Egyptian and Roma Adolescents' Perspectives on Their Developmental Assets in Albania During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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This mixed-method study explores the accessibility of developmental assets among Egyptian and Roma minority youth in Albania during the COVID-19 pandemic. Six focus groups were conducted in August 2020 with Egyptian ($n = 16$) and Roma ($n = 15$) adolescents (14–20 years, $M_{age} = 16.71$; $SD_{age} = 2.00$; 14 girls and 17 boys). In addition, adolescents rated how much they experienced each developmental asset. Descriptive and thematic analyses highlighted: (1) low developmental assets and barriers to accessing resources, (2) mental health concerns and coping strategies, (3) the role of proximal contexts of life, and (4) experiences within the society in terms of discrimination, integration, and contribution to society. Inter-sectoral community-based interventions are urgently needed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on minority youth.
Key words: Egyptian and Roma youth – positive development – COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting youth development globally (Nearchou, Flinn, Niland, Subramaniam, & Hennessy, 2020; Rousseau & Miconi, 2020). For minority youth, the consequences of the pandemic can be even more devastating due to limited access to basic resources, which may hinder their psychosocial development. Indeed, empirical evidence shows that individuals that experience structural and social inequities, such as ethnic and racial minorities, are disproportionately exposed to the virus and affected by the pandemic (Miconi et al., 2021; Novacek, Hampton-Anderson, Ebor, Loeb, & Wyatt, 2020). This is mainly due to systemic social

and economic disparities that can further compromise their resources and coping strategies (Raifman & Raifman, 2020). Yet, empirical investigations on how minority youth are coping with the present pandemic are lacking. The present mixed-method study explores the experiences of a group of Egyptian and Roma minority youth in Albania during the pandemic to investigate what personal and contextual assets are available for their development within a positive youth development (PYD) perspective. Egyptian and Roma minority groups in Albania are two of the most deprived and stigmatized communities in the country (De Soto, Beddies, & Gedeshi, 2005), and their situation during the pandemic has been a cause of concern (Larkins, 2020). Nonetheless, their voices are often excluded from research and intervention (Larkins, Jovanovic, & Milkova, 2020). To support the realization of Egyptian and Roma youths' potential and prevent social inequalities between majority and minority youth during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is fundamental that societies shed light on and invest in the resources that can boost the positive development of minority youth (García-Coll et al., 2012).

The Underrepresented Voices of Egyptian and Roma Youth

Egyptian and Roma communities were granted national minority status in Albania only in 2017 (Assembly of the Republic of Albania, 2017). In the present study, Roma is used as a term for diverse Roma populations while acknowledging the multiplicity of identities within this ethnic group (Parekh & Rose, 2011). Roma moved to Europe from Northern India in the 11th century AD and are Europe's largest minority. They mainly live in Central and Eastern Europe and have a long history of marginalization (Vermeersch & Ram, 2009). Egyptians consider themselves to be a national minority distinct from both the Roma community and the Albanian community, based on their ethnic background and cultural traditions as well as their stated historical roots as descendants from Egypt (Home Office, 2017). Despite these differences, Egyptian and Roma communities in Albania share a very similar and concerning situation (De Soto et al., 2005; Home Office, 2017). Both groups face multiple challenges, such as barriers to education, poor integration, discrimination, marginalization, and poverty (De Soto et al., 2005; Republic of Albania, 2015). Undeniably, their situation has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Forced in overcrowded settlements with no running water, sanitation, Internet, or health care, these minority groups have been singled out as a threat to public health by the media (Matache & Bhabha, 2020).

In 2010, the National Action Plan for Roma Inclusion, which also benefitted the Egyptian minority, was adopted at the governmental level (Home Office, 2017). It focused on the promotion of education, employment, and social protection to promote inclusivity and equal opportunities. Although some progress was achieved, some concerning issues persist. For instance, there was a reduction in school dropout, but rates still remained the highest in the country (about 50% school dropout rate for Roma specifically; 1–5% of Egyptian and Roma persons aged 7–20 have completed secondary education vs. 94.5% overall in Albania) (Home Office, 2017; Psacharopoulos, 2017). Compulsory education in Albania starts at the age of 6 and ends at the age of 16 and includes primary education (ages 6–10) and lower secondary education (ages 11–16). Upper secondary education is optional, and students can choose to enter general (*gymnasium*), "oriented" (e.g., arts) or vocational programs.

Recently, the European Union underlined the need for considering Roma youth participation and inclusion in research and interventions during the pandemic (Larkins, 2020; Milkova & Larkins, 2020). Unfortunately, little has been done to date in this direction. A recent report outlines a troubling situation during this health emergency for young Roma across nine European countries. The authors found that communities lacked essential and basic health, income and education, and that due to systemic discrimination, Roma youth were often excluded from participation in research initiatives (Larkins, 2020). To date, no specific information could be found on Egyptian youth. Thus, like Roma youth, research participation of Egyptian minority youth in Albania has been rare.

Indeed, compared to other minorities in Albania, Egyptian and Roma communities are an understudied population, mainly due to the fact that they are extremely hard to reach. The inclusion of Roma youth in research and intervention is a special challenge across European countries (Klaus & Marsh, 2014) and is mostly linked to the distrust toward the mainstream population and resistance to revealing their ethnicity for fear of discrimination (Ringold, Orenstein, & Wilkens, 2004). As most research on youth is conducted via the collaboration with schools, due to high dropout rates these minority youth's voices are often excluded from most available empirical studies (Dimitrova, van de Vijver, et al., 2017; Wiium & Uka, 2021). However, prior research conducted with Roma minorities in several European countries shows that Roma adolescents' response rate in research projects can be very high (up to 98%). A solid collaboration of the research team with local community leaders and organizations and the provision of incentives (small gifts) to participants appear to foster participation (Dimitrova, van de Vijver, et al., 2017). Research on Egyptian youth is more limited, although the same pattern may hold true for their situation in Albania (De Soto et al., 2005; Home Office, 2017).

Albania and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Albania is a country located in South-Eastern Europe. It has grown from one of the poorest European nations after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 to an upper-middle income economy (World Bank Group, 2021). Nonetheless, Albania remains one of the poorest countries in the Balkan region with a youth unemployment rate of 20.9% (INSTAT, 2020). The economic situation in the country is unstable (Kozak & Muça, 2020) and the emigration rate, even if it has decreased in recent

years, remains one of the highest in the world (INSTAT, 2020). The devastating earthquake in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic have further compromised development (World Bank Group, 2021).

