Social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for Poles

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Abstract

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on various areas of life is currently a key issue to which many scientific studies are devoted. This paper deals with social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for Poles. The purpose of this study is to analyze the effects in this respect. The materials used in the paper are mainly taken from the national literature. In the opinion of the authors of this article, this topic is extremely important, and at the same time, is an actual issue, because the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, and the whole world is struggling with its consequences. As it appeared, the possibility of the second and third waves was indicated from the very beginning of the pandemic. Taking into account the events of the last few months, it can be assumed that an avalanche pandemic increase may be expected at any time. Thus, the implementation of the nationwide surveys may contribute to, the so-called, preparation for the following waves of the coronavirus. The consequences of the epidemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus will be significant and it seems that it may affect all spheres of our lives. Polish society negatively assesses the very balance of the pandemic. The vast majority of them perceive the emergence of the economic crisis and notice the increase in inequality. It should be noted, that a small part of Poles sees some positive outcomes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a serious threat to society in the field of public health, but has also dramatic consequences for other social issues, such as economic security, democracy and gender equality.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, society, social support.

Introduction

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on various areas of life is currently a key issue to which many scientific studies are devoted. The consequences of the epidemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus will be significant and it seems that it may affect all spheres of our lives. Catastrophic costs that we will have to bear in order to return to the fragile equilibrium dominate in the public debate. Surely, the epidemic will take a heavy toll. It is impossible to underestimate the importance of the situations caused by illness and death of many people. One cannot ignore the fact that the financial situation of many families and social groups has deteriorated significantly and may not return to the state preceded March 2020. One should also take into account the harmful psychological consequences of long isolation, especially among young people and the elderly. It is hard to pretend it is just a nightmare we are about to wake up from. All this is happening before our eyes and it hurts so much that we were completely unprepared for it (R. Matczak, 2020).

Dr A. Rudnik emphasized that the epidemic affected each of us. “We are dealing with a long-term, chronic stress which is wreaking havoc in...”

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many ways - it affects our cognitive, neurological and immune systems”. She also added that stress mainly concerns fears for one’s own health and that of loved ones (A. Rudnik, 2021).

Polish society negatively assesses the very balance of the pandemic. The vast majority of them perceive the emergence of the economic crisis and notice the increase in inequality. It should be noted, that a small part of Poles sees some positive outcomes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, when education status of people increases, it also increases the percentage of people pointing out the negative effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Dissatisfied with life people evaluate the coronavirus influence on society in a more negative way than people who are satisfied with life and are able to properly assess their current condition (P. Długosz, 2021).

**Material and methods**

Based on the results of research carried out by P. Długosz before the second wave of SARS-CoV-2, it is indicated that Polish people are under the negative influence of the pandemic. The Poles assess negatively the balance of the pandemic and show fear of the future. It is interesting that the negative assessment also results from political views. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the awareness of the public about many problems on which they have been unaware so far. It goes here, first of all, about inequality of different societies. The difference on a global scale is significant. Polish people showed sympathy at the time when Italian crematoria were overwhelmed by corps and it became necessary to transport the coffins to the neighboring communes. Meanwhile, in Ecuador, the bodies of people who died of coronavirus were lying on the streets and in houses (P. Długosz, 2021).

It goes without saying that the poorest countries face the worst effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. When analyzing situation in society, it can be noticed that the crisis mainly concerns:
- economically weak entities,
- physically weak entities,
- competently weak entities.

Recent studies show a connection between social isolation and an increased concentration of acute phase in the blood, namely:
- fibrinogen,
- c-reactive protein.

Higher levels of inflammatory markers is the natural reaction of human body to injuries or infection, because then it is necessary to mobilize and survive the threatening condition. The evolutionary mechanism is considered to be one of the proposed explanations for this phenomenon. Being in a large community is associated with possibility to feel greater safety, due to the fact, that the risk of serious injury or death as a result of an attack by a predator is reduced. It is indicated that a lonely individual is much more vulnerable, as he/she is an easier target for a potential predator, and in case of injury, he/she will not receive quick assistance (A. G. Poleszczuk, 2021).

