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Young People in the (Post)pandemic Church

Młodzież w po(pandemicznym) Kościele

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Abstract: The coronavirus pandemic paralyzed the functioning of many institutions, including the Church. However, it did not cause the present religious crisis which has more complex roots of ideological rather than "medical" character. Nonetheless, the mental condition of young people continues to deteriorate, which is directly related to the current destruction of social life. This paper aims to analyse the conditions that should be met if adolescents are to remain in the Church. On their basis, I try to sketch a new paradigm of working with young people. I also draw on the indications of the new "General Directory for Catechesis" regarding catechumenal inspiration. I conclude that the basis of a formation model should be the recognition that we educate a person-in-growth. Indeed, young people explicitly say that they are interested in joining an ecclesial community that can appreciate current challenges faced by teenagers.

Keywords: adolescent, pandemic, youth catechesis, models of formation

Abstrakt: Pandemia koronawirusa sparaliżowała codzienne funkcjonowanie wielu instytucji, także skomplikowała życie w Kościele. Nie spowodowała jednak kryzysu religijnego, który ma bardziej złożone korzenie i zdaniem wielu badaczy jest raczej wynikiem podążania za decyzją wynikającą z powodów światopoglądowych niż medycznych. Niezależnie od tego wciąż pogarsza się kondycja psychiczna ludzi młodych, co ma bezpośredni związek z obecną destrukcją życia społecznego. Autor w niniejszym artykule dokonuje analizy wypowiedzi adolescentów dotyczących warunków, jakie stawiają Kościołowi, by zechcieli w nim pozostać. Na ich podstawie próbuje naszkicować nowy paradygmat pracy z młodzieżą, wykorzystując wskazania autorów nowego *Dyrektorium katechetycznego* dotyczące inspiracji katechumenalnej. Autor konkluduje, że podstawą budowania modelu formacyjnego jest uznanie, że podmiotem wychowania jest osoba-w-rozwoju. Wiąże tę tezę z zainteresowaniem młodzieży wstąpieniem do takiej wspólnoty eklezjalnej, która potrafi docenić aktualne wyzwania, przed jakimi stoi nastolatek.

Słowa kluczowe: nastolatek, pandemia, katecheza młodzieży, modele formacji

INTRODUCTION

Let me start with a cliché: it is not easy for a young person to function in the contemporary world. The world of a young person (an adolescent in particular) is full of contradictions, dismay and pain, even though we can hardly see it, or believe it. I shall not give a meticulous characteristic of the young, which would divert our attention from the main topic of this paper. Instead, I will quote a literary example. In her short story *Księżniczka z ostatniej ławki* [The Princess at the Last Desk], Barbara Kosmowska brilliantly depicts the inner dilemmas of a contemporary teenager. Anna, the protagonist, lives with her mom in New York where she goes to a Polish community school. She is rejected by her peers because she is shy and poor. To cope with the situation and regain her "dignity," she makes up her new image. She does not become a star in the class, but at least she can live a normal life for a while. However, after the holidays she does not come back to her school. She leaves a letter which her teacher reads out to the class: "Now that you are listening to these words, I am with my grandma in Poland. We have moved here after difficult and sad months of struggling to lead a normal life. When I came to your class, my dad was no longer living with us and my mom, at the end of her tether, was cleaning other people's houses. You could see one of them in the photos. It happens sometimes that a little family world falls apart like a decayed chestnut. I wanted to tell you about it, but I realized that you did not deserve it. You would not understand it because to you I was merely a worn-out jacket and thrift store sneakers. This is what you scrutinized when I first came to your class. That is why I made up a completely different world with fake photos. It was your world, not mine. I could gain favour with you only in this way. Today I close the door to the non-existent world. I did not drive a limo. I did not have any of these beautiful dresses, nobody bought me a dog (…) Now when you know all this it is time to thank you. Yes! I want to thank you. For when I was making up 'scenes' from my life, I felt like a princess. In this most difficult time, I could dream and imagine that everything I tell you is true. By the way, this overworked woman who picked me up from school is Elżbieta. It really did not work out well for her (…). And yet she teaches me how to carry on and live with dignity. She is my mum" (Kosmowska 2022, 7).

My study will have a theological character. I adopt the perspective of practical (pastoral) theology and with the experience of everyday pastoral care I illustrate the situation of the young in the contemporary Church. This is discussed from the points of view of a priest, an adolescent (and a parent). When I speak of "young people" I mean, above all, adolescents. Adolescence is pivotal when we think of educating the young in the Church. An adolescent undergoes significant physiological and mental changes (including emotional and cognitive ones), which impacts his/her perception of God and the community in which God is spoken of and in which one speaks to God. That is why, I take the position of an ethnographer who draws data from being among people and observing them

(this research methodology is called participant observation). However, I do not present the final results of this research – my paper is rather an introduction to future analysis.

The pandemic turned out to be so important that it is worth discussing its influence on the religious life of the youth. I intend, therefore, to inquire as to what the pandemic – as a sign of the times – has revealed to the Church about teenagers, and what pastoral and catechetical postulates can be put forward based on these discoveries. I pass from general remarks on the growth of adolescents (mainly in the context of social maturation) to specific observations related to perceiving the Church as a place where one can become mature.

1. Developmental conditions of adolescents

The brain of an adolescent is biologically immature, which one can see at every turn, especially in his/her risky behaviour. Adolescents cannot foresee the consequences of their actions unless they trust adults, which is rare (Jensen and Nutt 2014, 47-51). They are also hypersensitive to social stimuli and, in line with personal growth, reorient their attachment. This includes, first, "breaking ties" with parents (or guardians) to make room for entirely new relationships that will determine what is valuable (good) and "mature." Adolescents are prone to sacrifice a lot for these relationships – not because they want to but because they must. Their growth reveals the whole plenitude of being open to them, provided they dare to "set out on a journey" to become truly mature/adult.[1] Even though this separation from parents and their values seems painful to both parties, it is exactly this pain (and rebellion which manifests differently in a teenager and parents) that is crucial for maturation (and, as we shall see, conversion). An teenager's identity is like a construction site: the outlines of his/her personality are already visible due to a double package of genes and quite a lot of experience. Maturation lays bare various flaws and shortcomings that in the end may turn into active mental mechanisms, reaction patterns and even more or less latent mental disorders. That is why the stage of adolescence is pivotal – one still has a chance to "change one's personality." This is possible among people who are ready to accept the "demanding" character of a teenager and join him/her in the confrontation with his/her nature, which practically means overcoming it and heading for transcendence.

Maturation is also crucial from the theological perspective as it is forging a relationship with oneself, with others – with whom we are 'a community of pilgrims' – and ultimately with God. In science that deals with the growth of man[2], one finds an image of a mythical journey of a hero and his *rites of passa*ge. The latter helped one understand the meaning of suffering and one's roots and thus

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[1] God invites Abraham to set out on such a journey, telling him to "go for the sake of himself."
[2] It is worth paying attention to anthropological psychology (Kurzydło 2015).

discover one's adult identity.[3] As a result, one was included in the community of adults which translated into the ability to be responsible for the community.

At present, rites of passage have survived in a degraded form: bushcraft schools or staged esoteric rites. They are not meant to help one achieve mental (emotional) or spiritual maturity. Rather, they are a pop-culture version of rites meant to prepare one to separate from one's parents and to live autonomously. Significantly, they rarely translate into experiencing internal transformation or discovering one's place in the adult world. A teenager, therefore, does not become ready to be a valuable member of the community or to solve difficult problems.[4]

It is in the interest of every community, the Church included, to recognize these developmental conditions of the young and to "take part" in them. The civilization at present, with its technological development, is at the same time axiologically chaotic and unable to maintain stable relationships. Thus, various educational milieus should take responsibility for teaching how to shape mature bonds and care for the common good (Francis 2020).

Adolescence is the period most suitable for this kind of "forging" because of the changes (e.g., psychological ones) that take place at that time. Unfortunately, adolescents fearfully experience the world. This includes, above all, relationships. When devoid of stable bonds with one's family and peers, they find it difficult to face the challenges that maturation poses. Uncertain about their social status,[5] teenagers may get stuck in this stage of development. Also, they may reject their identity (including gender identity) and undermine the very sense of striving for maturity. As a result, they may choose the mode of being that is easiest, i.e., they construct *the ideal self* picking from a variety of attractive images submitted by pop culture (Brosch 2013, 114-148). The phenomenon of avatarization is a dangerous one – as a child, one managed to overcome the temptation to remain in the world of fairy tales, but as an adolescent, one finds it hard to give up functioning in the world of virtual reality.

This is the key moment when an educator can invite an adolescent to enter the world of adults, i.e., the world of real suffering, demanding relationships and the necessity to deal with failure. At the same time, an educator should make it possible for an adolescent to encounter true friends and reliable authorities.[6] A dramatic

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[3] Victor Turner wrote that in a true *rite de passage* one dies to be transformed or transfigured and attain a higher quality of one's existence. One leaves the state of undifferentiation and amorphism that is characteristic of childhood and is reborn into masculinity and personality (Cf. Turner 1962, 173). Traditional *rites de passage* had three phases which, in terms of development, can be arranged in a sequence: you are no longer a child – you have set out on a journey which will teach what life is – you are an adult, ready to die for the sake of others.

[4] Martine Segalen claims that contemporary initiation practices merely reflect neurosis of young people and deepen the problems with which they cannot cope (Segalen 2008, 60).

[5] In most cases, teenagers have not yet experienced a meaningful parting with their childhood. Therefore, they display infantile behaviour and associate being an adult with activities that are harmful to their health (e.g., smoking, getting drunk, having sex or driving fast (Stare wino 2014, 14-15).

[6] Extensive research on teenage risk behaviour has shown that peer groups are very important points of reference for teenagers. A group focused on values that contribute to growth is capable of

rise in adolescent depression and suicide attempts reveals that the young feel helpless in the face of the real world. When left unattended, they wander around their made-up world and painfully experience their lives as lonely and redundant. Therefore, every parent and educator (formator) should realize the significance of these developmental conditions. Pedagogical models, especially catechetical/pastoral ones, which do not encompass developmental psychology and the analysis of adolescents' needs (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, 279-280) are doomed to failure. The methods employed by St. John Bosco or Franciszek Blachnicki were successful precisely because they responded to the needs of young people. In my analysis, I am going to see these issues through the eyes of adolescents.

2. Adolescents and the Pandemic

The global coronavirus pandemic paralysed the functioning of the state and society. Mobility restrictions, remote learning and the necessity to deal with the illness or death of loved ones have had serious consequences of psychological and spiritual character (e.g., questions whether God was absent when millions of people were suffering or whether it was possible to catch covid through contact with the Host). Research shows that various types of symptoms have intensified, e.g., those related to depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, obsessive-compulsive and even psychotic symptoms (Kowalski 2021, 135-148).[7] As for now, there is no major research that would reveal the impact of the pandemic on spiritual life. However, the studies show that participation in Church services and the life of the Church has dropped significantly (mainly due to quantitative limitations). Participation in religious practices has become more "truthful," especially in the case of the young: those who are deeply religious have not given up their practices while those related to the Church superficially have found a good reason to justify their absence during Church services. However, we still have to wait for specific numerical data.

Apart from the pandemic, ideological issues have contributed to the decreasing participation in religious worship. The credibility of the Church has diminished due to paedophilia scandals, ideological demonstrations or decisions of politicians. That is why while analysing adolescents' crisis of faith, one ought to consider these factors and see the pandemic as a catalyst for certain resolutions. The clergymen confirm that although these are mainly decisions to leave the institutional Church, in some cases these are commitments to search for God, join a religious community and even return to the Church. In the past, a conversion was

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"fixing" previously acquired destructive behaviour. It is worth analysing all results of this research in *Vademecum skutecznej profilaktyki problemów młodzieży* [Vademecum of Effective Prevention of Adolescents' Problems] (Grzelak 2015). A particularly important element of a peer group is the presence of slightly older friends whose example one may follow. They are of similar age but have already faced "difficult reality" (Znaniecki 2001, 85; Sroczyńska 2015, 61-62).

[7] When we compare the results of this study with the results of research before the pandemic in Poland, a significantly higher percentage of people aged 18-34 is now described as depressive (16,2% - 36,6% respectively) (Kowalski 2021, 148).

rather a return to inherited religiosity. At present, it is about a conscious decision to choose faith as the highest value while imposing firm conditions on the Church: "I do not want the priest to decide about my life; I disagree with certain standards of the moral teaching of the Church (e.g. on contraceptives or in vitro fertilization); I demand the exclusion from the Church of those who have turned a blind eye on evil deeds within Her."[8] These rebellious statements reveal a broader awareness of adolescents and, at the same time, their fear that they might be identified with a milieu that – in the virtual reality – is associated with values that are outdated or even threatening mental health. Notwithstanding, young people are ready to remain in the Church provided their conditions are satisfied (or at least heard). Leaving aside the question of the legitimacy of their requirements, in the present axiological condition of society and creeping depression among the young, it is all the more important to discern any signs of kindness and deeper religious feelings on their part. In practice, this entails creating adequate models of pastoral care and support of the young in various crises (George and Kasper 2020).

Laying down conditions is part of adolescent rebellion which has a developmental character: the young question values or structures that have been imposed (or they consider them imposed) by adults. Either we educationally use this rebellion, or we lose young people. The message "it's meant to be like that, end of story" is unacceptable to the young and we run the risk of losing the bond with them. They cannot yet recognize that there are absolute values that are not to be imposed but chosen freely. That is why, they unconsciously try to cast these values into "the flame of everyday life" to feel with their whole being whether they are truly indestructible, useful and reasonable. To do this, they need space, our consent and the discreet presence of mature and considerate adults (Christians). Usually, adolescents reject any attempt to interfere with their growth at that time: "I want to be left alone so that I may find out if I can take responsibility for my life. I don't seek help from adults – their lecturing paralyses me; I don't know how they could help me if they can't cope with their own problems; when I tried to talk about my problems with a priest, I thought he didn't understand a word; [if I seek help], it won't be in the Church, because they think they are already 'in the know,' but then I am different."

The pandemic has helped the young see that "freedom" from the obligation to participate in Church worship (due to dispensation) is "cool", but also that it triggered or sanctioned their "acedia." When asked if they watched the Mass via the Internet, some adolescents admitted, that yes, they did have to "stare" at the screen with the whole family. However, the majority "did not feel the need to watch." All of them considered the situation artificial and weird, which is good as it shows that they have a sense of real participation in the Eucharist in the church: "I prefer to be in the church even though I cannot focus; it is different though, a real Mass during which you may receive the Holy Communion is something important, whereas

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[8] The quotes in italics, sometimes slightly altered, come from young people with whom I talked during the pandemic.

the one via the Internet is, as if, for show; I rarely went to the Mass but when I did, I went to my favourite church and it meant something to me. The Mass via the Internet is... sad; it made me laugh when my whole family stood before the computer screen; I don't know, it was ok, even though I couldn't concentrate."

