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Value of Health, Life, Freedom and Economic Stabilization at the Early Stage of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Poland: According to Students of the University of Rzeszów

Introduction

The year 2020 will go down in the history of mankind as one that was dominated by problems related to the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and the pandemic it caused. SARS-CoV-2 officially appeared in December 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan, and then subsequent cases began to be recorded in other countries, especially in South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Thailand to cover more and more areas. Seeing the dynamics and scale of the phenomenon, in January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO), at a special council gathered for this purpose, announced a public health crisis, named the pathogen SARS-CoV-2 and the disease caused by it COVID-19.¹ Initially, it seemed that COVID-19 did not differ in symptoms from the seasonal flu known so far, but by observing the number of complications it causes, the world has learned how dangerous and how difficult to treat this infection can be. Although the majority

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¹ J. Duszyński, A. Afelt, A. Ochab-Marcinek et al., *Zrozumieć COVID-19*, https://informacje.pan.pl/images/2020/opracowanie-covid19-14-09-2020/ZrozumiecCovid19_opracowanie_PAN.pdf (accessed 15.06. 2020).

of those infected with SARS-CoV-2 experienced a mild or an asymptomatic course (in about 80% of cases), bilateral interstitial pneumonia appeared in the most severe cases, leading to ARDS,² sepsis or septic shock.³ In the months to come it turned out that even mild or asymptomatic transmission of the infection may cause later problems in patients, e.g. of a neurological or psychological nature. These symptoms are termed “long COVID”, and the term is used to describe various consequences of SARS-CoV-2, even weeks or months after the infection. The term “post-COVID syndrome” is used interchangeably and can be continuous or recurrent and resolving.⁴ Compulsory isolation related to the need to limit social interactions and imposed quarantines brought further negative long-term consequences related to physical⁵ and mental health. These manifested themselves in e.g. high levels of anxiety, fear, stress and even depressive symptoms that could persist long after the period of forced isolation.⁶

The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus appeared on the European continent at the end of January 2020. Initial infections were successfully contained in Germany, France, Finland and the United Kingdom, but the epidemic began to spiral out of control first in Italy, then in Spain and France. As a result, in March 2020, Western Europe became the centre of the disease, and then the virus quickly spread to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and to the other continents. On 5 March 2020, the disease was confirmed in 84 countries of the world, which caused that on 11 March 2020, WHO declared a pandemic.⁷ Six months after the pandemic was announced, more than 6 million people worldwide became infected with the virus and 380,000 died.⁸ According to data as of 18 October 2021, more than 240 million infections and 4.8 million deaths have been recorded worldwide.⁹ Observing the increasing number of infections in Europe and beyond, the European governments decided to take steps to prevent the

² Acute respiratory distress syndrome, caused by an injury to the capillary walls where the lungs cannot work properly.

³ M.A. Wujtewicz, A. Dylczyk-Sommer, A. Aszkielowicz et al., *COVID-19 – What Should Anaesthesiologists and Intensivists Know about It?*, “Anaesthesiology Intensive Therapy” 2020, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 34–41. DOI:10.5114/ait.2020.93756.

⁴ A.V. Raveendran, R. Jayadevan, S. Sashidharand, *Long COVID: An Overview*, “Diabetes & Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research & Reviews” 2021, vol. 15, iss. 3, pp. 869–875. DOI: 10.1016/j.dsx.2021.04.007.

⁵ A. Sharma, D.R. Pillai, M. Lu et al., *Impact of Isolation Precautions on Quality of Life: A Meta-analysis*, “Journal of Hospital Infection” 2020, vol. 105, iss. 1, pp. 35–42. DOI: 10.1016/j.jhin.2020.02.004.

⁶ S.K. Brooks, R.K. Webster, L.E. Smith et al., *The Psychological Impact of Quarantine and How to Reduce It: Rapid Review of the Evidence*, “Lancet” 2020, vol. 395, pp. 912–920.

⁷ J. Duszyński, A. Afelt, A. Ochab-Marcinek et al., *Zrozumieć COVID-19...*

⁸ World Health Organization, *Critical Preparedness, Readiness and Response Actions for COVID-19: Interim Guidance*, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/336373> (accessed 17.10.2021).