Socially isolated people may develop a typical stress response with increased activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and the sympathetic nervous system. It results in higher level of inflammatory markers. The organism then adjusts to the increased level of possible risk of injury, thus increasing the probability of survival in the event of unfavorable circumstances (A. G. Poleszczuk, 2021).

Such situation is not inherent in people who are in contact with others, while the indicators of acute phase proteins are at a lower level. In case of long-term inflammation, it is said that there are negative effects on health and an increase in the risk of:
- ischemic heart disease,
- stroke,
- cognitive dysfunction,
- depression (A. G. Poleszczuk, 2021).

According to experts, new forms of family and friendship contacts, which have been forced by the current situation, have negative consequences for the mental condition. They cause a phenomenon described as a “skin hunger” - a touch. Specialists point out that it
increases with the following months due to the obligation to keep distance and recommendations to avoid gestures of closeness, especially with people, who you do not live with. Physical contact is reassuring, because it is the oldest way to feel safe. It causes positive neurochemical changes, such as the production of oxytocin, an attachment hormone that has a soothing effect (medonet.p).

Taking the above mentioned into consideration, it should be noted that despite the limitations resulting from the pandemic itself, maintaining contacts with other people is of great importance, even by using the Internet or a telephone. This applies primarily to people who live alone or have been subject to forced quarantine (A. G. Poleszczuk, 2021).

In order to mitigate the negative effects of isolation, it is worth limiting the availability of media information, which largely focuses on the increase in the rate of infected people and the increase in the number of people who died because of coronavirus. The above information did not appear with such a significant intensity as it is today. In this way, the fear of the recipients increases and it contributes to a higher level of stress. Therefore, even the World Health Organization has issued a recommendation to limit the above information, as it causes anxiety and discomfort among recipients. Then it is worth limiting the inflow of information only to those concerning the recommendations of sanitary and epidemiological services and other reliable sources, thus enabling better adaptation to the prevailing conditions in the world (A. G. Poleszczuk, 2021).

One of the most useful fields of information is:
- ways of coronavirus transmission,
- ways of infection risk reduction,
- proper hygiene care.

It is possible in this way to realistically increase safety in society and, at the same time, to protect mental health if people are convinced that they are in control of risk to the greatest and best possible extent (A. G. Poleszczuk, 2021).

One of social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic is also the need to maintain an appropriate level of physical activity, in this case while staying at home. This type of action is intended to replace inaccessible physical exertion in the fresh air.

Considering the objective issues, it can be stated that coronavirus pandemic is a total catastrophe, relating to all possible stressors, namely, it is:
- a trauma (threatens health, life);
- an event with life impact (e.g. job loss);
- an obstacle to proper functioning in everyday life (e.g. causing troublesome changes in the daily routine);
- a macrosystemic event (the economic situation is deteriorating);
- a series of non-fulfillments (because of the necessity to cancel life stages);
- a chronic stressor.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still spreading all over the world, the number of deaths continues to increase, and it continues to cause stress, and further virus relapses are predicted (A. G. Poleszczuk, 2021). Thus, the social and psychological consequences of this type of disaster will continue to occur. Taking into account the available research on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for Poles, it is indicated that this pandemic is characterized by:
- lack of unanimous assessment of the threat,
- lack of sufficient information that can be considered reliable,
- political conflict,
- polarity in society.

Social support is understood as: “the type of social interactions through which individuals give each other real assistance (received social support), create a network of interpersonal contacts perceived as caring and ready to provide help in times of need (perceived social support). It is an extremely important resource that protects health and mental well-being in life difficulties” (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021).

Social support involves more research than the actual help obtained in this matter. Social identifications that result from belonging to particular social groups, such as: family, political
party, neighborhood or cultural region are also fundamental factors that determine both, health and the appropriate mental state. Various types of disasters and catastrophes are political events associating with the simultaneous pressure of a quick return to the previous state, even in case of the necessity of ruling out the possibility of bringing about social changes (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021).

