

‘Adolescents future prospect amid crises’

A qualitative study among Dutch adolescents on future prospects amidst contemporary crises



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Foreword

Presented to you is my master thesis: ‘Adolescents future prospects amid crises’. With this I am wrapping up my master Sociology: Contemporary Social Problems. This thesis wouldn’t be what it is right now if it weren’t for a few people involved in this process that I would like to thank.

First of all, I would like to all the participants that took part in the focus group discussions. Twenty-six adolescents gifted their time, vulnerability and openness. Without them, I would not have been able to conduct this research.

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Abstract

This qualitative study delves into the interplay of contemporary crises and adolescents' perceptions of their future prospects in the Netherlands. Through a nuanced exploration of external challenges and internal dynamics, the study shows the multifaceted ways in which young individuals navigate the uncertainties of their evolving lives. The impacts of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instabilities, housing challenges, and geopolitical conflicts are explored.

This study underscores the far-reaching implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left an indelible mark on mental well-being, educational pursuits, and social interactions among adolescents. Amidst these external pressures, the formation of self-concept and identity emerges as a crucial internal anchor, shaped by stability and disrupted by crises. The interplay between external disruptions and internal self-discovery underscores the role of personal attributes, such as resilience.

This study highlights the importance of stable environments, supportive communities, and comprehensive policies in fostering a sense of well-being and confidence in future trajectories. By embracing the complexities of adolescent experiences and addressing the intertwined factors of crisis and identity formation, this study provides a framework that shows the challenges of the current generation of adolescents.

Furthermore, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between contemporary crises and future prospects, providing insights that can inform policy, education, and support systems aimed at nurturing the well-being and confidence of adolescents as they navigate the uncertainties of the contemporary world.

Ethical statement

This study was approved by the Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University. The approval is filed under number 23-0387.

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem definition

Adolescents nowadays have to deal with multiple global crises: the aftermath of COVID-19, economic instability and ecological problems (Ataman, 2023). These three crises have an enormous impact on our society, including youngsters who are in a critical stage of their development. During the stage of adolescence, young people face biological, psychological, and social transitions. This stage marks the transition into adulthood, characterized by pivotal decisions that sculpt future trajectories (Settersten Jr & Ray, 2010).

The pandemic played a disturbing role in this as it led to abrupt disruptions to schooling, social interactions, and outdoor activities, contributing to heightened anxiety, altered dietary patterns, and shifts in social dynamics (De Figueiredo et al., 2021). These effects collectively influence adolescents' outlook on their future and their ability to pursue their desired life trajectories. It can potentially hinder their motivation, impact their academic and career aspirations, and contribute to a sense of uncertainty about their future prospects (Sools et al., 2022). Next to that, the instable economic situation the world also plays into this as shown through a study by Golberstein, Gonzales & Meara (2019), which found that economic changes and their effects on the mental health of young people are meaningful. Their mental health outcomes worsen as the economy weakens. As we are facing an economic crisis, we might see another increase in the mental health problems amongst youth (Fegert et al., 2020). This influences their future prospects by potentially shaping their outlook, decisions, and opportunities as they navigate the challenges posed by economic uncertainty. Furthermore, ecological crises can be seen as an impactful source of future uncertainty when looking at the interplay between environmental conditions, societal responses, and individual well-being.

Increased mental health issues, particularly among adolescents, has become a pressing concern in recent times. A study conducted by the Dutch Health Institute (RIVM, 2023) revealed that one-third of Dutch adolescents encountered psychological distress in 2022, which could be caused by the contemporary crises. The interplay between mental well-being and future prospects is a dynamic subject of investigation. The term "future prospects" refers to an individual's aspirations and expectations regarding the future, encompassing their evaluation of potential outcomes and opportunities (Blakemore, 2019). Notably, these expectations wield influence over mental health, and conversely, mental health influences the

perception of future prospects. This interrelation between wellbeing and future prospects, assumes further complexity during times of crises, amplifying its significance (Guessoum et al., 2020). In the face of multiple crises, adolescents' mental well-being and future prospects intertwine, underscoring the need for collective action.

1.2 Societal and scientific relevance

This study focuses on the future prospects of contemporary adolescents and their alignment with contemporary crises. The relevance of this study lies in the huge impact on society if adolescents have limited future prospects when it comes to being able to achieve what they want in their future. Adolescents represent the future workforce. Their success or failure in education, employment, and social integration can have a profound impact on society's economic and social development (Bodolica et al., 2021). A generation of adolescents sensing a limitation in their future prospects, can have long-term economic consequences for society as it may result in higher unemployment rates, increased dependence on social welfare systems and a decline in overall productivity (Heckman et al., 2006). A previous study by White (2017), shows the influence of crises on multiple generations of adolescents. The research delves into the concept of "crisis generations," which refers to cohorts of individuals who experienced a particular crisis during their formative years. It reveals a direct correlation between decisions concerning the future and these crisis-afflicted generations.

The linkage between uncertainty about the future and adverse mental health outcomes has been underscored by Keyes et al. (2014), with such uncertainty precipitating risky behaviors. Donovan & Halperin (2017) further elucidate the connection, highlighting that individuals with improved mental well-being tend to harbor a more optimistic outlook on the future. Additionally, an economic dimension punctuates this discourse, as mental health issues entail societal expenditures. Evidently, adolescent depression treatments incurred a cost of 37.7 million euros annually for Dutch society in 2018 (Bodden et al., 2018).

From a scientific perspective, this research delves into the nuanced mechanics underlying existing quantitative findings. Prior studies have discerned the influence of socio-economic status on educational opportunities, which, in turn, cast a long shadow on future prospects in terms of career trajectories and financial stability (Grasso et al., 2021; Scarpetta et al., 2010; Smit, 2020). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) underscores the positive correlation between higher education levels and improved future prospects, particularly concerning employment, income, and career options.

Conversely, lower education levels engender heightened uncertainty about the future, impairing prospects for a secure and stable tomorrow. In an endeavor to unravel this phenomenon, this study engages adolescents in homogenous focus groups, enabling them to collectively examine these intricacies within the context of their education levels.

1.3 Research questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how adolescents, aged 18-25, in the Netherlands perceive their future prospects, whilst facing contemporary crises. In order to answer this, there are four questions that are central during this study.

The main research question that this study aims to answer:

How do Dutch adolescents (aged 18-25) navigate their future prospects amidst the backdrop of contemporary crises?

In order to answer the main research question, it is important to explore which factors contribute to the future prospects of adolescents, according to adolescents. Therefore, the descriptive question is formulated as follows:

Are there factors that contribute to adolescents' confidence in their future prospects, as perceived by the adolescents themselves?

An explanatory question is formulated as it is important to study how adolescents experience the influence of contemporary crises on their lives. Therefore the following question is formulated:

How do adolescents experience the impact of contemporary crises on their lives?

The connection between future prospects and contemporary crises, as explored by Masten & Obradović (2006), accentuates the study's focus on the disruptive potential of crises, their role in perpetuating disparities, and the consequent molding of adolescents' opportunities.

Lastly, a policy question is formed, based on a tool used by my internship organization: Nederlands centrum Jeugd gezondheid (NCJ). They are in search of a tool that measures well-being amongst adolescents and want to adapt the Broad Prosperity Monitor (BPM) to do so.

Ever since the development of the BPM, it is commonly used to measure well-being in the Netherlands. The BPM serves as a tool to measure widespread well-being and its implications for present and future generations. The BPM assesses the distribution of prosperity across societal segments, evaluating its resilience to shocks and potential to absorb future disturbances (CBS, 2022). The concept of broad prosperity encapsulates not only economic growth but also the enhancement of population well-being. The eleven indicators used to measure broad prosperity amongst the Dutch society are: safety, environment, health, subjective well-being, work-life balance, housing, education, material prosperity, community involvement, social relations and jobs (Utrecht University, N.d.). However, the relevance of these indicators for adolescents has not been researched yet. It is therefore important for the NCJ to research what indicators are important to adolescents when it comes to their well-being. The well-being of adolescents plays a role in their future prospects, since adolescents with higher levels of wellbeing are more likely to experience better mental and physical health outcomes in the future (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001), it is important to be able to adapt this tool to this group of young people and design indicators that are adapted to their needs.

This leads to the following policy question:

What steps can be taken to optimize the Broad Prosperity Monitor for exploring the future prospects of adolescents?