The conditions that the young lay down should be treated as an introduction to their world in which not everything is ready or ideal. Their will is honest and rooted in the need to experience something truly good. However, this does not automatically entail pastoral success. We should pay attention to certain signals which reveal their longing to be noticed. The conditions they impose are in fact an expression of their rebellion. In this way, they check what they can take from their childhood to adulthood.

In this sense, the pandemic has not changed the young. Pandemic stress translated into specific mental or organizational problems. However, adolescents still look for what is best in the Church, especially if they have in mind the negative image of the Church in the media. Nevertheless, they do not want to be in the Church that requires standard behaviour or treats everyone alike. They search for a life that is more valuable and "truth that is better than the one enclosed in virtual bubbles." Obviously, "bonds built by the young are (…) very fragile and susceptible to constant promises of a better life, that is one cherished by celebrities and media stars" (Kurzydło 2018, 98; Białecka 2013, 23-25). However, they may use this made-up world as a camouflage behind which they take pains to face the hostile world and their experience of growing up. Jesus' pedagogy may be used here. He accompanied his disciples on their way, in their dilemmas, inquiries, sorrows and loneliness after His death.

The pandemic showed the world without the Church to the young. Due to restrictions on the number of faithful during services, at least some of them "missed what always happened so regularly. Now you had to wait if there was still room [to enter the church]." Even though such statements are rare, they reveal the strength of those young people who have been more attached to the community and have not lost hope. Perhaps it was this hope that saved the longing for the Mass and surely gave them strength to overcome the stress which triggered so many mental problems. The pandemic, therefore, has not changed much in the crucial issues but confirmed the shallowness of the faith of those who had never seen it as a value, and the strength of faith of those who had treated it seriously. As one of the older adolescents admitted: "If you do not want to believe, then even a tragic event will not change your behaviour. If you truly believe, then in the face of deep suffering, you may get closer to God." Stress and anxiety are not only pathogenic, but they also reveal the true mental toughness to which mature faith contributes.

3. Working with the young after the pandemic

History shows that when the Church was in crisis due to Her sins, God purified Her and raised Her from the fall. Various theologians emphasize the ground-breaking character of the present stage and assure us that the Church,

above all, belongs to Christ. She is not guided by temporal success but points to the eschatological goal. Therefore, the community must be restored in line with this goal. The dogmatic perspective stresses that the community should aim at discovering the Truth; the catechetical perspective underlines that in the educational model, other issues should be emphasized. I am going to discuss the latter perspective.

Man's growth is a long journey of self-knowledge. Therefore, the new "Directory for Catechesis" contains a new and useful term "catechumenal inspiration" (the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization 2020, 2; 61-65; 135; 232; 242; 262; 297; 303; 328; 421). Point 61 of the Directory speaks of the requirement "not [to] assume that our audience understands the whole background to what we are saying or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel."

The kerygmatic character of catechesis requires a catechumenal process of formation which encompasses: processuality (graduality), the dynamism of evangelization (inculturation), the ability to initiate into faith and the community of faith (with the participation of a living community of friends). The pedagogy of initiation should, therefore, be sensitive to "the variety of circumstances" in which people live at present. Consequently, pastoral influence should be individualized though not isolated from the community. It is such catechesis that introduces one to the Christian life (the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization 2020, 65) and at the same time meets the conditions that the young talk about. These conditions for their participation in the Church mean that they, rebellious as they are, would like to belong and contribute to a certain kind of community. It is worth noting that this model corresponds with the recommendation of psychologists to restore a good community in which the social context is therapeutic and contributes to recovery (Cechnicki 2021, 241-258).[9]

Even though in such catechesis and "therapy" the objectives seem similar (which in the case of the pandemic is of huge importance), we ought to remember that the Communion with Christ – the primary goal of catechesis – goes beyond the postulates of humanism and understands man's endeavours in the context of much deeper source and goal. Therefore, a religious element should be part of man's education, a part that may be easily overlooked if we limit the "therapeutic motive" to restoring someone's well-being or the experience of the meaning of life. Referring to the teaching of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, Jerzy Szymik points out that our world of secular humanism contains 'a deadly virus of God's dethronement, of replacing the Almighty with idols, i.e., depriving life of the root and the relationships of the fundamental bond' (Szymik 2019, 275). In a theological context, we reach a spiritual dimension of pandemic *kairos*. The catechumenal model of Christian formation should immunize the young against the virus of 'God's dethronement.'

Let us see how this can be incorporated into the catechetical work with the young. However, I should make some clarifications. Firstly, catechetical work

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[9] Such a community makes sense especially in the face of growing loneliness, individualism and consumerism of young people.

does not mean teaching religion at school. Even though we generally call it 'katecheza szkolna' [school catechesis], it is more an element of interdisciplinary dialogue (The Dicastery for the Clergy 1997, 73), an opportunity for students to add a religious dimension to their knowledge about the world and man. Thus, they may enrich their perception of reality and/or make their lives sensible and comprehensible. The above elements of catechesis at school are of a cultural and ecclesiastical character. On the other hand, catechesis as the expression of everyday life of a given community is rooted in cultivating communion with Christ – with liturgy and through discerning one's situation in the community of faith and in the light of God's Word. Secondly, adolescents are at a particular developmental stage. Therefore, in the Church, they should be treated according to their capabilities. Above all, we should hear their "cry of helplessness." Adolescents feel doomed because of what they dream about or because they do not have dreams. Realizing what is crucial – amid the confusion and noise that surrounds them – means that we reach out to their true world, language and culture. First and foremost, it means that we see their fears and anger.[10] Thirdly, catechumenal inspiration which is recommended at present should not translate into dusting off the ancient model of pastoral care or adding a new activity to the old pastoral practice. Inspiration is, first of all, creativity and zeal. Therefore, we have to find witnesses of living faith and formators who understand modern times. Thus, the catechumenal model should not copy some general patterns, but – if "man is the way of the Church" (John Paul II 1979, 10) – pay heed to men in their given situations, amid their everyday lives, and find true friends to stand by them.

In pastoral documents this attitude is now called "accompanying" and "the culture of encounter" (the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization 2020, 3; 50; 55; 64; 68; 85; 11; 113; 118; 132; 135; 139; 155; 179; 203; 234-235; 244; 252; 259; 261; 263-265; 271; 352; 370-371; 404; 419; 423; Congregation for the Clergy 2020, 25).[11]

While thinking of ways to work with the young, one ought to take into account the above conditions. I realize how hard it is to devise a detailed plan for such an endeavour. Moreover, we have learnt that attempts at renewal which literally implement a given model easily turn into a rigid structure. Consequently, the young protest or leave. We should acknowledge that the Good News is/should be easy to grasp even for the most sophisticated people. Jesus used simple stories thanks to which he received feedback from His listeners (the refusal to accept these simple truths was rather the result of the refusal to believe and not the inability to

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[10] When devoid of existential motivation, the young perceive belonging to the Church as belonging to some organization whose rules they must obey. Such an immature attitude usually leads to "dependent religiosity", ecclesiogenic neurosis (Andrzej Molenda), noogenic neurosis (Wiktor Frankl) and/or sectarian thinking (Molenda 2022; Buksik 2009, 191-199).

[11] "Accompanying people in their *dramas of life* (in their unbelief) means that we agree that they follow their own paths (it is thus a form of spiritual hospitality), that we try to recognize this enslavement from which God wants to free them and see the wounds that they try to hide from others and sometimes from themselves" (Kurzydło 2019, 48).

comprehend). We should, therefore, realize what content we put forward that the young cannot accept – not because they lack faith but because they may have no philosophical background.[12] Perhaps they lay down conditions regarding moral issues because they do not understand expectations that are formulated in a specific way. The young are often accused of not taking up these issues. But maybe this is because they are not invited to speak freely. Rather, certain views are imposed on them. The catechumenal model should, therefore, involve making the young aware of the significance of their problems for their growth. It is these situations (exams, change of school, illness, rejection, falling in love) that should become part of their initiation, and not teaching catechism, which is more fruitful in religious classes. The term "pedagogy of transition" seems to correspond well to the situation of adolescents. Moreover, it is well reflected in the Bible.

Jesus did not explain the world but proclaimed the presence of God in the world. At the same time, He made it possible for people to see the reality truly/completely and adequately to their situations (which also contributed to their recovery). Young people are repelled by an impersonal attitude which would be impossible in Jesus' pedagogy.[13] They are attracted by certain idealism with which they try to mask their own imperfection ("if others are far from ideal, I do not have to strive to achieve it").

That is why the catechumenate at this stage should help them accept their own sinful nature and reorient their lives. The idea of conversion which is so crucial in this model does not imply that we stop sinning. Rather, it means that we come closer to Christ who embraces sinners. For holiness is not the outcome of our efforts but the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That is why, when inspired by the catechumenate we may discover the ways the Holy Spirit works in our lives and the mission He gives us in the Church and the world.

What elements of the catechumenate during adolescence could we consider? Let us discuss "the rite of parting with one's childhood."

When an adolescent discerns that he/she is ready to take on the tasks of adolescence, they are invited to 'the rite of parting with their childhood'. Of course, this decision is not only his/hers. The idea of fulfilling certain tasks together with others is part of the catechumenate. The rite, organized by the parish, should include a solemn acknowledgment in front of others that 'childhood is over' and it is time to express gratitude to parents and relatives. Also, the adolescents should then acknowledge that they have received certain good (skills or values), that there are things for which they want to apologize, that they have decided to set off on a journey toward adulthood and that they want to invite certain people

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[12] For example, in the *Credo*, certain words are difficult for the young to grasp. Sławomir Kołata proposes that the truths of faith be expressed in the language of personalism which would make the *Credo* more intelligible (Kołata 2017, 201-202).

[13] Jerzy Bagrowicz has coined the term "spiritual gendarmerie." According to him, reaching out to the young requires that we refer to their everyday affairs. He calls this model of catechesis for the young "confessional-dialogical" (confessional-diaconal). He also observes that "the young cannot be impressed by the kind of piety that would hinder their life goals (…) and personal growth" (Bagrowicz 2000, 265; Bagrowicz 2006, 102).

to accompany them. Last but not least, they acknowledge that they entrust their journey to God.

Usually, this rite of passage would take place at the age of around 12. Like the Jewish *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah*, it may be an opportunity to express gratitude to God and read aloud an excerpt from the Holy Scripture. This may be attractive to a teenager since it is related to his/her maturation so that he/she may tell others: "I am no longer a child." Interestingly, adolescents express an interest in such a rite provided they could take part in preparing such a ceremony and invite their true bunch of friends on whose acceptance and understanding they can count (not some anonymous, random people). They also admitted that they were interested in building such a community for younger people who would also like to experience this rite. Thus, they might cherish a real community that is open to them and influence the ecclesial community whose valuable part they would become. As they said, they did not feel the need to get to know God. However, they found it interesting to learn that God would like to get to know them.

The major challenge for this paradigm of thinking of young people's formation is realizing that its subject is a person-in-growth, a person who is continually changing and is aware that these changes are difficult both for him/her and others. Adolescents are amid a developmental crisis: they are discovering their true identity while reorienting their lives. That is why it is crucial to initiate them as profoundly as possible into the experience of their own lives (and not teaching them theology/catechism). In their lives, it is God who takes the initiative to meet them and show them how they may live. Therefore, this paradigm is about encountering teenagers in their existential experience, in their *drama* of living, in the decisions they take, in doubts of which they vaguely speak, in their fears which they do not understand, in their dreams that they hide even before themselves. It is only with these fragments of their lives that we may together devise a plan for living with God. Therefore, the question is not about what to tell them about God but how to help them find Him in their lives. Christ came to such lives and world and only there one can meet Him and allow Him to be led further to a new life. One can see sacramental significance in all these situations, i.e., see God who is present there. When undertaken together, this journey guarantees that adolescents will feel noticed, appreciated and 'sent'. That they will no longer be alone and that they will be creators of their own lives.

Conclusion

The above model of working with young people emphasizes individualized pastoral formation. Working with children boils down to the joy of being near Jesus, while working with adolescents means initiating them into their personal journey, being aware that this maturation leads, above all, to being of service to others (proexistence). Since the catechumenal model of transition to mature Christianity involves the experience of the sacraments of Christian initiation, the question is when

and how to give these sacraments. An individualized path means that one leaves aside the mass character of professing faith, being an anonymous follower for whom the process of initiation into the experience of the living God ends in failure. Christians should help his/her "infantile" faith die, which is possible when at the right time (i.e., when an adolescent is ready for this "death") and place (i.e., in a credible community of faith) he/she receives the "rite" of confirmation, that is the rite of strengthening and sending. Therefore, preparing for confirmation is no longer a mass religious service, but is related to readiness to undertake a mission in the Church. Young people in their formative years are aware that to undertake an important task, they need the rite of confirmation. They also know that this will be an exceptional event – they will take responsibility for the maturity of their faith in a given task (its realization entails various trials and transitions and is the question of their whole being immersed in God presence). Has the pandemic had any impact on this? For now, it only shows that it is possible to become infected with coronavirus as well as the desire to grow in holiness.

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Youth in the Society During the Pandemic. Subjective Evaluation of the Pandemic and Its Objective Consequences for Students in the Remote Teaching Process

Młodzież w społeczeństwie pandemicznym. Subiektywna ocena pandemii i jej obiektywne skutki dla uczniów w procesie zdalnego nauczania

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Abstract: The article discusses problems related to the educational crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis hit the whole society, but it especially affected disadvantaged groups by increasing the existing social inequalities. The article, moreover, analyses factors influencing various ways of experiencing the pandemic and its effects by particular groups of students, as this age group was most severely affected by the pandemic. Contrary to adults, almost all students were transferred to the remote education for a prolonged period of time. This article presents first of all a subjective assessment of the period of remote education made by students, their understanding of the situation, how they assessed teachers, parents and their colleagues. Next, the article points to both the protective and risk factors related to experiencing crises, especially in the context of family and religiousness. Finally, the article illustrates how the pandemic deepened the existing social problems rather than created new ones, primarily affecting the most vulnerable groups.