⁹ World Health Organization, *WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*, <https://covid19.who.int/> (accessed 17.10.2021).

spread of the virus. In order to break the chain of infections, China has decided to completely close down the Hubei province with its capital city of Wuhan, cutting off about 60 million people from any contact with the world.¹⁰ Seeing the tangible results of this action, many countries decided to take radical steps in the first weeks of the pandemic. Among the European countries, the state of emergency was declared by the Czech Republic, Georgia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Portugal and Romania; health emergency – France; emergency – Spain; emergency – Estonia and Slovakia; crisis – Luxembourg; emergency – Hungary. In other European countries, no emergency measures were introduced, while in Sweden and initially in Great Britain, almost no restrictions related to the pandemic were introduced, caused by the hope that a high number of infected people should immunize the society against the virus (herd immunity).¹¹ In Poland, an epidemiological emergency was announced on 12 March 2020, and an epidemic was announced on 20 March 2020. This resulted in the closure of schools, universities, restaurants, public offices, shops (except convenience stores), gyms, theaters, cinemas etc. The imposition of restrictions affected the functioning of entities in various areas of the economy. It also evoked the need to transfer students to the remote learning system. On 24 March 2020, Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki announced further restrictions, including a ban on leaving one's place of residence with exception of travel to perform professional or official activities, satisfying the basic needs of everyday life, performing services to counteract the effects of COVID-19, physical exercise or participating in religious worship. Assemblies of more than 2 people were forbidden as well. Restrictions on traveling by public transport and on foot were introduced, and a maximum of 5 people could participate in religious gatherings.¹²

On 1 April 2020, further restrictions were introduced, including the closure of parks, boulevards and beaches, along with the suspension of such services as hairdressing, beauty and tattoo salons. Limits on the number of customers in stores and service points were tightened, and time-slots were introduced in which only people over 65 could shop (from 10 am to 12 pm)¹³. This last batch of

¹⁰ H.A. Janiszewski, *Globalizacja produkcji, pomimo istotnych korzyści, niesie również ryzyko, w tym ryzyko zależności od jednego kraju – dostawcy*, <https://www.rp.pl/Biznes/302169950-Wuhan-w-Hubei--centrum-kryzysu.html> (accessed 25.04.2020).

¹¹ A. Stawicka, R. Stawicki, *Pandemia Covid-19. Sytuacja w wybranych krajach europejskich*, Opracowania Tematyczne 680, Biuro Analiz, Dokumentacji i Korespondencji, Kancelaria Senatu, Warszawa 2020, <https://www.senat.gov.pl/gfx/senat/pl/senatopracowania/186/plik/ot-680.pdf> (accessed 18.10.2021).

¹² Rozporządzenie Ministra Zdrowia z dnia 24 marca 2020 r. zmieniające rozporządzenie w sprawie ogłoszenia na obszarze Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej stanu epidemii, Dz. U. z 2020 r., poz. 522.

¹³ Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 31 marca 2020 r. w sprawie ustanowienia określonych ograniczeń, nakazów i zakazów w związku z wystąpieniem stanu epidemii, Dz. U. z 2020 r., poz. 566.

restrictions overlapped with the period of Easter (12–13 April 2020), which most Poles spent among their household members, as the government recommended not to arrange meetings with people from outside one household. It was also practically impossible to participate in masses due to the limitations related to the number of people in the churches, so the worshippers could only watch the mass on TV or on the Internet. This situation is commonly called the “first lockdown” in Poland. The following months showed that after the first wave of coronavirus passed, the consequent waves were coming, and it was necessary to impose further restrictions. At the time of updating this article (October 2021), Poland was experiencing the so-called IVth wave of COVID-19, but due to the fact that 52% of the population had already been fully vaccinated against the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, the Polish government did not decide to introduce far-reaching restrictions.¹⁴

Contemporary young Poles grew up in a world where there were no restrictions related to travel and movement. The situation related to the forced lockdown was undoubtedly surprising and difficult for them. The aim of the article is to try to answer the following questions: how do young people - students at the University of Rzeszów, perceive the pandemic situation? What are they missing most due to government restrictions? What are their concerns about this situation? What values are the most important for them at that time? Do they see any benefits related to lockdown? What do they think the world will be like when the pandemic is over? How will they behave when the pandemic restrictions are lifted? The research was conducted using the Computer Assisted (Aided) Web Interviews (next CAWI) technique and the results are presented in the chapters describing the results of own research. The introductory section discusses Polish research on the social aspects of the coronavirus pandemic, followed by a section describing the methodology of the author’s own research. At the end of the article, the results of the conducted research are summarized, accompanied with conclusions and indications for future research.

Social aspects of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic: A selective review of Polish research from the “first wave” of the pandemic

The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on many aspects of people’s lives, especially in the health, economic and social spheres. Concern for the health of oneself and of one’s relatives and of workplaces,

¹⁴ Polska Akademia Nauk, *COVID-19 a granice (stanowisko nr 23 z 26 października 2021 r.)*, <https://bip.pan.pl/artykul/209/807/covid-19-a-granice-stanowisko-nr-23-z-26-pazdziernika-2021-r> (accessed 30.10.2020).