The findings of this study will be used to formulate a policy advice on this question.

2. Literature

This chapter explores the theoretical concepts and theories that are relevant to this research. First, the impact of contemporary crises on the future prospects of adolescents are discussed. Second, factors associated with adolescents' future prospects will be examined.

2.1 Impact of contemporary crises on the future prospects of adolescents

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1975) accentuates the crucial significance of stability in the process of shaping one's identity as they transition into adulthood, which intertwines with the concept of future prospects. In essence, the theory underscores that a stable and supportive environment plays a fundamental role in fostering the establishment of a cohesive and well-defined sense of self during this critical developmental juncture, influencing one's future prospects. Consequently, when crises emerge during this formative period, they have the potential to exert lasting and profound effects on future prospects. This is due to the fact that these crises disrupt the foundational backdrop against which the intricate process of identity formation and self-discovery is taking place. The interplay between the challenges posed by crises and the ongoing task of forging an identity can lead to enduring consequences that resonate well beyond the immediate timeframe of the crisis itself, shaping individuals' future prospects as they navigate adulthood (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

Present-day adolescents confront a range of contemporary crises, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability, and ecological worries, all of which intersect with their future prospects. Notably, these challenges amplify the mental health predicament experienced by the youth. The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) in the Netherlands discerned a deterioration in young people's mental health during the pandemic, marked by a significant surge in reported anxiety and depression (RIVM, 2021). Studies further substantiate this, revealing heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and stress among young individuals in response to the pandemic (Loades et al., 2020; Orgilés et al., 2020). The interplay between stress and mental health is intricate, with elevated anxiety stemming from uncertainty and perceived threats (Selye, 1956). Furthermore, disruptions to daily routines and restricted outdoor access can have effect on dietary habits, potentially exacerbating mental health issues (Jacka et al., 2017).

This intricate relationship between contemporary crises, mental health, and future prospects underscores the multifaceted nature of adolescents' experiences during these critical phases of development. Due to the disruption in the life of adolescents', negative consequences can be predicted.

The above leads to the following expectation: ‘Adolescents in the Netherlands experience a negative influence of contemporary crises on their future prospects’.

2.2 Factors associated with the future prospects of adolescents

As adolescence is a critical period of human development, understanding the indicators that influence the future prospects of adolescents is crucial. Especially when it comes to promoting positive outcomes in various domains, such as health and social functioning (Wachs, 2014). There are other factors that are in some degree also associated with the future prospects of adolescents. Social support is one of them. Adolescents who experience a positive relationship with peers and adults tend to have more positive outcomes when it comes to their future prospects (Suldo et al., 2014). Next to that, health and well-being is also an important factor as adolescents who engage in healthier behavior, have more positive outcomes in adulthood (Lerner et al., 2009). Furthermore, career prospects are also closely tied with the future prospects of adolescents as this can lead to greater overall life satisfaction (Schneider et al., 2003). Last, resilience seems to be an important as it has turned out to be a critical factor in predicting positive outcomes when individuals face crises (Werner, 2000). These factors and their association with the future prospects of adolescents will be explored further.

2.2.1 Social support

Previous studies show a link between social support and the future prospects of adolescents. A systematic review done by Mishra (2020) has shown a positive relationship between social support and success in higher education. The review highlights the need for higher educational institutions to recognize the importance of social networks and social support, in order to help students who miss these support networks (Mishra, 2020).

One’s environment also plays a role. Research done by Masten et al., (2008) found that adolescents who grew up in unstable families and neighborhoods are more at risk of having hindered future prospects. It can lead to poor academic performance, behavioral problems and a lack of resources to pursue higher education or career goals.

Furthermore, research by Fuligni (2019) has shown that adolescents who engage in prosocial activities, such as volunteering and helping others, have better mental health, higher self-esteem, and stronger social connections. It is emphasized that parents, educators, and other adults can play a crucial role in fostering a sense of social responsibility in adolescents by providing opportunities for them to contribute to their communities and by modeling the

value of giving back. It is important to recognize and support adolescent efforts to contribute to society, as doing so can have positive effects not only for the individual, but also for their communities and society as a whole. This will thus lead to more confidence in the future.

Therefore it is expected that social support is associated with the future prospects of adolescents.

2.2.2 Well-being

An underlying mechanism into all of this, is well-being. Adolescents who have access to healthcare and are in good health during their childhood are more likely to have positive outcomes in adulthood (Spencer et al., 2018), which relates back to the social-economic status as people with lower SES have less access to healthcare (McMaughan et al., 2020). According to research done by Patel et al. (2007) mental-health is also closely related to this, where individuals who have access to mental health services and support are more likely to have positive outcomes in adulthood. Their research highlights mental health problems of young people as a global burden and therefore there is an urgency for addressing this issue more and more. The authors argue that mental health services should be made accessible to young people and that global attention should go towards this, especially when it comes to research, policy and practice (Patel et al. 2007).

Psychological factors have proven to be a hindering factor in the future prospects of adolescents (Anderson, 2018). Where a growth mindset leads to the belief that one's abilities and qualities can be developed through effort and persistence, it is believed that individuals with a fixed mindset, who believe that their abilities are predetermined, may be less likely to take risks and pursue ambitious goals (Dweck, 2017). According to Fredrickson's (2004) broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions can also influence future prospects. Emotions such as joy, gratitude and hope broaden one's mindset, which in turn build personal resources. It may increase an individual's creativity and social connections, which can be beneficial for pursuing their goals. Research done by Neff, Hsieh & Dejitterat (2005) argues that self-compassion also plays an important role in this. Self-compassion is the ability to treat oneself with kindness and understanding, when facing failure or difficulty. It can lead to greater resilience and well-being, which in turn can lead to more positive prospects (Neff, Hsieh & Dejitterat, 2005).

Therefore it is expected that well-being is associated with the future prospects of adolescents.

2.2.3 Career prospects

Previous research has shown that career prospects are important. Research done by Elman & O'rand (2004) shows a relationship between socioeconomic status, education and wage attainment. Individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to attain higher wages. Higher education is also associated with higher wages. The prospect of higher wages also leads to more positive future prospects. Scroth (2019) has done research on the expectations of Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, as employees in the workplace. They were brought up in a world of technology and are known for their digital literacy. The article suggests that employers should adapt their workplace culture and policies to meet the needs of Gen Z, such as offering flexible work arrangements, providing opportunities for skill development and career growth, and promoting a culture of transparency and inclusion. Employers that successfully attract and retain Gen Z employees are likely to benefit from their creativity, innovation, and drive (Scroth, 2019).

Luken (2020) argues that career development should take an innovative approach. He emphasizes the importance of self-directed learning and flexible career paths. Linear career paths and formal training programs are no longer effective in today's rapidly changing work environment. Instead, individuals should focus on developing a strong sense of career identity, which involves reflecting on one's interests, values, and skills, and actively seeking out learning opportunities to build a diverse set of experiences. The authors suggest that organizations can support self-directed career development by offering flexible work arrangements, promoting a culture of continuous learning, and providing resources for skill development and networking (Luken, 2020).

It therefore is expected that career prospects are associated with the future prospects of adolescents.

2.2.4 Resilience

An overlapping factor in this is resilience as this can influence how adolescents respond to the previously named factors.

According to Herrman et al., (2011) resilience refers to positive adaptation or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity. Resilience is not a fixed trait, but rather a dynamic process that can be developed through various strategies, such as social support, cognitive-behavioral therapy and mindfulness practices (Herrman et al., 2011). It therefore can be linked to the social capital theory. Social capital refers to features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate coordination and

cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1994). Social capital can serve as a protective factor, when it provides individuals with access to supportive relationships, cultural knowledge and community resources, which strengthens resilience (Ledogal & Fleming, 2008). Next to that, resilience can be seen as a form of social capital, as it involves the ability to draw on personal and social resources in order to cope with adversity. Individuals hereby draw their own strengths and the resources of their social environment to overcome adversity (Masten & Obradović, 2006). Obradović, Burt & Masten (2010) found that children who had high levels of social support from their families and peers, were more likely to develop resilience and perform academically as opposed to those who had low levels of social support.

