

## Perception of quality of life of Chilean secondary education students in the post-confinement context by Covid-19

### Percepción de la calidad de vida de estudiantes chilenos de enseñanza media en el contexto de post confinamiento por Covid-19

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research was to know the perception of the quality of life of a group of high school students from the Maule-Chile Region in times of post-confinement after Covid-19. This qualitative study is located within the interpretive phenomenological paradigm. A focus group approach was applied to students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade of high school in Talca, Chile, resulting in 40 subjects in total. The data is presented through a systematization matrix configured with from primary categories derived with from the theoretical framework, complemented with secondary categories that emerged from the data coding process as a product of applied content analysis. The results reflect the innumerable changes in the quality of life (QL) of the subjects, mainly provoked by the quarantine periods, and how the post-confinement has impacted the improvement of the various variables that make up the CV of secondary school students. In conclusion, it is necessary to promote the practice of physical and sports activity among in students, thus developing various skills that allow them to safely navigate the adversities that arise in the post-confinement stage.

**Key words:** Quality life, school, presence modality, physical activity, Covid-19, post-confinement.

### Resumen

El propósito de esta investigación fue conocer la percepción sobre la calidad de vida de un grupo de estudiantes de enseñanza secundaria de la región del Maule-Chile en tiempos de post confinamiento por Covid-19. El estudio es una investigación cualitativa y se ubica dentro del paradigma fenomenológico-interpretativo. Se utilizó la técnica de grupo focal, aplicado a estudiantes de enseñanza secundaria de cuatro centros educacionales de la ciudad de Talca-Chile, con un total de 42 sujetos participantes. Los datos se presentan a través de una matriz de sistematización, que se configura a partir de categorías primarias, que devienen del marco teórico, complementadas con categorías secundarias que emergen a partir del proceso de codificación de los datos, producto del análisis de contenido aplicado. Los resultados dan cuenta de los innumerable cambios en la Calidad de Vida (CV) de los sujetos, provocados principalmente por las cuarentenas y en cómo el post confinamiento ha impactado en la mejora de las diversas variables que configuran la CV de los estudiantes de secundaria. Se concluye que es necesario promover la práctica de actividad física y deportiva en los estudiantes, desarrollando diversas competencias que les permitan afrontar con mayor seguridad las diversas adversidades que surgen en la etapa de post confinamiento.

**Palabras clave:** Calidad de vida, escuela, presencialidad, Covid-19, post-confinamiento.



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## Introduction

The year 2020 surprised us with a new disease that was similar in structure to the well-known SARS-CoV and Mers-CoV. It left the world in a state of confusion about how to prevent the disease in order to control the pandemic (Rahman & Sathi, 2020). This virus originated at the end of 2019 in Wuhan, China, where it began as a small outbreak. However, due to its great contagious capacity, it managed to spread worldwide. Given the rapidity of the contagion, governments and health entities ensured that the population entered a period of quarantine during the times of highest contagion (Hadi et al., 2020).

Confinement, caused by generalized quarantines, is an intervention applied at the community level when measures have been insufficient to contain the contagion of disease. It consists of a state where strategies are combined to reduce social interactions such as social distancing, mandatory use of masks, restriction of movement schedules, suspension of transportation, border closures, among others (Cetron & Landwirth, 2005; Fuentes et al., 2021; Vásquez et al., 2020; Wilder-Smith & Freedman, 2020). According to Erades and Morales (2020), it implies restrictions in terms of mobility and movement of people, which produces negative effects such as aggressive reactions from behavior or sleep disturbances, leaving detrimental side effects on health such as addictive behaviors, social isolation, decreased sun exposure, weight gain and a considerable decrease in physical activity levels (Bustamante et al., 2022; Etchevers et al., 2022; Faúndez et al., 2023). These effects are more indirect since they are more difficult to quantify, and their onset is slow and silent (Alvites, 2020).

Quarantine is defined as the separation and restriction of movement of persons exposed to an infectious disease but with no symptoms, to observe whether they develop the disease (Escobar, 2021). The list of problems visualized in the pandemic's development is extensive. However, one aspect that goes unnoticed is the impact of confinement on children and adolescents' physical and mental health (Carvacho et al., 2021; Díaz & Donoso, 2022). Although the pandemic has not mostly harmed the child population, this crisis is detrimental to their well-being, which in some cases is increased by mitigation measures such as restrictions on coexistence with other children, which could unconsciously cause more harm than benefits (United Nations, 2020).