which, along with the deteriorating economic situation, were more and more insecure, were combined with the limitations resulting from the lockdown, which additionally had a negative impact on the well-being of many people. Recognizing this problem, universities and research centers began to undertake research on the social aspects of the coronavirus, and a selective overview of research conducted on Polish society is presented below. Public Opinion Research Center (next CBOS) was one of the first to conduct research on the social aspects of the coronavirus pandemic. The first research to address this problem was conducted by CBOS just after the first officially diagnosed case of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus emerged in Poland, but before the introduction of extraordinary preventive measures related to the epidemic. It took place on 5–15 March, 2020 on a representative random sample of 875 adult residents of Poland. One of the research reports was published under the title *Poczucie zagrożenia u progu epidemii koronawirusa* [*Sense of Danger at the Threshold of the Coronavirus Outbreak*]. It shows that Poles were then quite skeptical about the potential threat of the pandemic. Almost half of the respondents (48%) were inclined to underestimate the danger, believing that COVID-19 is a disease similar to other seasonal diseases, such as influenza, from complications of which people also die. Slightly fewer respondents (46%) considered COVID-19 to be a unique disease that can have many negative effects on the world. Those opinions were slightly differentiated depending on the level of education, although less educated respondents were slightly more convinced of the seriousness of the situation. Age also poorly differentiated were views on this subject, although the age group that clearly neglected the epidemiological threat were young people (between 24 and 34 years old – 58%). 62% of respondents admitted that they were personally afraid of getting SARS-CoV-2, of which 45% were a little worried and 17% were very worried. 27% of the respondents were rather not afraid, 10% were not afraid at all, and 1% had no opinion on this subject.¹⁵

Another report from the same CBOS research is called “How we protected ourselves – the behaviour of Poles in the first days of the epidemic”. At the time of the research, the state of the epidemic in Poland had not yet been introduced, but the public was getting a lot of information about the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease, which testified to its great contagiousness and dangerous consequences. More than half of Poles (57%) at that time admitted that they had not changed anything in their everyday behaviour or the behaviour of their family due to the ease of contracting the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus or other viral diseases. Changes in behaviour were declared by 43% of respondents. Most often

¹⁵ CBOS, *Poczucie zagrożenia u progu epidemii koronawirusa*, oprac. K. Pankowski, Komunikat z Badań nr 40/2020, Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, Warszawa 2020, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2020/K_040_20.PDF (accessed 20.05.2020).

it was washing hands more often (80%), then avoiding the proximity of people with a cold, coughing or sneezing (66%), making sure not to touch the area of own mouth, nose and eyes in public places (64%), avoiding traveling (57%), avoiding being in public places (48%), not shaking hands and not kissing when greeting each other (40%), limiting social life, direct meetings with friends, acquaintances (34%), prophylactic use of drugs or supplements strengthening the body's immunity (30%), decontaminating houses or apartments (23%), stocking up on basic foodstuffs, medicines, hygiene products (12%), taking over-the-counter antiviral drugs (8%), covering the mouth and nose with a mask in public places (1%).¹⁶ As can be seen, despite the lack of official regulations introduced by the government at that time, a large group of Poles, being aware of the threat, applied measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

In the second week after the announcement of the epidemic in Poland (between 24 and 26 March), researchers from the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities (SWPS University) in Warsaw, in cooperation with the Stefan Batory Foundation, conducted the study entitled *Społeczeństwo wobec epidemii* [Society and the epidemic]. The research was conducted online on a nationwide random-quota sample of 1080 people over 18 years of age. The analysis showed that the level of acceptance of restrictions on freedom recommended by the authorities as intended to protect against infection was high (over 80% in the entire sample). It was differentiated by age, sex, education and place of residence. Acceptance grew with age, education level or size of the city in which the respondents lived. There was a significant discrepancy in this regard between the genders. Women more often than men declared that they complied with the recommendations (the difference was almost 10%).¹⁷

In April 2020, the report on the first stage of the research *Życie codzienne w czasach pandemii* [Everyday life in a pandemic time] was published. The analysis was conducted by researchers from the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań. The first stage of the research was conducted between 19 and 24 March 2020, using an online survey with 2,500 collected responses. Almost 95% of the respondents were in their place of residence in the first days of the pandemic. Those who were away from home at that time usually had important reasons, such as leaving for fear of becoming infected or the need to help their relatives. The respondents were asked to assess the behaviour of others during the pandemic. The vast majority negatively assessed the issue of organizing social gatherings at home (30% condemned such behaviour, 38% did not accept

¹⁶ CBOS, *Jak się chroniliśmy – zachowania Polaków w pierwszych dniach epidemii*, oprac. K. Panowski, Komunikat z Badań nr 42/2020, Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, Warszawa 2020, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2020/K_042_20.PDF (accessed 23.05.2020).

