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Difficulties Perceived by Polish Academic Teachers in Connection with the COVID-19 Pandemic: Predictive Role of Resilience

ABSTRACT
Coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19) poses a significant challenge for the society. One of such social groups are academic teachers. The aim of this study is to become acquainted with the perceived difficulties of Polish academic teachers connected with the COVID-19 pandemic and to assess the importance of resilience in perceiving these difficulties. One hundred and one (n = 101) Polish academic teachers completed the Scale of Perceived Difficulties Associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic SOTCov19 (NA) and the Resilience Assessment Scale SPP-25. The descriptive statistics, correlation analysis (Pearson’s correlations coefficient), and progressive stepwise regression analysis were used. The study shows that Polish academic teachers experience the greatest difficulties in three areas: recreational and cultural aspect, health and care aspects, and remote working – online lessons. A significant correlation between included variables was obtained. It is also well worth mentioning that the two subscales of resilience – tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge, and personal competence to deal with and tolerance of negative emotions – entail a predictive function in explaining the perceived difficulties, however the percentage of variance is low, unlike expected.

Keywords:
COVID-19 difficulties, COVID-19 pandemic, higher education, Polish academic teachers, resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

The name “coronavirus” comes from Latin word ‘corona’ and refers to the structure of the envelope of these particles. Under the electron microscope, it is seen as surrounded by a ring of small structures (Wawrzyniak et al., 2020). According to World Health Organization (WHO), the disease’s name was recommended as COVID-19 (Zhu et al., 2020). Next, 2019-nCoV was renamed as SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus – 2) by International Committee of Taxonomy of Viruses (Ruetzler et al., 2020).

Coronavirus causes respiratory and intestinal infections (Du Toit, 2020). The most common initial symptoms are fever, dry cough, muscle pain, and general weakness. The obtained data indicates that all patients with coronavirus infection 2019-nCoV develop pneumonia (Huang et al., 2020). The most frequent form of SARS infection transmission between people is the result of close and/or direct contact, e.g., droplet route of infection. However, due to the high resistance of the virus to environmental conditions, it is possible to transmit the infection indirectly via faecal-oral contact with contaminated objects. It should be stressed that knowledge of COVID-19 is still evolving (Wawrzyniak et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education around the world – from kindergartens to schools, universities and professional development facilities. Roughly, 94% of students worldwide were affected by the pandemic by mid-April 2020, i.e., 1.58 billion people in 200 countries (United Nations, 2020).

The first case of coronavirus in Poland was confirmed on March 4, 2020. On March 20, 2020, by the Decree of the Minister of Health (JoL 2020, item 491), the state of epidemic was declared in the Republic of Poland. As a result, i.a., the movement of citizens was restricted and the functioning of certain institutions and workplaces was limited. In connection with preventing, counteracting and combating COVID-19, the functioning of the university was limited by the Decree of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of March 11, 2020 (JoL 2020, item 405). Initially, it was restricted until March 25, however currently until September 30 (Decree of the Minister of Science and Higher Education, JoL 2020, item 911). During the epidemic, universities were obliged to conduct classes using distance learning methods.

Academic teachers are a specific professional group. The primary role of the academic teacher is to educate students or participate in the training of PhD students (Act of 20 July 2018 – Law of Higher Education and Science. JoL 2018, item 1668). The correct implementation of this task requires a whole range of competences as it is considered essential for academic teachers to explore new
teaching methods and improve learning programmes in order to provide attractive and useful content (Sierecka & Pindor, 2012).