Keywords: youth, pandemic, COVID-19, religiousness

Abstrakt: Artykuł opisuje problemy kryzysu edukacyjnego, jaki został wywołany przez pandemię koronawirusa. Kryzys ten dotknął całe społeczeństwo, jednakże bardziej uderzył w grupy poszkodowane już wcześniej, powiększając istniejące nierówności społeczne. Artykuł diagnozuje także czynniki różnicujące sposób przeżywania pandemii i jej efektów przez poszczególne grupy uczniów, jako najbardziej dotkniętą przez pandemię grupę wiekową. W przeciwieństwie do dorosłych prawie wszyscy uczniowie zostali przekierowani na tryb pracy zdalnej na bardzo długi okres. W niniejszym artykule przedstawiam po pierwsze subiektywną ocenę okresu edukacji zdalnej dokonaną przez uczniów, to, jaki mieli obraz sytuacji, jak oceniali nauczycieli, rodziców i swoich współpracowników. Następnie wskazuję na czynniki chroniące i czynniki ryzyka związane z przeżywaniem kryzysów, zwłaszcza w kontekście rodziny i religijności. Na koniec obrazuję, w jaki sposób pandemia raczej pogłębiła dotychczasowe problemy społeczne, aniżeli wytworzyła nowe, przede wszystkim dotykając najbardziej narażone grupy.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzież, pandemia, covid-19, religijność

Introduction

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2019 posed to the entire world the challenge of coping with the situation unexperienced since the times of the Spanish flu. As regards sociologists, they were interested not only in reactions to the disease or methods of coping with it by individuals and groups, but also in those elements that affected both those who fell ill, and who remained healthy. This involves ways of coping with the fear of contracting the disease, or with stress and concerns for their own and their relatives' and friends' life and health, how people coped with fears about their livelihood, ensuring proper education or coping with the fact of being locked at home due to restrictions introduced by governments.

In March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic in Poland, remote teaching was implemented with just a few days' warning, initially, for a few weeks, and eventually it lasted until the end of June and the beginning of the summer holiday.[1]

In September 2020, students returned to schools after the summer break, but in October 2020, due to the second wave of the pandemic, the teaching again changed to the remote mode for all students until February 2021. Unfortunately, at that time the third wave of the virus, this time in the "British variant" spread, and after just several days, students once again sat in front of their computers to study online. This situation continued until June 2021, when students returned to schools for the last few weeks, following the success of the first stage of vaccinations. As it can be seen in the chronology of events described above, decisions about starting and ending remote education were neither permanent nor predictable. Furthermore, each time students, parents and teachers did not know how long those educational restrictions were going to last.

This paper describes factors differentiating the ways of experiencing the pandemic and its effects by individual groups of students, as the age group most heavily affected by the pandemic. Contrary to adults, nearly all students were transferred to the remote education for a prolonged time. The period of adolescence is also the time when peers play an increasingly important role in the individual's life. However, remote education and other restrictions in each country significantly limited options for direct contacts with friends.

This article will first present a subjective evaluation of remote education by students, their understanding of the situation, and their assessment of teachers, parents, and colleagues. Then, it will indicate protective factors and risk factors related to experiencing crises, especially those related to family and religiousness. Finally, the article will show how the pandemic rather than creating new social problems, exacerbated the existing ones by affecting mainly the most sensitive groups.

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[1] In Poland, a school year covers a period from 1 September to the last weekend of June. The education system is based on primary schools: eight years of education for children aged 7 to 15 years, after which one of three types of secondary schools can be selected: comprehensive secondary school: for four years, 15 to 19 years of age; technical secondary school, for five years, 15 to 20 years of age; or 1st grade vocational school, for three years, from 15 to 18 years of age.

The problem of coping with crises concerns practically the entire world, regardless of the region of the globe and the period in which a given crisis has occurred; usually, it results in the impoverishment of a large part of the society. However, the studies show that poorer people are the most vulnerable to the consequences of crises.

An example might be a situation after the food crisis in Zimbabwe. Studies on its consequences demonstrated that it mainly affected poor households, as the first consequence of that crisis was an increase in food prices. As rich households have options to reduce their spending in a way enabling them to continue providing food for their families and have reserve resources that can be spent on food during a crisis (Tawodzera 2011, 518), it were poorer households that felt the crisis more acutely. The financial crisis in Indonesia in 1997 also mainly affected the poor, as when compared to other groups of society, it was them who felt its consequences the longest (Suryahadi and Sumarto 2003). A similar situation also occurred as a result of the crisis in Mexico in 1995, where the poorest again were those who suffered most and needed the longest time to recover from it (Cunningham and Maloney 2000). Similarly, during the previous global crisis, that is, the financial crisis of 2008, those who were affected the most were less affluent people, mainly living in rural areas. In this case, the ability to cope with the crisis consequences also depended on households' pre-crisis characteristics such as accumulated financial and material resources (Faulkner, Murphy and Scott 2019).

Therefore, regardless of the scale of a crisis, whether it occurs in one country, in a given region of the world, or globally, like the financial crisis of 2008, the poorest people are the social group most exposed to its consequences and to the long-term recovery from the crisis. Moreover, it is not important whether it is a financial, food or political crisis. The deeper the crisis, the richer groups it affects.

So, what was the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, the global health crisis? Research carried out in Chicago shows that COVID-19 affected mainly poor African Americans in Chicago to a much greater extent than other social groups in this city (Kim and Bostwick 2020). Also in Japan, COVID-19 hit mainly the poorest groups (Kikuchi et al. 2020, 2). Studies by Robinson (Robinson et al. 2021) indicate that the pandemic crisis not only affected the poorest classes, but also exacerbated the already existing inequalities.

One of the factors influencing inequalities during the pandemic were digital competencies, very important in the context of quarantine, remote work, and remote education introduced in many countries of the world. Beaunoyer indicates that COVID-19 increases digital inequalities, which in turn increases the risk of falling ill, and thus the consequences of the crisis caused by those inequalities (Beaunoyer, Dupéré and Guitton 2020). In the first days of the pandemic digital inequalities impacted obtaining information. Results of some other studies also show that digital competencies were a factor that influenced the capability of coping with the pandemic crisis. People with low digital competencies coped worse, received less information, and they found it more difficult to deal with the pandemic situation. (Yap, Xu and Tan 2021; Robinson et al. 2020; Nguyen, Hargittai

and Marler 2021). Other researchers indicate clearly that digital competencies and technology, especially digitalisation of the society, is not only a tool of individual people or social groups, but actually something that establishes and stabilizes the social order, while deficiencies and inequalities in digital competencies only intensify this problem (Zheng and Walsham 2021; Deursen 2020).

The areas of sociological interests also include religion and its relationship with the way of experiencing the pandemic. Researchers focused mainly on how the pandemic and the associated restrictions affected religiousness and religious practices (Kowalczyk et al. 2020). The Pew Research report of 2020 indicated a change in the forms religious practices. People more frequently prayed individually for the end of the pandemic, and less often participated in services in churches, rather watching them on TV or on the internet (Pew Research Centre 2020). The Gallup study implied that the pandemic led to the increasing, rather than decreasing religiousness among Americans (Newport 2020).

The ethnic and religious differentiation in the approach to the pandemic showed that in the U.S., representatives of the Protestant Churches more frequently worried about the condition of the economy, while the representatives of the Catholic Church were more concerned with the public health (Cox 2020).

Another subject of studies were certain areas of the social reality such as accelerated digitalisation of religious communities forced by the pandemic (Kühle 2021; Barreau 2021; Ganiel 2021) or religious, ethnic and political conflicts, for which the pandemic frequently acted as a catalyst (Perry, Whitehead and Grubbs 2020; Erdoğan 2020; Sexton 2021), which was true also in Poland (Bożewicz and Boguszewski 2021).

Comparisons were also made on how individual religions dealt with the pandemic, or to be more precise, how they facilitated or complicated coping with this problem for their followers (Robinson 2020; Gerstenfeld 2020). It was demonstrated that more religious people significantly better coped mentally with the fight with the pandemic and stress associated with it (Schnabel and Schieman 2021). This relationship was already observed in the past and concerned not only the last pandemic (Hill and Mannheimer 2014; Pearce and Koening 2010).

1. Research methodology

The research presented in this article was conducted in May-June 2021, that is, a little more than a year after the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic in Europe. It was also the period when students had already spent a significant time studying remotely, with a break at the beginning of the school year and in the beginning of 2021. Furthermore, in April, an action of mass vaccinations started, designated not only for elderly citizens, but, by the end of May, for almost all adult citizens. Therefore, the research was conducted at a period of a certain relief and enthusiasm associated with a hope for the end of the pandemic,

which was also enhanced by decreasing number of COVID-19 cases. On 31 March 2021, an average number of newly diagnosed infections for the last 7 days reached almost 29,000 cases, while on 31 May that average amounted to 871 cases (John Hopkins University 2022).

The main research was preceded by a pilot study, in which 2399 students (15 to 19 years old) took part, answering an online survey questionnaire and participating in a random survey in a period from October to December 2020. Furthermore, simultaneously 7 FGI were conducted in a group of 49 participants aged 15 to 16 years and 7 FGI were conducted in a group of 49 participants aged 17 to 19 years, Additionally, we conducted individual in-depth interviews (IDI) with parents, students and teachers.

The main quantitative research had a form of an electronic survey (CAWI). From the database of the Educational Information System, we selected at random schools participating in the study. The database was limited to primary schools teaching Grades 7 and 8, comprehensive secondary schools, first grade vocational schools, and technical secondary schools.

22,097 educational institutions became subject of the research in the whole of Poland. From this group of population, a sample of 378 schools in specific voivodeships was randomly selected. The above sample allows drawing conclusions with a maximum error of 5% and the confidence interval of 95%.

Table 1. Sample classification according to a school type and a voivodeship.

	Primary schools		1st grade vocational schools		Technical secondary schools		Comprehensive secondary schools	
	urban area	rural area	urban area	rural area	urban area	rural area	urban area	rural area
Dolnośląskie	6	5	2	0	4	0	5	0
Kujawsko-pomorskie	6	6	3	0	3	1	3	0
Lubelskie	3	11	2	0	4	1	4	1
Lubuskie	2	3	2	0	2	0	2	0
Łódzkie	4	8	2	0	4	0	5	1
Małopolskie	5	15	3	1	5	1	5	0
Mazowieckie	11	15	4	1	7	1	13	1
Opolskie	2	3	1	0	1	0	2	0
Podkarpackie	3	12	2	0	3	1	4	1
Podlaskie	2	4	1	0	1	0	2	0
Pomorskie	4	5	3	0	3	1	4	0
Śląskie	13	7	4	1	7	0	8	1
Świętokrzyskie	2	6	1	0	2	1	2	0
Warmińsko-mazurskie	5	4	2	1	3	0	3	0
Wielkopolskie	6	11	3	1	4	1	5	0
Zachodniopomorskie	4	3	2	0	3	0	4	0
							Total:	378

In each school, we asked for one class to be selected for the survey. This way, we collected 5906 anonymous student responses. The survey for parents was completed by 5174 respondents, and for teachers by 2419. A link to the survey was distributed with a support of individual voivodeship education superintendents, so the respondents received it from school directors. For the quantitative data analysis, we applied weights for age and sex of the respondents.

2. Results

We mainly asked the respondents about their emotions associated with the emergence of the pandemic and their experience of it. We asked students about their emotions at different stages of the pandemic crisis, and parents and teachers about their perception of students' behaviour and reactions to the pandemic.

Fear and uncertainty about the future, both in terms of health hazards, and the economic and school situation, predominated in all answers. With time, the increasingly often expressed attitude was the sense of responsibility and boredom, but fear remained the most common factor influencing students' behaviour throughout that period.

Figure 1. Reactions to the outbreak of the disease, *source*: Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.
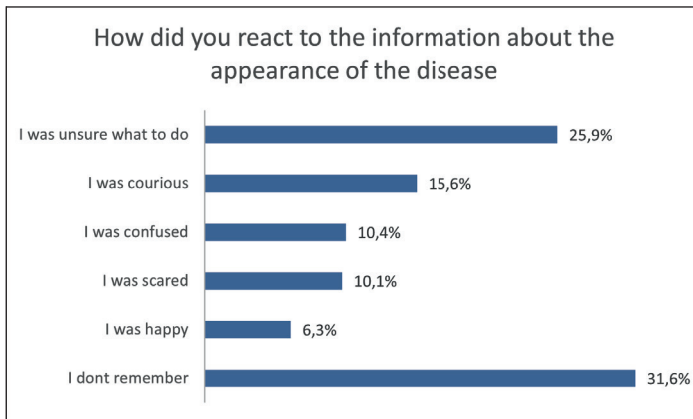
The outbreak of the disease brought mainly uncertainty (Fig. 1), 25.9% of students gave this answer as their main reaction to the emergence of the disease. 15.6% indicated their interest in a phenomenon that had previously been unknown to them. Both fear and confusion were declared by slightly more than 10% of respondents each. The only positive reaction, "I was glad" was selected by only 6.3% of the respondents. This positive reaction to the pandemic was caused by closing of schools, which for many students initially seemed to be a very welcome information.

Figure 2. What or who helped you most during the pandemic?
Source: Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.
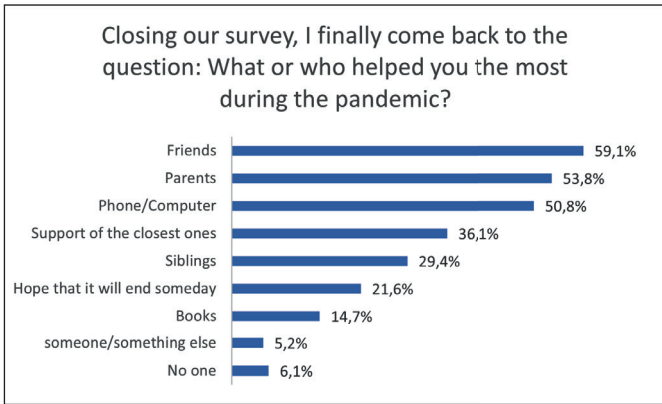
A very important factor helping to deal with problems resulting from the pandemic was a well-developed network of social relations. The students named first their friends (59.1%), followed by their parents (53.8%) and a smartphone /computer (50.8%) as elements most helpful during the pandemic. The smartphone and the computer were important for two reasons. First, they helped to deal with boredom through playing games, watching films, and access to the Internet resources, and second, they were a means of communication with friends and other members of the family, and this was of crucial importance for young people at the time of the strictest restrictions. 6.1% people indicated that nothing helped them during the pandemic. The students who were surveyed were between 13 and 20 years old, i.e., during their adolescence, when parents are shifted to the background and replaced by friends as the most important reference group. In this situation, access to the Internet was even more important, as it enabled contacts with peers and continuous belonging to the group, despite isolation.