### Results and discussion

The research conducted in April 2020 on a nationwide sample by CBOS shows that the most burdensome restrictions for Poles include: the need to stay at home (48%), the prohibition of going to forests and parks (45%) and the need to wear masks (44%). The latter is an interesting example of a lifestyle that is not adapted to Polish and European styles, is associated with the countries of the Far East, especially Japan. While at the beginning of the pandemic, wearing masks was even en vogue, it seems that now the effect of attractiveness has given way to the belief that it is burdensome and artificial in nature (A. Cybulska, K. Pankowski, 2020).

For the time being, we can only speculate which social norms and behaviors will survive the pandemic. They include habits that are considered by people as beneficial ones. The advantages of restrictions imposed by the government include, spending less money (40% of Poles) – less consumption is obvious, and then the ability to watch more movies (30%), doing home renovations, cleaning up (23%) and reading books (22%). Not less than (19-21%) indicate benefits in the form of having a rest, reflecting on your life, cooking, having more time for yourself, devoting yourself to your life passions and talking to your spouses. It should be emphasized that they are all forced by external circumstances, so they are rather temporary (A. Cybulska, K. Pankowski, 2020).

According to CBOS survey, only 27% of Poles indicated that they lost their earnings or income, 7% - they lost their job, 2% - they had to close the company, 23% - they had lower income, but 6% indicated that started to work at that time. The research shows that the negative effects of the coronavirus are concentrated in only one social category - business owners: 54% of owners indicated a decrease in income, while among all employees, this percentage was 25%. The owners were also overrepresented in terms of the necessity to work in a shorter period of time (this was declared by 43% of owners in comparison to 24% of the total population). Therefore, a more general conclusion is that business owners suffered more than other social categories of people during the COVID-19 pandemic (A. Cybulska. K. Pankowski, 2020).

The most important thing is that the pandemic has heightened social distancing. This applies, inter alia, to meeting lifestyle needs. It is true that upper class population is engaged in various forms of sports, go to the theater and attach greater importance to spending their free time more often, in comparison to people belonging to the lower-class population. The COVID-19 pandemic is the confirmation of the above situation: specialists (40%) complained much about the lack of activity, but unskilled workers complained less frequently (22%). On the other hand, specialists were relatively often afraid of coronavirus infection (76%) in comparison to an average Pole (69%), as if education and knowledge of social mechanisms has increased the sense of risk rather than reduced it (A. Cybulska, K. Pankowski, 2020).

On the other hand, K. Z. Kaniasty points out that post-crisis political motivations primarily result in changes aimed at increasing support for conservatism and conformism in relation to the groups that currently exercise power. Recommendations for psychological interventions, as well as future preventive actions are the result of analyses of the coronavirus pandemic consequences in Poland, which are based on fundamental premises, defined in social sciences and describe social and psychological processes occurring in case of crisis events (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021).
The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the way of foreign nationalities perception by Poles. Based on the above studies, it was indicated that the pandemic causes an increase in prejudices and conservative attitudes (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021).

In addition, the above-mentioned studies have shown a connection between the risk-mitigating measures of COVID-19 transmission and morality, as well as religiosity and faith in science. On this basis, it was found out that Polish people do not follow certain governmental recommendations for philosophical reasons, or because they do not understand them or wonder on them. The COVID-19 pandemic also influenced the way of thinking of Poles. They also confirmed the fact that exposure to information regarding the coronavirus pandemic increases public anxiety, thus hindering creative and analytical thinking, however, this type of result was confirmed only among the male sex. In addition, it has been concluded that information on the COVID-19 pandemic may also contribute to a disrespectful approach to the threat posed by the coronavirus. It is worth noting that contrary to popular belief, lockdown did not have a negative impact on creative thinking. On the contrary, it was stated that it could promote this kind of thinking. It was noted that people who were more involved in the issues relating to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and talked with their relatives, at the same time often solved their problems and undertook the activities, the effects of which could be treated as creative effects (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021).

A higher degree of organization was also observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among men. The reason for this is that the male gender achieves a higher emotional calmness. In the case of the female gender, differences were observed in terms of lack of conventionality, creativity and openness. In particular, there was an increase in these features among younger women, in comparison to the previous year.

The study conducted by M. Kowal and P. Sorokowski focused on the ways due to which experts and specialists should inform public about medical recommendations to reduce the risk of the virus spread. The study referred to a mode of communication that would increase the chances, in case the public would comply with them. The aforementioned research is important because its results contribute to the use of information obtained at that time by commentators and management staffs. (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021).