In 2018, there were 86,044 full-time employed academic teachers in Poland (professors, assistant professors, assistant lecturers, senior lecturers, and lecturers) (GUS 2019, Higher Education Institutions and Their Finances in 2018). COVID-19 pandemic is the reason why universities in Poland needed to introduce e-learning. However, not all academic teachers are ready to conduct their classes remotely. Perceived difficulties are portrayed as a complication or adversity in daily life and work issues resulting from COVID-19 pandemic and they can be associated with, e.g., access to equipment enabling remote working, high speed Internet connection, access to educational material, verification of students’ presence during online classes and their assessment. Besides, academic teachers can also feel a lot of complications connected with their private lives. Teachers with short seniority are in the specific situation as they are put in the same professional responsibility as their experienced colleagues (Tait, 2008). Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic among academic teachers in Jordan indicated that teachers showed various levels of psychological distress and challenges during remote teaching (Akour et al., 2020). What is important, teachers and school counsellors also experienced stress at work (Košir et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated perceived difficulties can undoubtedly cause individuals to feel increased stress and distress symptoms (cf. Kimhi et al., 2020). Stress is defined as feelings that occur when an organism is threatened and when there is a threat of loss of resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A high sense of danger is positively correlated with individual resilience (Kimhi & Eshel, 2016). Ways of explaining positive adaptation in the face of difficult, stressful events are seen in the concept of resilience (Boczkowska, 2019).

The English concept of resilience comes from Latin verbs – *salire* (‘to spring’) and *resilire* (‘to leap back’) (Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2008). Resilience is a multifaceted complex concept that helps finding the answer to the question: why some people in a difficult, sometimes traumatic situations can recover from it and maintain a positive attitude, whereas others surrender to such experiences? For over 50 years, researchers have been trying to understand which natural mechanisms allow units, families or communities to cope in the face of adversity (Masten, 2018). When the world experienced consequences of World Wars and the Great Depression, the need of searching for such conditions of adaptation processes came up. The consequences of these events pose a question of how such dramatic adversities threaten human adaptation and what can be done to increase one’s adaptability. The research included the units or families who have experi-
enced the dead of a loved one, violence, separation, torture, homelessness, terrorism, consequences of economic, natural and political disasters (Masten, 2018; Southwick et al., 2014). All of the above can cause stress. Every person can be exposed to a potentially life-threatening traumatic experience in their lives, most importantly – probably more than once. These experiences can influence mental health and general post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Karam et al., 2014). At the same time, when stress exposure is very intense, chronic, uncontrollable and overwhelming, it leads to, inter alia, burnout, depression, and anxiety (Southwick et al., 2014). However, the research showed that some units or families will not give up and will adapt themselves to positive functioning in the face of trauma. Moreover, some of them may function better than earlier.

Resilience as a concept is seen in different ways – as a feature, a process, an outcome of that process, life course model, or a broad conceptual field encompassing all these concepts (Luthar, 2006; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016; Masten, 2018). According to the basic definition, resilience may be understood as “a process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress” (APA, 2014, paragraph 4). It is noted that this is a simplified approach because “determinants of resilience include a host of biological, psychological, social and cultural factors that interact with one another to determine how one responds to stressful experiences” (Southwick et al., 2014). Some researchers use the term ‘resilience’ to refer to individual characteristics – ego-resiliency. This term, first used in the 1980s, referred to a set of traits that indicated positive coping with stress and different difficulties and the ability to adapt to different life conditions and experienced adversities (Borucka & Ostaszewski, 2008). Many definitions of resilience emphasise the importance of stress and trauma for positive adaptation and good functioning. Chronic stress is defined as stressful situations with no definite end in time, and the duration of the stressful situation, its strength and the number of stressors are risk factors for somatic, psychological and social disorders. Stressful and traumatic experiences include the death of a parent in childhood, the divorce or separation of parents, disasters caused by forces of nature, or acts of terrorism (Heszen & Sęk, 2008). The meaning of the term ‘resilience’ has changed with the accumulation of knowledge concerning this phenomenon (Boczkowska, 2019). It should be emphasized that one should meet the following conditions to use the term ‘resilience’: 1. exposure to risk factors, processes and mechanisms; 2. action of protective factors, processes and mechanisms; 3. positive adaptation: positive result of two previously mentioned opposing factors (Ostaszewski, 2014). The concept unites salutogenic (protective factors) and pathogenic (risk factors) approach. In summary, resilience is
seen as a way of explaining positive coping despite the difficulties and adversity experienced.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the current study is to become acquainted with the perceived difficulties of Polish academic teachers resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and to assess the importance of resilience in perceiving these difficulties. Resilience is understood here as relatively permanent personality traits (Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2008). At the same time, the perceived difficulties are portrayed as a complication or adversity in daily life and work issues resulting from COVID-19 pandemic.

