, Arslan-Çevik and Gülür, 2020; Hocoğlu and Erdoğan, 2020). However, in a study conducted with children and adolescents in Japan, no significant relationship was found between the pandemic period and child and adolescent suicides (Isumi et al., 2020). It has also been stated that individuals who are stigmatized about having Covid-19 may be more vulnerable in terms of mental disorders (Yılmaz, Erdoğan, and Hocoğlu, 2020). In addition to these findings, risky behaviors in adolescents may have increased with the dimension of technological addiction, especially depending on the isolation conditions, which emerged with the opinions of the participants in this study. However, the participant views that especially risky behaviours within the scope of substance addiction decrease with the increase in parental observation and follow-up is noteworthy.

Examination of the views of the participants about their lives during the Covid-19 process in terms of the spiritual dimension of existentialism showed that the views are generally in the form of emphasizing the importance of values (P16, P32, P19, P25). In addition, more prominent values such as love (P23, P6, P1, P2, P35), help/sacrifice (P20, P17, P32), appreciation of beauty and excellence (P9, P33), gratitude (P27, P21), and spirituality (P36, P24, P23, P4) came to the fore. Unlike the first four values, it was observed that the spirituality value is shaped around the existential concepts of meaning (P27, P20, P5, P23), freedom (P13, P9) and death (P6, P29). According to Van Deurzen and Adams (2017), the spiritual dimension is related to one's views on the world they want to be. In this respect, the participants also talk about the ideal world they want to live in this dimension, highlighting their existential values, especially the pandemic life. In addition, according to the existential view, individuals can acquire new behaviours from similar experiences as well as their efforts to find personal meanings in their own lives. Unique meanings can also contribute to the emergence or development of universal meanings. These universal meanings are considered as values and they help the individual in making decisions about the situations encountered in daily life (Karahana and Sardoğan, 2016). From this point of view, the values that stand out in the spiritual field in the views of the participants can enrich the lives of individuals both personally and in the universal sense during and after the pandemic. It is noteworthy that among these values, the spiritual value stands out with a more detailed dimension compared to the others.

By considering the participant opinions in this study, vital limitations such as distance education, quarantine, social distance with other people experienced by individuals during the pandemic period can be interpreted as the participants highlighting their values in the context of recognizing and enriching them, and perhaps existentially trying to make sense of the process through their values. Because, according to Seligman (2001), understanding values is particularly relevant to existential therapy, as it is to other therapy approaches. Values are an important dimension of an individual's identity and affect the choices one makes. A life success consistent with values is closely related to a sense of self-actualization and the meaningfulness of lives.

Besides, Yalom (2002) focuses on the role of border experiences in developing conscious awareness of ontological being. It is possible for the individual to re-determine the priorities of life values with border experiences. Other turning points in life, although not as obvious as death, can also be treated as border experiences. In this study, awareness of the Covid-19 experiences observed in the participants regarding the values in the spiritual dimension of existence can also be evaluated in the context of border experiences. For individuals in adolescence, who are in an important period in terms of character and identity development, the Covid-19 pandemic process can be seen as a turning point in their lives to determine and review their values.

The results of the current research and the literature review; suggests that the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic can be considered as one of the border experiences in the spiritual sense, in terms of creating-reviewing the values in the lives of adolescents. Thus, it may be possible to provide psychological support on an existential basis in the personal development and life of clients in counseling processes. In addition, in this study, it is seen that the values that stand out in terms of spiritual existence are also considered as character strengths in the literature (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). These strengths, which are considered as traits that can change in individuals and that can be improved in this respect, can be addressed in psychoeducational studies in order for adolescents to use the five different character strengths that stand out in the study as a positive way of coping in similar traumatic difficulties during/after the pandemic. The spirituality value, which stands out with its more detailed dimensions compared to other values in the research, is currently heavily associated with the coronavirus process in the literature of different disciplines (Jóðar and Prieto-Ursúa, 2020; Lucchetti et al. 2020). Considering these findings, it would be beneficial to focus more on the power/value of spirituality in psychosocial adjustment studies for young people during and after the pandemic. Finally, for practitioners working in the field of mental health, the existential perspective is 'the existence of the individual' and this suggests that they act with the knowledge for which a holistic perspective is needed, without ignoring that they address each of the four dimensions simultaneously. For example, by including the physical dimension in this process, necessary support can be provided for adolescents to keep their bodies in contact with the outside world healthy. For this, families and adolescents can be encouraged to do sports and exercise at home, and to pay attention to nutrition. Complementing this is the provision of social and emotional support for psychological health. Psychological counselling units can offer psychosocial training studies and provide psychological health support through remote workshops, including the meaning and approach to death, acceptance of defensive attitudes and grief reactions.

Further studies may be needed in addition to the findings of the current study, in a way that wider experimental studies can be conducted on adolescents in different developmental stages, and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the four dimensions of the existence of individuals may be revealed. The research is limited to adolescents, and the use of online tools brought by the pandemic conditions in collecting data limits face-to-face interviews. In addition, in this study, understanding the experiences of adolescents during the pandemic period was investigated from an existential perspective, and it would be valuable to study these experiences with different counseling theories in the future. Moreover, including younger age groups may be beneficial, and investigating the findings limited to qualitative data through complementing them with quantitative data may be significant.

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### **Etik Beyannamesi**

Bu alıřmada ‘‘Yksekğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Arařtırma ve Yayın Etiđi Ynergesi’’ kapsamında belirtilen kurallara uyulduđunu ve ‘‘Bilimsel Arařtırma ve Yayın Etiđine Aykırı Eylemler’’ bařlıđı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hibirini gerekleřtirmediđimizi beyan ederiz. Aynı zamanda yazarlar arasında ıkar atıřmasının olmadıđını, tm yazarların alıřmaya katkı sađladıđını ve her trl etik ihlalinde sorumluluđun makale yazarlarına ait olduđunu bildiririz.

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