Figure 3. Pride in the family, *source*: Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.
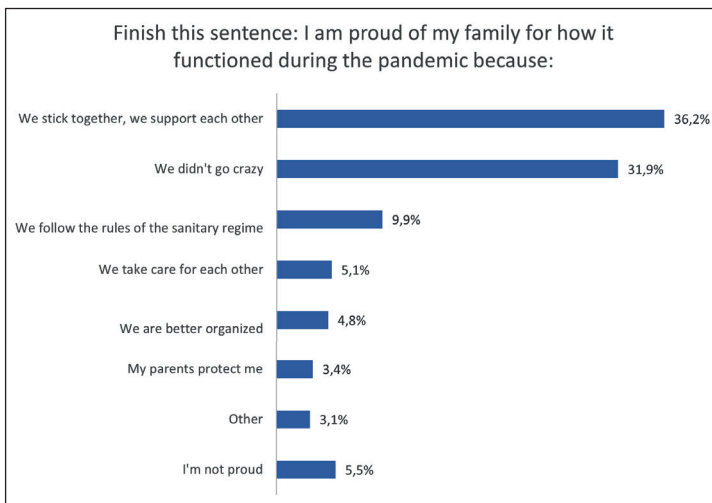
However, the family was not completely forgotten by young people. 94.5% of the respondents were proud of the way in which their family functioned during the pandemic, regardless of whether the family followed the restrictions or belonged to the so-called coronasceptics; the subjective opinion of the student was important. The qualitative analysis demonstrated that the answer "We didn't go crazy", indicated by 31.9% of the students, was actually the answer of people negating the pandemic or questioning the sense of far reaching restrictions in social life. A well-functioning family turned out to be an important factor protecting young people against negative consequences of the pandemic crisis. Those who perceived their family well were involved in providing assistance to their peers and to seniors during the pandemic more frequently than others. Satisfaction with family life, expressed as pride in one's family made students more frequently involve in various help actions, including those addressed to strangers.

Figure 4. Problems with access to a computer and parents' education background, *source*: Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.
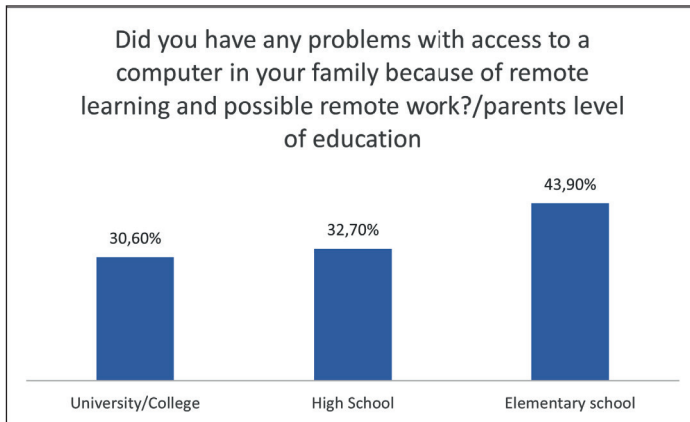
As the answers above proved, during the pandemic, the smartphone and the computer were very important tools for students, both due to the online mode of education, and the possibility of maintaining social contacts. However, a significant group of parents declared having problems with access to the computer for all members of a family. An important variable affecting the ability to ensure this access was the educational background of the parents, which in Polish conditions is reflected in salaries (Fig. 5). Statistically, people with primary education earn significantly less than people with higher education. This problem was indicated by as many as 43.9% of parents with primary education, 32.7% of parents with secondary education, and 30.6% of parents with higher education. This already significant difference exacerbated when we asked parents how the problems with the access to the computer for all members of a household were solved.

Figure 5. Problems with access to a computer versus parents' education background, *source*: Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.

How did you solve computer access problems for all family members?/*parents level of education

Elementary | High School | University/College

- We bought\borrowed an additional computer \ computers: 43%, 50%, 66%
- We received an additional computer / computers: 15%, 9%, 6%
- Parents have given their children priority in using computers: 13%, 26%, 21%
- Children have given their parents priority in using ccmputers: 1%, 1%, 1%
- Other solution…: 1%, 0%, 1%
- We have not solved this problem: 23%, 11%, 4%
- The children used the phones: 5%, 2%, 1%

One year after the beginning of the pandemic, as many as 23% of parents with primary education indicated that they still had not solved that problem, while among parents with higher education this ratio was only 4%. This means nearly sixfold difference between those two groups. Therefore, the economic factor had a very high influence on the way children could participate in remote education.

Figure 6. Problems with access to a computer versus a number of siblings.
Source: Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.

Did you have any problems with access to a computer in your family because of remote learning and possible remote work?/number of siblings

- 0: 20,3%
- 1: 24,5%
- 2: 31,0%
- 3: 33,7%
- 4: 42,6%
- 5: 51,3%
- 6 and more: 58,3%
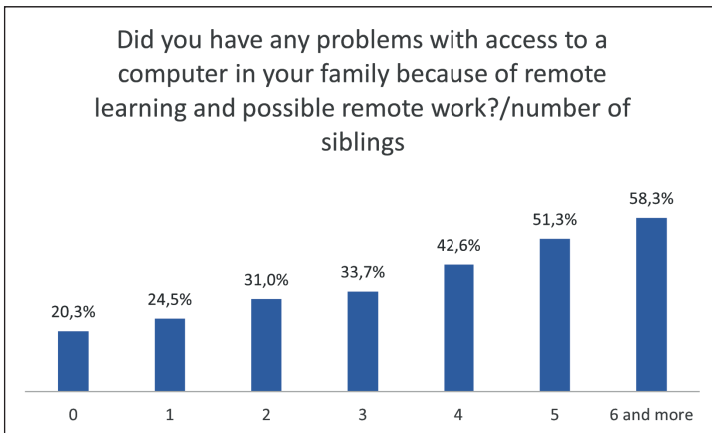
Unfortunately, the family had a negative impact on access to a computer. This concerned, in particular, large families. The more siblings students had, the more often they indicated lack of a sufficient number of computers at home. The chart below (Fig. 6) shows that in the case of six siblings this problem concerned every second household. Among only children, 20.3% indicated that they had

a problem with access to the computer at home. Of course, this situation also derives from economic problems. It is understandable that before the pandemic, in large families not everybody had their own computer, even in the case of wealthy people; however, in the case of an educational crisis wealthier parents were able to quickly purchase computers for their children.

Figure 7. A sense of loss versus problems with access to a computer.
Source: Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.
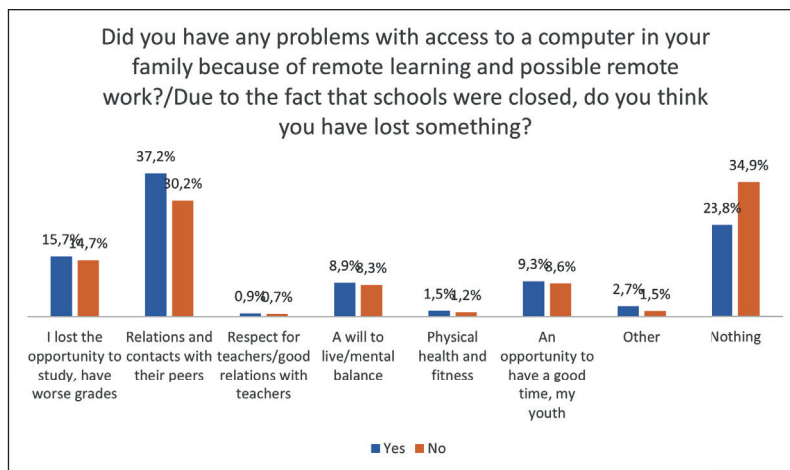
The above chart demonstrates how important the computer was for young people. The answers to previous questions already clearly showed that students value the access to a computer very highly. In this case (Fig. 7) we see that lack of the access to the computer negatively affected practically all spheres of their life. People who declared problems with the access to the computer, more often indicated that they lost something in each category during remote education and closing of schools. Regardless of whether those were issues strictly associated with the school or learning, such as "I lost the opportunity to study, have worse grades" or "Respect for teachers/good relations with teachers", those students also more frequently indicated that they lost "Relations and contacts with their peers", "A will to live/mental balance", "Physical health and fitness", and "An opportunity to have a good time, my youth." At the first glance, those areas are not directly associated with access to the computer. Those who had no problems with access to the computer, more frequently noted that they did not lose anything.

This problem shows how important the computer is to young people, and how important it was during the pandemic. Its role was not limited to education alone, but it organised the entire life of young people. Therefore, problems with access to the computer, resulting mainly from economic factors, significantly influenced not only poorer educational results, but also other areas of satisfaction with life, physical and mental health, free time, and many other.

In subsequent individual and focus group interviews (IDI and FGI) it was shown that when students had problems with access to the computer, they usually used a smartphone instead of a computer, or took turns with their siblings, so each of them could optimally use the time for studies. Some students admitted that they wrote tests during classes on their smartphones, and this significantly prolonged their time, when compared to colleagues who used their computers. This, of course, resulted in worse grades.

The study focused on equipment shortages, and on an assumption that in rural areas and more distant places children would have problems with access to the Internet, and this would also create an advantage for students from cities. Indeed, this was partly true. According to the GUS data (2021) it appears that in 2020, 90.4% of households had access to the Internet (for households with at least one child this percentage is higher), with 67.7% of them having access to the broadband Internet. However, it turned out that it was not the internet access but an internet router at a household that was the weakest link. Equipment for home users frequently did not manage to handle several live streamings at the same time, e.g., in a situation when parents worked from home, and two or three children were participating in the remote classes at the same time. Even though everybody had a computer and the broadband internet provided, it turned out that the problem was often associated with technical capacities of the equipment, which had not been used so intensely before the pandemic.

A very important factor protecting the youth during remote education, the pandemic, isolation and closing of schools was religiousness, associated, of course, with the Catholic faith, as Poland is a homogeneous society in terms of ethnicity and religiousness. Religions other than the Catholic one represent less than 5% of the society, and people declaring themselves to be atheists left the Catholic Church rather than any other. Therefore, when comparing the influence of the religion on students' behaviour and choices during the pandemic, the present study actually compares the influence of the Catholic faith.

Table 2. Correlation between religion and pride in the family, developed on a basis of Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.

		I am proud of the way my family functioned during the pandemic
What is your faith?	Pearson's correlation	0.199
	Materiality	0.001
	N	5880

The first correlation worth noting is the one between religiousness and the pride in the family. People declaring themselves as Catholics more frequently indicated that they were proud of their family. A sense of pride in the family also influenced the overall mood during the pandemic, and the declared will to help others. Those happier with their family more often helped other people, not members of their family.

Table 3. Correlation between religion and a sense of being supported by mother, developed on the basis of Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.

		Who helped you during the pandemic? Mother
What is your faith?	Pearson's correlation	0.153
	Materiality	0.001
	N	5880

Table 4. Correlation between the faith and a sense of loneliness.
Source: Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.

		Who helped you during the pandemic? Nobody
What is your faith?	Pearson's correlation	-0.075
	Materiality	0.001
	N	5880

The two correlations between the declared faith (Catholic) and a feeling of being supported by others, as presented above, indicate that Catholics more frequently declared that a person who helped them during remote education was "Mother", while atheists more frequently indicated that "Nobody" offered them support. These correlations show the influence of the Catholic faith declared by students on their sense of loneliness or receiving support, proving that religion was an important factor supporting young people during such a large crisis as the pandemic and associated sanitary restrictions, including remote education.

Figure 8. Type of assistance provided to peers versus the religious background.
Source: Kurzępa, Leszczyński and Przybysz 2021.
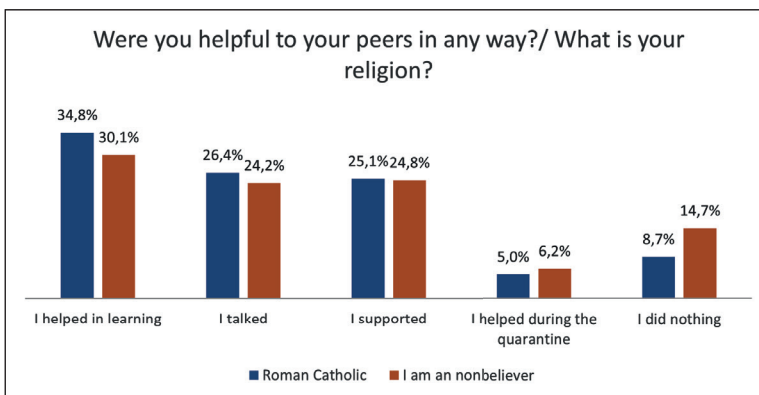
Religiousness was also a factor that slightly influenced providing help to friends and peers during the pandemic. As the above chart (Fig. 8) shows, people declaring themselves as Catholics helped others more frequently than those

declaring themselves as non-beliver, regardless of the type of the assistance, excluding help during the quarantine. A significant difference is also visible for the answer "I did nothing", as it was given by 8.7% of Catholics and 14.7% of atheists.

Therefore, religion not only influenced the students' mood, support of their families, and better mood during the pandemic, but also their actions outside the circle of their nearest family, such as informal help to their friends and peers.

Conclusions

The above results indicate that factors such as the number of siblings, family prosperity, perception of the family situation and relations at the respondents' homes, and membership in larger communities, such as, e.g., the Catholic Church, significantly contributed to the way of experiencing the pandemic. Economic factors were the main thing influencing students' educational opportunities, mental well-being, and ways of experiencing the pandemic. People who could afford to immediately purchase computers for all members of the family, and those who could obtain computers from formal communities and other support networks, were less affected by educational problems as those who did not have such options at their disposal. Therefore, children who had to participate in classes using their smartphone, those who had to give way to their parents when it came to the use of the computer, or those who took turns in using equipment resources with their siblings were on the other end of the scale as regards this problem.

This implies the occurrence of the Matthew effect, known for centuries and adapted for the needs of sociology by Robert Merton (Merton 1968). It was much easier to go through remote education and isolation caused by the pandemic for children from families with certain resources, and they additionally increased their advantage in terms of the gained knowledge and the quality of obtained information and skills, when compared to those children who had already been in a worse social and economic situation before the pandemic. On the other hand, ten years after Merton, Lipton described a situation where the poor stay poor and cannot escape their economic situation. Lipton indicates that this happens, because even when they manage to achieve something, the rich, people with various types of capital, are intermediaries in supplying goods to the market or in getting various resources (Lipton 1977).

The above observations, translated into the educational reality during the pandemic, indicate that those most affected in the described situation, i.e. those less wealthy, with lower digital competencies, people from families in which parents do not pay a lot of attention to education of their children, students that were more alienated and less involved in providing help to their colleagues, will bear the consequences of the pandemic and remote education also after their end. Furthermore, they will be affected by those circumstances much longer and more intensely than their colleagues from families less affected by this crisis. The very example of teachers from better, private paid schools very well demonstrates the

economic differences and their importance for fixing the social order that prevailed at the outbreak of the pandemic.