Several factors have been identified as important for promoting resilience in adolescents. One key factor is a supportive social network, which includes family, peers, and other adults who can provide emotional support, guidance, and opportunities for positive experiences. Positive relationships with caring adults have been shown to buffer against the negative effects of stress and promote resilience in adolescents (Masten & Obradović, 2006). Self-regulation is another important factor in this. This involves the ability to manage emotions, behavior, and attention in response to stressors. Self-regulation can be learned and practiced through various activities such as mindfulness meditation, physical exercise, and cognitive-behavioral therapy (Masten & Tellegen, 2012).

Lastly, a sense of purpose and meaning in life has been linked to resilience in adolescents. This can involve the development of personal values, goals, and a sense of identity, which can provide a sense of direction and motivation in the face of adversity (McCabe, Cunningham & Brooks-Gunn, 2004).

Therefore it is expected that resilience is associated with the future prospects of adolescents.

3. Methods

In this chapter, the methods of this research are discussed. First, the study design will be explained, with an emphasis on the focus groups. Secondly, the participants are introduced and it is described how they were recruited. A description of the data analysis will be discussed after that. Finally, the reliability and validity will be extended on.

3.1 Qualitative research

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to delve into how adolescents perceive their future prospects amidst contemporary crises. Qualitative research offers a nuanced exploration of adolescents' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, revealing insights and mechanisms that quantitative research may overlook (Mack et al., 2005). The aim is to engage directly with adolescents to comprehend their perspectives deeply, making focus group discussions the preferred method for data collection. This is a qualitative research tool, used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants viewpoint (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Focus group settings allow for interaction and discussion between participants, which can help to uncover a range of perspectives and insights that might not be discovered through surveys or individual interviews (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020). Focus group discussions can also be used to gain a more nuanced understanding of the experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of adolescents. It might also uncover factors and mechanisms that are not always obvious through quantitative research (Mack et al., 2005). Compared to interviews, focus group discussions can also provide diverse perspectives, which can then lead to synergy, with participants expanding upon each other's perspectives, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject (Acocella, 2012).

During the data collection, a topic list was used to guide the conversation. The topics within this list were derived from the theoretical framework. Questions could be modified or omitted during data collection, depending on the flow of conversations with the adolescents. At times, the adolescents spontaneously addressed the questions before they were even posed.

3.2 Participants and access

The target population for this study encompasses Dutch adolescents within the ages of 18 to 25. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2022), this group made up 8.92 percent of the entire population in the Netherlands in 2022.

Aiming for six to eight participants per focus group, as is the ideal group size according to Hennink, Hutter & Bailey (2020), this study organized six groups across varying levels of education. This approach fosters a sense of safety and homogeneity among participants, enabling them to candidly share their experiences. Grouping participants based on their education level enhances their comfort in discussing educational matters, thus enriching the data (Krueger, 2014). When participants share similar educational backgrounds, they may feel more at ease discussing their experiences and perspectives with others who can relate to their knowledge and educational level. This sense of belonging and shared understanding can promote a supportive atmosphere where participants are more likely to openly share their thoughts and feelings (Fishbein & Azjen, 1977).

The participants within this study were currently getting a secondary vocational education, a higher professional education or an university education. These are the three main types of post-secondary education within the Netherlands. The characteristics of these educational types vary. Secondary vocational education is a form of vocational education and training that is aimed at providing students with the practical skills and knowledge required to work in a particular field. Higher professional education is a form of post-secondary education that is aimed at providing students with the practical and theoretical knowledge required to work in a particular profession. University education is a form of post-secondary education that is aimed at providing students with the theoretical and academic knowledge required to work in a particular field or pursue academic research (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2020).

The adolescents were recruited through different channels, including distributing posters, via email, social media, schools, student associations, and personal connections.

While recruiting of University-level participants students posed fewer challenges, a key figure sampling approach was eventually adopted for secondary vocational and higher professional education due to difficulties in reaching these groups. Teachers who teach at these levels were contacted, to ask if they could share the study or if there was a possibility to do the focus groups in their classroom.

Eventually, it was decided that a minimum of three participants per group would be sufficient in order to still go through with the study. According to Stewart & Shamdasani (2014) creating a smaller group is a possibility if you have a homogeneous group.

The sample size of 26 participants was achieved through a combination of on-site and online focus groups, ensuring geographic reach while maintaining interaction effectiveness (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020).

Eight of the participants studied at the secondary vocational level. As it was hard to reach this group, these focus groups will be held at the scene of a school. The respondents, divided into a group of five and a group of three, are in the same class and therefore have the same educational background.

Eight of the participants were getting a higher professional education. Two of them attended the on-site focus group at the NCJ. The other 6 joined an online focus group.

The other ten participants were getting an education at a University. Two participants took part in the on-site focus group at the NCJ. The other Eight participants were present in an online focus group.

The length of the focus groups was around 45-90 minutes. According to Morgan (1997) the ideal length of a focus group is between 60-120 minutes as this is enough time to balance the need of depth and richness of data. However, both the groups for the secondary vocational level were only 45 minutes as this is the length of their class. For the other focus groups, 60-90 minutes were aimed to be the guideline. The decision to have six focus groups was made as data saturation is mostly reached after 4 to 8 focus groups (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

3.3 Data analysis

Thorough transcription of focus group discussions formed the foundation of data analysis. The transcribing was done non-verbatim, as the goal of this research is to focus on the key items as named by the participants.

Using Nvivo, the coding process followed a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. Inductive coding began by identifying specific observations and gradually uncovering themes, while deductive coding integrated theoretical framework concepts to structure the analysis (Soiferman, 2010; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The resulting topic list guided the conversations, which were adapted based on participants' interactions.

An iterative Grounded Theory process followed and involved open, axial, and selective coding, allowing for the development of a comprehensive theory grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Soiferman, 2010; Bryman, 2016). During the open coding process, all the transcripts were thoroughly read and labels were placed at the most relevant text fragments of this research. According to Bryman (2016), these labels describe the meaning of the contents of the text fragment. After that, axial coding was used, in which the labels were revised. The labels that belonged together got an overarching code (Bryman, 2016). The last step in the process was selective coding, in which all the codes were compared

and connections and relationships between them were explored. Selective coding involves a systematic process of constantly comparing and contrasting data to refine and clarify the core category (Bryman, 2016). A second researcher did go over the codes and approved them.

3.4 Reliability and validity

Ensuring reliability and validity is crucial in scientific research.

Reliability refers to the consistency and reliability of research findings over time. Generated answers should be independent of chance as much as possible (Fraenkel, Warren & Hyung, 2012). To ensure reliability in this study, it is extensively described how this research is conducted and what choices are made with regard to the research methodology. The list of topics used in conducting the interviews has been added to appendix A. In this way, an attempt was made to ensure that other researchers can conduct the same research. Although a relatively small group of adolescents was recruited to participate in this study, the transferability of the results can be addressed by providing a description of the context. This is also known as a 'thick description' (Bryman, 2016). This has been responded to by providing a clear description of the context in which this research occurs. In this way, researchers who want to generalize the results to another situation can judge whether this is possible. When it comes to reliability, objectivity is also an important factor. However, research cannot be completely objective. As a researcher, you always have an influence; after all, you have your own interests, norms, and values (Bryman, 2016). However, objectivity will be taken into account as much as possible by taking the story of the adolescents in each focus group and each interview as a starting point. The researcher will direct the conversation as little as possible.

Validity refers to the accuracy of the research findings. It is concerned with the credibility and authenticity of the findings. The important factor in ensuring validity is the measurement instrument. A measurement instrument is valid when it measures what is supposed to be measured (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020; Krueger, 2014). In order to ensure this, two different focus groups are held for each level of education, leading to a total of six focus groups.

4. Findings

The following section describes the findings of the data collection, which aims to answer the research questions. It examines the future prospects of adolescents in the Netherlands, aged 18-25, and explores the connection with contemporary crises.

The data collected from the study revealed several themes that are crucial to the participants' future prospects. These themes will be elaborated upon in this section.

4.1 Contemporary crises

4.1.1 COVID-19

COVID-19 was an emerging theme during this study, as it showed to have a profound impact on the lives of the respondents as it came back as a theme in all the conversations that were held. Even though the pandemic might be over and there are no longer any safety measures in place, the respondents still struggle with the impact of it on their lives. One participant voiced the disruption experienced by many adolescents during the pandemic as follows:

“I feel like part of my youth is missing.” – (respondent 5, secondary vocational level)

This specifically applies to the age group of the participants in this study, as missing part of one's youth is different for adults who experienced the pandemic.