The implementation of research may provide the answers to the following questions:

(1) What are the perceived difficulties in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic of the surveyed Polish academic teachers?
(2) What is the resilience of the surveyed Polish academic teachers?
(3) What significance does the resilience have for perceived difficulties in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic of the surveyed Polish academic teachers, if any?

It indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has put the society in crisis and by the time the pandemic is over, each individual will have known someone who has been affected by this disease personally or indirectly. Hence, everyone will experience primary or secondary traumatic stress. Secondary traumatic stress is an emotional stress that occurs as a result of information about the traumatic experiences of other people (Hart & Nash, 2020). Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic meets the condition of resilience – an individual experiencing adversity or a traumatic event. It underpins the hypothesis that resilience is a significant factor linked to perceived difficulties.

PARTICIPANTS

Polish academic teachers were invited via emails to the study group. There were two major selection criteria, namely, being an academic teacher and conducting classes during the current summer semester 2019/2020. Finally, 101 Polish academic teachers participated in the research. This study was conducted at the turn
of May and June 2020. The research was a cross-sectional study. The participant’s characteristics are presented in Table 1.

### Table 1. Participant Characteristics

| Characteristic                        | Descriptor n (%) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| **Sex**                               |                  |
| Men                                   | 30 (29.70)       |
| Women                                 | 71 (70.30)       |
| **Marital status**                    |                  |
| Single                                | 16 (15.84)       |
| Married                               | 73 (72.28)       |
| Divorced                              | 10 (9.90)        |
| Separated                             | 1 (0.99)         |
| Widowed/Widower                       | 1 (0.99)         |
| **Place of residence**                |                  |
| City                                  | 78 (77.23)       |
| Rural area                            | 23 (22.77)       |
| **Academic degree**                   |                  |
| Doctor                                | 70 (69.31)       |
| Habilitated doctor                    | 20 (19.80)       |
| Not applicable                        | 11 (10.89)       |
| **Professor title**                   |                  |
| Yes                                   | 4 (3.97)         |
| No                                    | 97 (96.03)       |
| **Employment position**               |                  |
| Assistant                             | 21 (20.79)       |
| Assistant Professors                  | 38 (37.63)       |
| Adjunct with PhD degree               | 24 (23.76)       |
| Professor of University               | 13 (12.87)       |
| Titular Professor                     | 3 (2.97)         |
| Senior lecturer                       | 2 (1.98)         |
| **Employment form**                   |                  |
| Full-time                             | 89 (88.12)       |
| Part-time                             | 9 (8.91)         |
| Civil contract                        | 3 (2.97)         |
| **Material status assessment**        |                  |
| Very bad                              | 1 (0.99)         |
| Bad                                    | 6 (5.94)         |
| Average                               | 54 (53.47)       |
| Good                                   | 35 (34.65)       |
| Very good                             | 5 (4.95)         |
| **Descriptor M (SD)**                 |                  |
| Age                                   | 45.04 (10.65)    |
| Seniority                             | 17.39 (11.73)    |