In the case of families who were not able to provide the necessary access to the computer to all members of their household, the educational crisis during the pandemic is the lose-lose situation, as both children and their parents lose in this case, regardless of which of the generations could use the computer more. Additionally, this crisis may result in consequences such as being discouraged to study in those who experienced more problems during the pandemic. After all, it is also a social stigmatisation for those absent at classes. When a student is absent at remote classes for longer, and this is caused by no access to a computer, their colleagues know the cause. In the future, this may result in stigmatisation of those "absent" as poorer, so poor that they could not even go to school.

This paper presents problems of the educational crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis affected the entire society; however, to a great extend it hit stronger those groups who had already been disadvantaged before the pandemic thus further exacerbating social inequalities. To overcome the consequences of this crisis, political decision-makers, but also directors of schools and teachers, should pay attention to the fact that it was not only laziness or students' dislike of work that caused their poorer results and worse attendance in classes. Factors that to a large extent were beyond the control of students, or even their parents, were of a great significance. Thus, to prevent exacerbation and prolonging of this crisis, it would definitely be necessary to provide an additional psychological support for students, as well as for teachers and parents, and, depending on educational shortages caused by the pandemic, also create opportunities for students to catch up with their education. In the future, in order to secure ourselves against educational crises of this type, all students must be provided with the broadband Internet access, computers for studying, or at least emergency educational programmes and lesson scenarios must be developed in the case of remote education, which are similar for the entire country, instead of depending on the initiative and resourcefulness of a given teacher. This would allow to equalize the level of education and support teachers that have problems with coping with this situation. It is also crucial for all teachers, regardless of their age and taught subject, to develop digital competencies.

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Highly Religious Young Poles in the Process of Transformation

Głęboko religijni młodzi Polacy w procesie transformacji

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Abstract: The article describes highly religious young Poles who are at the stage of entering adulthood (aged 18-19 and attending the final grades of high school). In the empirical analysis, we use the existing data from quantitative research carried out in 1996, 2010, and 2021. The same methodology for the implementation of the survey, including sample selection, as well as a broadly comparable research tool, allowing to capture significant changes, tendencies, and trends that have occurred among young Poles in the last 25 years in terms of religiousness.

The data show that despite a significant decrease in the percentage of people who define themselves as religious, and even more so as regularly practicing religion, the percentage of deeply religious people and regular religious practitioners remains relatively constant (about 5% of the population of young Poles who have reached the age of majority). The question arises whether the socio-demographic structure of this group remains stable over the time and whether and to what extent it differs from the structure of other groups, including less religious and non-religious people. The article attempts to answer this question.

Keywords: youth, faith, religious practices, value system, late adolescence

Abstrakt: Artykuł opisuje wysoko religijnych młodych Polaków, którzy są na etapie wkraczania w dorosłość (mają 18-19 lat i uczęszczają do ostatnich klas szkół średnich). W analizie empirycznej wykorzystano dane zastane z badań ilościowych zrealizowanych w latach 1996, 2010 i 2021. Ta sama metodologia realizacji badań, w tym dobór próby oraz w dużej mierze porównywalne narzędzie badawcze, pozwalają uchwycić istotne zmiany i tendencje, jakie zaszły wśród młodych Polaków w zakresie religijności w ciągu ostatnich 25 lat.

Z danych wynika, że pomimo znacznego spadku odsetka osób określających się jako wierzące, a tym bardziej jako regularnie praktykujące religijnie, odsetek osób głęboko wierzących i regularnie praktykujących pozostaje na względnie stałym poziomie (około 5% populacji młodych Polaków, którzy osiągnęli pełnoletność). Powstaje pytanie, czy struktura społeczno-demograficzna tej grupy pozostaje stabilna w czasie oraz czy i w jakim stopniu różni się od struktury innych grup wyróżnionych ze względu na religijność, w tym osób mniej religijnych i nireligijnych. Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na to pytanie.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzi dorośli, wiara, praktyki religijne, system wartości

Introduction

In Poland, the religious and church-related situation – despite the changes that are taking place – is clearly different from that in Western countries. Religion sociologists point to the exceptional persistence of religiousness in Polish society in its most general dimensions, i.e., religious self-declarations and religious self-identifications (Grabowska 2018). Socio-political and economic transformations have not led to a significant decline in religiousness at the level of the so-called national religiosity ("the faith of the nation"), where religiousness functions more as a common value than a personal one. In the post-war period, religiousness, measured by religious self-declarations, maintained a relative continuity, and in some periods, it was subject to particular transformations. Under conditions of compulsory and top-down atheization, overt religious affiliation ceased to be a matter of "inheritance," "fate," or "destiny," and more and more often became a matter of personal decisions and choices, sometimes bordering on risk and heroism. In global dimensions, there have been no significant transformations in religious affiliation, and belonging to religion (mostly Catholic) was, and to a large extent still is, a specific social norm in Poland and, to a certain extent, cultural obviousness. Catholicism represents a more expansive and extensive socio-cultural system than any other alternative socio-cultural system that could compete with it in Poland (Sadłoń 2021). It should be noted, however, that the young generation of Poles is already experiencing fundamentally different conditions for shaping religious personalities from those that formed the older generations. In youth circles, especially after 2005 (the death of Pope John Paul II), the first symptoms of changes in the primary (general) parameters of religious life, such as belonging to a specific denomination or global attitudes towards faith, were particularly noticeable. However, in these circles, the changes were more evolutionary than revolutionary (Boguszewski 2018). Some acceleration has been visible only in recent years, which is undoubtedly consistent with the findings of sociologists that the modernization process, which is connected with an increased financial, social and existential security, results in a decreased need for religious reassurance (Norris and Inglehart 2011; Höllinger and Muckenhuber 2019; Molteni 2020).

Participation in religious practices is systematically decreasing, especially in Sunday and Easter observances (Scovil 2022). Specific religious patterns of behavior, which are a clear sign of the spiritual culture, disappear from everyday life. The rates of formal withdrawals from Christian Churches are increasing, far exceeding the rates of people joining these Churches. Norms in force in the Church, especially in the moral field, are gaining less and less theoretical and practical approval. Many members of the churches believe that they themselves and on their own have the right to determine what is binding for them in religious and ecclesiastical matters (Boguszewski 2022). These decisions are frequently different from those provided for in the Church's programs of life and activity and indicate a trend towards

privatization (Luckmann 1967) or decomposition of religion (Hervieu-Léger 1999), where religious life, as in the economic paradigm, constitutes a specific market for spiritual goods (Stark and Bainbridge 1996). At the same time, outside the ecclesiastical framework of the official Christian Churches, "new religious scenes" and alternative forms of religiosity are developing, ranging from various forms of extra-church and sectarian religiosity, from psychotherapeutic cults to multiple forms of occultism and esotericism (Zaręba 2012), indicating to some extent the desecularization (Berger 1999; Mariański 2013), or the deprivation of religion (Casanova 1994).

The complete diagnosis of the state of religiousness is currently rather doubtful. It is not a documented expert opinion. One thing is certain: in the changed socio-cultural situation, more and more "opaque" reality, many of the current views on religion and the Catholic Church in Polish society, especially in youth circles, require rethinking and formulation. Until recently, the processes of change in the religiousness of Polish youth were described as "creeping" secularization and have been accelerating in the last few years ("accelerated," possibly "violent" secularization).

The results of sociological research among school children suggest an ongoing change in the global attitudes of the young generation towards religion, i.e., at the level of the so-called national religiosity (Mariański 2018). The shaking of the continuity of faith and unmistakable traces of non-continuation indicate a trend of individual choice of faith at the expense of its "inheritance." The model of Western European de-Christianization does not have to be realized in Poland, however, as a pluralist society is shaping. The changes related to the broadly understood social modernization do not inevitably entail a "decline" of religiousness. Undoubtedly, they facilitate the process of secularization and the change of forms of religiosity and churchiness.

Even if Polish youth is a unique case on the European religious map, the results of national polls and the findings of sociological research indicate a clear decline in the group of young people who define themselves as believers and a simultaneous increase in the declaration of religious indifference and irreligion (unbelief). It stays in line with the global trend (Pew Research Center 2018). In the last two decades, young Poles have become less and less interested in institutionalized forms of religiousness (Żurek 2020), although many people treat religious faith as one of the fundamental values in their lives, define themselves as deep believers, and regularly participate in religious practices. Despite the signaled secularization trends, this group has remained relatively stable over the years in terms of numbers. This group is the subject of our interest in the presented text.

1. Methods

The article describes highly religious young Poles who are at the stage of entering adulthood (aged 18-19 and attending the final grades of high school). In the empirical analysis, we use the existing data from quantitative research carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in 1996, 2010, and 2021, while the measurements from 2010-2021 were carried out in cooperation with the National Bureau for Drug Prevention.

All the studies, whose findings are described in the article, were conducted using an auditorium method on nationwide samples of students in the final grades of upper secondary schools, diversified by school type (general high schools, technical schools, vocational schools), size of place of residence, and voivodeship. The sample selection was random and consisted of two stages: 1) random selection of schools; 2) random selection of one class in each selected school. In all the studies, a partially repeatable survey questionnaire was employed (some questions varied depending on the current context and current issues).

1. The 1996 study was conducted from April 13th to April 22nd, 1996, with a sample size of N=1275 students.

2. The 2010 study was conducted from November 2nd to November 19th, 2010, with a sample size of N=1246 students.

3. The 2021 study was conducted from October 1st to November 5th, 2021, with a sample size of N=1531 students.

The same methodology for the implementation of the survey, including sample selection (carried out according to the same pattern; N>1200), as well as a broadly comparable research tool, allowing to capture significant changes, tendencies, and trends that have occurred among young Poles in the last 25 years in terms of religiousness.

The data show that despite a significant decrease in the percentage of people who define themselves as religious, and even more so as regularly practicing religion, the percentage of deeply religious people and regular religious practitioners remains relatively constant (about 5% of the population of young Catholics in Poland who have reached the age of majority). The question arises whether the socio-demographic structure of this group remains stable and whether and to what extent it differs from the structure of other groups, including less religious and non-religious people. We attempt to answer this question in the presented article.

We also analyze, among other things, the system of highly religious values of young Catholics in Poland, their views and ways of spending free time, and we check whether and to what extent they have evolved in the last thirty years and whether and to what extent they deviate from the goals and objectives in life, views and ways of spending free time of young Catholics in Poland who can be described as moderately religious and non-religious based on religious self-identifications in the field of declarations of faith and religious practices.

Religious self-identifications most often include identification with the community of believers, the dynamics of general attitudes towards religion in comparison with the period of childhood or adolescence or in comparison with their parents, and justification of one's own faith or lack of it. Studying the so-called global attitudes towards faith (deeply religious, hesitant, indifferent individuals, non-believers) only greatly approximates and tentatively characterizes religiosity. A declaration of belonging to a religious group or a general statement of attitude to religious and church institutions, a declaration of the type "I am a believer," is an external indicator of religiousness. It allows for a sociological approach to religion and attitudes in the most general dimensions – more institutionalized than non-institutional (Sroczyńska 2020).

The community of believers includes both Catholic believers and young people associated with sects (the so-called converts) as well as believers "in their own way," loosely associated with the Catholic Church or individuals not even feeling religiously connected to it. Positive self-declarations of faith, which create a certain frame of reference of a superior nature, remain in a statistically significant relationship with participation in religious practices and other rituals of a spiritual nature (Sroczyńska 2015). The criterion of global denominations of faith does not inform about faithfulness to religion or a significant bond with the Church. Still, it only shows the will to be included in the community of people who define themselves as Catholics or believers. It does not allow us to grasp extra-ecclesiastical and individualized religiousness.

In the article, due to the available data, we rely on the so-called attitudes towards religion and use declarations of faith and practices as an external indicator of religiosity. It is worth noting that in Poland, about 95% of the population are invariably referred to as Catholics, therefore, in public opinion polls, questions about religion are usually not treated as a differentiating variable, and thus they are rarely used in questionnaires. The question was also not asked in the research we refer to in this article. Therefore, when talking about highly religious young Catholics, we use a certain simplification because we mean all respondents aged 17-19 who described themselves as deeply religious and declared that they participate in masses, services, and other religious ceremonies at least once a week. This simplification is justified because in a recent population study in which the question about religion was used, 94% of people aged 18-24, who described themselves as deeply religious and regularly practicing, declared the Roman Catholic faith.[1]

2. Religiousness of Polish youth – changes over time

Cyclical studies monitoring the level of religiousness of Poles in terms of global attitudes towards religion (declarations of faith and frequency of religious

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[1] Based on the results of the CBOS research "Current problems and events" (378) carried out in October 2021.

practices) have been suggesting a slow abandonment of faith and a much faster abandonment of religious practices. These phenomena are observed in the entire society and all age cohorts, while in the youngest groups of Poles, they are particularly intense (Grabowska 2021). While in the entire population of adult Poles in the years 1992-2022, the percentage of people who define themselves as religious and deeply religious decreased from 95.3% to 83.8% (a difference of 11.5 percentage points), in the group of people aged 18-24, this decrease amounted to as many as 26.2 percentage points (from 93.1% to 66.9%).

Even greater differences relate to the decline in the implementation of religious practices. In the entire population in 1992-2022, the percentage of adult Poles practicing religion at least once a week decreased from 67.2% to 37.6% (a difference of 29.6 percentage points), while in the group of people aged from 18 to 24, the percentage regular practitioners decreased from 69.1% to 22.3% (a difference of 46.8 percentage points). At the same time, in the entire adult population, the number of not practicing individuals increased from 8.5% to 23.0% (a difference of 14.5 percentage points), and among the youngest adults – from 7.9% to 39.3% (a difference of 31.4 percentage points).[2]

Cohort analyses derived from aggregated CBOS data from monthly measurements in 1992-2022 suggest that the process of abandoning religious practices is evident in all age cohorts of Poles, while in the two youngest ones (the first including people born between 1980 and 1996 ("Millennials") and the second one including people born after 1996 ("Generation Z") – it is utterly dramatic (Grabowska 2021). In the millennial generation, in less than 24 years, the percentage of regular practitioners decreased by 42.8 percentage points. The number of non-practitioners increased by 22.7 percentage points, while in the youngest cohort (Generation Z) in just under 7 years, the percentage of regular practitioners decreased by 32.7 percentage points. The number of non-practitioners increased by 18.4 percentage points (Grabowska 2021).