Another participant observed increased vigilance and caution that has become prevalent in society:

“Since Corona, everyone has to tread lightly. Everyone reacts impetuously to each other.” –
(respondent 3, secondary vocational level)

These comments were confirmed by most of the respondents and show the impact that COVID-19 and the safety measures related to it, effects the lives of these young adults and society. Their behaviors and surroundings have changed and even though the pandemic is over, their struggles are not.

4.1.1.1 Increasing mental health problems

COVID-19's stresses were intertwined with its impact on mental health. Participants recounted their own and their friends' heightened struggles with depression during the pandemic:

“I have friends who, especially during the coronavirus period, have mentioned experiencing more difficulties with their depression” – (respondent 23, university education)

This underscores the impact of the pandemic on mental well-being, with individuals reporting increased struggles with mental health conditions.

Another participant described the profound change in their social behavior, stating:

“Since Corona, everyone has become socially withdrawn. I'm part of that too. I can't handle being around people anymore. I've always been a social person, but now I really don't feel like going into the city. It gives me genuine anxiety.” – (respondent 8, secondary vocational level)

This comment was voiced and supported by a great part of the respondents. It highlights the emergence of anxiety and social withdrawal as a result of the pandemic, further exacerbating the challenges faced by adolescents in their daily lives.

4.1.1.2 Study delay

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had repercussions on education, leading to study delays and a decline in motivation:

“After the COVID-19 period, everyone was down, everyone got burned out, and had no interest in school anymore. So yeah, I can see it in my friends and boyfriend that they are not attending school anymore” – (respondent 3, secondary vocational level)

In response to this, another respondent added:

“I'm really falling behind in school. I really didn't do anything during Corona, I would just lay in my bed all day.” - (respondent 7, secondary vocational level)

COVID-19's stresses were intertwined with its impact on mental health and therefore with its influence on the participants education.

4.1.1.3 Positive effects of COVID-19

While the COVID-19 pandemic has primarily been associated with negative impacts, some participants expressed positive experiences during this period:

“I actually experienced the quarantine period as a very nice time. Mostly because it brought a sense of peace, as you didn't have to do anything” – (respondent 18, higher professional education)

This is supported by other participants as they report a lot of stress during their studies and with other obligations:

“I also feel that there are always so many things to do, and there's always something you can do. I personally struggle with occasionally stepping back, not participating. It doesn't necessarily make me happier, and I notice that many people around me are constantly running, even with enjoyable activities, but it leads to more stress and depressive symptoms”
– (respondent 26, university education)

These positive insights underline the nuanced impact of COVID-19, showcasing the interplay of both adverse and beneficial consequences on adolescents' lives.

Overall, the COVID-19 theme underscores the profound effects of the pandemic on the lives and confidence of adolescents. From the loss of a significant part of their youth to increased mental health struggles, study delays, and contrasting experiences, these quotes provide a glimpse into the multifaceted impact of COVID-19 on the participants' current lives.

4.1.2 Economic crises

During the data collection it became clear that the respondents had concerns regarding their financial situation. Their concerns were primarily centered around inflation and the current Dutch loan system.

4.1.2.1 Inflation

Inflation's effect on participants' financial stability was a recurring theme, revealing its influence on housing costs and stress:

“I do indeed think that inflation could be one thing. You have to work again to pay your rent, which causes more stress.” - (respondent 1, higher professional education)

This comment underscores the financial pressures induced by inflation, with rising housing costs compounding the stress faced by adolescents. This was emphasized by others:

“The rent is getting more expensive.” – (respondent 2, higher professional education)

The comments highlight the increasing cost of rent, reinforcing the concerns related to inflation.

This also seems to be a cause for more concerns regarding the mental well-being of adolescents. A respondent stated:

“You are often obliged to live at home longer. And if your home situation is tense, then this impacts your happiness.” - (respondent 2, higher professional education)

These observations draw attention to the interconnectedness between financial stress, living conditions, and mental health, reflecting a complex interplay that influences adolescents' well-being and future prospects.

4.1.1.2 Loan system

Another significant theme that came into view during the data collection was the participants' apprehension about the student debts that they have. In the Netherlands there is a loan system for students, in which the government provides loans to facilitate educational and living costs. These loans have to be paid back after graduation. When asked about this impacting their perceptions of the future, one respondent expressed the negative sentiment towards the loan system:

"The loan system has made it (the future) a bit more negative, I must say. It's something that will haunt you in your future. And now with the interest added, that really sucks." –
(respondent 12, university education)

This statement reflects the belief that the loan system has negative consequences that will persist into the future, exacerbated by the recent inclusion of interest charges.

Criticism of the current loan system in the Netherlands was widespread among the respondents. Many voiced their discontent with broken promises made by the government regarding this system. Respondent 10 showed their dissatisfaction by stating:

“This year you suddenly have to pay interest on your student debt. That is unfair, because they (the government) promised it wouldn't be. You literally go to school to build up a debt

and then you go to work to pay off that debt.” – (respondent 10, secondary vocational education)

Collectively, these findings highlight the concerns expressed by adolescents regarding their financial situation. Participants acknowledged the potential influence of inflation on their financial stability, in particular with rising costs of rent. This can also be linked back to the Broad Prosperity Monitor, as this monitor is mainly focused on the financial wellbeing of people. This is thus also a relevant indicator for adolescents and their wellbeing.

Additionally, respondents expressed their worries about the long-term impact of their student debts on their financial future, as it leads to more restrictions regarding buying a house. One respondent even added that they think younger generations will skip ahead of them on the housing market as the loan system will be replaced in the near future:

“It is also a real problem that today's generation is exactly between two generations that do receive a basic grant. We will soon be financially behind the generation that will come under us for 5 years. And then you get a pitiful 1000 euros as compensation, which is not even half of the tuition fee. I just think that's very unfair.” – (respondent 24, university education)

The loan system works a bit different for students of the secondary vocational level, as they have to pay less tuition and they have no costs until their eighteenth birthday. However, they shared the worries of the other students:

“This year you suddenly have to pay interest on your student debt. Eventhough they promised you wouldn't have to. You literally go to school to build up a debt and then you go to work to pay off that debt. That's not logic, is it?” – (respondent 8, secondary vocational education)

These insights contribute to our understanding of the challenges faced by this specific group in securing their financial well-being in the future and their feeling of falling behind in life.

4.1.3 Housing crises

The housing crisis emerged as a significant concern for the participants, highlighting the interplay between financial instability, living conditions, and the broader challenges associated with securing housing. One of adolescents expressed their frustration about the situation, stating:

“Saving money to buy or rent a house, is simply not going to work” – (respondent 5, secondary vocational level)

This quote underscores the financial barriers that adolescents encounter when aspiring to secure housing, leading to heightened uncertainty and challenges in their quest for independence.

This theme also brought attention to the influence that their living conditions have on them and their mental well-being. A respondent explained this:

“You often find yourself obliged to live at home for longer. And if the home environment is not conducive, then you're not happy.” – (respondent 2, higher professional education)

This quote sheds light on the challenges faced by adolescents who are compelled to remain in unsatisfactory living conditions due to the lack of affordable housing options, once again due to inflation. Such circumstances can have detrimental effects on their well-being and their future prospects.

The housing crises also have implications for intergenerational dynamics and the expectations of familial support. One participant shared their parents' perspective, saying:

“For years, my parents have been saying: ‘we’ll keep the upstairs floor vacant. We have three children, the chance that one of them will need to come back and live with us is quite high, and as a parent, you have to consider the possibility that your adult children might come back to live with you because they have nowhere else to go. It’s actually quite sad’” - (respondent 19, university education)

This quote reflects the challenges faced by both parents and adolescents, with parents having to anticipate the potential return of their adult children due to housing difficulties.

In essence, the housing crisis intertwines with economic challenges, creating an intricate web of factors that impact adolescents' well-being and future prospects. Financial constraints, living conditions, and intergenerational dynamics all contribute to a heightened sense of uncertainty surrounding their housing situation and broader life trajectory.

4.1.4 War in Ukraine

The theme of the war in Ukraine emerged as a significant factor influencing the confidence in the future among the adolescents in this study:

"Another significant point that I also notice among people is the war in Ukraine. It creates a kind of stress point, like, how long until it reaches here? So, I think that also plays a role. I notice that many people are somewhat fearful of the future because there are quite a few things happening now that are not really positive" - (respondent 18, higher professional education)

This demonstrates the pervasive influence of geopolitical conflicts on the perceptions and anxieties of adolescents. The war in Ukraine serves as a source of concern and uncertainty, evoking worries about the proximity and potential spillover of conflicts.