¹⁷ K. Maj, K. Skarżyńska, *Społeczeństwo wobec epidemii...*

it). Almost half of the respondents condemned or did not accept coughing in public places. Many also condemned or disapproved of the elderly leaving home (70%), disseminating false information about the pandemic on social media (90%), and excessive panicking (55%). On the other hand, practices that the respondents assessed with understanding or with a sense of humour were buying large amounts of spare food (70%), buying large amounts of hygiene products (55%), not leaving home at all (90%), blind following the information on social media about the pandemic (50%), deliberately taking sick leave for fear of contracting an infection (55%).¹⁸

Interesting results were obtained from the research conducted by Konsultujemy research and public consultation centre.¹⁹ The research was conducted between 16 and 25 March 2020 using the CAWI technique.²⁰ It was conducted among 481 users of social media, with the respondents over 25 years old. The vast majority of the respondents (72%) were concerned about the coronavirus-related situation. Almost half (48%) were afraid that they might get sick, and 84% were afraid that one of their relatives might get sick. 86% were in favour of staying home to contain the spread of the virus. 93% supported the idea of closing schools and churches for two weeks. Half (50%) feared that the situation related to the pandemic might affect their financial situation. One fourth (25%) believed that many people in Poland exaggerated in their opinions and behaviours related to the coronavirus. 56% of the respondents were of the opposite opinion. The respondents were not positive about the future economic situation of the country. As many as 93% of them believed that the economic situation after the coronavirus in Poland would deteriorate, 62% of which believed that it would “definitely worsen”.²¹

Method

Research on the social aspect of the coronavirus pandemic grows over time and covers a growing range of issues. Links to the majority of Polish research in this area are published on its website by the Polish Sociological Society at:

¹⁸ R. Drozdowski, M. Frąckowiak, M. Krajewski et al., *Życie codzienne w czasach pandemii. Raport z pierwszego etapu badań*, Zakład Teorii i Badań Praktyk Społecznych, Wydział Socjologii, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań 2020, pp. 17–18.

¹⁹ M. Milewicz, *Opinie i postawy Polaków wobec koronawirusa. Raport z badania*, <https://konsultacjst.blob.core.windows.net/consultations/badania/0170e1f1-9399-4bb4-8c42-1cbbf6b9dda4/summary/6453db1a-baa2-414c-99ac-18c4d24f3c28> (accessed 25.11.2020).

²⁰ A technique of collecting information in quantitative market and public opinion research, in which the respondent is asked to complete an electronic survey.

²¹ M. Milewicz, *Opinie i postawy Polaków...*

<https://pts.org.pl/badania/>. The research indicated above show the mood of Poles before the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus epidemic in Poland and in its first weeks. The following months showed that the social mood was changing, an example of which may be the holiday season, where many people seemed to ignore or not notice the threat, as evidenced by holiday resorts full of tourists in Poland, the failure to maintain a proper social distance, the failure to use personal protective equipment (face masks), gloves) in public places. The so-called COVID denialists, who used to call the pandemic a plandemic, and the coronavirus, the coronafreak, became publicly active. Soaring infection levels and mortality data in the autumn of 2020, both in Poland and in other countries of the world, showed once again how dangerous and undiscovered this virus was, and how important it was to approach our and others' health in a responsible manner. The virus was dangerous not only in the sphere of health and economy, but also in the social area, which is often underestimated. Being locked up at home, in fear of the consequences of the illness, and the risk of losing one's life evoked justified fears in general populations and among the youth in particular. These will be discussed later in the article when the author's own research results are presented. Following Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński's definition, we assume that the social mood is all human attitudes towards important social issues, which are not necessarily revealed in public life, but generally accurately identified in in-depth social research.²²

The method used in this paper was a review of existing research. The author familiarized herself with the research, reviewed it, summarized selected items, and organized the collected material in order to prepare her own research contained in the research tool. Direct interviews were used in the CAWI technique. The CAWI technique is a computer-assisted interview conducted on a website. The respondents access the questionnaire using a web browser and answer the questions contained in the questionnaire. Modern IT technology enables the performance of advanced functions of the questionnaire, including the control of responses by reminding them of their necessity or creating conditional questions. Images and multimedia elements can be included in online surveys to make them more attractive to the respondents.²³ The aim of the research was to find out the opinion of young Poles (students at the University of Rzeszów) about the situation in which they found themselves in connection with the lockdown introduced by the government, which was a consequence of actions aimed at stopping the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus in the society.

²² E. Wnuk-Lipiński, *Nastroje społeczne...*, p. 13.

²³ R. Stanisławski, *Triangulacja technik badawczych w naukach o zarządzaniu*, "Organizacja i Kierowanie" 2017, vol. 7, p. 109.

The research was conducted in April 2020 by means of the survey creation system: <http://ankiety.interaktywnie.com>. The survey consisted of 10 questions, 8 of which were close-ended, single and multiple choice, while the other two were open and required a descriptive answer. The sampling was not probabilistic, based on the availability of the respondents. It was caused by the situation related to the introduction of significant restrictions in direct social contacts and movement. Three hundred and eighty-four students at the University of Rzeszów participated in the research, out of which 377 responded to all required survey questions and only the responses of those people were included in the analysis. Most of the respondents were women (66.05%). Men constituted one third of the respondents (33.95%). The vast majority were people aged 20-25 (90.72%), only 3.45% were under 19, 1.86% from 26 to 30, 2.12% from 31 to 40, 1.59% from 41 to 50 years of age and one person (0.27%) was over 51 years old.