As of January 14, 2021, the Republic of Albania has reported more than 65,000 cases of COVID-19 (Dyrmishi, 2020; Open Data, 2021). In March, to contain the spread of the virus, strict lockdown measures were put in place across the country, with school closures, curfews, and travel bans, including the banning of private transport and intercity travels. At the time of data collection for this study (August 2020), youth were still living in a partial de-confinement situation, after the first strict lockdown (Open Data, 2021).

Positive Youth Development in Egyptian and Roma Minority Youth

To guarantee the inclusion of Egyptian and Roma youth's perspectives in the present study, a collaborative community-based mixed-method research approach was used and a PYD framework was adopted (Benson, 2007; Lerner, 2017; Lerner et al., 2017). PYD proposes that young people are not passive in the contexts that are likely to affect their development but active participants in determining their own development. Specifically, Bensons' PYD developmental assets framework was designed to inform theory and research while also bringing practical value for the mobilization of communities. This framework is based on the belief that all adolescents have the potential for thriving if their developmental assets are nurtured (Benson, 2007; Lerner, 2017; Lerner et al., 2017). Within a socio-ecological perspective, developmental assets refer to the resources that youth need for thriving in their present and future lives (e.g., academic and work success, personal life, social relationships, well-being), including both external/contextual assets and internal/personal assets (Benson, 2003). Contextual assets refer to those resources that youth can find in their multiple developmental ecologies (e.g., school, family, community). Personal assets refer to individual resources in terms of personality and abilities that the adolescent develops over time. In a PYD framework, when both the individual and the context in which the individual moves are in alignment, young people can thrive and actively contribute to their personal development and in turn that of their contexts.

The asset framework is one of the most empirically tested PYD theories across diverse cultural settings. Although mounting research is exploring the validity and applicability of this theoretical framework in low-and-middle income countries, most studies so far have been conducted in the North American context and on majority youth. Less is known on how this theory applies to minority youth in the Eastern European context. Some quantitative studies have been conducted that focused on Roma youth in the school context across multiple Eastern European countries (Dimitrova et al., 2018; Dimitrova, Chasiotis, Bender, & Van de Vijver, 2014; Dimitrova, Musso, Abubakar, et al., 2017; Dimitrova, van de Vijver, et al., 2017; Wiium & Uka, 2021). These findings suggest that family was an important asset for Roma adolescents and the only one that was not challenged by their environment (Dimitrova et al., 2014). The limited available research from Albania (Nano, 2012; Scales, 2011) also adopted a quantitative research approach to investigate adolescents' developmental assets. Results suggested that, overall, Albanian adolescents could count on a moderate level of developmental assets. They had a strong motivation to learn and could also count on some assets across their family, and school contexts. However, they reported low levels of empowerment (Scales, 2011). Yet, these studies did not include ethnic minority groups nor adolescents who dropped out of school (Wiium & Uka, 2021). Moreover, little is known on how the situation has evolved during the pandemic. To the best of our knowledge, no study so far has focused on the developmental assets and positive development of Egyptian youth in Albania.

The Present Study

This collaborative, community-based mixed-method study's objective is to explore the experiences and developmental assets of a group of Egyptian and Roma minority youth during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Albania via a rating scale of Benson's (2007) developmental assets and focus group discussions probed by open-ended questions. Specifically, we investigated: (1) what developmental assets (personal strengths and contextual resources) were accessible to Egyptian and Roma minority youth in Albania; (2) how the pandemic impacted on their lives and resources.

METHODS

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of personal and contextual assets available to

Egyptian and Roma youth in Albania during the COVID-19 pandemic, we used a concurrent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Zhang, 2009). Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and analyzed separately, and the results are compared and contrasted in the discussion. The focus groups provided Egyptian and Roma minority youth with the opportunity to verbally express their perceptions of personal and contextual resources in their contexts of life beyond the standard developmental assets assessed by the quantitative measure.

Participants

Participants comprised a convenience sample of 31 Egyptian and Roma adolescents aged between 14 and 20 years (14 girls; 15 Roma; M_{age} = 16.71; SD_{age} = 2.00). Most participants (n = 26) were single and five were married. Two participants had one or more children. Most adolescents lived with one or both parents (n = 29), one was living alone and one with another adult. Ten participants (32%) had dropped out of school at the time of the study. The remaining participants were enrolled in classes ranging from 12th grade to the 2nd year of university.

Procedure

Five focus groups of five adolescents each (n = 3 groups with Roma and n = 2 groups with Egyptian adolescents) and one focus group with six adolescents (n = 1 group with Egyptian adolescents) were conducted in August 2020 in three Albanian cities (i.e., Elbasan, Berat, and Shkodra) by a team of an Albanian researcher and psychologist (Albanian woman) and two trained cultural mediators (a man and a woman) from the community at each site (3 women and 3 men in total). These cities were selected as they were among the municipalities most populated by Egyptian and Roma communities (Republic of Albania, 2015) and were situated across the country in different social and geographical areas (North, South, and Central Albania). Cultural mediators were young members of the community with an understanding of the language and culture of the targeted groups; all cultural mediators were working regularly within community organizations (in the three Albanian cities) and in charge of facilitating successful communication with the Egyptian and Roma communities. They all had prior experience with community-based research and facilitating focus groups.

Participants were recruited through three community, non-profit organizations working with the Egyptian and Roma communities in the three Albanian cities. These organizations all focused on youth, had access to the youth database, and had extensive experience in recruiting youth for research purposes; they were involved in the development of the focus group guide to ensure a collaborative bottom-up research approach aimed at building community resilience. A bottom-up approach was chosen to privilege the voices and experiences of minority groups, as it is effective in ensuring collaboration, trust, and empowerment when working with marginalized communities (Lauricella, Valdez, Okamoto, Helm, & Zaremba, 2016; Levkoff & Sanchez, 2003). Recruitment was conducted via personal contacts within the organizations by cultural mediators. With demographic categories of interest, such as age, gender, and level of education, a convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants, mainly from the same neighborhoods, for the present study. As inclusion criteria, eligible persons needed to be an Egyptian or Roma youth, and between ages 14 and 20 years. Exclusion criteria omitted youth that did not belong to the two minority groups, those who had audio-visual difficulties and youth that suffered from severe mental health problems. The organizations' feedback on the general themes explored in the focus groups was also solicited. For participants under the age of 18, parents were contacted before reaching out to youth. If parents agreed to the participation of their child in the study, they were asked to sign a parental informed consent. After that, selected adolescents were contacted and asked for their interest in participation and verbal assent. Participants aged 18 years or older were asked directly for their interest and signed an informed consent. A total of 32 participants were contacted, and only one refused to participate in the study due to the distrust of parents.