The data was collected using SOTCov19 (NA) Scale of Perceived Difficulties Associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic constructed for the purpose of these research by the Authors of manuscript. This is an original questionnaire which consists of 45 items. It is divided into seven categories, namely T-SC – daily busi-
ness, T-ZR – family and social obligations, T-RK – recreational and cultural aspect, T-AZ – health and care aspects, T-AT – remote working – technical aspects, T-ZP – remote working – online lessons, T-SZ – self-development, and T-WO – total score of perceived difficulties. Respondents were asked to assess the items using five point scale where 1 means “I don’t feel any difficulty”, and 5 – “I feel very difficult”. Additionally, one extra item was available, namely “This category doesn’t concern me”. There was a gap provided for the respondents to enter their own/other difficulties. At the end of the scale, the respondent was asked to enter three major difficulties. The psychometric properties of the instrument are satisfactory: Cronbach’s alpha – 0.76 (Cronbach’s alpha for all subscales: T-SC – 0.74; T-ZR – 0.76; T-RK – 0.77; T-AZ – 0.75; T-AT – 0.77; T-ZP – 0.78; T-SZ – 0.77), and Pearson’s r from 0.24 to 0.77.

The Resilience Assessment Scale (SPP-25) by N. Ogińska-Bulik and Z. Juczyński (2008) is a 25-objects questionnaire evaluated by respondents on a 5-item scale from 0 to 4. It is used to determine the general level of resilience and the score may be observed in five subscales: perseverance and determination in action (R-WD), openness to new experiences and a sense of humour (R-OD), personal competence to deal with and tolerate negative emotions (R-KO), tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN), optimistic attitude to life and ability to mobilize in difficult situations (R-ON). The scale has good validity and reliability: Cronbach’s alpha for total SPP-25 – 0.88, and for each subscales: R-WD – 0.89; R-OD – 0.89; R-KO – 0.82; R-TN – 0.83; R-ON – 0.85; Pearson’s r = 0.67 – 0.75. The total score of SPP-25 can be expressed on a standard ten scale where results in the range of 1–4 indicate low, 5–6 medium, and 7–10 indicate high resilience (Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2008).

Data were analyzed using SPSS 26. The analysis was conducted in two stages. Firstly, all of the descriptive statistics and coefficients of correlations were prepared for the analysed variables (perceived difficulties and resilience). Secondly, a regression analysis was used in order to test the hypothesis whether resilience plays a significance role for perceived difficulties in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic among Polish academic teachers.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the resilience and perceived difficulties in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. Three difficulties which obtained the highest average value are: recreational and cultural aspect (T-RK),
health and care aspects (T-AZ), and remote working – online lessons (T-ZP). The least difficulties were perceived in connection with the technical aspects of remote work. In resilience, the highest scores were achieved in terms of optimistic attitude to life and ability to mobilize in difficult situations (R-ON), perseverance and determination in action (R-WD), as well as in tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN).

The respondents were asked to indicate three out of 45 categories of difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic which stand for the greatest complications for them (Table 3).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Variables: Perceived Difficulties (1–8) and Resilience (9–14)

| Variables                                      | M   | SD  | Score range (min-max) | Scale range (min-max) | Subscale |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| 1. Daily business (T-SC)                      | 13.65 | 5.05 | 4-25                  | 1-30                  | 2.28    | 0.84 |
| 2. Family and social obligations (T-ZR)       | 18.29 | 6.49 | 5-32                  | 1-35                  | 2.61    | 0.92 |
| 3. Recreational and cultural aspect (T-RK)     | 19.13 | 5.75 | 3-30                  | 1-30                  | 3.19    | 0.96 |
| 4. Health and care aspects (T-AZ)              | 15.72 | 5.77 | 3-25                  | 1-25                  | 3.14    | 1.15 |
| 5. Remote working – technical aspects (T-AT)   | 7.44  | 3.70 | 0-25                  | 1-25                  | 1.49    | 0.74 |
| 6. Remote working – online lessons (T-ZP)     | 26.59 | 9.89 | 10-50                 | 1-50                  | 2.66    | 0.99 |
| 7. Self-development (T-SZ)                     | 12.34 | 4.63 | 4-23                  | 1-25                  | 2.49    | 0.93 |
| 8. Difficulties perceived Total Score (T-WO)   | 113.16 | 28.75 | 54-184                | 1-220                 | 2.57    | 0.65 |
| 9. Perseverance and determination in action (R-WD) | 15.58 | 3.14 | 5-20                  | 0-20                  | x       | x    |
| 10. Openness to new experiences and a sense of humour (R-OD) | 16.21 | 2.87 | 9-20                  | 0-20                  | x       | x    |
| 11. Personal competence to deal with and tolerance of negative emotions (R-KO) | 15.06 | 3.35 | 2-20                  | 0-20                  | x       | x    |
| 12. Tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN) | 15.38 | 2.86 | 6-20                  | 0-20                  | x       | x    |
| 13. Optimistic attitude to life and ability to mobilize in difficult situations (R-ON) | 14.08 | 3.21 | 3-20                  | 0-20                  | x       | x    |
| 14. Resilience Total Score (R-WO)              | 76.31 | 12.76 | 36-100                | 0-100                 | x       | x    |
Table 3. The Most Frequently Reported Difficulties Associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic among Surveyed Academic Teachers (N = 96)