More than half of the surveyed students lived in rural areas (58.36%), 18.4% lived in cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants, 16.18% in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants and 7.43% in cities with 50,000–100,000 inhabitants. Due to their young age, the respondents were not usually in formal relationships. 90.19% of them were unmarried/single, 3.45% admitted living in cohabitation, 5.84% were married and 0.53% were divorced. Only one fourth of people were employed under various forms of employment contracts (25.73%), which might be due to the fact that as many as 94.16% of the respondents were full-time students, 79.05% were first-cycle students (21.49% second-cycle students). Taking up studies in full-time, first-cycle mode significantly reduces the possibility of taking up work, as studying requires a lot of time and commitment. The highest number of students filling the questionnaire were students of social sciences (42.71%), fewer respondents were students of science and natural sciences (25.20%), representatives of medical sciences and health sciences accounted for 13.53%, engineering and technical sciences 9.02%, arts 7.43% and humanities 5.31%.

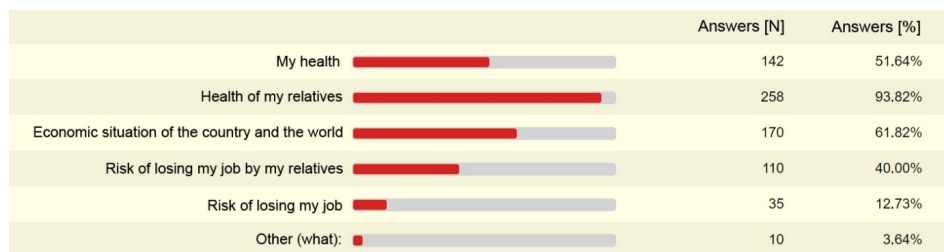
The research presented by the author, due to the fact that they were conducted in the so-called “first wave” of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic were one of the first to address the problem of the social consequences of the pandemic. There was almost no Polish research in this area during their conduct. There were also few world research, because academia was just beginning to analyse this issue.

Results

The world during the pandemic in the opinions of the students

The situation related to the coronavirus pandemic worried the respondents. Most of them admitted that they felt anxiety related to it (72.94%). Only 27.06% responded that they did not feel such anxiety. As shown in figure 1, that anxiety was related primarily to the health of relatives (93.82%) and, to a slightly lesser extent, the economic situation of the country and the world (61.82%). Despite the fact that the respondents were young people, more than half of them also worried about their health (51.64%). Up to 40.00% of them were worried about the risk of losing their jobs by relatives, and 12.73% were worried about the risk of losing their jobs by themselves. Other concerns were expressed by 3.64% of the respondents, including those related to: the risk of failing a semester at university, isolation, lack of contact with other people, loneliness, and the lack of job offers after graduation due to bad economic situation.

Figure 1. Responses to the question on concerns related to the coronavirus pandemic



Source: author's own analysis.

The respondents were asked to mark on a scale (from 0 to 5) what activities they lacked due to the restrictions introduced with the state of the epidemic in Poland, of which selecting 0 meant that they did not lack the given activity at all, while selecting 5 meant that it was missing the most. The choice was among shopping, sports, personal meetings with friends, personal meetings with family, going to restaurants, going to discos, parties, walks, the possibility of free movement, trips, participation in masses, stationary education, going to the cinema/theatre. The authors of the study focus on actions that were almost completely impossible to perform during the first wave of the pandemic due to government restrictions. The vast majority of respondents stated that they lacked personal meetings with friends the most. As many as 60.48% of the respondents chose 5 on a five-point scale. Young people also lacked, although to a lesser extent, personal meetings with their families (37.93% – response no. 5). The respondents were acutely affected by the inconvenience of the inability to

move freely (63.93% – response no. 5). In turn, trips were missed the most by 37.93% people. While studying remotely only, students missed their full-time studies (31.30% – response no. 5). More than one fourth of the respondents (27.85%) stated that the activity that was most noticeable for them was walking. One fourth of the respondents said that they lacked participation in the Holy Mass the most (25.46%).

The remaining activities obtained a much smaller number of maximum indications. The response no. 5 on a five-point scale was obtained by: going to the cinema/theatre (19.63%), sports (18.57%), going to a restaurant (12.20%), going to discos/parties (10.88%), shopping (6.63%). It seems that such a small percentage of responses indicating purchases in stationary stores was caused by the possibility of shopping online, which was already very popular among the young generation before the pandemic. The complete lists presenting the responses are included in the charts below.