The focus groups, which lasted for 60–90 min, took place outdoors, in a private, quiet, and confidential setting, in small groups to reduce infection risks and facilitate physical distancing in line with public health guidelines. The discussions were held in Albanian, and all participants were fluent in that language. Focus groups discussions were audio-recorded. Participants were compensated with a gift of the value of two euros for their time. The study protocol and procedures were approved by the ethics committee of the University of Bergen (Norway) (Reference number: 612969).

Measures

Quantitative measure. At the beginning of each focus group discussion, the moderator stated the purpose of the study, stressing its exploratory nature and ensuring the confidentiality of the research process. Participants were subsequently asked to fill in a short socio-demographic form, indicating gender, age, ethnicity, living arrangement, marital status, and education. After that, the 40 developmental assets (Scales et al., 1999) (see https://www.search-institute.org/our-research/development-assets/developmental-assets-framework/) were presented and participants were given a short questionnaire. They were asked to rate on a Likert scale from "1 = *Not at all*" to "4 = *A lot*" the extent to which they had experienced each of the 40 assets in their lives.

Qualitative data collection. The group discussion started with a general question about what comes to mind when we talk about resources for young people in the community. The subsequent questions investigated whether participants felt their strengths were recognized in their community and what could be done to help young people thrive. Last, participants were asked if and how the pandemic impacted on their resources and well-being and what they thought could help them during the health emergency.

Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis. Mean scores and standard deviations for each item of the questionnaire were computed in SPSS, in the overall sample and separately for Egyptian and Roma youth.

Qualitative data analysis. Using QSR International's NVivo12 (Burlington, MA, USA), a deductive and inductive thematic analysis was conducted. First, focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim by the second author, who is fluent in both Albanian and English. The second author then translated the content into English. Transcriptions were checked for accuracy by the fifth author, who is also fluent in both Albanian and English. Second, an initial codebook was generated, based on preliminary reading of the transcript as well as by concepts as defined in the developmental assets theory (e.g., internal assets, external assets, family, school, positive identity). This was carried out by two coders (first and third authors, Caucasian and

Black women). Third, each coder independently coded each transcript. The coding proceeded in an iterative process, whereby the two coders met regularly to discuss coding categories, compare codes and resolve discrepancies until a complete agreement was reached. This process resulted in successive elaborations and refinements of the codebook and coding process. Fourth and finally, the relations among categories were explored and organized narratively. To validate the findings, we used Creswell and Miller's approach (2000): (1) external audit—we asked co-authors outside the coding team as well as the moderator of the focus groups (the second author) to review the study and report back; (2) member checks—we asked cultural informants working in the involved community organizations to review our paper; (3) negative case analysis—we reported and analyzed conflictual and discrepant findings.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Egyptian and Roma youth's ratings on the level of each developmental asset they had experienced were both similar and low (see Table 1). In the overall sample, all average ratings of developmental assets were lower than 3 (i.e., "very"). Participants reported very low ratings (close to 1, i.e., "not at all") for most external assets (support, empowerment, boundaries & expectations, constructive use of time). Among these contextual assets, the highest scores (above 2, i.e., "somewhat") were reported for those assets which involved the youths' family (i.e., family support, family communication, parent involvement in school, family boundaries). A good level of perceived safety was also reported, despite very low scores in the other areas of empowerment. In terms of internal assets, low levels of commitment to learning and positive identity were found. In contrast, ratings of personal assets referring to positive values and social competences were higher, all on average above 2.

Qualitative Findings

As with the quantitative findings, overlapping themes and content emerged for both ethnic groups. To reflect this concurrence, results are reported below on the overall sample that combines Egyptian and Roma youth. Four themes

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Ratings of the 40 Developmental Assets, for the Total Sample and Separately for Egyptian and Roma Youth

40 Developmental Assets	Total Sample (n = 31)		Egyptian Youth (n = 16)		Roma Youth (n = 15)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
External assets						
Support						
Family support	2.72	0.71	2.87	0.71	2.40	0.63
Positive family communication	2.25	0.82	2.37	0.71	2.00	0.65
Other adult relationships	1.29	0.50	1.40	0.63	1.25	0.43
Caring neighborhood	1.08	0.28	1.25	0.35	1.40	0.50
Caring school climate	1.53	0.68	1.56	0.71	1.46	0.63
Parent Involvement in school	2.36	0.98	2.68	0.93	1.66	0.72
Empowerment						
Community values youth	1.12	0.33	1.12	0.33	1.13	0.35
Youth as resources	1.10	0.31	1.12	0.33	1.06	0.25
Service to others	1.02	0.14	1.00	0.01	1.06	0.25
Safety	2.87	0.74	3.06	0.75	2.46	0.51
Boundaries & expectations						
Family boundaries	2.61	0.89	2.75	0.84	2.33	0.97
School boundaries	2.21	0.90	2.18	0.82	2.26	1.09
Neighborhood boundaries	1.12	0.39	1.12	0.33	1.13	0.51
Adult role models	2.31	0.66	2.43	0.71	2.06	0.45
Positive peer influence	1.78	0.46	1.68	0.47	2.00	0.37
High expectations	2.34	0.81	2.43	0.87	2.13	0.63
Constructive use of time						
Creative activities	1.08	0.28	1.12	0.33	1.00	0.01
Youth programs	1.00	0.01	1.00	0.01	1.00	0.01
Religious community	1.08	0.40	1.12	0.49	1.00	0.01
Time at home	2.17	1.12	2.12	1.12	2.26	1.16
Internal assets						
Commitment to learning						
Achievement motivation	2.04	0.75	2.18	0.64	1.73	0.88
School engagement	1.55	0.61	1.56	0.61	1.53	0.63
Bonding to school	1.48	0.68	1.56	0.71	1.33	0.61
Reading for pleasure	1.10	0.42	1.12	0.49	1.06	0.25
Positive values						
Caring	2.42	0.68	2.50	0.71	2.26	0.59
Equality and social justice	2.31	0.72	2.31	0.69	2.33	0.81
Integrity	2.87	0.67	3.06	0.56	2.46	0.74
Honesty	2.10	0.59	2.18	0.53	1.93	0.70
Responsibility	2.36	0.56	2.37	0.49	2.33	0.72
Restraint	2.68	0.95	2.75	0.98	2.53	0.91
Social competences						
Planning and decision-making	2.17	0.73	2.18	0.73	2.13	0.74
Interpersonal competence	2.29	0.54	2.25	0.56	2.40	0.50
Cultural competence	2.19	0.77	2.06	0.75	2.46	0.74
Resistance skills	2.27	0.77	2.31	0.78	2.20	0.77
Peaceful conflict resolution	2.19	0.77	2.25	0.76	2.06	0.79
Positive identity						
Personal Power	1.70	0.62	1.75	0.56	1.60	0.73
Self-esteem	1.82	0.56	1.81	0.53	1.86	0.63
Sense of purpose	1.51	0.58	1.50	0.50	1.53	0.74
Positive view of future	1.42	0.54	1.43	0.50	1.40	0.63