Several researchers agree with the complexity of establishing a definition for Quality of Life (QoL), usually varying the terms used, such as self-perception of health, subjective well-being, degree of satisfaction, and condition of life, among others (Higuita et al., 2015; Oyanedel et al., 2015; Sabando & Albala, 2019; Urzúa & Caqueo-Urizar, 2012; Valdés et al., 2018). According to Muntaner (2014), QoL is understood as a holistic and multidimensional concept that combines subjective elements referring to the degree of satisfaction that the person experiences in relation to the

coverage of their needs and objectives in accordance with the living conditions that the environment offers them.

One of the dimensions of QoL is mental health in adolescents and the psychosocial factors associated with it, since they are relevant in determining the perception of it (García, 2005; Madrid, 2014; Martínez, 2013; Ministerio de Salud, 2020; Ravens et al., 2008). In this sense, according to Guzmán et al. (2021), less social interaction could increase some manifestations such as depression, stress, and anxiety.

For their part, Bairero (2018) and Huyhua et al. (2020), argue that the psychological impact caused by mental exhaustion, virtual classes, confinement, and the impossibility of relating, directly affect mental well-being and, therefore, the stress in students' VC is key in terms of mental health deterioration.

It is possible to observe that the Covid-19 pandemic changed the environment since the environment in which the individual develops in his or her daily life is also a determinant of QoL. In this line, the population, in general, had to undergo closures of educational establishments, confinement in homes, and also social distancing, which caused certain changes in the levels of physical activity and exercise, which harms the physical and mental health of individuals (Ballena et al., 2021; Bravo et al., 2020; Celis et al., 2020; Vásquez et al., 2022).

There is scarce literature that addresses this line of research associated with defining the impact of QoL of the pandemic and periods of confinement from the student's perspective. Consequently, assigning a value that includes all aspects, or deciding on a strategy to understand how students perceive it, is challenging. In this sense, the objective of this study focuses on analyzing the perception of QoL of a group of high school students from a region of Chile in times of post-confinement because of Covid-19.

## Method

This study was inscribed under the interpretative phenomenological paradigm (Duque & Granados, 2019), in which the experiences of students regarding the dimensions of QoL are investigated, approached from the qualitative methodology that attempts to understand and interpret reality in its natural context, as the participating subjects in the contexts understand it studied (Rodríguez et al., 1996). 42 students from 1st to 4th year of high school from four schools in Talca-Chile participated in the research. The technique used for data collection was the focus group, which allows the investigation of the accounts of actions through the opinion of the interviewees (Hamui & Varela, 2013). The focus group technique was chosen since it is advantageous, with attention to the phenomenological support of the study, as stated by Flores (2014) when pointing out that the social actor is rescued as a fundamental protagonist, recovering the interpretations and meanings that reality has for people. That is, to

understand not only what the subjects investigated think about the phenomenon, but how and why they think what they think, emphasizing interaction (Cypress, 2018; Sim & Waterfield, 2019).

The focus groups were developed in June 2022, based on questions validated by expert judgment, elaborated under a systematization matrix based on dimensions obtained from the review of the referential framework (Gibbs, 2013). Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes, and two to three students from each level per establishment participated in each interview. The participation of the students was through an open call and voluntary participation. The educational establishments belong to public administration (1), private subsidized denominational administration (2), and private subsidized secular administration (1).

For data processing, a content analysis was chosen using an inductive logic of categorization (Almonacid &

Almonacid, 2021). Before data collection, the researchers obtained written informed consent from the institution to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, taking privacy into account and emphasizing voluntary participation. The subjects were informed about the purposes of the research, and their authorization was requested to record the interview to safeguard the study's ethical aspects, considering the Helsinki Treaty's guidelines.

## Results

The following matrix (Table 1), has a mega-category which focuses on students' perception of their quality of life in post-confinement times. Two primary categories emerge from the data analysis, namely: "Impact of post-confinement" and "Educational impact of post-confinement", from which six secondary categories emerge, according to the coding of the primary categories. Each story has a nomenclature to identify the subject and interview number.