The constant rush that had been characteristic of the world before the coronavirus pandemic was suddenly brought to a halt with an emergence of the lockdown. A slogan that often appeared in public space was: “time has stopped”. For young people, the situation where they were forced to stay at home and prevented from going out without any important reason was undoubtedly unusual and surprising. As part of the research, they were asked to list the benefits they perceived in connection with the need to stay in their place of residence due to restrictions on movement. Figure 2 shows that over half of the respondents (55.17%) stated that thanks to that they had more time for themselves. For 43.77% of the respondents, the possibility of being at home with relatives at that time was positive. More than one third (36.34%) stated that thanks to lockdown they had time to reflect on their life priorities. Only 17.24% enjoyed the fact that there was no need to attend universities. 19.36% of people did not see any positives of this situation, and 4.77% mentioned others, such as the possibility of better organization of their household (e.g. time for cleaning), time for training at home, the benefits of protecting the planet by reducing the amount of exhaust gas produced, more time for reading books and developing passions, more time for learning and self-education.

The obligatory stay in the place of residence generated additional time, which the respondents spent in various ways (see figure 3). Due to the fact that the research was conducted on students, they most often learned the course material (73.47%). They also spent a lot of time watching movies on the Internet (63.93%) and communicating with friends via instant messaging and other Internet channels (62.07%). More than half of the respondents used this situation to rest (55.97%) or to clean their places (53.85%). Half (50.66%) listened to music. Many people admitted that they would spend their time at home sleeping (44.56%). Over one third of them read books (38.99%), watched TV

Figure 2. Responses to the question on the positives of staying at home in the period of a coronavirus outbreak in Poland

	Answers [N]	Answers [%]
More time for yourself	208	55.17%
Possibility of staying with relatives at home	165	43.77%
Time to reflect on your life priorities	137	36.34%
No need to go to university	65	17.24%
There are no positives to this situation	73	19.36%
Other (what):	18	4.77%

Source: author's own analysis.

(32.89%) or developed their hobbies/interests (31.30%). Only 11.14% of people used that time to learn foreign languages, and 9.81% admitted that they were engaged in other activities, of which the most common response was: "I play computer games."

Figure 3. Responses to the question of what are the main activities of spending time at home during a pandemic

	Answers [N]	Answers [%]
I watch TV	124	32.89%
I communicate with my friends via instant messaging	234	62.07%
I watch movies on the web	241	63.93%
I listen to music	191	50.66%
I read books	147	38.99%
I learn material from the course of studies	277	73.47%
I clean	203	53.85%
I develop my hobbies and interests	118	31.30%
I learn foreign languages	42	11.14%
I rest	211	55.97%
I sleep	168	44.56%
Other (what):	37	9.81%

Source: author's own analysis.

Our research shows that students had a lot of concerns about the pandemic situation. They also suffered from limitations related to the possibility of free movement and the possibility of maintaining direct social contacts, especially with close people (family and friends). Their concerns were related in particular

to the health of their relatives and the future economic situation in the country and in the world, which, in their opinion, would directly affect their future, including their professional careers.

The world after the pandemic in the opinions of students

The respondents were asked about their predictions about when the pandemic would end and what would be the first thing they do when the situation is back to normal, and the lockdown was over. The survey contained two open questions, the first of which was: “What do you think the world will look like after the coronavirus pandemic?”. The responses fall into four basic categories: 1 – emphasizing the upcoming deep economic and social crisis, 2 – noticing changes in interpersonal contacts due to the fear of further infections, 3 – showing positive issues resulting from the pandemic (including appreciating things that have not been noticed so far), 4 – not predicting major consequences after the end of the pandemic and significant changes in the world.

The vast majority of responses were negative and focused primarily on the deteriorating economic, and hence social, situation at home and in the world. Here is an example: “A huge number of people will die. In my opinion, a similar number of people will die as in the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918–1919. Later on, there will be major social changes. If state governments fail to stop the riots, anarchy can result. Of course, many organizations such as the European Union will collapse sooner.” The lack of a quick chance to return to normal interpersonal contacts was an issue put in the first place by many respondents. The isolation and social distance imposed, according to the respondents, will cause a person to be afraid of another person for fear of contracting this or that virus: “In my opinion, people will get used to the fact that they lived in isolation for some time and returning to crowded places, e.g. to universities, will be uncomfortable; for example I am a person who will be afraid to return to ‘normal’ life when the epidemic is over.” Among the answers there were also those that pointed to the positive sides of the pandemic; however, they also featured a bit of anxiety about the future. The respondents expressed the hope that interpersonal relations would change in a favourable way as people would become more friendly towards each other. They would start appreciating what they have and enjoy small things that they had not noticed before: “I believe that despite the unpleasant effects of the coronavirus, we needed it. I mean humanity in general. Time seemed to slow down, we found a moment to do what we didn’t have time for before. I see the more gentle world after the coronavirus, with people more kind to each other, appreciating the fact that they can meet friends, go shopping to a mall or have an ordinary coffee in a café.”

Some respondents assumed that the pandemic will not change anything in the reality around us, and if it does, the changes will not be permanent, and after a time everything will return to the pre-pandemic status, or they will not be deep enough to significantly affect humanity. However, such opinions were a minority: "I think everything will return to normal and people learn to live with the knowledge that the virus is to stay between us and the spread of panic about it will decrease."

