



Didactic Challenges

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

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Osijek, 26th – 27th May 2022

Editors:

Sohail Inayatullah

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**DIDACTIC CHALLENGES IV:
FUTURES STUDIES IN EDUCATION**

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ANICA BILIĆ

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Osijek, April, 2023

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CULTURE OF FEAR AND LEARNING

Preliminary communication

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Abstract

In his book *Algerian Chronicles*, the writer Albert Camus described the 17th century as the century of mathematics, the 18th century as the century of physics, the 19th century as the century of biology, and the 20th century as the century of fear. We can rightly ask ourselves whether the 21st century is also marked by fear and whether we live in a culture of fear. In a world of significant and rapid change, a young person may feel frightened and lost in a culture dominated by fear, threats and uncertainty. A culture that imposes new values on an almost daily basis, and consequently imposes rules and norms, in which the news changes from minute to minute, fear becomes a daily companion of a (young) person. In the previous two years, the Republic of Croatia has been afflicted by the coronavirus epidemic, the devastating earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja, and consequently the slowdown in economic growth, which causes a number of existential issues and uncertainties. The fear that already existed has been exacerbated by the threats of a nuclear war outbreak propagated in the global media following the onset of the war in Ukraine. This paper deals with the issue of the impact of fear on learning in the student population. For the purposes of research, a semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted to examine the presence of uncertainty and fear in students, given the global environment, and how the presence of fear, as a form of distraction, affects the learning process.

Keywords: Coronavirus, culture of fear, learning, media, students

Fear and the culture of fear

Fear is one of the innate and normal human emotions and has helped the human species survive throughout the history of human evolution. Thanks to fear, humans are able to react and avoid potentially dangerous situations. Moreover, when thinking about future situations, a person can take certain actions to prevent undesirable phenomena or at least minimise their side effects. In other words, fear enables us to survive. The presence of fear is quite normal; however, when fear begins to affect a person's daily life and interfere with his or her ability to work and perform routine activities, we speak of fear that disturbs a person's inner peace. Fear manifests itself in the form of a lack of sense of control over one's life, which can often have a devastating effect on the performance of daily activities. Feelings of loss of control and inability to control one's life can cause a young person to experience feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, as well as panic and increased anxiety.

There is no person who has not experienced fear – fear is a fundamental, biological and naturally given emotion and reaction, and it should be remembered that fear that is learned always correlates with cultural references. Then we talk of culturalised fear. All cultures also produce a corresponding range of culturalised fears (Košničar, 2013, p. 37). Fear is also one of the most effective and at the same time inhumane ways of dealing with people and other living beings. Basically, fear is a feeling of depersonalisation and collapse of one's own personality, (Košničar, 2013, p. 43). Over time, fear has become a concomitant in all areas of family life and is largely reflected in the emotional states of individuals. In younger children, fear manifests itself in the form of stubbornness, anxiety, dreadness, anger, anxiety, sadness and aggression.

To be afraid means to perceive the world around you and to take it into account. To experience fear and to be afraid also means to perceive one's own limitations, i.e., one's boundaries and dependence on other people. This awareness that we are interdependent on is a source of trust and fear, which encourages us to trust or be afraid. Being with others can be the happiness of trust or the misfortune of fear (Bošnjaković, 2016, p. 122).

In the last two years, the Republic of Croatia was hit by a number of disasters. The first case of coronavirus was recorded in February 2020, which also marked the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in Croatia. A month later, a strong earthquake hit Zagreb (March 22, 2020), and nine months later, another earthquake hit Sisak-Moslavi-na County (December 29, 2020). A series of earthquakes caused human casualties (8 deaths) and great material damage, which will have to be repaired over the years. As a result of the pandemic and a series of devastating earthquakes, the topic of possible economic problems began to take space in the media. The topic received special impetus with the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 and Russian threats of nuclear war. We can conclude that fear has become commonplace. In his *Chronicles*, the writer Albert Camus called the 17th century the century of mathematics, the 18th century the century of physics, the 19th century the century of biology, and the 20th century the century of fear. We can rightly ask ourselves whether the 21st century is also characterised by fear and whether we live in a culture of fear.