Table 1. Systematization matrix

| Mega category  | Primary categories                  | Descriptor  | Secondaries categories |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Perception of high school students, regarding their quality of life in times of post-confinement by Covid-19 | Post confinement impact             | Category that describes the post confinement effects              | Quality of life        |
|  |                                     |   | Psychological aspects  |
|  |                                     |   | Social relationships   |
|  | Post confinement educational impact | Category that describes the perception of the learning experience | Sociability            |
|  |                                     |   | Presence modality      |
|  |                                     |   | Learning               |

Source: author's elaboration.

### Analysis by category

Primary category: post-confinement impact. Secondary category: quality of life

This category exposes the results referring to the QoL area, composed of different variables, among which are healthy living habits, health condition, amount of physical activity performed, and the student's perception in general areas within the post-confinement context, as exposed in the following accounts:

"I think that now my quality of life is better, because before I had to be locked up all the time eating, going to bed late, getting up late, and by changing that routine, coming to school, eating well and all that, I can say that I feel better, I have more energy" (S10, JC).

"I went from being a sedentary person to being a person who does physical activity, it is a big change for me since I did not do any sports, and now I exercise every day" (S6, LA).

In this category, it is possible to appreciate the different factors that affect the QoL of students, who state that they perceive an improvement in it when expressing that they

feel happy and satisfied with a positive approach to their routine and health condition. The younger participants state that they have improved their healthy habits, such as rest and nutrition, thanks to the possibilities and schedules of the educational centers. In addition, they state that due to the physical spaces they can access, and the extra programmatic activities corresponding to each establishment, they are more willing to engage in physical activity, thus improving their perception of QoL.

Primary category: post-confinement impact. Secondary category: psychological aspects

The psychological aspects are related to the sensations and emotions perceived by the students as a result of the post-confinement context, such as the return to in-person attendance, the new workload, and the influence of stress and anxiety. This is shown in the following accounts:

"(...) now there are more things to do, it is not so much lying down, now there are more things, one's head is still in different parts, the anxiety is not so much, one is more focused, one's mind is not so distracted, it is occupied with other things" (S8, JP).

"At the beginning, I was a little nervous before coming because two years had passed, there were several changes in us, adolescence, things that we thought about at home, but suddenly I came back here, and it passed right away, a week later I was back to normal, so I feel good about myself" (S1, JC).

From the students' perspective, we can perceive both a negative and positive impact on the psychological aspects produced by the return of in-person attendance. In the first instance, they presented negativity because they felt more exposed and pressured when committing to work since they were distracted doing other things, which generated anxiety and stress. On the other hand, the positive aspects were evident shortly after returning to the classroom, presenting almost immediate normality, since being around more people generated new bonds and created more of a purpose to attend classes.

**Primary category: post-confinement impact. Secondary category: social relationships**

Social relationships are connected to post-confinement experiences regarding interpersonal relationships in their daily lives. This category seeks to determine how these experiences impact the reality of the students as a result of the measures of social restriction, isolation, friendships, and family life. Based on this, the interviewees state the following:

"(...) now in post confinement my family relationships have improved, there has always been communication, but now there is kind of physical communication, more face to face even with my own family before I did not like to go down to share" (S7, LR).

"(...) before I was locked up every day and did not get together with anyone, now I go out more, but my circle is still small" (S10, LR).

The students indicate that their family relationships have improved since post-confinement. However, they indicate that living together was an abrupt experience full of difficulties, as well as the mandatory use of masks and social restriction measures. They comment that when they return to their routines, they are reunited with their friends, and at the same time, they have their loved ones close to them, so they value social relationships.

**Primary category: educational impact of post-confinement. Secondary category: sociability**

The sociability category is related to the post-confinement experiences of students around their educational community and how interpersonal relationships in educational settings influence their CV. It is related to how they experience the transition from virtual to in-person classes, and the hierarchy in the classroom. This situation is exposed in the following accounts:

"I now isolate myself from my classmates. That is the change I had felt the most before. I used to get together

with more classmates, and now I am lucky with two or three because when I was locked up, I did not have much of a social life" (S10, LR).

"(...) going back to the classroom and socializing with people made me afraid and panicked because I did not know how to establish a conversation with someone and generate friends" (S1, LA).

"I was happy because I missed going back to class, seeing classmates, meeting some new ones and all that, but most of all, I was happy to see people again" (S3, LR).