Note. Participants rated on a 4-point Likert scale from "1 = *Not at all*" to "4 = *A lot*" the extent to which they had experienced each of the 40 assets in their lives.

emerged from the focus group discussions: (1) Lack of assets and barriers to accessing resources, (2) Mental health concerns and coping strategies, (3) Experiences in proximal contexts of life, and (4) Experiences with regard to discrimination, integration, and contribution to society.

Lack of assets and barriers to accessing resources. *Lack of assets.* An overall lack of contextual and personal assets was consistent across all focus groups. This was described both in reference to their own communities and on a broader level to youth in Albania. In the words of some participants:

> (Laughing) Resources, what resources? Here it is a desert, we live in a place that is a desert. (Egyptian boy in Berat, 19 years old).

> What are you saying? There are no resources for us, we are just able to breath and I said everything. Don't make fun of us now, what opportunities can we have, you tell me? I do not see any for myself. (Egyptian boy in Berat, 16 years old).

The pandemic aggravated the financial hardship and stress that youth were already experiencing on a daily basis. Most of the adolescents had parents who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and many mentioned being scared and lacking food, clothes and basic essentials during the lockdown. As this participant described:

> The situation became very difficult during the pandemic because my father had no job, my mother was sick, and we had no money to buy medicine or bread. We were very scared as we did not know how long this situation would last (Roma girl in Shkodra, 14 years old).

Especially during the pandemic, participants agreed on the importance of granting some support from the state to families in their communities in the form of food and money to meet basic daily needs.

Barriers to accessing resources. Even when youth knew about existing resources, participants highlighted a lack of awareness on where to find out how to use them as well as the difficulty in surmounting the structural barriers (e.g., lack of money, clothes, support) to accessing them. This

was true already before the pandemic. As this girl noted:

> It is difficult because there is no job, no income… we have no school and we have no way to get a job. I left school because we could not afford it, even though the books are free we have no conditions, we have no clothes to wear (Roma girl in Shkodra, 14 years old).

Participants' dreams and desires to use their own abilities and strengths were often severely limited by the lack of support from institutions, as was the case for this boy who said:

> For me, for example, strengths are related with my ability in sports. I was an athlete, and I was engaged with school, I participated in some races and I won the first place in a national competition, but no one supported me, and I quit. It was difficult for me to buy shoes and a uniform, my family could not help me with that anymore, so I quit. Young people in my community are good in sports, some in arts, but there's no opportunity to go on (Roma boy in Elbasan, 18 years old).

Many adolescents were not able to recognize any personal strengths, reporting feelings of being completely dependent on their families and lacking any possible form of power or autonomy in relation to their lives and future. While anger and despair emerged toward the lack of contextual assets, self-blame was also common in relation with the perception of lacking strengths and ability at the personal level. Some participants expressed complete pessimism about the future and their skills, like this participant:

> My future is very difficult because I do not know how I can be able to help others as I do not have much to give. I have nothing (Egyptian girl in Elbasan, 15 years old).

Some adolescents underlined how they felt used as objects by adults in the society at large, rather than assets in which to invest, like this participant voiced:

> Young people in our community have strengths but adults don't recognize them. Some of my friends left school because they had to work with their parents not because

they did not want to go to school, they do hard work to raise some money for their family, in jobs that are not appropriate for them. Adults treat us badly and see us as objects to use but not as an asset (Roma boy in Elbasan, 19 years old).

Mental health concerns and coping strategies. *Mental health concerns.* Most participants reported significant fears and worries related to the risk of infection, the high levels of uncertainty, and the lack of clear information around the situation during the pandemic. Participants expressed worries about how the pandemic could further reduce their chances to get a job and survive. Adolescents reported difficulties sleeping and concentrating, sleeping a lot, angry outbursts, and distress, especially during the lockdown. As this participant mentioned:

We [referring to the family] were all scared and did not feel optimistic about the future. I was very afraid that something bad would happen to my family. We were all locked in the house and doing nothing. During the pandemic I've had problems with sleeping, I got irritated very easily, I started to change my eating habits and to eat more (Egyptian girl in Elbasan, 14 years old).

In the words of this participant talking about life during lockdown:

I did not have the strength to do anything, I wanted to stay without doing anything all day (Egyptian boy in Berat, 17 years old).

Gambling and substance use were reported as significant problems that worsened during the pandemic, involving principally adults, but also some youth, and contributing to heightened stress in the community environment. As this participant described:

Adults in my neighborhood spent a lot of time gambling. In my neighborhood, gambling was a very concerning issue. This was very dangerous, as people were losing a lot of money (Roma boy in Elbasan, 18 years old).

Adolescents were very concerned about the possibility of having to go through another lockdown, as this participant noted:

The economic problems and the isolation put a lot of additional stress on us, I do not want to be isolated again because it was terrible for me! (Roma girl in Berat, 18 years old).

Coping strategies. The need of psychological support was mentioned, as one participant said:

During the pandemic I would have liked to receive some support to help us [e.g., the family] be a little calmer and not to get upset so easily, for myself but also for my family (Egyptian girl in Elbasan, 14 years old).