When it comes to the culture of fear, Tudor (2003, cited in Maskalan, 2014) describes numerous social eruptions of fear. When examining the ways in which fear is embedded in physical, psychological, social, and cultural relationships, and referring to the many contemporary fears that exist in developed Western societies, Tudor (2003) notes that fear is more or less part of the shaping of not only everyday social relationships, but also modern lifestyles. Hence the term "culture of fear" (Tudor, 2003, cited in Maskalan 2014).

In his discussion *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*, Glassner (1999) rhetorically asks why there are so many fears in society, and so many more "undiscovered". That is, fear is also a cultural construction supported by the media mediation of reality that tells us what we should be afraid of. For exam-

ple, when we talk about the coronavirus pandemic, media information about the daily number of patients, deaths, the number of patients on ventilators, etc., act as stressors that affect individuals.

There are numerous studies on the effects of fear on the learning process (Van, Khang and Thi, 2022; Cushman and Byrne, 2017; Arnsten, 2009; Perry, 2006), especially when it comes to fear of learning a foreign language and the effects of fear and anxiety on younger children. For example, Vukelić et al. (2022, p. 66) note that respondents who pointed out that they worked and learned from home during the pandemic emphasised, *inter alia*, the problem of lack of concentration and focus on learning. They also noted that a significant number of participants in their research “mentioned the constant exposure to information about the pandemic as a stressor, the constant topic of all conversations was the pandemic, the lack of verified information and conflicts between people due to different views of the situation”. Al-Marouf, Salloum and Hassanien (2002) note that, during the Coronavirus pandemic, fear due to family lockdown situation, fear of education failure and fear of losing social relationships are the most common types of threat that may face students. Same authors note that fear alone negatively affects the psychological status of students and lead to stigma in some situations.

Since all types of media spread and consequently reinforced the feeling of fear at the onset of the pandemic, we can generally speak of living in a culture of fear where “only bad news is good news” (Brajković, 2020). The media, which can very easily shape public opinion and impose certain views as the only truth, play an important role in creating a culture of fear and generating fear in general. In this way, fear becomes a “commodity” that is “sold” to an individual, says Brajković (2020), and adds that the media have played a major role in creating panic several times since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The same author concludes that instead of providing relevant information that can help individuals cope better with the new situation, most of the media have created unprecedented fear among people who are no longer able to hear objective information from experts.

The media play an important role in mediating and creating a culture of fear, as fear becomes a “lucrative media commodity” (Brajković, 2020). The media can easily shape public opinion, establish value systems, and highlight messages that trigger heightened fear in people, and the philosophy of fear is a consumer good that sells newspapers and increases newspaper readership (Brajković, 2020). Vujić (2020) agrees and states that today no one can deny the key role of fear in initiating and legitimising everyday extraordinary sanitary and political actions that disrupt our current habitus of thinking and living. Not only individual but also collective fear is significantly exacerbated by the influence of global and national media as part of media and social psychosis. In addition to this social and emotional dimension of fear, however, it is important to remember how much the feeling of fear has influenced and shaped the collective cultural and civilisational identities of the world. One can rightly speak of the cultural anthropology of fear and the diversity of the culture of fear (Vujić, 2020).

Empirical research methodology

The aim of the qualitative research was to establish a connection between the occurrence of fear in the student population and media reports and publications during the coronavirus pandemic, the Zagreb and Petrinja earthquakes, and the outbreak of war in Ukraine. In addition, an attempt was made to describe the manifestations of the current forms of fear in the student population and their impact on the learning process.

Research questions

The research study addressed 4 main research questions:

1. Did the observed events (the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja, the outbreak of war in Ukraine/threats of nuclear war) influence the occurrence of fear among research participants? How was fear itself manifested?
2. Did the occurrence of fear among research participants affect the learning process and how?
3. Did the research participants follow media reports and publications more frequently during the observed events (the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja, the outbreak of war in Ukraine/threats of nuclear war)?
4. Did research participants ask for psychological support and why?

Sample

The survey was conducted in March, April and May 2022 with a sample of 15 participants. There were 13 female and 2 male participants. The research participants are students of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek.

Instrument

For the purpose of the research, a semi-structured in-depth interview was constructed. The semi-structured interview consists of six thematic sections:

1. Coronavirus pandemic.
2. Earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja.
3. Threats of nuclear war and the war in Ukraine.
4. Media reports and publications about the coronavirus pandemic, the earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja, and the war in Ukraine.
5. The occurrence of fear in the learning process.
6. Psychological support.