| Item                                                                 | N    | %   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----|
| 1. Restrictions related to the organization of family and social gatherings | 31   | 32.30 |
| 2. Combining family and professional responsibilities                 | 21   | 21.88 |
| 3. Free recreational movement, e.g., walking                           | 19   | 19.79 |
| 4. Limited possibility of direct contact with students                 | 17   | 17.71 |
| 5. Participation in Holy Mass, services and religious meetings         | 16   | 16.67 |
| 6. Use of public places, e.g., park, square, playground                | 16   | 16.67 |
| 7. Wearing gloves and protective masks                                 | 12   | 12.50 |
| 8. Use of gym classes (gym, fitness)                                   | 11   | 11.46 |
| 9. Contact with a doctor                                               | 10   | 10.42 |

*does not add up to 100%

The most frequently indicated difficulty in everyday functioning for the respondents is restriction related to the organization of family and social gatherings – almost every third respondent indicated this inconvenience. 21.88% of surveyed academic teachers say that the biggest problem causes the combination of family and professional responsibilities and almost 1/5 of all respondents (19.79%) experience the greatest difficulties in functioning related to restrictions on free, recreational movement.

Table 4 presents the relationship between included variables: resilience and perceived difficulties, in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remote working – online lessons (T-ZP) was found to be negatively correlated with the four dimensions of resilience: perseverance and determination in action (R-WD), openness to new experiences and a sense of humour (R-OD), personal competence to deal with and tolerate negative emotions (R-KO), tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN), and the total score of resilience (R-WO).

Self-development (T-SZ) was also negatively correlated with personal competence to deal with and tolerate negative emotions (R-KO), as well as with tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN) and total score of resilience (R-WO).
Table 4. Correlations (Pearson’s r) between the Analysed Variables: Resilience and Perceived Difficulties

| Variables          | 1   | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   | 11   | 12   | 13   | 14   |
|--------------------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Perceived difficulties |    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| T-SC               | -   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| T-ZR               | 0.53** | -   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| T-RK               | 0.46** 0.33** | -   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| T-AZ               | 0.54** 0.44** 0.55** | -   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| T-AT               | 0.42** 0.25** 0.24* 0.31** | -   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| T-ZP               | 0.38** 0.36** 0.27** 0.34** 0.50** | -   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| T-SZ               | 0.32** 0.33** 0.24* 0.29** 0.28** 0.56** | -   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| T-WO               | 0.73** 0.68** 0.64** 0.71** 0.59** 0.77** 0.63** | -   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Resilience         |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| R-WD               | 0.17 | 0.04 | -0.06 | -0.10 | -0.05 | -0.22* | -0.12 | -0.12 | -      |      |      |      |      |      |
| R-OD               | -0.18 | -0.08 | 0.05 | -0.05 | -0.07 | -0.16* | -0.18 | -0.14 | 0.15** | -      |      |      |      |      |
| R-KO               | -0.06 | -0.07 | 0.05 | -0.07 | -0.12 | -0.22* | -0.20* | -0.15 | 0.63** 0.58** | -      |      |      |      |
| R-TN               | -0.17 | -0.15 | -0.05 | -0.22* | -0.08 | -0.22* | -0.23* | -0.24* | 0.57** 0.62** 0.79** | -      |      |      |      |
| R-ON               | -0.08 | -0.09 | -0.05 | -0.19 | -0.06 | -0.17 | -0.17 | -0.18 | 0.51** 0.48** 0.75** 0.78** | -      |      |      |      |
| R-WO               | -0.11 | -0.08 | -0.01 | -0.15 | -0.09 | -0.24* | -0.23* | -0.20* | 0.72** 0.70** 0.91** 0.91** 0.86** | -      |      |      |      |