Physical exercise at home was considered as helpful, but difficult to do due to structural limitations. Being able to take care of others and help family or friends were also considered protective. Adolescents mentioned that public health measures during the pandemic should allow people, even during lockdown, some time outside to get air, and expressed a desire for public health guidelines that allowed for some social contacts outside one's household.

Many of the factors that participants mentioned as protective for their well-being and positive development were attributed to their personalities and values in terms of personal assets. Specifically, being tough, hardworking, patient, perseverant, determined and not "giving up" in the face of adversity were some personality traits that were thought to contribute to life success. Adolescents were aware of having to endure a hard life and re-signified the difficult situations they had to overcome as experiences that were helping them to be strong and fight for a better life. Indeed, being optimistic, having a sense of purpose and envisioning a positive future for oneself were all aspects that helped these youth get by their daily challenges, as noted by this participant:

Our strengths are more related to our ability of not giving up in the face of adversity as well as the ability to take life easy (...). We are tough people, we are used to living in difficult conditions, and we are young. I'm optimistic that things will get better (Roma girl in Berat, 19 years old).

Special talents (for instance in sports or at school) were considered potential indicators of well-being. Other participants looked for comfort in criminalized activities, like this boy:

There was no real change for me from before to during the pandemic, I was the same: I slept, I went out with friends, I 'inhaled a plate' [e.g. heroin]. This is the best I can hope for! With some drinks this has been my routine. (Egyptian boy in Berat, 16 years old).

Experiences in proximal contexts of life (family, school, and community organizations). *Family.* Family was mentioned in all focus group discussions as the main, and often only contextual asset that adolescents could count on for practical and emotional support. Parents encouraged and motivated their children to go to school and work for a better future. Family was also the primary way for adolescents to make sure their basic needs were met (e.g., clothes, food) and that they were safe and protected. As this participant underlined:

I think that young people in my community don't have any other assets, just family and of course they know that family is the only support (Egyptian boy in Berat, 17 years old).

Despite being the main source of support, family could also represent a risk factor in some cases. The isolation and confinement during the pandemic could increase the level of family conflict and problems at home. Being confined at home, in small spaces without any social interaction with friends was stressful for some youth, who needed to get out to get some air in order to take care of their mental health. This often resulted in conflicts with the parents who wanted the children to stay home. As described by this participant:

I was scared because everything was closed, the streets were empty (…). I did not want to stay inside because I felt like I was drowning, I definitely had to go out. At home I was very irritated and always discussing with my parents because they did not want me to go out but I went out anyways because I couldn't stand all that arguing anymore. (Roma boy in Elbasan, 18 years old).

School. School dropout emerged as a significant problem in both communities. Whereas some participants did not feel like their situation at school changed during the pandemic, others dropped out because they did not have Internet at home and could not participate in online learning. Some participants suggested that schools might provide

supports so that all youth could access online learning. As this participant noted:

I think it would probably be good if the school helped us a little more during the pandemic as we did not always have the opportunity to attend online lessons and it is not as if anyone helped us. Neither the state nor any organization asked about us (Egyptian girl in Elbasan, 18 years old).

When it was possible to continue trainings or school during the pandemic, this helped youth preserve their routines and mental health. This was especially true for the few participants who reported receiving support and having a good relationship with teachers before the pandemic.

Both girls and boys were at risk of dropping out of school, but sometimes for different reasons, as this exchange between two participants indicates:

Here in Berat young people face more risks but that is true mostly for boys. I know many boys who take drugs and drink alcohol, whereas there are fewer risks for girls as they stay home all the time (Roma girl in Berat, 18 years old).

Roma boy in Berat (17 years old) responds: "There are many dangers for young people of both genders, not just for boys! Some girls also smoke, I know some girls who smoke even though they are very young, they do not go to school, they get married and get pregnant when they are still very young. But it is also true that boys often get into fights with each other and drink alcohol and smoke hashish, they are neither in school nor working."

For boys, spending time with peers in the streets without a purpose was described as a risk factor for school dropout, which in turn was associated with drug and alcohol consumption and involvement in violent acts (e.g., fights). Girls were at higher risk of getting pregnant/eloping with their boyfriends or being victims of violence both in the streets and at school. Parents tried to protect them by not sending them to school and keeping them at home as much as possible.

For girls, taking care of household chores (e.g., cleaning, doing the laundry, cooking) was mentioned as protective because it provided purpose. However, it was also mentioned as a risk as the

lack of education and resulting lack of choice could prevent them from building a better future. A change in mindset in adults in the community was mentioned as necessary to grant girls more choices and greater independence. Like this participant said:

> I think it is very important that adults realize that education is important for our future (…) but they don't understand that forcing girls to stay at home is not helping at all (…). Getting an education will help empower girls and prevent early marriages. I think that my friends in my community deserve to learn how to write their names, to get a job and to contribute to our community (Roma boy in Elbasan, 18 years old).

Bad results in school and economic issues in the household were risk factors for both genders for dropping out of school.

In terms of personal assets, although some adolescents expressed no motivation to attend school, almost all of them agreed on the importance of an education to increase their ability to secure a job in the future. They expressed the desire that schools and teachers could adapt their curricula and activities to provide a safe space where young people in the community would not be forced to drop out over safety or financial concerns. Participants voiced that if they were in a favorable position to complete their education, they would have access to opportunities their parents did not have. Financial and individualized educational support tailored to students' needs and abilities were mentioned as crucial for school success. In addition, they advocated for a fairer and more supportive environment at school, like this girl who said:

> First of all, teachers should see the children as the future but in our country there is an expression for what teachers think of us: come on, this is how you will stay, you will never move forward. They do not give courage to young people (Egyptian girl in Shkodra, 19 years old).

However, youth expressed that even for the educated members of the community, a lack of opportunities and high levels of unemployment hindered the chances of securing a job.

Community organizations. Some youth reported a positive experience with community leaders and mentioned how the support of such institutions was fundamental for their well-being and ability to pursue their life objectives. In the words of this participant:

> The community leader has supported me, I see sport as a good opportunity, I see I have a chance. So far it is going very well with football! I hope to have the support of B. [community leader] to continue even further (Egyptian boy in Shkodra, 15 years old).