The interview consisted of 10 questions. The first three questions were related to the coronavirus pandemic, the earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja, and the war in Ukraine. The next two questions were related to media reports and publications about these topics. The second group of five questions examined the learning process and the possible role of fear in learning, while the last question was related to providing and seeking psychological support.

The average duration of an interview was 20 minutes. Prior to the interview, all research participants were individually informed about the research goal and tasks, and their rights. None of the participants withdrew from the interview, and the interview was conducted without violating the guaranteed anonymity of the responses and participants. The interview was conducted at the Faculty of Education. All space and time requirements were met prior to conducting the research, and participants gave consent to participate in the research and recording. Interviews were recorded using a cell phone and then converted to text on a computer. The excerpts from the coded interviews were then thematically grouped according to the main themes and topics that emerged in participant responses.

The research findings are presented in a table where participant responses are grouped by categories. Participant responses are modified in some places linguistically and stylistically so that the meaning and absolute context of what was said was not changed.

Results

Research results are presented according to the topics discussed in the interview. Each participant's response is labelled with codes for ease of tracking, where S denotes "student" and the associated number refers to a numerical identifier so that each interview has an assigned reference.

Table 1 shows the research results referring to the occurrence of fear at the coronavirus pandemic outbreak. The results are grouped by categories *I was afraid* and *I was not afraid*, and the causes of fear are underlined in the responses.

Table 1 Occurrence of fear associated with the coronavirus pandemic outbreak

I was afraid	I was not afraid
<p><i>I was afraid, not for myself, but for the older members of my family. (S1, S4, S9)</i> <i>At first we were very scared, both me and my family, especially when we saw pictures from China, but over time it got weaker and weaker. (...) I was mostly afraid for my family's health because they are older. I was not afraid for myself. (S10)</i></p>	<p><i>I could not influence it (...) I didn't feel scared or afraid. (S3)</i> <i>I would not say I was afraid because I approached it more like this: If I catch it, ok, if not, ok. I can only hope that my loved ones do not get hurt. (S8)</i></p>
<p><i>At first I felt scared, I was afraid of what would happen next, especially when <u>online teaching and learning</u> was introduced. That was when I felt the most fear. Everything was different for me and I was not coping well. I felt like I was living in a box. (...) I was most afraid for <u>the health of the people I live with and the people around me, but also for the sick children</u> who have some symptoms. (S2)</i></p>	<p><i>I was not afraid, I was only afraid of the scenes from China, of people being locked up, doors being broken open, padlocks, police, and stories of people dying in the streets. (...) The media was spreading fear. It was generally confusing. I was careful not to get too close to people and to avoid contact with other people. (S12)</i></p>
<p><i>We were all <u>locked in houses</u>, people were scared and confused, everything was interrupted, and the environment was depressing, which affected my mental health a lot. (S5)</i></p>	<p><i>The footage from China had a very stressful effect on me because I was sick at the time. It was probably the flu, but in my head it was like a coronavirus (...). When more news came, I understood that it was like the flu and I wasn't afraid. (S14)</i></p>
<p><i>It was a very difficult time in my life. I was afraid <u>that I would get infected, that I would not do all the assignments and obligations for school, and that I would violate some rules of conduct related to the pandemic.</u> (S6)</i></p>	<p>N = 4 (26.67%)</p>
<p><i>I had no one around me to ask what to do next and what would happen to my <u>school related obligations</u> and that's why I was scared. (S7)</i></p>	
<p><i>With the shift away from online teaching and measures I have to admit I was scared. I stayed in the house with my grandmother, we lived together for three months. I didn't go anywhere. I was just solving tasks. I was most <u>afraid that I would get infected and how my body would react to it</u> because I have a coughing problem. I was afraid that I would be put on a ventilator and what I would do if that happened. (S11)</i></p>	
<p><i>Since very little was known about the virus, I felt fear and anxiety. My <u>mother is in a high-risk group</u>, so I was most afraid for her, but I was also afraid for myself. (...) I started to have panic attacks. (S13)</i></p>	