All in all, the contemporary crises together form a cumulative impact on the adolescents. COVID-19 has an impact on their mental wellbeing and their studies. The economic crises has a big influence on how they see their future, with concerns due to inflation and their students debts. This leads, together with the current housing crisis, to uncertainty about their future living situation. The war in Ukraine, which had great influence on the current economic crises, also leads to a lot of uncertainty amongst the adolescents.

4.1.5 Ecological Problems

Amidst the array of contemporary crises, ecological concerns emerged as an additional dimension influencing adolescents' perspectives on their future prospects. While participants acknowledged the stress associated with ecological issues, they also expressed a sense of detachment and skepticism about their personal impact on the environment.

Participants recognized the presence of ecological problems and the stress they generate:

"For the environment, I think people do get a lot of stress from it. But it's more like it's a bit distant from us. We have little influence on it." – (respondent 12, university education)

This quote highlights the acknowledgment of environmental stressors and their potential effects. However, it also emphasizes a perceived distance between individuals and the broader

ecological issues, suggesting that while awareness exists, the perceived impact on personal lives might be limited.

A sense of skepticism emerged regarding the efficacy of individual actions in addressing ecological concerns:

"I feel like, I can do something, but it doesn't matter what I do. Because everyone continues to do things, so why should I pay attention to the environment?" – (respondent 6, secondary vocational level)

This perspective underscores a perceived futility in individual efforts to combat ecological problems, as participants expressed doubts about the collective impact of their actions. Incorporating these quotes into the broader context of the study's focus on future prospects reveals a nuanced perspective on ecological concerns. While participants acknowledged the stress associated with environmental issues, they also expressed reservations about their personal agency and the broader impact of their actions.

The theme of ecological problems intersects with the broader narrative of contemporary crises, contributing to adolescents' perceptions of uncertainty and concern for the future. While the ecological theme was not as extensively discussed as other crises, it nonetheless underscores the intricate web of challenges that shape adolescents' confidence and outlook.

4.1.6 Cumulative impact of Contemporary Crises

Collectively, the diverse range of contemporary crises – from the ongoing impact of COVID-19, economic challenges including inflation and the student loan system, the housing crisis, geopolitical uncertainties like the war in Ukraine and ecological problems, such as the climate crisis – exert a cumulative influence on adolescents' lives and future prospects.

The participants' narratives reveal the intricate ways in which these crises intersect and intertwine, shaping their experiences, anxieties, and overall confidence. The impacts of these crises are not confined to discrete categories but rather overlap and interplay, reflecting the complex reality that adolescents navigate.

In essence, the challenges posed by these contemporary crises intertwine and reverberate, further magnifying their effects and underscoring the need for a comprehensive understanding

of their combined influence on adolescents' perceptions of their future prospects. The next section delves into the internal factors that also contribute to shaping these perceptions.

4.2 Influential factors

4.2.1 Mental health

The theme of mental health emerged as a significant aspect impacting the future prospects among the adolescents in this study. The quotes from the participants provide insights into the challenges they face regarding their mental well-being and its implications for their overall outlook on the future.

Multiple participants expressed concerns about the mental well-being of young people, stating:

“I don't think the mental well-being of young people is necessarily very good. I think many young people are struggling in that regard, and their mental well-being is not always in the best state.” (respondent 1, higher professional education)

“I also see it (mental health problems) around me, many people who see a psychologist and people who have problems.” - (respondent 12, higher professional education)

4.2.1.1 Breaking taboos

Mental health problems were a recurring theme amongst the participants. Reflected in the conversation was the increasing openness, also illustrated by this next quote:

“Everyone goes to a psychologist, and everyone has mental problems. I hardly know anyone who isn't affected by it” - (respondent 17, higher professional education)

This quote reflects the increasing openness and willingness to discuss mental health issues among adolescents. It highlights the normalization of seeking professional help and the recognition of the prevalence of mental health challenges among their peers.

Another participant acknowledged the changing attitudes towards discussing mental health, stating:

“I also think that nowadays, you have more means to talk about it. For example, a few years ago, I wouldn't know how to talk about it with people. But now, because you see it more

around you, on Instagram, in the news, you know that it's good to talk about it and ask questions. And that's how you can support people, so to speak." - (respondent 13, higher professional education)

This emphasizes the growing awareness and accessibility of resources that facilitate open conversations about mental health and adds to the difference between adults and this group. Adolescents are more informed and encouraged to discuss their experiences, enabling them to seek support and contribute to a supportive environment.

4.2.1.2 High pressure amongst students

Another sub theme that emerged within the mental health theme is the high pressure experienced by students. Almost all students confirmed that they felt the pressure of their studies highly. One participant reflected on the constant demands and difficulties during their time as a student, stating:

"As a student you really just have to have a social life, you have to work on top of that, you just have to pass your studies and all of that nominally." – (respondent 1, higher professional education)

Additionally, the pressures associated with the student experience were highlighted by another participant who expressed:

"The pressure on students is so high. Bills, students working themselves into debt. Of course, there are students who have a debt because they want to party, but many use it solely to pay their bills and for textbooks that they don't even use. The expectations are too high, in my opinion" – (respondent 8, secondary vocational level)

This links back to the financial stress that was described before and these factors are interconnected with each other as it shows that the financial crisis adds even more pressure to the stress students already have.

4.2.2 Social support

The theme of social support emerged as one of the most crucial factors influencing the confidence in the future among adolescents in all of the focus groups. It is not necessarily linked to the problem of contemporary crises, but according to the adolescents it is a big help

within having future prospects. In the Broad Prosperity Monitor this theme comes back as ‘social contacts’, however the concept of social support covers a bigger surface.

When social support is absent, this can also negatively impact the mental health. The adolescents in all groups highlighted the significance of social connections and support networks in navigating challenges and enhancing well-being. One participant emphasized the importance of discussing their concerns with friends, stating:

"It does help to talk about it with friends. Knowing that I'm not the only one dealing with this." - (respondent 11, university education)

This reflects the supportive nature of friendships, providing a sense of validation and reassurance, as individuals realize they are not alone in their struggles and it shows how breaking taboos by talking about these struggles helps others to talk about it too.

Another participant highlighted the role of their partner in providing support, stating:

"He (my boyfriend) supports me a lot. He can be tough sometimes, but I need that. For example, if I don't feel like going to school, he motivates me to go." - (respondent 10, secondary vocational level)

This quote illustrates the instrumental support received from a significant other, who plays a motivating role in encouraging positive behaviors and actions.

The significance of social connections in personal development and future orientation was underscored by one participant, who explained:

"We are exploring who we are as individuals. And when you're exploring who you are as an individual, you also consider how others are as individuals and how you want to develop yourself. Where do you want to go? What experiences have you had? What does the future hold? And I believe that social contacts enable you to have those discussions. So, you're involved with each other. You talk about it together and have fun together. Contacts play a crucial role in that." - (respondent 1, higher professional education)

This respondent emphasized the role of social interactions in self-discovery, mutual support, and creating a positive and engaging environment with this.

However, while familial support was acknowledged, the understanding of stress and emotional experiences was found to differ. One participant expressed this as following:

“Luckily I have a mother that I can really fall back on. And not just in terms of social and mental support, but also financially, for example. So, if there really is something wrong or with my student debt, I can also partly turn to her with that, so to speak, and I think that also gives me some peace of mind. So if I'm really down and I couldn't buy anything, I can go to her. Or she can partially help me financially. I am also very grateful for my friends, but I mainly talk to them and they give me more mental and social support.” - (respondent 26, university education)

Another respondent added to this, saying:

"My parents are always there, and indeed, even financially, if there's something, I just have to send a message, and it'll be okay. But I do feel that they don't necessarily understand how stress feels for us. My mother would say, 'Well, then you should work more or graduate as soon as possible. Then you'll have a job.' And in that aspect, I find more support from my friends. So, it's a combination that is important because I know I can always turn to my parents, but I feel like they understand me less than my friends do." (respondent 25, university education)

These adolescents highlight the nuanced nature of social support, where different sources may fulfill specific needs. While parents provide consistent support, mainly when it comes to finances, the adolescents turn to friends when it comes to the emotional aspect, as other adolescents offer a deeper understanding of emotional struggles.