Participants believed community services and schools could help young people to secure a job, allowing them to accumulate experience in the job market so that their expertise can be valued and acknowledged in the society. The possibility to have a part-time job while attending school was mentioned as a possible solution to building a good resume, while at the same time being able to support one's family. On one occasion, participants insisted on the lack of support from service organizations in helping them attend trainings that might enable them to secure employment. The cultural mediator, who was familiar with the situation of participants, mentioned that the community organization had helped them access a professional training. The youth disagreed, saying that the organization was not providing the adequate support for them to be able to attend the classes (in this specific case, one participant had a child to take care of).

At a broader level, the adolescents mentioned the need for the government to invest in young people and create job opportunities for the future to fight unemployment. Investing in centers for leisure activities (sports, arts, cinema) that youth could attend was also suggested; given the limited offer in their neighborhoods, more options were seen as being helpful in reducing idle time which was seen as contributing factor in risk-seeking behavior.

Experiences with regard to discrimination, integration, and contribution to society. *Discrimination and integration.* Divergent experiences related to discrimination were expressed. On the one hand, some participants reported that the prejudices of the mainstream society, the so-called "white-handed people" (literal translation of the Albanian expression used by the participants to refer to Albanians) against the Egyptian and Roma communities jeopardized their chances of being hired, suggesting the presence of widespread discrimination. Some participants described

experiencing both personal and structural discrimination, mentioning the feeling of being treated unfairly in schools and in the larger society compared to their White peers. Some described hate incidents (e.g., insults, bullying) in the streets and at school, with both peers and teachers. This participant said:

> We have many problems as Roma people because we are often discriminated against, with what I have witnessed in my life, it is difficult for me to talk to majority youth, we are very different and even kindergarten teachers are not as close to us as they are with members of the majority (Roma girl in Berat, 19 years old).

Other participants strongly denied such experiences and underlined how they had many Albanian friends who regarded them as equals. In the words of this participant:

> This is not true, I have a lot of friends from the majority group and never had a problem with that, I do not feel discriminated at all. In contrast, I have no friends from my own community! (Roma boy in Berat, 16 years old).

In terms of personal assets and positive values, some participants stressed how inclusion and positive social relationships with majority youth were important for them, like this girl who mentioned:

> I would like to have the opportunity to hang out with people who are white-handed but they do not approach us, they have a lot of prejudices about us even though we are all human, we are the same, but they see us without any value (Roma girl in Berat, 19 years old).

Contribution to society. A change in the mentality of the society and of adults in their communities toward how youth are valued and perceived was mentioned as essential for a better future. Some expressed the importance of being able to fight for a better life and for a more fair and inclusive society, like these participants:

> We can fight for our rights although it will not be easy, but I will try. Young people need to be educated, to become masters of themselves, we need to start even though it is very difficult (Roma boy in Elbasan, 18 years old).

I am the type who fights for my rights, and I do not want to be seen differently. I want my children to be treated the same as all other children (Roma girl in Berat, 19 years old).

However, such a change was not considered possible by some participants who shared with the group a sense of powerlessness, as illustrated in the following extracts:

> Nothing can be done, there is nothing you can do to change people's minds, you are wasting your time, my friend (Roma boy in Elbasan, 18 years old).

> This is difficult, I don't think that there is anything I can do, I'm just a girl that feels lucky to have a supportive family, but the society is selfish and doesn't care about us, we don't have any power to change things (Roma girl in Elbasan, 20 years old).

Others thought that their only chance was to migrate to a bigger Albanian city such as Tirana or abroad:

> I will not do anything to change the society. I will not deal with it at all because it is not worth it. I want to leave Albania and never come back here. This country values no one. (Roma boy in Elbasan, 19 years old).

DISCUSSION

The present study adopted a community-based mixed-method research approach to explore the developmental assets available to Egyptian and Roma minority adolescents living in Albania, with a particular focus on how such assets were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. From a PYD perspective, our results showed a low availability and awareness of developmental assets for both Egyptian and Roma youth. Participants reported a daily struggle for meeting basic needs, describing their lives as a "desert" of opportunities. The present study supports the findings of prior research that these two minority groups in Albania share a concerning situation (De Soto et al., 2005).

Results from quantitative and qualitative data were mutually supportive. They both highlighted that family, social competencies, and positive values were the primary assets experienced by these

youth. Qualitative findings helped us to better understand the nuances of the experiences of young people during the pandemic, allowing for the emergence of experiences that are not typically included among traditional developmental assets (e.g., mental health concerns, discrimination). Whereas quantitative results pointed to a general low commitment to learning, focus group discussions suggested a more complex reality where violence and low academic achievement compromised youth's motivation to learn and contributed to high school dropout. However, during the focus groups, the value of getting an education clearly emerged as pivotal for their positive development.

The perceived safety that emerged from the quantitative data contrasted the risk of violence reported at school and in their neighborhoods which was described during the focus groups and may be linked to the sense of protection and support that youth reported from their families. Adolescents indicated that this lack of assets has been a constant in their lives and is not just the result of the challenges experienced during this health emergency. Nonetheless, the pandemic exacerbated prior individual, family, and community issues, further compromising adolescents' development and well-being. This is not surprising given that these minority groups are among the most deprived and discriminated ethnic minorities in Europe (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016; Parekh & Rose, 2011). Research documenting the experiences of minority youth during the present pandemic is an important contribution to prevention and intervention efforts aimed at reducing the short- and long-term negative impact of this pandemic on young people's development (Benner & Mistry, 2020; Bhabha et al., 2017; Nearchou et al., 2020).

Structural Barriers to Positive Development

The overall lack of both personal and contextual assets, alongside the difficulty of obtaining adequate information or accessing existing resources, was pervasive in the community. This is in line with preliminary reports on the situation of Roma communities during the pandemic in Europe (Larkins, 2020; Milkova & Larkins, 2020) and contributes to the mounting evidence on the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on minority and vulnerable groups due to the widening of pre-existing social and economic inequalities (Benner & Mistry, 2020; Miconi et al., 2021; Novacek et al., 2020; Raifman &

Raifman, 2020). Systemic and structural issues represent important barriers to the positive development of these adolescents, limiting possibilities for education or securing employment. These findings are in line with prior studies that showed how unemployment and school dropout are central barriers to the integration of Egyptian and Roma communities in the mainstream society (Bosakova, Madarasova Geckova, van Dijk, & Reijneveld, 2020; Egi, 2020). Systemic barriers during the pandemic (e.g., lack of a computer for online classes) may further compromise the possibility for adolescents in these communities to attend school and may contribute to widen educational disparities between majority and minority groups (Benner & Mistry, 2020).