T-SC – daily business; T-ZR – family and social obligations; T-RK – recreational and cultural aspect; T-AZ – health and care aspects; T-AT – remote working – technical aspects; T-ZP – remote working – online lessons; T-SZ – self-development; T-WO – difficulties perceived total score; R-WD – perseverance and determination in action; R-OD – openness to new experiences and a sense of humour; R-KO – personal competence to deal with and tolerance of negative emotions; R-TN – tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge; R-ON – optimistic attitude to life and ability to mobilize in difficult situations; R-WO – resilience total score.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01
Total score of the perceived difficulties (T-WO) was negatively correlated with tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN) and the total score of resilience (R-WO). In addition, health and care aspects (T-AZ) were negatively correlated with tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN). In all presented correlations, the statistical significance is at 0.05.

Results of the resilience level are presented below in Table 5.

Table 5. The Resilience Level of the Surveyed Academic Teachers

| Level of resilience | N  | %   |
|---------------------|----|-----|
| Low                 | 19 | 18.81|
| Medium              | 37 | 35.63|
| High                | 45 | 44.56|
| Total               | 101| 100  |

The largest group of respondents, less than half of them (44.56%), are characterized by a high level of resilience. Next, there are academic teachers with a medium level of this variable (35.63%). The fewest respondents are characterized by a low level of resilience (18.81%).

Table 6. Results of the Stepwise Regression Analysis

| Predictors                                                                 | B   | SEB  | β   | t      | p      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|-----|--------|--------|
| Tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN)             | -0.71| 0.17 | -0.35| -1.97  | < 0.04 |
| Personal competence to deal with and tolerate negative emotions (R-KO)    | 0.58 | 0.17 | -0.34| 1.99   | < 0.04 |

In line with the theoretical assumptions of this research as well as to verify the formulated hypothesis, a stepwise regression analysis was used. Table 6 presents the regression model of health and care aspects (T-AZ), which includes tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN) and personal competence to deal with and tolerate negative emotions (R-KO). It only predicted 8% of the variability of this perceived difficulty linked with COVID-19 pandemic among Polish academic teachers. Higher level of tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN) and personal competence to deal with and tolerate negative emotions (R-KO) was linked with less difficulties in health and care aspects. Tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN) have marked a more significant
contribution to its intensity among the surveyed women. The obtained results indicated that as much as 4% of variability in self-development (T-SZ) was explained only by tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN). Higher level of tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN) was linked with less difficulties in self-development (T-SZ). At the same time, tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge (R-TN) explained only 6% of the variability in the perceived difficulties in total score (T-WO). Higher tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge corresponded to a less perceived difficulties at all.

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic that we have been experiencing for several months is far from over. The term ‘unprecedented times’ has been used to describe reality during the pandemic (Sokal, Babb, & Trudel, 2020). The effectiveness of activities in higher education during the pandemic largely depends on the academic teachers themselves. Therefore, it is important for this group to receive support in overcoming difficulties related to, among others, distance learning. When teachers do not have the resources they need and constant job demands are high, they experience chronic stress and, as a consequence, a professional burnout. There is a need to analyse issues related to the functioning of teachers, including academic teachers, in order to strive to understand the mechanisms determining high quality of teaching in the pandemic era.