In the beginning, until it came to us, I was very scared because I am a panicker and any feeling of fear is manifested even worse with me. (...) When it came to us, we thought that the quarantine would last only three weeks, but it was extended. I was very scared because there were those videos circulating with people who had just collapsed due to the coronavirus, and that really scared me. (...) I was also afraid for the elderly, for my grandparents. (S15)

N = 11 (73.33%)

The results in Table 1 show that as many as 73.33% of the students were afraid at the time of the coronavirus pandemic outbreak. It can be noted that most respondents feared for the health of elderly family members and the possibility that they would not be able to fulfil their school related duties and obligations, but they were also afraid of the possibility that they might end up on a ventilator (S11). Respondents who stated that they were not afraid said that they felt no fear because they had no control over the situation (S3, S8), while two respondents answered that they were not afraid but that they were made uncomfortable by the scenes from China showing infected people dying in the streets (S12, S14).

Furthermore, Table 2 shows the results referring to the occurrence of fear during the earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja, and the responses are presented by categories *I was afraid* and *I was not afraid*.

Table 2 Occurrence of fear in relation to the earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja

I was afraid	I was not afraid
<i>I felt the earthquake, I was in a closed room and I didn't know what was happening (...), even the possibility of an earthquake seemed incredible to me at that moment. (S3)</i>	<i>I can't change anything here, so why should I be afraid of it and worry, be depressed and have a problem in my head? It's strange that so many people panic and can't do anything about it, but only inflict stress upon themselves. (S1)</i>
<i>I was most afraid for those people, where they will go now and how they can be helped. (S4)</i>	<i>I was not afraid, to be honest. No. (S2)</i>
<i>At first I did not realise what had happened. I couldn't believe what had happened, especially when I saw what the situation was with people and how they live. Just thinking about it was horrible for me and I felt bad because I imagined what it would be like if it happened here, where we would all go, what we would do with the houses, just as they all lost everything overnight. (S5)</i>	<i>I was horrified. It was shaking here too, I was alone in the room and I was very uncomfortable. I didn't know how to act at all, and in general everything was horrible for me because people's lives were ruined. I saw that the children could not go to school and this was terrible, but I personally was not afraid. (S7)</i>

<i>I watched the news every day, it was terribly hard to follow it all. Our heads all ached, and when we saw how everything collapsed, we knew that it would never be the same again. (S6)</i>	<i>I have no reason to be afraid of natural phenomena because we never know where or what might happen. But since my friends lived in those areas, I worried about it. (S10)</i>
<i>I was afraid of it and of the coronavirus because I was kind of hoping that soon there would be a vaccine or a solution, but there is no cure for an earthquake when it happens, and I felt sorry for those people, I felt sorry for them losing their houses (...). It made me very sad and I was afraid for myself. (S8)</i>	<i>As for the earthquakes, I was not worried because Osijek is not located on tectonic plates that move, and everyone claims that Osijek is safe in this regard, so this part did not worry me. I felt sorry for the people from the affected area. (S12, S14)</i>
<i>I was very scared of that. I thought the workers had knocked, but it was Christmas time. The earthquake caught me in bed. (S9)</i>	N = 6 (40.00%)
<i>I felt the earthquake and I was really scared. Especially when I saw on the news that holes were opening up in the ground. (S11)</i>	
<i>At first I was scared because we are not prepared for it, we are not trained for such situations (...) but of course I kept thinking about these people and putting myself in their shoes - what is it like for them, where are they going to live? (S13)</i>	
<i>I was afraid because I am a panicker and my fear is getting stronger. (S15)</i>	
N = 9 (60.00%)	

The results shown in Table 2 show us that most of the respondents, i.e. 60%, were afraid during the earthquake, while 40% of the respondents stated that they were not afraid of the earthquake, although some respondents were worried and sad about the people affected by this disaster (S7, S10, S12, S14).

Table 3 shows the occurrence of fear in relation to the outbreak of war in Ukraine and threats of nuclear war, and the responses are presented by categories *I was afraid* and *I was not afraid*.