4.2.3 Resilience

The theme of resilience emerged as a significant aspect during the groups with university education and higher professional education, however this indicator does not yet play a role in the Broad Prosperity Monitor.

Resilience can be linked back to the contemporary crises, as it takes resilience to bounce back from setbacks. One participant highlighted the importance of resilience in navigating difficult situations, stating:

"But if you have resilience, it's easier to accept things you can't change and adjust things you can change. I think that plays a significant role (...) I think resilience is also related to emotion regulation, and many of us struggle with that " - (respondent 24, university education)

Another respondent added to this:

"Resilience is also how you learn to react to situations. You must also express discharge. Maybe that's more now, but talking about your feelings wasn't very normal in the past. And now sometimes not, because we are all very individualistic." - (respondent 26, university education)

This emphasizes the ability to bounce back from adversity and demonstrates how resilience enables individuals to accept the uncontrollable aspects of life while actively working towards modifying the controllable ones.

With this, the participant suggests that the capacity to effectively manage and regulate emotions contributes to resilience. It implies that individuals who experience difficulties in regulating their emotions may find it more challenging to develop resilience.

The importance of experiencing moments of failure and overcoming them was highlighted by another participant, who stated:

"Those moments of failure are also crucial for building confidence because you know that you can get through them. But if you encounter a failure and can't recover from it, well, then it's gone." - (respondent 2, higher professional education)

They emphasized the significance of experiencing setbacks and learning from them, as successfully overcoming challenges builds confidence and resilience. However, it also acknowledges that if individuals are unable to recover from failures, their sense of resilience may diminish.

4.2.4 Job opportunities

Having work is a big indicator in the Broad Prosperity Monitor, however the adolescents ranked this indicator low. This might be, because they are focused their job prospects rather than having work right now.

The theme of job opportunities emerged as a significant factor in adolescents' future prospects during the groups of all levels of education. However, their take on this was different. It is not yet clear if this is due to their level of education or if their field of study maybe plays an even bigger role in this.

A participant who pursued a secondary vocational level education program highlighted the advantage of working in the healthcare sector, stating:

"I think we do have an advantage being in healthcare. It can't be replaced by machines or robots." - (respondent 10, secondary vocational level)

This emphasizes the perceived stability and demand for jobs in the healthcare industry, suggesting a sense of confidence in future job prospects.

One participant, who pursued a higher professional education (HBO) program, also expressed confidence in their career prospects, stating:

"I do have job security with my teaching degree. That helps me. I know that with that, my partner and I will probably be able to buy a house if we both work full-time. I can imagine that if you're studying a program where job security is not so automatic, you would be more concerned about it." - (respondent 17, higher professional education)

This respondent highlights the perceived advantage of having job prospects and the sense of security it provides. The participant acknowledges that individuals studying programs without guaranteed job prospects may experience greater worries about their future employment.

Another participant from a higher professional education program expressed optimism about the abundance of job opportunities, stating:

"There are so many job chances that you can choose your own future. That gives you confidence." - (respondent 2, higher professional education)

This emphasizes the positive outlook regarding the availability of diverse career options and the freedom to shape one's future based on individual preferences and strengths.

In contrast, a participant with a university education expressed dissatisfaction with the practical relevance of their studies, stating:

"I've only had dry theory for four years. I've gained more from my part-time jobs than from my studies." (respondent 12, university education)

This quote highlights the perceived disparity between academic studies and practical skills development, potentially impacting job prospects and raising concerns about the applicability of their education in the job market.

Another participant with a university education shared their perception of average job prospects, stating:

"I have a fairly broad education, and I think my job prospects are average." - (respondent 11, university education)

This suggests a minimum level of confidence in future job opportunities based on their educational background. It seems that their field of study might be more important than the differences in the levels of education.

In summary, the interplay between external contemporary crises and internal, influential factors, such as mental health, social support, resilience, and job opportunities, collectively shape adolescents' perceptions of their future prospects. The alternation between stability and disruption, along with personal attributes like resilience and social networks, influences how adolescents navigate the challenges and uncertainties that lie ahead.

5. Conclusion and discussion

In this section the conclusion based on the results will be described. Next to that, the strengths and limitations of this research will be addressed. Lastly, recommendations for future research will be given.

5.1 Conclusion

The main question that was designed for this research is: *'How do adolescents, aged 18-25, in the Netherlands face their future prospects in light of contemporary crises?'*

Therefore this study starts with exploring how adolescents, aged 18-25, in the Netherlands face their future prospects. Previous research showed that adolescents are likely to have a negative outlook on their future due to contemporary crises, which are stressful events for adolescents (Compas et al. 2001). During the data collection it became clear that contemporary crises do affect how the adolescents face their future.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the lives of adolescents. The participants in the study expressed struggles with the pandemic's lingering effects on their daily lives, social interactions, and mental well-being. It also led to study delays for some participants, further contributing to their concerns about their future prospects. However, positive effects of the pandemic were also named as it allowed the adolescents to take a step back from their busy lives.

Their financial situation also plays a big role. Inflation and the student loan system were prominent themes within the economic crises category. Participants voiced concerns about the rising cost of living and financial stability, particularly related to the student debt burden. The economic challenges affected their mental well-being as well and influenced their decisions regarding housing and future financial planning. Linked to this, the participants expressed their worries about housing. The lack of affordable housing options and the resulting uncertainty about future living situations were significant sources of stress and anxiety for adolescents. The housing crisis had implications for their mental well-being, financial stability, and expectations of familial support. Some of the adolescents were also worried about geo-political conflicts in the world, especially the war in Ukraine. The conflict in Ukraine served as a source of concern and uncertainty for adolescents, impacting their perceptions and anxieties about the future.

Stability, both in personal circumstances and broader societal contexts, provides the bedrock upon which their self-concept is constructed. Disruptions, however, introduce dissonance, prompting a reevaluation of goals and aspirations.

Yet, there are influential factors when it comes to how adolescents perceive their future prospects.

First, it was expected that social support was a factor of influence, since Fuligni (2019) has shown that adolescents who engage in prosocial activities, such as volunteering and helping others, have better mental health, higher self-esteem, and stronger social connections. In line with what was expected from the literature, this was an important theme during the focus group discussions. Adolescents voiced that social support was one of the most crucial factors when it comes to their wellbeing. However, it is interesting to note that there's a difference between the support adolescents get from their peers, as this is mostly emotional support, and the support they get from their parents, as this is mostly financial and materialistic support.

Second, the literature showed that health and well-being could be a factor of influence as adolescents who have access to healthcare and are in good health during their childhood are more likely to have positive outcomes in adulthood (Spencer et al., 2018). Groups of all levels of education brought up the importance of their mental health on their future prospects. Where the expectation was that health and well-being played a role, the adolescents expressed during the focus group discussions that mental health had an greater influence on their wellbeing than their physical health has. This can be explained due to the fact that young people face less physical health problems than elderly people do. Next to that, mental health is a big theme amongst current adolescents.

A third expected factor was the influence of career prospects, as individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to attain higher wages. Higher education is also associated with higher wages. The prospect of higher wages also leads to more positive future prospects (Elman & O'rand, 2004). Respondents in higher professional education and university programs expressed a sense of advantage, perceiving better job prospects and increased confidence in their ability to secure stable careers. However, concerns were raised regarding the practical relevance of university education and the need for more hands-on experiences. Participants in secondary vocational education had mixed experiences, with some acknowledging the advantages of job security in certain industries while also expressing worries about limited opportunities and the need to constantly upgrade their skills. So this expectation turned out to be partly true.

Lastly, resilience was expected to be an influential factor as it can be seen as a form of social capital as it involves the ability to draw on personal and social resources in order to cope with adversity. Individuals hereby draw their own strengths and the resources of their social environment to overcome adversity (Masten & Obradović, 2006). However, only students with a university education and with higher professional education named resilience as an influential factor. It did not emerge as a theme during the focus group discussion with the students from the secondary vocational level.

Furthermore, a holistic approach that integrates external crisis management with internal self-discovery can empower adolescents to transcend the challenges of their time. By nurturing resilience, strengthening social bonds, and embracing change as a catalyst for growth, society can lay the foundation for a generation that not only endures crises but emerges from them with renewed hope and a steadfast belief in their ability to shape their own futures.