From their accounts, it is understood that they need to spend time with classmates in the same space, as they declare it to be a stimulant in their CV. It makes them happy to share at recess and talk about their situations. Initially, feelings of fear and anxiety arose due to the unknown; a group of the interviewees declared facing problems socializing because they experienced a change of establishment during online classes, so they did not know their new classmates.

**Primary category: educational impact of post-confinement. Secondary category: face-to-face attendance**

The face-to-face category is related to students' post-confinement experiences and their liking to continue in classes in a face-to-face manner. For the students, having more activities in their routine increases their participation and attention in class, improving their concentration, as shown in the following testimonies:

"(...) In online classes, you were in class, but you were still sleeping, and you learned almost nothing of what you learn now, or you left the computer there and did something else; I would play games, for example, but not now, now you pay attention and learn what is happening to you" (S5, JC).

"(...) I did not like being locked up at home, because in the end every day was a routine and going back to school, I still liked it, because I did well at school" (S10, LA).

In this category, it is possible to appreciate different factors that influence the willingness to continue in on-site classes. Among them, the importance of seeing their friends, being in constant movement, having to get up to go to classes, generated nostalgia which increased their desire to return to their learning environment, where a climate of tranquility is generated so that they can distract themselves and overcome their emotional problems. They expressed their desire to continue with the face-to-face modality.

**Primary category: educational impact of post-confinement. Secondary category: learning**

This category corresponds to how high school students learning is benefited or harmed in a post-confinement context where they went from an online to a face-to-face modality. In this regard, the subjects indicate that:

"(...) last year I learned nothing about mechanics, nothing at all, this year, I am learning because I saw it in the workshop, but when I arrived at the workshop, I knew nothing. The theoretical things we saw were useless to me because mechanics theory is not very useful; it is better to practice" (S10, LR).

"(...) before, one was in the online classes and did not do anything or was busy with other things and only answered the teacher when she was named in the roll call or to say goodbye" (S12, LA).

As a result of the stories collected, it is possible to show how significant face-to-face classes are to learning when compared to online classes, where participation was null, making the process even more complex. The students express that they learned more easily in the classroom because they concentrate on their ideas and are forced to participate in all the activities.

## Discussion

Covid-19 disrupted, in many ways, people's daily lives, especially their social dynamics. Staying at home, although it was fundamental to avoid massive contagion, did not prevent difficult situations within households. As stated by Montero et al. (2020) and Macías and Aveiga (2021), confinement caused some changes in families from the point of view of cohabitation, roles, and challenges of a stressful situation. In other words, home became a scenario where the family was forced to live together for longer periods than usual, since the space as a whole was transformed into a classroom, office, study and recreation room, in addition to what was traditionally used for. Once this stage was overcome, the return to activities in a similar way as before the confinement began gradually, bringing with it a process of adaptation that required attention, since changes were generated in the way of relating and, at the same time, in people's ways of teaching and learning (Guzmán, 2022).

The first category that emerges in this study was related to the impact that post-confinement has had on different spheres, and, in light of the participants' accounts, emphasis is placed on psychological aspects and social relations, i.e., substantive components of QoL, which allows us to have an approximation of their perception of this phenomenon.

According to the ample evidence regarding the modification of physical activity habits, and alterations on QoL and health in general during confinement (Caballero et al., 2021; Castañeda et al., 2020; Celis et al., 2020; García et al., 2021; López et al., 2020; Pérez et al., 2021; Reyes et al., 2022; Ruiz et al., 2020), it is possible to indicate that this is consistent with the findings of this study since most of the participants report this situation. However, the post-confinement condition has allowed them to perceive some improvement in their QoL, since positive progress is observed in the control of sleeping hours, more balanced eating, and improvement in social relationships. Results

were close to those reported by Oyanedel et al. (2015), where he indicates that 70% of Chilean children and adolescents are satisfied with their life in general aspects. That is, the reencounter with social life and academic activation allows glimpsing a rapid recovery of what was once seen to have declined (Castañeda et al., 2022).