The second open question asked to the respondents referred to their predicted behaviour after the end of the pandemic and the related limitations. Its content was: "Please describe what will be the first thing you will do when the coronavirus pandemic is under control, and you can return to your former activities?" The vast majority of respondents stated that it would be a meeting with relatives – acquaintances, friends, family: "First of all, I will visit family and relatives whom I contact only by phone or communicators. I need a live meeting with those who are important to me"; "First, I will meet the family, because I especially miss visiting my grandma and grandparents. Time flies inexorably and I do not know how much time they still wander around this world." Some students assumed that after the pandemic restrictions were lifted, they would do things that had been obvious to them so far, such as going for a walk. Those responses show how important for them is freedom, which was partially taken away during the pandemic. As a result, respondents began to appreciate the simple activities and enjoy the little things: "I will go outside, take a deep breath, look up to heaven and thank God for freedom." There were also voices, although few, that the first thing would be to return to the university because distance learning has a number of disadvantages, e.g. it is not as effective as classroom teaching: "I will be back at the university and I hope it will happen before the examination session, to be on time for any workshops and laboratories. Online learning is ineffective." Among the responses, there were some that pointed out how important it was for the respondents to attend the mass in person and pray to God in the temple: "I will go to church to pray"; "I will go to Church and meet my family and friends."

The above quotes show that the respondents are concerned about what the world will look like after the pandemic. They are most concerned about the economic sphere, which largely determines the future of them and their relatives. They also fear that social relations will not return to the pre-pandemic state and that isolation and social distance will stay with us for longer. The vast majority of respondents stated that when the pandemic is over, they will first meet their close ones (friends or family) or do such a mundane thing as, for example, going for a walk or going to the store. Time has shown that after the lifting of the first lockdown, social life in Poland did not fully recover to the pre-pandemic state. Shopping malls that were previously places of having

good time, social meetings in a restaurant or going to a cinema, now started to be mere sales points, where customers come for strictly planned shopping because they do not feel completely safe doing it.²⁴ Some people believed that the pandemic was a figment of the powerful people of this world, and it did not really exist, but some still feared infection and applied the rules of limited social meetings and social distance.

Discussion

Values are existential in nature and, whatever their kind, they do not exist in isolation. They are an inseparable element of the human world, and the lifestyles, goals and life plans are related to the value system. The lifestyle of a given person is related to the recognized values, beliefs and perceptions of the world.²⁵ According to Małgorzata Dubis, who quotes Andrzej Tyszkiewicz, a lifestyle can be defined as a culturally conditioned degree and manner of satisfying the needs and the possibility of fulfilling aspirations by means of prerogatives resulting from the occupied social position.²⁶

For young people, safety is of paramount importance. Research conducted at the Pedagogical University of Krakow among young Poles and Ukrainians, shows that they choose security first (70%), much less prosperity (10%) and democracy received only 5% of responses.²⁷ This sense of security was taken away from young people with the onset of the pandemic, as shown, among others, by author's own research. The consequence of this was anxiety for himself and his loved ones, and a mostly pessimistic vision of the future. The respondents appreciated the value of the health, life, freedom and economic security they had before the outbreak of the pandemic. It seems that the pandemic situation will have far-reaching consequences of a social nature, especially among young people who have just started their adult life and will build it, feeling this uncertainty about the future.

Research on the lifestyle of academic youth carried out by Lidia Kłos before the pandemic in the academic year 2017–2018 showed that the preferred ways

²⁴ *Zmiany zachowań konsumentów w czasach epidemii Covid-19*, <https://poradnikhandlowca.com.pl/artykuly/deloitte-zmiany-zachowan-konsumentow-w-czasach-epidemii-covid-19> (accessed 6.06.2020).

²⁵ M. Dubis, *Wartości i style życia młodzieży*, "Jagiellońskie Studia Socjologiczne" 2014, no. 1, pp. 38–39.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁷ Ł. Grzesiczak, *Alarmujące wyniki badań? Młodzi bardziej cenią bezpieczeństwo niż demokrację*, <https://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/7,44425,23089696,alarmujace-wyniki-badan-mlodzi-bardziej-cenia-bezpieczenstwo.html> (accessed 15.04.2020).

of spending free time were: cinema (41%), gym (38%) clubbing (38%), hobbies (36 %) and a walk (35%)²⁸. During the first wave of the pandemic, due to the introduced lockdown, these activities were impossible, but as the author's own research shows, the respondents missed the most not to go to the cinema, gym or club, but personal meetings with friends and family and the possibility of free movement. Therefore, it can be concluded that they appreciated the activities that were previously obvious to them, which is also confirmed by their statements in open questions. It seems that it would be advisable to conduct research on the values, lifestyles and social moods of young people after the pandemic has been extinguished, because then it will be possible to diagnose whether there have been permanent changes in these areas as a result of the pandemic or have returned to the pre-pandemic state.