The observed trend of a decline in religiousness among young people in Poland is also confirmed by research carried out by CBOS in the 1990s on a sample of young Poles who are at the stage of entering adulthood – aged from 17 to 19 and studying in the last grades of high schools. Hence, it is a sample constituting the basis of this article. Also, in this group of respondents, a decline in the number of people who declare religious faith and participation in religious practices is evidently visible. In the mid-1990s, the number of students who defined themselves as non-believers increased almost fivefold (from 5% to 23%), and the number of believers decreased by a third (from 80% to 54%). Between 2018 and 2021 alone, the number of believers decreased by 9 percentage points (from 63% to 54%), and the number of non-believers increased from 17% to 23%. Compared to the general population of adult Poles, the percentage of non-believers among students

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[2] Based on the aggregated data from monthly CBOS surveys carried out from 1992 to 2022 (last year include surveys carried out from January to June).

in a comparable period turned out to be almost five times higher (23% compared to 5%), and declarations of faith were expressed much less frequently (89% among all Poles compared to 54% among the surveyed students).[3]

Another dimension of religiosity that shows a downward trend regards participation in religious practices. Moreover, in this dimension, the decrease is even more marked than in the case of self-identification. Since the mid-nineties of the twentieth century, the number of students leaving secondary education has tripled (from 16% to 49%). At the same time, the percentage of people participating in religious services such as masses, services, or religious meetings at least once a week has decreased almost three times (from 62% to 24%). The decline in participation in religious practices noted in recent years is one of the most radical studies in the history of young Poles leaving secondary education. It is dictated by, among other things, the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying restrictions, which at various stages, to a greater or lesser extent, hampered access to institutional religious practices. In the period between 2018 and 2021 alone, the percentage of respondents who regularly practice religion decreased by 11 percentage points, while the number of non-practicing individuals increased by 14 percentage points (from 35% to 49%). These trends are consistent with the results of other studies carried out in Poland, which indicate the impact of the pandemic on the decline in religious commitment and suggest the polarization of religiosity (Bożewicz 2022; Bożewicz and Boguszewski 2021; Boguszewski, Makowska and Podkowińska et al. 2022).

3. Who are highly religious young people in Poland, and how is their structure changing?

Although the percentage of declarations of faith and regular religious practices is systematically decreasing among young Poles, what has remained almost unchanged for 25 years is the number of young Poles who define themselves as deeply religious and regularly (at least once a week) practice religion. In 1996, they constituted 5.1% of the population of students attending final grades of high schools, and in 2021 their percentage was 4.7%. In the context of the outlined tendencies of changes in religiousness in Polish society, a question arises about the religious profile of highly religious young Poles, its possible changes over time, and differences concerning the profile of less religious and non-religious people. When analyzed over time, the structure of young Poles who call themselves deeply religious and who see themselves as regular religious practitioners and non-religious individuals shows that both men and women belong to the group. The sex division remains stable over time. In the other discussed categories, however, there is a clear shift from male to female dominance. At present, for example, the groups of non-believers and non-practitioners include more women than men, while in the 1990s, this group included over five times more men than women.

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[3] Based on the CBOS and KBPN survey "Youth 2021."

In the group of highly religious youth, there is a slight increase in the number of people from large cities, while in the structure of non-believers and non-practitioners, the share of inhabitants of rural areas and small towns is increasing. Nevertheless, the analyzed group of highly religious youth are mainly rural residents.

In the entire population of young Poles, the number of students in vocational schools is decreasing, which is also visible in the structure of each of the compared categories and results from the decline in popularity of these schools in Poland. However, while in the case of believers and practitioners who practice religion irregularly, as well as believers and non-practitioners, at the expense of vocational students, the number of students in technical schools is increasing in two extreme groups (highly religious and non-religious), the share of high school students increases.

Highly religious young Poles invariably live mostly in complete families. Although there are slightly more highly religious people from one-parent families, which is in line with the trend of an increase in the percentage of such people in the entire youth population, in other groups (especially among non-religious individuals), the increase in the share of people growing up with one parent or without parents is much more noticeable.

Highly religious young Poles are more and more often people satisfied with their material status, which is also related to the general trend of increasing the level of wealth in Poland and can be observed in all the compared groups. However, in the highly religious group, this increase is the highest.

In all the compared groups, the structure of parents' education is also changing – the number of less educated people is decreasing, and the number of parents with higher education is increasing. These changes are also most often observed in the highly religious group. This group, similarly to non-religious groups, currently comes from families where parents are relatively best educated. While in the 1990s and 2010, highly religious young Poles more often pointed to the relatively low level of education of their parents (especially fathers). Currently, highly religious people more often come from families where parents (especially mothers) have higher education.

The structure of highly religious and non-religious people, slightly more often than in other groups, constitutes people with an above-average interest in politics. Nevertheless, those with an average interest in politics dominate across all the compared groups. In all the analyzed groups, people with unspecified political views usually predominate. However, they are relatively the least numerous among highly religious and non-religious individuals. In contrast, if they have specific political views, highly religious people often describe them as right-wing and non-religious as left-wing. In this regard, the data remains relatively stable.

In the structure of highly religious people, as compared to other groups, since the 1990s, more people rated their school achievements highly. This tendency is becoming even more evident with time. Currently, students with top marks in the highly religious group account for more than a quarter (27.5%), while among non-religious groups, the percentage is 10.1%.

Table 1. Profile of highly religious young Poles compared to other groups distinguished by their level of religiosity

| Socio-demographic characteristics: | Declarations of faith and religious practices | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | deeply religious and regularly practicing | | | believers and practitioners irregularly | | | believers and non-practitioners | | | non-believers and non-practitioners | | |
	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021
Total percent	5,1%	4,3%	4,7%	15,2%	25,7%	17,4%	8,1%	8,9%	14,2%	3,6%	5,7%	20,5%
Total number	N=64	N=53	N=70	N=185	N=313	N=276	N=92	N=109	N=224	N=45	N=70	N=308
Gender												
Male	51,6	52,8	51,4	69,7	50,0	44,6	70,7	53,7	47,1	84,4	63,8	47,9
Female	48,4	47,2	48,6	30,3	50,0	55,4	29,3	46,3	52,9	15,6	36,2	52,1
Place of residence (population size)												
Village	34,9	62,3	48,6	18,4	51,1	47,4	9,1	33,9	45,3	2,2	21,4	26,3
City of up to 19,999	20,6	11,3	14,3	18,9	15,3	12,0	20,5	20,2	14,3	13,3	12,9	14,3
City 20,000 – 199,999	36,5	11,3	20,0	27,6	16,3	20,1	34,1	21,1	21,1	31,1	27,1	27,3
City 200,000 – 499,999	1,6	7,5	10,0	20,0	11,2	12,0	14,8	13,8	9,9	8,9	15,7	15,6
City of over 500,000	6,3	7,5	7,1	15,1	6,1	8,4	21,6	11,0	9,4	44,4	22,9	16,6
Type of school												
General secondary school	42,2	52,8	62,8	30,3	42,5	42,0	37,4	36,7	36,1	35,6	60,0	57,4
Technical secondary school	10,9	24,5	25,7	29,2	38,3	46,0	22,0	24,8	42,9	31,1	18,6	34,1
Vocational school	46,9	22,6	11,4	40,5	19,2	12,0	40,7	38,5	21,0	33,3	21,4	8,4
Do you live permanently												
With both parents	89,1	86,8	81,2	77,3	82,6	72,8	80,2	63,3	68,8	77,8	75,7	59,1
Only with mother	10,9	9,4	10,1	14,1	10,0	17,0	12,1	25,7	17,4	15,6	14,3	26,9
Only with father	0,0	1,9	1,4	2,2	1,9	2,9	5,5	2,8	3,1	4,4	2,9	4,5
With someone from extended family (grandmother, aunt, etc.)	0,0	1,9	1,4	3,2	1,6	1,8	1,1	2,8	2,7	0,0	0,0	1,6
Different situation	0,0	0,0	5,8	3,2	3,9	5,4	1,1	5,5	8,0	2,2	7,1	7,7

Financial situation												
Very poor	2,3	2,9	6,7	1,8	3,7	2,2	1,8	1,0	1,1	0,0	7,5	7,9
Poor	2,6	11,4	8,9	4,0	9,2	14,3	1,4	5,5	15,7	4,3	3,8	19,0
Moderate	28,9	44,3	42,2	24,7	37,6	47,3	19,9	37,6	49,7	14,3	37,7	41,3
Good	41,9	24,3	40,0	34,5	36,7	35,2	49,6	42,1	32,4	35,7	37,7	31,7
Very good	24,4	17,1	2,2	35,0	12,8	1,1	27,2	13,8	1,1	45,7	13,2	0,0
Mother's education												
Primary and lower	4,2	4,4	2,2	3,4	6,4	16,9	5,5	8,2	13,5	0,0	3,8	22,2
Vocational	9,3	19,1	22,2	22,5	31,2	27,0	19,4	32,7	34,6	12,5	26,9	27,0
Lower secondary	3,1	4,4	4,4	2,0	4,6	6,7	1,6	4,9	8,6	0,0	5,8	3,2
General secondary	9,0	8,8	11,1	8,8	15,6	12,4	10,7	11,1	10,3	4,7	15,4	0,0
Secondary vocational	13,5	19,1	6,7	20,1	18,3	10,1	20,2	16,0	9,7	17,2	23,1	12,7
Post-secondary	8,7	8,8	15,6	11,8	5,5	6,7	9,9	7,5	9,7	10,9	5,8	11,1
Incomplete higher	8,3	11,8	13,3	4,9	5,5	6,7	5,1	3,9	5,4	9,4	1,9	7,9
Higher	43,9	23,5	24,4	26,5	12,8	13,5	27,7	15,7	8,1	45,3	17,3	15,9
Father's education												
Primary and lower	3,3	3,0	4,4	4,4	6,5	16,1	6,4	6,9	14,2	1,6	17,6	12,9
Vocational	14,6	34,8	26,7	26,6	42,1	35,6	22,7	39,7	42,6	12,9	35,3	48,4
Lower secondary	1,8	3,0	4,4	4,4	6,5	4,6	1,2	6,2	8,7	0,0	0,0	6,5
General secondary	5,5	3,0	0,0	6,4	6,5	3,4	4,4	5,6	2,7	1,6	7,8	3,2
Secondary vocational	23,7	19,7	13,3	26,6	15,9	10,3	33,1	21,3	14,2	38,7	19,6	6,5
Post-secondary	10,9	12,1	13,3	8,9	6,5	9,2	9,2	7,9	4,4	8,1	3,9	9,7
Incomplete higher	8,0	6,1	11,1	3,0	5,6	5,7	5,2	4,3	4,4	11,3	3,9	1,6
Higher	32,1	18,2	26,7	19,7	10,3	14,9	17,9	8,2	8,7	25,8	11,8	11,3

Interest in politics												
Very interested	7,8	11,3	8,7	4,9	1,6	3,0	1,1	1,8	5,0	2,2	4,3	6,2
Interested	21,9	9,4	14,5	13,5	9,0	10,7	8,8	9,2	11,3	17,8	18,6	15,1
Moderete interested	50,0	41,5	40,6	53,0	44,9	40,7	51,6	27,5	35,6	33,3	28,6	42,6
Slightly interested	6,3	13,2	11,6	19,5	18,6	24,8	16,5	11,0	16,2	15,6	12,9	16,4
Not interested	14,1	20,8	21,7	9,2	25,0	17,0	18,7	45,0	26,6	28,9	28,6	15,1
Other answer	0,0	3,8	2,9	0,0	1,0	3,7	3,3	5,5	5,4	2,2	7,1	4,6
Political views												
Left-wing	12,7	15,4	12,0	10,3	7,1	17,8	13,0	17,0	18,2	35,6	20,3	47,7
Centrist	11,1	7,7	10,4	11,9	11,6	10,0	14,1	9,4	10,5	0,0	7,2	11,8
Right-wing	31,7	26,9	34,3	27,0	11,6	11,9	14,1	11,3	9,1	13,3	13,0	7,5
No views	44,4	50,0	43,3	50,8	69,7	60,2	58,7	62,3	62,3	51,1	59,4	33,0
Typical school grades												
E (2)	0,0	7,5	7,2	3,2	10,3	4,8	6,5	16,7	8,1	8,9	20,3	7,8
D (3)	35,9	39,6	21,7	48,1	50,3	33,8	43,5	50,9	43,4	64,4	33,3	37,3
C (4)	48,4	35,8	43,5	41,6	34,3	41,5	43,5	27,8	36,2	22,2	34,8	44,5
B (5)	14,1	11,3	23,2	7,0	4,2	17,6	6,5	2,8	9,0	4,4	7,2	7,5
A (6)	1,6	5,7	4,3	0,0	1,0	2,2	0,0	1,9	3,2	0,0	4,3	2,6

Source: Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) and National Bureau for Drug Prevention (KBPN)

4. Values, norms, and behaviors of highly religious young Poles compared to other groups

Values, norms, and judgments constitute social life considered from the normative perspective. Norms presuppose values because what they demand is the realization of values. In other words, norms of behavior accompany values, defining acceptable and socially acceptable ways of behaving and acting, which is the implementation of recognized values. Values indicate the right goals to pursue, and norms suggest the right ways to achieve them. Values and norms indicate what is considered right, proper, fair, or justified in human life (axionormative sphere); they are something valuable (for various reasons), something worth taking care of and striving for (Štefaňak 2018).

The ongoing socio-cultural, economic, and political changes are reflected in young people's choices of life values and life strategies. Not always recognized life values form a coherent hierarchy or system of values. There are sometimes conflicts between them, which can be a source of personal tensions and social problems. The observed preferences regarding life values may turn out to be quite persistent in the minds of schoolchildren and determine – also in the future – specific evaluation criteria in many life situations and be a factor of selectivity in determining the life plans of individuals. It is also worth noting that the life values declared by young people may or may not precisely coincide with values that are recognized and realized. Some values and norms are contradictory and mutually exclusive. What individuals choose from different offers is primarily their individual decision. Changes in values are characterized not so much by a sharp fluctuation as by a "continuity fluctuation."

According to sociological research, the leading everyday values of young Poles include family, love, and friends. Supportive values, as if a kind of background for the former, include work, education, self-realization, and to some extent also religion. Social values that require disinterested openness to the issues and problems of a specific person, especially to broader social structures, such as the homeland, are clearly less popular. The low rank of political values has been maintained for a long time, which is probably related to the lack of trust in the political elite. There are many indications that the surveyed high school graduates are focused on their needs, and the orientation towards one's own self is formed to some extent. Regardless of the quality of life values declared by high school graduates, it should be emphasized that this is not a generation suspended in an axiological vacuum but a generation diversified in terms of recognized values (Mariański 2012).

Strong individualization tendencies are noticed in the selection of life goals and aspirations (everyday values) in youth circles in Poland. The emphasized subjectivity is often focused on seeking personal happiness "here and now," among values that are "at hand" (possible to achieve). In a spirit of seeking happiness in earthly life, religious values are losing their importance. However, sociological research confirms a significant discrepancy in the approval of values, norms,

and patterns of everyday behavior by various religious and non-religious self-identification categories (Prüfer 2018).