Table 3 Occurrence of fear in relation to the outbreak of war in Ukraine and threats of nuclear war

I was afraid	I was not afraid
<i>It affects my mental health a lot, I am afraid that the war will come to us, that we will be endangered by the war, where we will flee to, how we will be saved and what will happen to the prices when the salaries are getting lower and lower. (...) I think about that every day. (S4)</i>	<i>I'm not afraid because I cannot influence that. It's beyond my reach. (S1)</i>
<i>I am afraid because it's all gone too far and these people are really living in catastrophic conditions, especially now, I am following everything that's happening to children, children have been killed in kindergartens, oncology hospitals have been bombed. It's terrible and I cannot believe that something like this is happening and, it seems, could happen to us. (...) I often wonder what will happen if the war comes to us. (S5)</i>	<i>I don't think about nuclear war, I don't feel afraid. I think I have started thinking – it's going to be the way it's supposed to be! (S2)</i> <i>I don't bother with that because there are too many conspiracy theories and somehow I don't feel like following this all the time. I just don't want to bother with it. (S3)</i> <i>I can't influence it in any way, unfortunately, so I deal with it in the following way - if it happens, it happens, if not, thank God it doesn't. It's about communication between people that we can't reach. (S8)</i>
<i>I worry a lot about money, I check my bank account all the time, I tremble every time I have to go to Konzum to buy two or three items because it ends up costing 60 HRK. (...) I am afraid for my whole existence. From the very beginning, I was afraid that this war would spread to our country as well. (S6)</i>	<i>I'm not afraid because I have the impression that everything is too much staged. But I believe that this will not spread to Croatia, and that is why I am not afraid. (S9)</i>
<i>I am really afraid that the war will spread to our country, because I would not like to experience that. I would definitely not want that to happen, and all the things that are happening in this regard, the inflation and the prices, that's really terrible for me because it was already bad here before, and now it can only get worse. That's what I am afraid of. (S7)</i>	<i>I don't care about it because I can't influence it. I just hope and I can only hope that it will get better. Fear and worry can't help, so I'm not afraid. (S10)</i>
<i>I followed the news and everything that was published about it. I was afraid that World War III was about to start. I read about it and talked to my parents about it. At first I was really worried. (S11)</i>	N = 6 (40.00%)
<i>As for the war in Ukraine, I was scared at first, even though I am not very politically educated, so I do not understand politics that well, but somehow I thought that the world would be levelled to the ground if someone touched Putin. But that did not happen. As far as nuclear war, I think the Russians also know that they are putting themselves in danger. (S12)</i>	

The war in Ukraine does not affect me because it is far away from us (...) but I try not to watch the news and to distance myself completely from the news because I cannot do anything and then it makes me even sadder and more afraid. (S13)

At first I was very scared and I talked to my parents and friends. I told them that if there were a nuclear war, I would rather be hit by something and die immediately than suffer from the effects of radiation and food shortages, because it will lead to nothing. (S14)

I feel terrible and I am very afraid of the threats of nuclear war. I keep imagining a scenario where my parents will have to leave, my dad will go to war, we will become refugees, I will be separated from my boyfriend and he will also leave. I keep imagining all of this. In fact, this adds to my panic. (S15)

N = 9 (60.00%)

When it comes to the frequency of following media reports and publications, when asked *if they followed media reports and publications more frequently during the coronavirus pandemic, the earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja, the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the threats of nuclear war*, 13 participants (86.67%) said they did, i.e. that confirmed that they followed media reports and publications more frequently, and only 2 participants (13.33%) answered that they did not follow media reports and publications more frequently (S1, S14).

Parts of the responses are underlined related to what the research participants who followed media reports and publications more frequently followed specifically.

- *As soon as I woke up I would follow the news, the number of new infections, the number of people on ventilators, etc. (S2)*
- *In one period, I followed both the number of new infections and the number of deaths (...), but as the pandemic progressed, not so much. The same with the situation in Ukraine and this drone that crashed in the Jarun area. (S3)*
- *I followed the media more often at the beginning of the pandemic and it had a great psychological effect on me. It came to me in my dreams - will it ever stop, will life return to normal, will it become a normal disease like any other, will we learn to live with it, etc. (S4)*
- *I definitely used to follow the news more frequently, I can say that since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic I follow the news on the Internet every day. Sometimes even three times a day. I am informed about everything that is happening. (S5)*
- *I started following all types of media, portals, media, newspapers, and I continue to follow them. And I'm in a Viber group that informs me every day about the number of new infections and if I don't find this out in the morning, it's like I'm in knots and I have*

to find that information out. It became like a disease to me. I don't even know how to describe it. (S6)