This article indicates the difficulties experienced by academic teachers as a result of COVID-19 both in the professional and private sphere. These subjective feelings could only be discussed at that specific point in time, namely, a month after the lock-down and distance learning had been announced. It is noted that the urgent need to move education to an online process has increased the stress and workload among university staff. It should also be emphasized that academic teachers have previously struggled with balancing teaching and research responsibilities with their private lives (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2020). In this study, which took into account the aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic, academics also indicated that combining the professional and private spheres is difficult for them. However, the respondents most often indicated that the limitations related to contacts with other family members and close friends were the greatest difficulty. In the areas perceived as the greatest difficulties, remote teaching was ranked on the third place (research question no. 1). Almost half of the surveyed academic teachers experience a high level of resilience (research question no. 2). It can be assumed
that they are aware that life is full of challenges and despite numerous problems and the fact that adversities cannot be avoided, one should be open and flexible which will facilitate a positive adaptation.

Moreover, the study also attempted to determine the importance of resilience for the perceived difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (research question no. 3). The proposed hypothesis has only been partially confirmed. The obtained results indicate that resilience explains the difficulties experienced by academic teachers, however to a very limited extent. In particular, the resilience dimension, which is tolerance for failure and treating life as a challenge, is related to the overall result of the perceived difficulties and such areas as health and care aspects and self-development. Perceiving one’s life as a challenge and striving to achieve the set goals, despite the difficulties and adversities, characterize people with a high level of resilience. It may, therefore, indicate that this variable is conducive to activities related to one’s own development, care for one’s health as well as a general approach to completely new experienced difficulties, e.g., specific challenges that must be faced. It should be emphasized that the empirical analysis showed that the largest group of the surveyed academic teachers is characterized by a high level of resilience which prompts the perception of this professional group in a specific way. On the one hand, the level of resilience may, to some extent, determine the difficulties they experience and foster the belief that any boundary can be faced. On the other hand, despite showing a high level of resilience, a careful reflection on the current pandemic situation may favour the perception of some areas of functioning as the ones causing particular difficulties. At the time of the research, this particular limitation was noticed not only in a professional aspect, but also within the families and social meetings. The latter was caused by the need to work remotely from home where other household members often had to remotely perform their duties as an employee, student, or pupil. This specific situation, which had never happened before, significantly disrupted the existing patterns of thinking and acting, presenting academic teachers with a number of new challenges.

This research is an initial diagnosis of the difficulties related to the daily functioning and conduction of distance learning. The conducted analysis has proved that resilience does not condition their perception to a large extent. Therefore, other determinants should be sought – individual, personality-related or social factors that are relevant to the perception of the current pandemic situation and positive adaptation.

There is a need to continue the research on the functioning of academic teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the willingness to provide various
types of support to this professional group. As long as the quality of the education process of students is taken into account, it should be emphasized that it cannot be lower than before the pandemic. It would be the most beneficial if academic teachers could develop and enrich their didactic workshop. Therefore, it can be assumed that the perception of the difficulties related to the pandemic, their nature and intensity which depend on numerous factors, belongs to the personal interpretation of an individual based on their values, beliefs, personal experience, and knowledge (Boldrini, Sappa, & Aprea, 2019). For this reason, the conducted analysis should be multidimensional in order to establish the roles of individual factors and their interrelationships. It would allow to build a theoretical framework for the process of supporting academic teachers.

Apart from cognitive values, the current research has some limitations. Firstly, due to the lack of literature concerning the subject, it was impossible to discuss the obtained research results. Secondly, the present study is quantitative, thus unique experience of difficulties that can occur in academic teachers could not be captured here. Qualitative research should complement the current results. Therefore, the presented study should be treated as a preliminary diagnosis of this phenomenon. Thirdly, the relatively low percentage of the explained variance of perceived difficulties in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic of academics with the participation of resilience indicates the significance of other variables not included in this study.

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