Conclusions

Since World War II, the world seemed a safe place that offered a predictable life. The 21st century has also been a time of prosperity, rapid technological development, unhampered global movement of people, and advanced medical discoveries that offer a chance for a healthy and long life. To the inhabitants of highly developed countries, the problems that appeared, for example, in the form of armed conflicts, usually seemed distant (apart from the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria) and did not threaten them directly. When the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus appeared, the entire world and lifestyle of people changed within a few weeks. This is the first pandemic to appear in the age of social media, and therefore access to information about it, both accurate and false, is enormous.

The media created a picture of the pandemic, and in its initial period, information about the virus dominated their message, thus intensifying the fear and anxiety related to the prevailing situation. As our own research shows, this anxiety was significant among the respondents because almost 73% of them felt it. During the first wave of the pandemic, students were most concerned about the health of their loved ones and, secondly, about the economic situation of the country and the world. What they missed most was face-to-face meetings with friends that were not replaced by digital media contacts. The inability to make face-to-face contacts made them appreciate and miss them. However, they also noticed the positive sides of the lockdown, such as more time for oneself and the possibility of being at home with loved ones, which 43.77% of respondents considered positive. While at home, they most often absorbed

²⁸ L. Kłos, *Styl życia młodzieży akademickiej*, "Gospodarka w Praktyce i Teorii" 2018, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 26–27.

the material from their studies, but also devoted a lot of time to entertainment, e.g. watching movies online or keeping in touch with friends on the Internet. Nevertheless, respondents saw far fewer positives related to isolation than negatives. They were primarily concerned about the coming deep economic and social crisis and the lasting changes in human interactions. The main positive was that the pandemic allowed them to appreciate things that were previously little appreciated and noticed, such as health and freedom.

Information shown in the media during the fall, most of them had a negative tone and were embellished with images from inefficient hospitals and titles that deepen the drama of the message. Therefore, it is important that the governments do not neglect the social aspect of the pandemic, especially in relation to young people who, as the research shows, often feel lost and depressed by the surrounding reality. One of the possibilities of helping such people is to enable them to obtain free psychological advice in the form of, for example, a generally available helpline. In Poland, there are, among others, support centres for people in the state of mental crisis. His helpline operates under the number 800 70 2222 and is a free 24-hour hotline on which psychologists from the Itaka Foundation are on duty. They direct callers to the appropriate aid facility in a given region of the country.²⁹ The campaigns addressing the social consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and the possibilities of dealing with the problems related to the crisis are also important. Campaigns on the social consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and special thematic websites on how to deal with problems related to the crisis pandemic are also important. An example is the new website Epidemia a Mental Health, launched by the Central Institute for Labour Protection, which contains advice on how to deal with mental problems during an epidemic.

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²⁹ *Linia bezpośredniego wsparcia dla osób w stanie kryzysu psychicznego*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/kppsp-limanowa/linia-bezposredniego-wsparcia-dla-osob-w-stanie-kryzysu-psychicznego> (accessed 16.10.2021).

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Summary

The article attempts to answer the question of the approach of students at the University of Rzeszów to the values of health, life, freedom and economic stabilization during the restrictions on movement and maintaining social contacts introduced at the beginning of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic. The introduction describes the characteristics of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic and the COVID-19 disease it causes. Then, a selective overview of Polish research on the social aspects of the pandemic conducted at its beginning, from March to May 2020, is presented. The next section presents the results of own research, divided into those concerning the perception of the current situation by the respondents and their predictions for the future. The purpose of the article was to review the results of existing research and to find out about the opinions of students on the given issues.

Keywords: coronavirus, fears, lockdown, pandemic, student, values

Wartość zdrowia, życia, wolności i stabilizacji ekonomicznej w początkach pandemii COVID-19 w Polsce w opinii studentów Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego

Streszczenie

W artykule podjęto próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, jaki był stosunek studentów Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego do wartości zdrowia, życia, wolności i stabilizacji ekonomicznej w czasie ograniczeń w poruszaniu się i utrzymywaniu kontaktów społecznych wprowadzonych w początkach pandemii koronawirusa SARS-CoV-2. Na wstępie opisano charakterystykę pandemii koronawirusa SARS-CoV-2 i wywołanej przez niego choroby COVID-19. Następnie przedstawiono selektywny przegląd polskich badań dotyczących społecznych aspektów pandemii prowadzonych w jej początkach, od marca do maja 2020 roku. W kolejnej części przedstawiono wyniki badań własnych, które podzielono na te, które dotyczą postrzegania obecnej sytuacji przez respondentów oraz ich przewidywań na przyszłość. Celem artykułu był przegląd wyników badań zastanych oraz poznanie opinii studentów w kwestii zadanej problematyki

Słowa kluczowe: koronawirus, obawy, lockdown, pandemia, student, wartości