• In the beginning, I followed the media a lot, I went online every day and looked for the number of new infections because I was just waiting for it to stop. (S7)

• I followed the media more often, but primarily because I had nothing else to do, and over time I became interested in everything because my future and my destiny depended on the pandemic and then of course I became much more interested in the news than before. (S8)

• I used to follow the media more often, primarily because of the situation in Ukraine, as I was interested in how it was developing. I did not follow the coronavirus pandemic related news. (S9)

• I definitely followed the media more often during the pandemic outbreak, I waited for the news at noon because of the report on the number of new infections, in this first month, it was very current and then I kept looking at the numbers and got tired of them. (S10)

• I followed the media every day. I was also in a group on Viber (...). Every day we followed what was happening, how many new infections were recorded, what the measures were, etc. (S11)

• Sure yes, but then at one point I stopped and continued to follow only news released as main or important on social media. (...) I read what turns up, but again it comes down to clicking on portals because the big question is which of all this information is true at all. (S12)

• In the beginning I followed everything, I couldn't even get away from it because everyone was sending everything in groups and all my friends were talking about it, but at one point it was just too much and I said I could neither read nor watch it anymore and just I moved away from everything – from both the number of new infections and the number of deaths so that I could actually get peace in my head. (S13) • I felt overwhelmed with information during the pandemic outbreak, although I added news to myself to follow what was happening and somehow it all exhausted me. I was too nervous and worried about what would happen to my grandparents. I read everything. (S15)

Interestingly, almost all research participants who followed media reports and publications more frequently than usual indicated that they did so primarily during the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic (i.e. as many as 12 participants, i.e. 92.31%), whereas only 1 participant (S9) stated that he or she followed media reports and publications more frequently at the outbreak of war in Ukraine. None of the research participants said that they followed media reports and publications more frequently than usual during the earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja.

When asked *if fear appeared during learning*, 10 participants (66.67%) stated that they did not feel fear during learning, while 5 participants (33.33%) said that they did. The parts of their responses are underlined that refer to the ways of fear manifestation:

• *It all went deep into my subconscious and at one point, when I was writing seminar papers, I was simply exhausted, at one point, like when the switch turns on and off, it all came to my mind and it really bothered me. I could no longer concentrate or do anything. That's how fear affected me. (S3)*

Of course it affected me. When there was an earthquake, I had to practice playing, record my playing and send the recording to the professor. Simply, after ten times I succeeded because my thoughts were somewhere far away, with these people, what happened to them, where they were going and I wondered how I could help them. I had no peace so I started volunteering, I wanted to do some good work. (S4)

• *Fear hinders me from doing my college duties on a daily basis. When I know that I have to study for a midterm exam, I just have thoughts like "Tomorrow I may not be there anymore and why am I doing all this at all?," I wonder how these children in Ukraine are, if they were killed, how these poor people are who came to us to Osijek, how they are in an unfamiliar environment. I burden myself with these things while at the same time other people are losing their lives. (S6)*

• *What is happening now with the war in Ukraine is affecting me in the form of intrusive thoughts. A thought just comes to me, "Alas, war! It may come to us!" But I quickly get back to my commitments. (S14)*

• *I usually have panic attacks so I get scared, it turns into a lot of nervousness, a headache and stomach pain, fever and then I have to sit down and wait for it to pass. This has happened to me many times, especially when it comes to war, it is a disaster for me now, at this time. As soon as I start thinking about it, I immediately have a stomach ache and I can't learn or do anything. Over time, I have already developed the fear of fear. As soon as I start thinking about the war, I tell myself – don't be nervous and don't think about it. (S15)*

Based on the responses it can be concluded that fear, as a form of distraction during learning, manifested itself as loss of concentration, exhaustion, intrusive and unwanted thoughts, nervousness, headaches, stomach aches, fever, and panic attacks, which subsequently causes the individual to develop fear of fear, thus entering a vicious circle typical of panic disorder.