Guzmán et al. (2021) presented results comparing self-reported QoL in pre-pandemic contexts, in contrast to the situation of confinement, applying a questionnaire containing 36 questions related to people's health. The results showed that those evaluated presented a decline in their QoL, with the greatest impact on the emotional role and general health, since the relationship between emotional intelligence and QoL is significant and, at the same time, they depend on each other (Muñoz & Yovera, 2022). However, the psychological aspects of the students interviewed varied; they did not only go in one direction; although most indicated feeling happy, there were reports of having suffered stress and anxiety. It can be interpreted that those students who indicated that were physically active, perceived an improvement in their CV in terms of mental health and control of their emotions. This is consistent with the findings of different authors such as, Bravo et al. (2020), Mastrantonio and Coduras (2020), Boraita (2021), Díaz et al. (2021), Saldías et al. (2022) and Jiménez et al. (2022).

On the other hand, the second primary category associated with the educational impact of post-confinement addressed aspects related to students' sociability, the return to face-to-face classes, and learning. According to Fernández and Peña (2022), the return to face-to-face classes in the post-confinement context would be a challenge but also an opportunity, since the research subjects expressed dislike for online classes. This coincides with the results of Ojeda et al. (2020), Castillo et al. (2021) and Faúndez et al. (2023), where students sit for a set time in front of the screen and, in some cases, they do not have a computer device. This context caused the students to have null participation, according to the subjects, and as a result, they did not feel they had good learning experiences in classes. According to Serrano et al. (2022), attending face-to-face classes at the educational establishment provides not only learning of conceptual and procedural content but also attitudinal content. This is reflected in the information collected, where the students state that they have a better perception of their learning and better CV in the post confinement stage.

From the point of view of the educational approach, the main agents that will intervene in this process will be the teachers. As Guzmán (2021) states, education is faced with the challenge of reconstruction and redefinition since the paradigmatic change that this transition entails will require rethinking the roles of all actors. Along the same lines, Arciniegas (2022) indicates that it is not possible to return to the school of the past, to the traditional and decontextualized school, but that it is imperative to

generate other forms of teaching intervention, where the view is broader and more generous. Cardini et al. (2020) indicate that teachers and families should help in emotional containment. The dynamics that should be applied to cope with the effects of post-confinement and coexistence in the educational institution require pedagogical support with activities, according to each situation, that help in the development of emotional intelligence.

Undoubtedly, the challenge is to observe the reality and, from this, establish lines of action that allow the broad deployment of students' skills in the school context. This incorporation of learning situations and physical, emotional, and relational implications will result in the improvement of QoL and learning (Almonacid & González, 2022; Canaza, 2021; De Sousa Santos, 2020; Leng, 2021; Singh, 2022).

## Conclusion

The main characteristic that emerges from quarantines is the impact on aspects of QoL and learning methodologies. Social distancing and the lack of coexistence with others affected the students' health and, consequently, their QoL. This impact is mainly attributed to factors such as food, physical and recreational activities, quality of sleep or hours of rest, and the management of emotions. The latter being a determining factor, as it was the cause of psychological conditions and stress. Anxiety, as mentioned, is a constant in the stories. As a result, the students realized that it generated, on many occasions, the need to overeat, a fact that brings with it a decrease or drastic changes in the quality of food intake.

It is concluded that young people have improved their healthy habits, such as rest and nutrition, thanks to the possibilities and schedules of the post-confinement educational centers. In addition, they state that due to the physical spaces they can access and the extra programmatic activities corresponding to each establishment, they are more willing to engage in physical activity, thus improving their perception of QoL.

On the other hand, promoting the inclusion of recreational and sports workshops in educational establishments inside and outside them in the context of post-confinement normality is suggested. This encourages the practice of physical activity and sports of students. This would contribute in developing resilience, constancy, and perseverance, providing, in turn, a possibility to keep them active and healthy to face the adversities that arise in post-confinement with greater calm. In addition, generating situations in which the entire educational community of the establishments is integrated into these physical activity practices to achieve better sociability among students, teachers, parents, and school management, promoting values such as empathy and solidarity, among others, is suggested.

Moreover, there should be occasions in which immediate attention is given to the students' psychological distress,

attending to their emotional and social needs, providing them with psychological support and nutritional guidance as well as healthy habits during the entire school process.

## Limitations and projections

One of the study's limitations was marked by the lack of scientific evidence regarding the conditions and characteristics of the QoL of post-confinement high school students. This issue could eventually be remedied by continuing this line of research with this particular group.

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