This discrepancy can also be noticed in our data analysis from research conducted since the mid-1990s among adolescents entering adulthood. The data show that the value system of highly religious people changes over time to some extent and, at the same time, differs from that declared by less religious and non-religious people. Even though highly religious young Poles consider being helpful to others as necessary less and less often, they still more often than others treat this value as important in their lives. They value love and friendship more often than others, and it can be seen that the importance of this value (similarly to the other compared groups) is systematically growing.

More often than others, and especially than non-religious ones, highly religious young Poles care about successful family life and children. On the other hand, as a rule, they value a successful sex life, interesting work in line with their interests, peace, and the pursuit of political power less often than representatives of the other analyzed groups.

What distinguishes highly religious people from the rest of the value system is the striving to live in accordance with religious principles. Although the significance of this value slightly decreases, it invariably remains at the forefront. It is mentioned as significant by highly religious people, while it is indicated least often or not at all in the remaining groups. Highly religious students in the final grades of high schools invariably attend religion classes almost universally and, as the only group, the vast majority of them positively evaluate the activities of the Catholic Church, and their behavior is more consistent with its teaching. They get drunk much less often than others and reach for cigarettes and intoxicants less frequently, with a slight upward trend in this group in the case of the last category.

Similarly to other groups, highly religious people mostly have limited trust in others, although they are the only analyzed category in which this trust increases with time. On the other hand, they tend to believe that a person who wants to achieve something in life should look for opportunities to act together with those who have similar problems, rather than act alone and rely solely on themselves.

Community action of highly religious people correlates with their above-average social commitment. More often than non-practitioners, they participate in elections to the school self-government. They also show a relatively higher propensity to economic activity because they usually do not exclude running their own business in the future.

Despite some symptoms of increased trust in other people, highly religious young Poles are characterized by a relatively low tolerance for LGBT+ people. They express reluctance towards them slightly more often than tolerance, while acceptance prevails in the remaining groups, especially among non-religious people. Highly religious people treat climate change as one of the greatest threats to modern civilization slightly less often than others and less than non-religious people.

Table 2. Values, norms, and behaviors of highly religious young Poles compared to other groups distinguished by their level of religiousness

Socio-demographic characteristics:	deeply religious and regularly practicing			believers and practitioners irregularly			believers and non-practitioners			non-believers and non-practitioners		
	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021
Total percent	5,1%	4,3%	4,7%	15,2%	25,7%	17,4%	8,1%	8,9%	14,2%	3,6%	5,7%	20,5%
Total number	N=64	N=53	N=70	N=185	N=313	N=276	N=92	N=109	N=224	N=45	N=70	N=308
People have different goals and aspirations in life. Which of the following goals are most important to you?												
Achieving success in the field of science or art	17,2	3,8	12,3	6,5	6,4	7,3	12,0	5,5	10,3	15,6	14,3	11,7
Achieving a high professional position, making a career	29,7	28,3	30,8	27,6	34,2	41,2	23,9	30,3	38,0	8,9	32,9	28,7
Gaining wealth, achieving a high material position	20,3	26,4	16,9	33,5	31,6	35,4	32,6	26,6	38,5	31,1	27,1	42,0
Being useful to others, „living for others"	20,3	18,9	10,8	8,1	5,1	5,8	12,0	11,9	6,6	4,4	14,3	8,3
A colorful life, full of entertainment, a rich social life	12,5	11,3	7,7	23,2	16,3	17,2	17,4	22,0	18,3	42,2	31,4	27,0
Love, friendship	39,1	49,1	69,2	46,5	55,0	61,3	34,8	53,2	49,3	37,8	41,4	53,7
Successful sex life	1,6	7,5	6,2	15,7	8,9	9,9	9,8	19,3	10,3	31,1	22,9	16,3
Successful family life, children	48,4	39,6	46,2	48,1	53,7	38,7	37,0	44,0	37,1	15,6	24,3	16,7
Gaining political power	0,0	1,9	0,0	1,1	1,6	1,5	3,3	4,6	0,5	4,4	2,9	3,0
The ability to make important decisions in the economic sphere	1,6	0,0	0,0	2,2	1,6	0,0	2,2	1,8	0,9	2,2	0,0	0,3
Living according to religious principles	42,2	37,7	36,9	1,6	1,6	1,1	4,3	0,9	1,4	0,0	0,0	0,0
Independence at work	6,3	3,8	9,2	9,7	3,2	7,3	13,0	11,0	8,9	17,8	12,9	12,0
Interesting work in line with your interests	29,7	34,0	29,2	39,5	37,7	38,3	41,3	32,1	39,4	37,8	37,1	40,0
A peaceful life without hassles, conflict	18,8	22,6	16,9	28,1	31,9	27,0	37,0	23,9	28,2	22,2	20,0	26,7
Other answers	4,7	5,7	0,0	0,0	1,3	1,1	3,3	0,0	0,9	2,2	2,9	2,0
Do you attend religion lessons at school?												
Yes	91,9	92,5	85,7	80,8	97,1	68,4	61,5	86,9	47,8	31,1	54,3	21,1
No	8,1	7,5	14,3	19,2	2,9	31,6	38,5	13,1	52,2	68,9	45,7	78,9

How do you rate the activities of the Roman Catholic Church?												
Very good	-	17,4	-	2,5	-	4,0	-	1,0	-	-	-	-
Good	-	55,1	-	38,2	-	24,1	-	1,0	-	-	-	-
Bad	-	7,2	-	26,2	-	15,6	-	18,2	-	-	-	-
Very bad	-	7,2	-	10,5	-	28,6	-	51,6	-	-	-	-
No opinion	-	13,0	-	22,5	-	27,7	-	28,2	-	-	-	-
Which of the following statements is closer to your opinion?												
In general, most people can be trusted	4,7	9,6	10,0	5,5	11,3	7,3	13,2	7,6	8,6	8,9	13,0	6,2
You have to be careful in dealing with people	84,4	80,8	78,6	86,8	80,0	85,7	79,1	72,4	79,5	80,0	78,3	87,3
Hard to say	10,9	9,6	11,4	7,7	8,7	7,0	7,7	20,0	11,8	11,1	8,7	6,5
Which of the following statements is closer to your opinion?												
Nowadays, a person who wants to achieve something in life should do his own thing, relying only on himself	39,2	41,4	44,6	56,1	49,5	55,7	60,0	55,0	-	-	-	-
Nowadays, a person who wants to achieve something in life should look for opportunities to act together with those who have similar problems	47,1	40,0	40,4	27,3	27,2	29,0	25,7	31,9	-	-	-	-
Hard to say	13,7	18,6	15,0	16,6	23,3	15,4	14,3	13,0	-	-	-	-
Have you participated in the elections to the school council?												
Whenever it was held	-	28,8	-	22,3	-	18,5	-	18,6	-	-	-	-
Yes, but not every year	-	15,4	-	30,3	-	18,5	-	21,4	-	-	-	-
I have never participated	-	51,9	-	44,8	-	59,3	-	54,3	-	-	-	-
There is no school council in my school	-	1,9	-	1,3	-	1,9	-	1,4	-	-	-	-
Other answer	-	1,9	-	1,3	-	1,9	-	4,3	-	-	-	-
Are you considering starting your own business in the future?												
No	9,6	11,4	3,2	5,5	4,6	7,2	12,4	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	53,8	64,3	51,8	54,5	47,7	54,3	51,0	-	-	-	-	-
Hard to say	36,5	24,3	45,0	40,0	47,7	38,5	36,6	-	-	-	-	-

How many times (if any) have you been drunk with an alcoholic drink, such as beer, wine or vodka, in the last 30 days?												
I have not got drunk even once in the last 30 days	-	65,4	64,7	-	49,8	58,9	-	47,2	53,0	-	50,7	56,1
1-2 times	-	26,9	27,9	-	35,1	28,0	-	31,5	32,0	-	31,9	29,8
3-5 times	-	1,9	1,5	-	9,9	9,5	-	15,7	10,5	-	11,6	7,9
6 times or more	-	5,8	5,9	-	5,1	3,6	-	5,6	4,6	-	5,8	6,2
Do you smoke?												
Yes, regularly	9,4	13,5	13,0	37,0	25,6	15,9	39,1	43,0	24,1	57,8	33,3	29,3
Yes, but only in exceptional circumstances	15,6	11,5	13,0	13,6	21,2	22,8	10,9	10,3	16,8	2,2	17,4	21,5
No	75,0	75,0	73,9	49,5	53,2	61,2	50,0	46,7	59,1	40,0	49,3	49,2
Have you used any drugs in the last year?												
Yes	4,7	5,8	10,0	10,8	17,3	10,2	13,0	23,1	10,8	50,0	20,0	23,5
No	95,3	94,2	90,0	89,2	82,7	89,8	87,0	76,9	89,2	50,0	80,0	76,5
How could you describe your attitude towards gays, lesbians and other LGBT + people?												
Aversion	-	-	41,8	-	-	18,6	-	-	23,3	-	-	13,0
Neither aversion nor acceptance	-	-	20,9	-	-	25,9	-	-	17,8	-	-	12,1
Acceptance	-	-	37,3	-	-	55,5	-	-	58,9	-	-	74,9
What is your personal opinion on climate change?												
Climate change is currently one of the greatest threats to modern civilization	-	-	22,9	-	-	25,1	-	-	27,3	-	-	42,7
Climate change is a threat, but it is one of many dangerous issues	-	-	42,9	-	-	40,4	-	-	33,6	-	-	34,9
Climate change is not a particularly significant threat	-	-	4,3	-	-	7,3	-	-	5,5	-	-	2,9
Climate change is not a dangerous issue at all	-	-	1,4	-	-	1,1	-	-	0,5	-	-	1,0
There is no such issue as climate change	-	-	0,0	-	-	0,4	-	-	1,4	-	-	0,7
No opinion	-	-	28,6	-	-	25,8	-	-	31,8	-	-	17,9

Source: Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) and National Bureau for Drug Prevention (KBPN)

5. Forms of spending free time by highly religious young Poles compared to other groups

"Free time, like play, can be defined in two ways: as a kind of cultural and moral institution, or in psychological terms – as an area of activities subject to human motivations. When discussing free time as a cultural institution, we mention behaviors recognized in a given community as being outside the sphere of duty. Leisure activities as an institution are quantifiable and defined in each community. If, on the other hand, free time is included in terms of subjective motivations, then the possibility of easy statistical comparisons disappears. For everyone, free time can mean something different; everyone needs to be asked individually about their sense of freedom and pleasure in the course of various activities. A sociologist and culturologist, as well as statisticians, prefer to use the institutional formula of free time, while a psychologist can investigate individual feelings of a free time activity" (Sułkowski 1998).

In our sociological analyses, we pay attention to patterns and preferred ways of spending time outside work, i.e., free-time behavior and activities. We present forms of spending free time by religious people (deeply religious and regularly practicing individuals) and check whether and to what extent they differ from the ways of spending time by religious and irregularly practicing people, believers, and non-practitioners as well as non-believers and non-practitioners.

It turns out that young Poles who are highly religious are clearly more likely to play sports and engage in artistic activity than representatives of the other analyzed groups. On the other hand, they are much less lazy, play computer games less frequently, and spend much less time online. More often than non-religious people, they spend their free time "in the real world."

Generally speaking, highly religious young Poles clearly differ from non-religious ones regarding forms of spending free time. Both groups have in common the relatively high number of friendships they make. Young people characterized by above-average religiosity declare a rather large number of close acquaintances in the class, although the average, in this case, is slightly lower than in the case of non-religious people and higher than the average among moderately religious people.

Table 3. Forms of spending free time by highly religious young Poles compared to other groups distinguished by their level of religiosity

Socio-demographic characteristics:	Declarations of faith and religious practices			
	2021			
	deeply religious and regularly practicing	believers and practitioners irregularly	believers and non-practitioners	non-believers and non-practitioners
Total percent	4,7%	17,4%	14,2%	20,5%
Total number	N=70	N=276	N=224	N=308
How many students in your class would you include as your friends?				
Mean:	4,83	3,26	3,84	2,84
What is your favorite way to spend your free time? Indicate your three favorite ways of spending free time				
Meetings with colleagues, friends, girlfriend/boyfriend, peers	81,4	89,0	83,3	76,5
Watching tv	15,7	16,5	20,7	9,1
Reading books	18,6	14,3	11,7	23,1
Playing computer games	20,0	26,8	27,5	40,7
Sharing on social networks (e.g. Facebook, etc.)	7,1	8,8	7,2	7,2
Surfing the internet	17,1	28,7	23,9	28,3
Plaing sport	41,4	27,2	28,4	20,2
Artistic activity: playing an instrument, creating artwork / computer graphics, etc.	27,1	8,5	9,5	17,9
Going to concerts	4,3	8,1	7,2	6,5
Going to clubs	24,3	22,8	19,8	12,7
Doing nothing, e.g. resting, lying down, sleeping, etc.	17,1	32,0	34,7	40,4
Other answer	18,6	5,5	9,0	7,5

How often do you play sports or engage in physical activity - apart from physical education lessons?				
Every day	21,4	11,0	13,1	11,0
A few times a week	21,4	26,0	27,5	24,4
1-2 times a week	28,6	26,0	20,7	22,7
2-3 times a week	15,7	13,2	10,8	11,7
Once a mounth or less	7,1	15,4	14,4	14,6
I do not play sports at all, I do not take up physical activity	5,7	8,4	13,5	15,6
How many hours a day (average) do you spend on the Internet?				
Mean:	4,16	4,73	5,10	5,74
Do you spend more of your free time with friends in real life or on the Internet?				
I spend much more free time with my friends in real life than on the Internet	49,3	51,3	54,8	39,5
I spend a bit more of my free time with my friends in real life than on the Internet	14,5	19,8	15,8	15,4
I spend about the same amount of free time with my friends in real life as on the Internet	13,0	15,4	14,9	20,9
I spend a bit more of my free time with my friends on the Internet than in real life	14,5	9,5	7,7	13,1
I spend much more free time with my friends on the Internet than in real life	8,7	4,0	6,8	11,1

Source: Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) and National Bureau for Drug Prevention (KBPN)

Conclusions

In the period of intense socio-cultural changes, there are discrepancies between the institutional requirements of the Church and the actual religious attitudes of Christians. The number of orthodox attitudes that correspond to the standards of the official interpretation of faith by the Church is decreasing, and there are more and more attitudes inconsistent with this interpretation, which, depending on the degree of inconsistency and deviation from the established dogmas and hierarchy of religious values, are described as ambivalent, selective and heterodox (Adamczyk 2020; Klimski 2018). In many modern societies, orthodox faith is already a matter for a minority of believers, and the Church is becoming less and less needed as an intermediary with the supernatural world. Some believers define themselves as religious but, at the same time, more or less radically reject many elements of institutionalized religion (according to the principle "my religiousness is my private matter"). They believe that the way to God is found not through ecclesiastically recognized forms of religion but personal faith.