Furthermore, when asked *whether they asked for or sought or attempted to seek psychological support since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic*, all respondents (N = 15) stated that they did not ask for any form of psychological support. The underlined parts of the interviews refer to the reason why the research participants did not choose to ask for support:

• *I didn't think I needed psychological support. (S1, S2, S4, S5, S7, S9, S10, S12, S13, S14)*

• *I have been thinking of seeking psychological support, but I do not know who to turn to or who to seek advice from. (S3)*

• *I did not ask for psychological support, I only got help from my family in the form of talking and calming down in terms of these topics. I feel like I have PTSD and I should*

ask for help, but I didn't because I feel that I don't have the right to ask for this support while those kids and these people may have more right to it than I do. And it's also about money. I pray in the evening and that's all I do. (S6) • I did not even know that psychological support could be sought for coronavirus. I didn't even know there were phone calls. (...) I think people should be more informed about that. (S8)

• When I was in self-isolation, my dad tested positive and we were isolated for 20 days. It was very difficult for me and then I thought that I needed some help because I was not used to being locked in a flat. I have a lot of obligations, I am always on the move, and it was very difficult for me. (...) I did not ask for help because I tried to solve this with myself and by talking to my parents. I also talked to my grandmother and my friends. (S11)

• I was thinking about seeking help, but I never thought about it deeper. I know that the University has a psychologist and that you have to wait for this support for a long period of time. Other than that, it is very expensive and I gave up. And I didn't think about visiting my MD and a psychiatrist. (S15)

Ten respondents (i.e. 66.67% of respondents), stated that they did not even think of asking for psychological support. Five participants (33.33%) confirmed that they *wanted to ask for psychological support*, but did not ask for it. Thus, if they felt the need for psychological support, some respondents talked to their peers/friends or family members (S6, S11), while one respondent emphasised prayer as a form of psychological support (S6). Other reasons for not seeking psychological support include financial difficulties (S6, S15), but also not knowing where to obtain such services (S3, S8).

Discussion and conclusion

Brajković (2020) notes that “it should not be forgotten that most of the media reported on the number of deaths in Italy, and only a few informed people about the number of recoveries, which further increased the level of panic and kept people in great fear. And, of course, all this was accompanied by frightening images of coffins”. Based on this statement, we can see the media of reporting on the topics observed in the paper and conclude that the media contributed significantly to the spread and creation of a culture of fear. These claims are supported by the statements of some respondents in the research claiming that they were especially frightened by the media scenes from China: “*At first we were very scared, both me and my family, especially when we saw pictures from China... (S10); I was only afraid of the scenes from China, of people being locked up, doors being broken open, padlocks, police, and stories of people dying in the streets... (S12); The footage from China had a very stressful effect on me (S14)...*”.

Regarding the frequency of following media reports and publications, 13 respondents (86.67%) stated that they followed the media more frequently than usual. In addition, these respondents also said that they were afraid of some of the observed events. Also, almost all research participants who followed media reports and publications more frequently than usual indicated that they did so primarily during the

outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic (i.e. as many as 12 participants, i.e. 92.31%), whereas only 1 participant (S9) stated that he or she followed media reports and publications more frequently at the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

Regardless of the fact that the majority of respondents stated that they felt fear during the corona pandemic outbreak (11/73.33%), earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja (9/60.00%) and media threats of nuclear war (9/60.00%), when it comes to the presence of fear during the learning process, 10 participants stated that they did not feel fear during the learning process, which is 66.67% of the respondents. 5 respondents (33.33%) noted that fear was a form of distraction for them. Fear appeared to one respondent during the writing of the seminar, while one respondent felt fear while practicing playing the piano. One respondent noted that he felt fear while studying for the colloquium since one respondent stated that he had a constant feeling of fear. Also, one respondent noted that he occasionally had sudden intrusive thoughts. In conclusion, during learning process fear manifested itself in difficulty concentrating, headaches, panic attacks, intrusive thoughts, as can be seen in the underlined parts of the responses.

Following up to the research question about asking psychological support during the coronavirus pandemic outbreak, the earthquakes in Zagreb and Petrinja and the outbreak of war in Ukraine/threats of nuclear war, none (0%) of the respondents asked for psychological support, although 5 respondents stated that they thought about it but did not ask for it. What should be seriously considered is providing the right and professional information about providing psychological help to students since 4 respondents did not know how and where to get free psychological help or psychological help in general.

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