We can conclude the finding of an interplay between external crises and internal dynamics, underscoring their profound influence on adolescents' outlook on the road ahead. By acknowledging the challenges and fostering a nurturing environment, we can empower adolescents to navigate their way through uncertainty, ultimately paving the way for a brighter future.

5.2 Discussion

This research has multiple strengths and limitations. When looking at the strengths, the first that comes up is the concept of the focus groups. The focus groups led to great conversations between the adolescents. As the researcher, I barely had to step into the conversations as the respondents themselves led the conversations. The subject the participants addressed, were closely connected to the research question.

Another strength of this study was the fact that, as far as my knowledge goes, no one has ever looked into the Broad Prosperity Monitor in this way and due to this, the research findings provide valuable insights that can inform policy and decision-making.

However, this research also has some limitations.

First of all, it was difficult to recruit respondents from the secondary vocational level as there are only a small number of them in my network. In order to reach more respondents, I called multiple schools that teach secondary vocational students, I reached out to teachers within my network and I contacted a student's association within Utrecht that has members of this level of education. However, I did not have the effect I hoped for. The schools that teach

secondary vocational level were not willing to share the study amongst their students, as they were already overwhelmed by the number of research requests they got. The second limitation connects to this, as all respondents for the secondary vocational level were from the same class and were therefore in the same field of study, which makes this group homogeneous. It was planned to also interview two students from different schools with a different study background in order to refute this issue, but both of the respondents did not show up for the planned interview. This could have been prevented by sending more reminders and planning the interview at a place near their house.

Another limitation of this study connects to this issue as well. During the focus groups, respondents that signed up did not show up. This led to two focus groups with only two respondents. This could be because this research had respondents from the age group 18-25. Adolescents in this age often have other places to be at and have to choose where they are going to attend. However, a financial reward was promised as an incentive to participate in this study. Apparently, this did not motivate every initial respondent to show up.

Lastly, time was a limitation in this study. With only five months to design the study, collect the data and write the results and conclusion, some parts were a bit more rushed, whereas I would have liked to elaborate more on certain aspects such as recruiting a larger group of respondents from the different levels of education or holding in-depth interviews in addition to the focus groups. This made it impossible to get data saturation. However, this research was partly explorative as most research on the topic is quantitative.

5.3 Recommendations

In order to counter the limitations of this research or to expand this research, there are a few recommendations for further research.

Firstly, I would recommend future research into the influence of different fields of study. As this study showed limited influence of level of education on the future prospects of adolescents, it would be interesting to explore if different fields of studies do have influence. As I talked with students that specialize in health care and education, for example, it became clear that they have more trust in their future job and financial prospects than the students who specialized in fields like linguistics.

Secondly, I would recommend a longitudinal study that follows adolescents over an extended period to track changes in their confidence in future prospects. This will help identify the factors that influence changes in confidence levels over time and provide insights

into the long-term impact of various social, economic, and educational factors. It will also lead to data saturation as I have not reached that point yet.

Lastly, it would be interesting to conduct comparative studies across different age groups. This might lead to a better attendance from respondents and it will also give insight into the future prospects of different generations, which can be valuable in designing monitors such as the Broad Prosperity Monitor.

6. Policy advice

This study included exploring which factors of the Broad Prosperity Monitor are relevant to adolescents and which indicators are still missing. The respondents in this study were asked about this during the focus group discussion, by naming which elements are important to them when it comes to their future prospects and they were later asked to rank the 11 indicators of the Broad Prosperity Monitor from important to less important.

As stated in the literature, the Broad Prosperity Monitor can play a significant role in forecasting the future prospects of adolescents in the Netherlands (Rijpma et al., 2016). Based on the data collection, results and conclusions of this study, there are certain steps that policymakers can take to effectively utilize the Broad Prosperity Monitor for adolescents aged 18-25 in the Netherlands.

The first step is to acknowledge the differences between the age groups. It is important for organizations using the monitor, such as the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), to recognize the unique needs, challenges, and aspirations of different age cohorts. By understanding these distinctions, policymakers can adapt interventions and policies more effectively to meet the specific requirements of each group (Vidal et al., 2019).

The second step would then be to design questionnaires that capture the perspectives and experiences of different age groups within the adolescent population (Carvajal-Velez et al., 2023). In the case of my internship organization, Nederlands Centrum Jeugdgezondheid (NCJ), it would be advisable to develop a dedicated questionnaire specifically focused on measuring the future prospects of young adolescents aged 18-25. This questionnaire should encompass a range of indicators that are of particular importance to this age group as emerged during the focus groups as per my research. These include social support, mental health, career prospects, and resilience. Within this second step, some additional pieces of advice come into play. Firstly, it is desirable to adapt the data collection methods and approaches to align with the contemporary world in which adolescents navigate. This may involve incorporating digital platforms, online surveys, and interactive data collection methods to ensure that the Broad Prosperity Monitor remains relevant and accessible to the target age group (Thompson et al., 2021).

Secondly, it is important to include indicators that hold significance according to the perspectives and priorities of adolescents themselves. By actively involving adolescents in the design and selection of indicators, policymakers can capture the nuances and complexities of their experiences and aspirations more effectively (Kimbell, 2015). This may involve

considering indicators related to social support, mental health, career prospects, and resilience.

Thirdly, as per my research continuous monitoring of social support and mental health indicators is crucial. Adolescents' well-being is deeply interconnected with these factors, and policymakers must remain vigilant in tracking this. By regularly assessing social support networks, mental health services, and related factors, policymakers can identify emerging challenges and adapt their strategies accordingly.

Lastly, policymakers should create initiatives and interventions that address contemporary problems faced by adolescents. This involves staying aware of societal changes. By developing initiatives that directly tackle these challenges, policymakers can enhance the future prospects and overall well-being of adolescents in the Netherlands (Andersson & Mustard, 2005).

In conclusion, by following these steps, policymakers can effectively utilize the Broad Prosperity Monitor to forecast the future prospects of adolescents aged 18-25 in the Netherlands. By acknowledging the differences between age groups, designing tailored questionnaires, adapting data collection to the contemporary world, including relevant indicators, monitoring social support and mental health, and addressing contemporary problems, policymakers can gain valuable insights and develop evidence-based interventions to support the prosperity and well-being of adolescents in the Netherlands.

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Appendix A: Topic list

Fase	Topics	Vragen
Introductie		
	Respondenten op hun gemak stellen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wat wil je drinken? - Wil je een koekje? - Wat over mezelf vertellen
	Informed consent	
	Kennismaking met en tussen de Respondenten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wat is je naam? - Welke opleiding doe je? - Wat is je leeftijd?
Inhoudelijke fase		
	Vertrouwen in de toekomst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hoe zouden jullie vertrouwen definiëren? - Welke gebeurtenissen hebben ervoor gezorgd dat jij positief of negatief naar de toekomst kijkt?
	Hedendaagse crises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hoe denken jullie over jullie toekomst met de huidige crises zoals COVID-19, de economische crisis en de huizen crisis? - Op welke manier hebben deze crises invloed op jullie leven en toekomstplannen? - Welke hulpbronnen, zoals overheidsprogramma's of gemeenschapsinitiatieven, kunnen jullie helpen om de effecten van deze crises op jullie toekomst te beperken? - Hebben jullie nog zorgen of angsten over de toekomst met deze crises? Zo ja, welke?
	Factoren die bij kunnen dragen aan meer vertrouwen in toekomstperspectieven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wat/wie kan jullie helpen om meer vertrouwen in de toekomst te krijgen/om vertrouwen in de toekomst te behouden? - Wat/wie kan je belemmeren om vertrouwen in de toekomst te krijgen/om vertrouwen in de toekomst te behouden?
	Invloed van opleidingsniveau op toekomstperspectieven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wat zijn de voordelen en nadelen van jullie opleiding?