Some participants vividly described experiences of discrimination in the streets, at school (from both peers and teachers), and when looking for a job. Others did not report any of such experiences. This suggests a plurality of experiences within and between majority and minority groups. Nonetheless, discrimination was a delicate and ambivalent topic for youth and raised some tensions during some focus groups. Some participants were trying to invalidate experiences reported by some of their peers different from their own. In light of the unstable and difficult situation in Albania, tensions between majority and minority groups may reflect the fragilization of the majority group as well as the oppression of these minority groups in the country (Freire, 2017; King & Vullnetari, 2003). It may also indicate variability in minority and majority groups' attitudes and experiences in times of rapid social change. Literature on minority oppression sheds some light on this plurality of experiences and ambivalence. Experiences of oppression can be internalized and operate at a psychological level, leading the oppressed person to view oneself and one's group as helpless and undeserving (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). This could partly explain the low positive identity (e.g., self-esteem and self-efficacy) expressed by some participants. These feelings can be interpreted as an indicator of the level of marginalization of the minority communities in the Albanian society, but also as a broader generational feeling of despair linked to a dire economic situation in the country (King & Vullnetari, 2003). These results could also be interpreted in light of the literature on how forbearance (i.e., the minimization of discrimination) may sometimes represent a protective factor for minorities in order to cope with social adversity (Noh & Kaspar, 2003). Emigration was mentioned as one

possible solution for escaping pervasive structural inequalities. On the other hand, some participants were more critical of the social structures and systems around them and expressed the impulse to fight to contribute to a more just and equitable society, which according to Freire (2017) is an important step toward social change. The Albanian context is considered underdeveloped in terms of integration practices (Dimitrova, Musso, Naudé, et al., 2017). Our findings suggest that assimilation into and marginalization/separation from the majority group are still the most common cultural orientation strategies adopted by these minority youth (António & Monteiro, 2015; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012).

Contextual and Personal Barriers to Positive Development

Both schools and neighborhoods were described as unsafe places by many adolescents. They also reported that parents did not trust sending their children, especially girls, to school for fear of violence. Early pregnancies and early marriages were common and were a risk factor for both school dropout and diminishing future opportunities, especially for girls. These findings are not new (Alvarez-Roldan, Parra, & Gamella, 2018; Fésüs, Östlin, McKee, & Ádány, 2012; Flecha & Soler, 2013) and suggest the ongoing lack of integration and high levels of violence and stigmatization of the neighborhoods in which these minority youth are living (Egi, 2020). The use of drugs, alcohol, and involvement in violent activities was reported as common among boys in the community (Kósa et al., 2007). Involvement in these activities was often described as inevitable and driven by external factors, such as the lack of better ways to employ time and the lack of future opportunities. This passive involvement in illicit and violent behaviors has been reported in other studies on minority youth' associations with gang violence (Ellis et al., 2020). Lack of a positive vision of the future and a sense of purpose in life are two documented risk factors for delinquency in youth (Miconi, Oulhote, Hassan, & Rousseau, 2020).

The isolation and uncertainty brought about by the pandemic contributed to an increase in mental health concerns and worries about the future among both Egyptian and Roma youth, and contributed in some cases to an increase in family conflicts and weakening of community solidarity. This confirms the urgent need to address mental health needs during this pandemic to reduce short and long-term negative impacts on young people's development (Benner & Mistry, 2020; Nearchou et al., 2020; Rousseau & Miconi, 2020).

Present and Potential Protective Factors

While the broader society was not a common source of comfort or certainty, the adolescents' family emerged as the main contextual asset that, despite all financial difficulties and divergences of opinion, would not abandon them and protected them from the dangers of life (e.g., violence, poverty). Strong family values have been reported in prior studies with Roma youth in Europe (Dimitrova et al., 2014), and our findings support the idea that both Egyptian and Roma adolescents' families are a crucial protective factor that needs to be considered in any prevention or intervention effort with these communities. Although the pandemic fragilized community solidarity and increased in some cases, the level of family conflict, family support remained essential to cope with the uncertainty and challenges of the lockdown.

Our findings suggest that both parents and adolescents attributed a lot of importance to one's education to build a better future, underlining how school dropout was rarely the result of cultural and family values (Lever, 2012; Levinson, 2015), but rather the result of financial and structural issues. School dropout and low school achievement were often due to lack of money to buy clothes or a school bag and to a lack of safety (Helakorpi, Lappalainen, & Mietola, 2020; Matras, Howley, & Jones, 2020). When teachers or community leaders were able to establish a trusting relationship with adolescents, they could become a fundamental element of youth' narratives of success. Unfortunately, those narratives were rare.

Our findings suggest that the establishment of a fruitful and continuative relationship with community organizations and services could play an important role for youth's positive development but may be jeopardized by a general resistance and lack of trust in institutions on the part of the adolescents and their families. These issues may reflect majority–minority tensions in a country that has already undergone rapid social changes and economic transitions and is presently facing social and economic challenges that go beyond those that have accompanied the pandemic. This resistance to community organizations and services is common of top-down interventions with vulnerable and marginalized communities (Timmer, 2013). Anti-oppressive   community-based,   bottom-up

approaches to prevention have been demonstrated to create more lasting relationships between services and marginalized communities (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998).

The desert of contextual opportunities reported by adolescents was balanced by a high value being placed in personal assets, such as one's personality and motivation. The quantitative data indicated very low levels of positive identity (e.g., vision of the future, sense of purpose, self-efficacy). The qualitative findings corroborated such results, but also suggested that being able to see oneself as strong, optimistic, hardworking, and perseverant was protective. This positive self-orientation helped adolescents to make sense of their past experiences and challenges and to construct a narrative that supported a positive vision of the future that included the possibility of regaining some sense of power and independence even during the pandemic. The impossibility to align their personal assets with the resources offered by their life context could jeopardize adolescents' chances to thrive and to actively contribute to their own development (Benson, 2003, 2007; Wiium & Uka, 2021).

Proposed Solutions and Implications of Findings

Adolescents themselves highlighted the need to ensure that young people in the community are offered the necessary structural and material support to be able to attend school, thus recognizing education and the school system among the main driving forces of change and improvement for their communities. This has been put at the forefront by the pandemic, which left many participants without the means to meet basic daily needs, reducing still further their ability to access education.