The study was also carried out by M. Kowal, and it dealt with the analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic relating to behavior and psychology. More than 40 scientists from around 45 countries participated in it. The aim of the study was to find correlations between the increased stress in the early stages of the pandemic. This study indicated that greater stress experienced the following categories of people (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021):

- younger people,
- people with low educational status,
- women,
- people who didn’t have families,
- people living in countries, where the Covid-19 pandemic was more severe,
- people having more children.

The next research was conducted by R. Poprawa, who focused on the issue of satisfaction and frustration with regard to main psychological needs, stress and the ability to cope with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (A. Czajkowska, 2020).

With regard to social effects of COVID-19, one can also refer to studies relating to compliance with recommendations of a sanitary and epidemiological nature. However, the article containing the results of this study has not been published yet (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021).

In the mid-2020, nearly 50% of respondents indicated that they took the COVID-19 pandemic seriously and took measures to protect their health and the health of their loved ones. However, the fatigue in this respect and an increased sense of uncertainty were growing. More and more people did not accept negative information (it was 45%), and only 28% of the
respondents spent time to follow current data on the COVID-19 pandemic (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021). The results of the study “Consumption in the shadow of the coronavirus” conducted by ARC Rynek i Opinia are presented in the chart below.

**Figure 1. ARC Study - Consumption in the shadow of coronavirus**
*Source: Consumption in the shadow of coronavirus, ARC Market and Opinion*

### Conclusions

We realize today that our lives will not be the same as they were before the pandemic. For many of us, it is associated with the necessity of difficult adaptation to new conditions, uncertainty about the future and with a huge psychological burden. It is said nowadays that the effect of the coronavirus pandemic will be another pandemic: there may be a significant prevalence of mental disorders in the world and one of the factors that has caused the above
situation is social isolation forced by the external factors and chronic stress associated with it. The necessity to stay at home is associated not only with the limited possibility of maintaining interpersonal contacts, but also with much smaller possibilities of taking up physical activity and contact with nature, which is another unfavorable factor affecting our mental well-being (T. M. Gondek, 2021).

Summing up, it can be indicated that during the coronavirus pandemic, the interest in the impact of the epidemic threat has undoubtedly increased in relation to (K. Z. Kaniasty, 2021):
- social behavior,
- emotions,
- dealing with crisis situations,
- lifestyle,
- social beliefs,
- social distance,
- the need to comply with sanitary and epidemiological requirements,
- the way the scientists work,
- scientists’ observations (cwid.uw.edu.pl).

According to the study, based on the research conducted by ARC Rynek i Opinia, significant fatigue with inflow of negative information from the media was confirmed by the respondents and that undoubtedly affected their well-being and the well-being of their loved ones.

Moreover, Poles still feel anxiety about the future, especially about the financial one. According to the finance Barometer, these fears are much greater than they were in previous crisis situations, that is, during the global financial crisis in 2008. In the Barometer of the Union of Financial Companies, the majority of the respondents admitted that their anxiety about the household budget grows along with the next wave of the pandemic. Poles are afraid of, inter alia, loss of job, this mainly applies to the families with low income, as well as to residents of small towns. The data of the finance Barometer show that the most Poles have paid their financial liabilities on time, but the problems with the current payment of receivables are already reported by a quarter of Poles (prnews.pl).

It should be emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a serious threat to society in the field of public health, but has also dramatic consequences for other social issues, such as economic security, democracy and gender equality. In just a few weeks, the pandemic triggered a violent crisis of unemployment all over the world. It disproportionately influenced the position of racial, ethnic and religious minorities, led to intergroup hostility and worsened the situation of women. It is therefore clear that the pandemic is more than just a public health problem and will influence significantly other social issues (K. Jaśko, 2021).

It is worth emphasizing that effective crisis management gives hope for a better future. It also refers to the coronavirus pandemic, which despite many problems and misfortunes, is a source of extremely valuable experience and observations. We must use the m, because the consequences of wasting the above potential will be many times greater, than the costs of the crisis itself (R. Matczak, 2020).

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