		- Hoe helpt jullie opleiding je om wel/geen vertrouwen te hebben in jouw toekomst?
	Brede welvaart monitor	- Welke indicatoren van de BPM zijn voor jou belangrijk? (ranking maken met kaartjes van indicatoren) - Welke factoren mis je nog?
Afsluiting		- Welke dingen die niet besproken zijn maar die volgens jou wel heel belangrijk zijn? - Wat vertel jij vanavond aan je vrienden over dit gesprek?
	Bedanken	

Appendix B: Informed consent letter

Titel: “Future prospects of adolescents related to their level of education”

Naam onderzoeker: Maritha Goedhart

Utrecht, 14/2/2023

Geachte heer/mevrouw,

Introductie

Middels deze brief willen we u toestemming vragen voor deelname aan het onderzoek over “Future prospects of adolescents related tot heir level of education”. Dit onderzoek heeft tot doel om te onderzoeken wat de toekomstperspectieven van adolescenten zijn, in de leeftijdsgroep 18-25, is en of dit gerelateerd is aan het opleidingsniveau. Hiermee willen we in kaart brengen welke factoren volgens de adolescenten een positieve bijdrage kunnen leveren aan het bevorderen van het toekomstperspectief.

Dit onderzoek is getoetst en goedgekeurd door de Facultaire Ethische Toetsingscommissie (FETC) van de Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen van de Universiteit Utrecht en voldoet aan de ethische richtlijnen.

Meedoen is vrijwillig en u kunt te allen tijde stoppen zonder dat u hiervoor een reden hoeft op te geven. Voordat u beslist of u wilt meedoen aan dit onderzoek, willen we u hieronder informeren over wat het onderzoek precies inhoudt en welke vragen u kunt verwachten.

Lees deze informatie rustig door en neem gerust contact op via het emailadres onderaan deze brief als u vragen heeft .

Opzet onderzoek

U neemt deel aan een focusgroep. Hierbij worden vragen voorgelegd in groepsverband. Afhankelijk van het gesprek zal dit 60-90 minuten duren.

Achtergrond onderzoek

Dit onderzoek focust zich op de toekomstperspectieven van adolescenten in de groep van 18-25. Er wordt onderzocht of hun perspectief op de toekomst gerelateerd is aan hun opleidingsniveau. De aanleiding voor dit onderzoek zijn de hedendaagse crises die invloed hebben op de mentale gezondheid van adolescenten en mogelijk ook hun toekomstperspectief. Er wordt in dit onderzoek gekeken naar welke factoren bij kunnen dragen aan een positief toekomstperspectief volgens de adolescenten, hoe adolescenten de invloed van hun opleidingsniveau op hun toekomstperspectieven ervaren en welke stappen er genomen kunnen worden om de brede welvaartsmonitor toe te passen in de voorspelling van de toekomstperspectieven van adolescenten.

Verwachtingen van u als participant

Van u wordt verwacht dat u actief deelneemt aan het gesprek binnen de focusgroep. Dit gesprek zal 60-90 minuten duren.

Voor- en nadelen voor u als participant

Naast de tijdsinspanning zitten er geen nadelen voor u als participant aan dit onderzoek. Het voordeel voor u is de beloning na afloop.

Vergoeding/beloning

Als dank voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek krijgt u een vergoeding in de vorm van een bol.com cadeaukaart van 15 euro.

Vertrouwelijkheid in verwerking van gegevens

Voor dit onderzoek is het nodig dat enkele van uw persoonsgegevens worden verzameld en gebruikt. Het gaat hier dan om uw naam, leeftijd en opleidingsniveau. Tijdens het uitwerken

van dit onderzoek, zullen deze gegevens geanonimiseerd worden. Uw eigen naam wordt dan niet meer gebruikt.

Al uw gegevens blijven vertrouwelijk. Alleen de onderzoekers weten welke naam u heeft. De onderzoeksgegevens zijn niet te herleiden naar u. Uw gegevens en privacy zijn tijdens dit onderzoek altijd beschermd en gewaarborgd.

Vrijwilligheid deelname

Deelname aan dit onderzoek is vrijwillig. U kunt op elk gewenst moment, zonder opgave van reden en zonder voor u nadelige gevolgen, stoppen met het onderzoek.

De tot dan toe verzamelde gegevens worden wel gebruikt voor het onderzoek, tenzij u expliciet aangeeft dit niet te willen.

Als u na het lezen van deze informatie besluit tot deelname gaat u akkoord door middel van het aanvinken van het vakje 'akkoord'.

Voor vragen of opmerkingen kunt u terecht bij:

M.goedhart1@students.uu.nl

Appendix C: Consent form

Hierbij verklaar ik de informatiebrief met betrekking tot "Future prospects of adolescents related to their level of education" gelezen te hebben en akkoord te gaan met deelname aan het onderzoek.

Dit betekent dat ik instem met:

- 1) deelname aan het onderzoek
- 2) verzamelen van mijn contactgegevens
- 3) verzamelen van bijzondere persoonsgegevens, namelijk:
 - Naam
 - Leeftijd
 - Opleidingsniveau

Deze gegevens worden geanonimiseerd bij het verwerken van de data.

Naam:

Datum:

Handtekening:

Appendix D: List of Respondents

	Level of Education	Age	Gender
Participant 1	Higher Professional Education	20	Female
Participant 2	Higher Professional Education	25	Female
Participant 3	Secondary Vocational Education	20	Female
Participant 4	Secondary Vocational Education	18	Female
Participant 5	Secondary Vocational Education	18	Female
Participant 6	Secondary Vocational Education	25	Male
Participant 7	Secondary Vocational Education	18	Male
Participant 8	Secondary Vocational Education	21	Female
Participant 9	Secondary Vocational Education	22	Female
Participant 10	Secondary Vocational Education	25	Female
Participant 11	University Education	21	Female
Participant 12	University Education	22	Female
Participant 13	Higher Professional Education	23	Male
Participant 14	Higher Professional Education	24	Female
Participant 15	Higher Professional Education	25	Female
Participant 16	Higher Professional Education	23	Female
Participant 17	Higher Professional Education	22	Female
Participant 18	Higher Professional Education	24	Female
Participant 19	University Education	23	Female
Participant 20	University Education	19	Female

Participant 21	University Education	23	Female
Participant 22	University Education	23	Female
Participant 23	University Education	24	Female
Participant 24	University Education	24	Female
Participant 25	University Education	24	Female
Participant 26	University Education	25	Female

Appendix E: Recruitment flyer

Gezocht:
Studenten voor een onderzoek over de toekomstperspectieven van jongeren

Waarom? Voor het afstudeeronderzoek van mijn master Sociologie wil ik met jongeren in gesprek over hoe zij hun toekomst zien.

Wat? Je gaat in een groep met 6-8 anderen met hetzelfde opleidingsniveau praten over jullie verwachtingen van de toekomst. Er zullen ondertussen vragen gesteld worden door de onderzoeker.

Wie? Studenten aan het mbo, hbo of de universiteit in de leeftijdsgroep van 18 tot en met 25 jaar.

Beloning: Je krijgt een bol.com bon of een bioscoopbon

MELD JE AAN

Scan de QR-code of klik op de link:
<https://forms.gle/Q1gsCq2Xj9eKzBV58>



Meld je aan voor maandag 27 maart

Voor vragen kan je mailen naar: mgoedhart@ncj.nl

Wanneer?:
Mbo: 6 april en 1 mei
Hbo: 11 april en 4 mei
Universiteit: 18 april en 8 mei

Waar?:

- **Optie 1** Fysiek: op het NCJ, Churchilllaan 11 in Utrecht
- **Optie 2** Online: Google Meet

Appendix F: Code book

Name	Description
Future prospect of adolescents	How do adolescents think about their future prospects.
Contemporary crises	The modern-day issues that adolescents have to face.
COVID-19	Pandemic with safety measures that impacted adolescents life's.
Increase of mental health problems	The impact of the pandemic on the mental health of adolescents.

Name	Description
Positive effects	The positive sides of the pandemic.
Study delay	The impact of the pandemic on the adolescents education.
Economic crises	The influence of the worlds current financial situation on the adolescents.
Financial stability	The importance of financial stability on the adolescents.
Inflation	The impact of inflation on the adolescents.
Student loan system	The impact of the loan system on the adolescents future prospects.
Housing crises	The impact of the current state of the housing market on the adolescents.
War in Ukraine	The impact of the war in Ukraine on the adolescents.
Influential factors	Factors that are associated with the future prospects of adolescents.
Job opportunities	The influence of job opportunities on the future prospects of adolescents.
Mental health	The influence of mental health on the future prospects of adolescents.
Breaking taboos	The impact of breaking taboos on the mental health of adolescents.
High pressure on students	The impact of high pressure on students for their mental health.
Resilience	The influence of resilience on the future prospects of adolescents.
Social support	The influence of social support on the future prospects of adolescents.