While their horizons were narrowing, participants highlighted the importance of thinking beyond the immediate needs presented by the pandemic to ensure long-term changes. They suggested the creation of more opportunities and support for young people in the community to find employment. In light of structural inequalities and discrimination, economic support to go to school and the creation of more jobs alone would not suffice to reduce unemployment and school dropout. A solution would have to include a more comprehensive approach that tackles discriminatory practices and prejudice in the mainstream society and institutions as well as the spatial stigmatization and violence in the neighborhoods where these communities live (Bosakova et al., 2020; Fésüs

et al., 2012). While the extent to which the pandemic is affecting these experiences has yet to be determined, our findings reinforce that this has been a reality for these communities long before the pandemic.

Given that threats to Egyptian and Roma adolescents' positive development are the result of a complex interplay at the individual, family, contextual and societal levels, policies and interventions need to adopt an inter-sectoral approach, encompassing sectors such as education, health, social policies, housing and the labor market (Fésüs et al., 2012). Prior research has documented that greater involvement of members of these communities in policy initiatives (e.g., active participation of Roma people in the design, implementation, and evaluation of research and intervention) strongly influences the effectiveness of such interventions (Fésüs et al., 2012; Netzelmann, Savova, Vassileva, Dreezens-Fuhrke, & Steffan, 2016). This points to the importance of a community-based bottom-up approach to research and intervention as a way to empower marginalized at-risk youth and build trust within and between communities (Iwasaki, 2016).

Cultural diversity training with an anti-oppressive lens to promote inclusivity and dismantle existing prejudices against Egyptian and Roma minorities among social and community workers, government officials, and school personnel could bring important benefits and contribute to the creation of a safer environment for minority youth. Investing in local community services in collaboration with local youth and cultural informants from the communities in order to provide minority adolescents with time and space for safe and monitored leisure activities (e.g., music, sports, arts) could help to improve living conditions in their neighborhoods and reduce levels of violence and delinquency.

The promotion of cultural integration in the school system and the use of a student-centered learning approach have been found as promising practices with Roma minority youth (Fésüs et al., 2012; García-Carrión, Molina-Luque, & Roldán, 2018; Helakorpi et al., 2020). The presence of cultural mediators from the minority communities as well as the engagement of families and other community members in decision-making processes in school was found to both prevent early school leaving among vulnerable youth and increase their enrollment in secondary education (García-Carrión et al., 2018). Building a bridge between family and mainstream institutions, such as schools and

social/community services, is a promising avenue to build trust and reduce parental anxieties about out-of-home risks for their children. Minority adolescents may also benefit from connecting with positive adult role models in their community via peer mentoring activities (Roffman, Suarez-Orozco, & Rhodes, 2003). In the short-term, to avoid the widening of educational disparities between minority and majority youth during the pandemic, it is crucial to ensure ways for minority youth to have Internet access and keep regular communication and support from the school to avoid dropout.

Overall health and mental health risks should be both considered and balanced by public health measures. The impact of isolation and lockdown measures on minority adolescents' mental health is concerning, especially when acknowledging the very limited personal and contextual assets they can count on. This study was conducted during the first wave of the pandemic, but the health emergency is far from over and longer exposure to such challenging circumstances is likely to further deteriorate adolescents' social and psychological well-being and resources (Benner & Mistry, 2020). To mitigate the collateral damages associated with the confinement, granting the possibility of some limited social life, for instance by promoting some peer relationships and a connection to school, can help the adolescents to cope with social isolation and routine disruption. Prevention efforts should be made to educate young people on how to maintain safe enough in-person social relationships during lockdowns and allow for some time outside of the home with friends. The promotion of clear information and messages of solidarity by the health, public health, and education networks can be a way to promote the re-establishment of community and family networks and contribute to overcoming the conflicts and social tensions associated with the pandemic.

In-person community-based and easily accessible services of psychological support (e.g., drop-in listening desk) could also help during and after this health emergency. Education provided by professionals to adolescents and their families about the normal responses to acute and chronic stress may help them to find ways to preserve and re-establish their routines and social relationships during the disruption brought about by the pandemic (e.g., sleeping and eating habits, physical activity). In such an intervention, it would be crucial that professionals acknowledge the potential presence of discrimination and violence in the life experiences of youth and help them think about

the future to make realistic plans to empower and increase their sense of agency, accounting for the many challenges they encounter and for the high level of uncertainty in their lives. In some cases, specialized help may be warranted. However, this may not be the case for the majority of youth who may be able to cope by relying on family and community support.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study presents some limitations. First, we targeted Egyptian and Roma youth in three locations in Albania and recruited them via collaboration with local community organizations. Results could differ for Egyptian and Roma youth from other communities or Albanian regions. Second, focus groups create a setting in which peer expectations may encourage participants to give normative answers that can influence the group discussion, and our mixed-aged and mixed-gender groups may not have been able to accurately detect diversity of experiences and opinions across ages and genders (Hollander, 2004). Future studies should adopt a multi-method research design and integrate focus groups with individual interviews. Third, despite the presence of cultural, historical, and social differences between Egyptian and Roma youth in Albania, our study found similar themes and experiences across both ethnic groups (in both qualitative and quantitative data), suggesting more commonalities than differences between them (De Soto et al., 2005). However, we conducted separate focus groups with Egyptian and Roma adolescents which may have reduced the opportunity for differences in their experiences to emerge. Future studies should also include focus group discussions in groups with participants from mixed ethnic backgrounds to more thoroughly investigate both similarities and differences between the two groups. Finally, although we used member checks to validate our findings and cultural mediators in each focus group, the main facilitator in all focus groups was Albanian and no coders were Egyptian or Roma; hence, some insights might have been missed.

Despite these limitations, to the best of our knowledge the present study is the first attempt to explore the developmental assets and experiences of Egyptian and Roma minority adolescents in Albania during the present health emergency. Our results highlight the urgent needs of these minority groups, especially during the pandemic and offer important insights on ways to move forward to

support the positive development of these adolescents during and in the aftermath of COVID-19. More efforts to empower minority youth and actively involve them in research initiatives and intervention are needed if we want to prevent the widening of inequalities between minority and majority groups during and in the aftermath of this health emergency and build a more equal world. The adoption of a community-based approach and the inclusion of cultural informants in the design and implementation of the study were key to ensuring the participation of these adolescents and support our conclusion that understanding the experiences of minority youth is possible and urgently needed.

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