In the conditions of progressive social modernization, entailing pluralization and individualization, also in Polish society, especially in younger generations, there are more and more people who shape religiosity in their own way, selectively ("like a Pole," "religiousness without consequences," "liquid-like," "hazy," "diluted," "no dogmas," "partially organized," "diffused," "deregulated"). The changing social forms of religiousness and the ways of its manifestation, which mean greater freedom and abandonment of orthodoxy, not always lead to the decline of faith, but most often to specific deregulation, disintegration, or privatization (Luckmann 1967; Hervieu-Léger 1999). It is true that the religious faith of many Poles, including young people, is still often embedded in the Christian tradition. Nonetheless, it is becoming less deepened and externalized to a lesser extent (many young people are ashamed to show their faith in public). One could even argue that it is gradually blurring and weakening, becoming less and less visible and "asymptomatic," what is consistent with the global trends (Pew Research Center 2018).

The processes of deinstitutionalization and privatization mean the weakening of ties with the Church and the "unchurching" of religiosity itself. At the same time, the position and role of the Catholic Church in Polish society are changing. In recent years, Polish society has become less favorable to the presence of religion and the Church in public space (Grabowska 2022), and the activities of this institution meet with less and less social recognition (Feliksiak 2021). A declaration of the "I am a believer" type does not always mean acceptance of the basic truths of the Christian faith (it often coincides with professing views contrary to the dogmatic teachings of Christian Churches) and certainly does not oblige regular participation in religious practices. Such attitudes are particularly often observed in the young generation of Poles. In a study of students in the final grades of high schools carried out in 2021, only slightly more than a half (54%) described themselves as believers, and in this

group, only every second respondent (51%) admitted that there is no doubt about the existence of God. Only 47% of young believers positively assessed the activities of the Roman Catholic Church, and only 38% admitted that they regularly (at least once a week) participate in religious practices.

In the religious beliefs and attitudes of young people, we deal with changeable and incoherent systems of content and behavior more and more often, which are symptoms of the privatization of the religious sphere and the process of erosion of religious consciousness and traditional religious beliefs, as well as the creativity of individuals. Religious identities are created – identities that can be seen as peculiar "unfinished projects" with varied and variable external expressions (Dyczewski 2020; Zemło 2021). Unorthodox forms of religiosity and spirituality are becoming more and more visible in Polish society (Mandes 2021; Szauer 2021). It is sometimes more vital that you believe than what you believe in and how coherent and consistent the belief is. Young selective Catholics often do not treat their attitudes as apostasy or heresy but as an autonomous and free choice of their faith. This also applies to people who define themselves as deeply religious and regularly practicing religion, although this group, despite the fact that it changes internally over time (like the whole society), invariably stands out from the other groups distinguished by us due to the presented attitude towards religion.

While in the entire population of young Poles (18-19 years of age) in the 2021 survey, only 28% of respondents admitted that they believed in God and there was no doubt about His existence. In the highly religious group, this percentage was 81%. Highly religious young Poles in the vast majority (72%) value the Catholic Church as an institution, while in the entire population of young people, this support is only 28%. Every second highly religious young Pole (50%) practices religion more than once a week, whereas this percentage is only 5% of the entire population.

Highly religious young Poles invariably mention their religious faith and family life at the forefront of their life values, and in their behavior, they use psychoactive substances less often than others. They devote themselves to laziness much less frequently in their free time than their peers. They prefer active forms of spending time and limit their presence on the Internet. They are characterized by above-average social commitment and appreciate collective action, which they see as more effective than acting alone. It is consistent with the results of population research (Boguszewski 2016) and Robert Putnam's concept which says that faith-based communities remain important reservoirs of social capital (Putnam 2000). On the other hand, these people do not stand out from society with the level of social trust, which is very low among them. Additionally, they are characterized by much lower tolerance towards people presenting different attitudes and behaviors (including, for example, non-heteronormative individuals). To some extent it confirms the findings based on the results of the World Value Survey according to which "the process of secularization, especially in countries, where the Roman Church once was a very powerful institution, often implied that the remaining 'hard core' of practicing Roman

Catholics is less tolerant than the society surrounding the faithful. By contrast, the Roman Catholic faithful are often at the vanguard of tolerance in countries, where Roman Catholics are in a minority position" (Tausch 2017).

The matters that currently absorb young people worldwide, such as ecology and counteracting climate change, clearly become less critical in the case of highly religious young Poles. It is consistent with US research which suggests that highly religious people are no more likely than other Americans to recycle their household waste and when making decisions about what goods and services to buy, they are no more inclined to consider the manufacturers' environmental records or whether companies pay employees a fair wage (Pew Research Center 2016).

Suppose the socio-cultural changes in Poland are, to some extent, imitative in relation to Western societies. In that case, it should be expected that the processes of "de-churchization," pluralization, and individualization of religiousness will be more and more visible in Polish society. Even if we can talk about the peculiar sociological uniqueness of Polish religiosity, it does not mean that Poland will always remain a country of such high religiousness as it is today or that there will be no further changes in Polish religiosity. As we can already see, the religious capital in Poland is not something inviolable and permanent. Yet, for some, including the younger part of Polish society, it is essential and at the same time conditions specific attitudes and behaviors that are close to the teaching of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it is difficult to fully accept the thesis that the religious faith of young Poles in the future will only have the dimension of a personal decision or that it will not exist at all. It can be expected that also in the coming years, the social and cultural conditions of religious faith will not be suspended for at least some young people and that the faith strengthened and experienced personally, supported intellectually, and characterized by commitment will always be a significant matter for a minority of young Poles. However, one should also expect further changes in this minority group – both in the demographic dimension and the attitudes and presented behaviors.

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To Educate Towards Values – But What Values?
Axiological Dilemmas of Education

Wychowywać ku wartościom – ale jakim? Aksjologiczne dylematy edukacji

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Abstract: In the simplest terms, the concept of value may be defined as something that is important and valuable to a person. The presented paper provides some reflection on the essence of value and its various understandings and indicates methods of educating young people towards the highest, social, and positive utilitarian values. The fact is, however, that in the modern world the prevailing values, especially among young people, are hedonism and focus on one's own well-being, benefits, possession of valuable things and comfort of life.

This paper discusses the reasons why young people prefer the above values and at the same time points to the dilemmas of teachers, namely, what values should students be guided towards, so that they do not suffer any harm when confronted with the contemporary reality of the world of adults. Should young people be directed towards higher values, if that may make them vulnerable to others especially those who want to use them for their own purposes? Or, should they rather be taught to be uncompromising, to stand up for themselves, which will help them achieve success in their professional and social life? The fact is, however, that hardly any educator will resign from leading students towards the highest values. So, the real question is: How to conduct moral and ethical education of students at the same time helping them prepare for the realities of the modern world? This paper attempts to make recommendations aimed at reconciling these two areas of education.

Keywords: values, education, teacher dilemmas

Abstrakt: Najprościej ujmując pojęcie wartości, można uznać, że określa ono to, co dla człowieka jest ważne i cenne. Prezentowany tekst zawiera refleksje na temat istoty pojęcia wartości oraz różnego rozumienia tego pojęcia. Wskazano w nim także drogi wychowania do wartości najwyższych, społecznych i pozytywnych wartości utylitarnych. Faktem jednak jest, iż we współczesnym świecie, zwłaszcza wśród młodych ludzi, dominują wartości hedonistyczne i nastawienie na własny dobrostan, korzyści, posiadanie wartościowych rzeczy i wygodę życia.

W treści artykułu podjęto dyskusję na temat tego, z jakich powodów młodzi ludzie preferują właśnie te wartości. Wskazano również dylematy wychowawców i nauczycieli, ku jakim wartościom należy kierować wychowanków, aby w zderzeniu ze współczesną rzeczywistością świata dorosłych nie ponieśli szkody. Czy na pewno kierunkować ich na wartości wyższe – przez co mogą stać się łatwą „ofiarą" dla innych ludzi, pragnących ich wykorzystać dla własnych celów, czy też raczej uczyć bezkompromisowej „walki o swoje", co zapewni im w przyszłości sukcesy w życiu zawodowym i społecznym? Faktem jednak jest, iż żaden wychowawca nie zrezygnuje z prowadzenia swoich wychowanków ku wartościom najwyższym. Jak więc prowadzić wychowanie moralne i etyczne wychowanków, jednocześnie pomagając im w przygotowaniu się do realiów współczesnego świata? W zamieszczonych w tekście rekomendacjach pedagogicznych podjęto próbę pogodzenia tych dwóch obszarów wychowania.

Słowa kluczowe: wartości, wychowanie, dylematy wychowawcy

Introduction – the question of values in literature

Values are commonly understood as all things constituting the object of human needs, endeavours, and aspirations. Therefore, values can include both material objects, people, social groups, institutions, ideas, types of activities and social relations. Values are most often considered in the context of human activity, needs, and aspirations.

The way of defining the concept of "value" in social sciences – psychology, pedagogy and sociology – involves emphasizing by those sciences different conceptual categories that values relate to. According to this view, there are three categories of values. From a psychological standpoint, value can be understood as an element of an individual's system of beliefs, other people's beliefs regarding states or actions considered desirable, objects that satisfy specific needs of an individual, or observable behaviours of an individual. In turn, while defining the concept of value, sociology highlights the social aspect. In this approach, values are objects or beliefs of a non-normative nature that evoke relatively similar experiences and behaviours of individuals, beliefs commonly adopted in a given social group regarding judgments and attitudes that are considered desirable for that group members, as well as beliefs of groups or individuals regarding preferable features of individual groups and society as a whole.

In the cultural approach, the source of value is culture. Values are defined here as objects of a symbolic or non-symbolic nature that are commonly desired in a given society, generally accepted existential and normative judgments and widespread beliefs regarding judgments as well as behaviours considered desirable for individuals and the whole society.

There are many ways of classifying values. One of them is the division according to the degree of abstraction covering two categories, namely, everyday values related to various areas of human life (e.g., professional work, family life, social activity, etc.) and more abstract values that give a life its overall meaning. Another classification is based on the degree to which values are internalized by an individual, i.e., values proposed by society, declared by an individual, acknowledged and actually adhered to. Those values form a number of systems that overlap one another.

A system of values can be regarded as harmonious when specific spheres of human existence (biological, psychological, social and spiritual) aim towards defining the hierarchy of importance of goals in view of the overarching goal pursued by man. In fact, this process of prioritizing goals is taking place permanently throughout human life, and therefore the system of human values is inherently ruled by the principle of conflict. Depending on the prevailing pressures of individual spheres of human life, the entire system of values or its subsystems may undergo changes of a progressive or regressive nature, thus moving away from the adopted, overarching goal.

M. Rokeach's (1973) theory of values is inscribed in a general theory of belief systems. In view of this concept, the system of values is a separate structure, located centrally in the system of beliefs, which testifies to its consequential regulatory functions for human behaviour. As M. Rokeach points out, values are beliefs

that dictate and prohibit, adjudicate on the object of belief whether it is desirable or undesirable. The scientist contends that "a value, according to traditional psychological theory, is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite mode of conduct or end state of existence." Individual values form a hierarchical system, which the author has defined as "the enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of relative importance" (Rokeach 1973, 5)

M. Rokeach believes that the number of values cherished by each individual is relatively small and amounts to about several dozen, while all people, regardless of their living conditions, cherish the same values, but to a varying degree. Rokeach distinguishes two types of values: terminal and instrumental. Terminal values mean certain end states of human existence and development. Instrumental values, on the other hand, refer to an individual's own characteristics that determine positive social functioning (performing social roles) in the moral aspect or those related to self-acceptance.

However, the Author prefers the approach to values in line with the study of Polish scientists and it is in this context that further considerations will be carried out.

As S. Ruciński claims, "Defining what is important and valuable in a human (...) cannot be brought down to the problem of choosing certain norms and patterns, proposed by one or another moral doctrine. It is a broader axiological problem, including questions about supreme human values" (Ruciński 1981, 17). While analysing various approaches to the issue of values, Ruciński emphasizes that values, apart from implying a transcendent aspect as absolute values, can also imply an instrumental aspect as the effectiveness of certain human activities that are valuable for an individual (Ruciński 1981, 33-35).

On the other hand, K. Obrycht, drawing on psychological ideas, states that "The concept of values (...) is interpreted as, on the one hand, what is important for human development, and on the other – as an individual's ideas and beliefs about what is important, desirable, valuable to this individual" (Olbrycht 2000, 71). At the same time, analysing various philosophical approaches (e.g., by Max Scheler, Dietrich von Hilderbrand, Roman Ingarden, Karol Wojtyła and others), he points to various approaches to the issue of values – from avoiding their specific definition, through their transcendent personal dimension, to viewing this concept almost exclusively in instrumental categories, as specific modes of conduct and goods valuable from the point of view of individuals (Olbrycht 2000, 124-140).

A similar approach is adopted by W. Stróżewski who proposes to make a distinction between "the value «in itself» and the materialized value, embodied in an object. And to distinguish something that is a value from something that has value. Value «in itself» can also be understood in two ways: as an abstract, universal, content of a concept extracted from a specific material – in such a case it is a specific intentional object, or as an autonomous, independently existing

entity – in such a case the value appears as an idea, independent of any concretum, although probably necessary for its axiological definition" (Stróżewski 2013, 68).

Following J. Gajda, it should be assumed that "Each human life is based on a more or less conscious implementation of values within a specific social structure and a given type of culture. A meaningful life means axiological maturity, expressed in the cognitive and emotional spheres as well as in the choice of decisions. An individual who lives such a life remains in a rational way faithful to the values he recognizes. He makes decisions about regarding the choice of values, about changing them or opening up to new values based on his own discernment" (Gajda 2008, 40).

There are many more definitions of values and ways of interpreting them that could be mentioned at this point, was it not for the limited volume of this paper presented for publication which prevents further in-depth analyses. However, in general, it can be stated that the concept of value is a multidimensional one, difficult to describe and define unambiguously. In further reflection, the Author will therefore refer to the examples of definitions cited above.

1. Education towards values

The modern world brings with it many moral dilemmas. Some important values have been devalued, others have taken on a new meaning and become more important than others. So, what is the meaning of education towards values, towards a valuable life?

"It is difficult (…) to reach a consensus in ordering values presented by individual social groups. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the values passed on to the young generation by parents, educators, and pedagogues, it is important and socially desirable to establish priority values that apply to most people. It is because the social dimension of normative behaviours indicates appropriate behaviours, sets boundaries, establishes binding relations, frames of reference, shaping social identity or national affiliation" (Bieńkowska and Kitlińska-Król 2016, 39).

Development and functioning of a system of values depends to a large extent on the initial conditions, i.e., the biological, mental, social and spiritual capabilities of an individual, and on the stimulation of the environment, leading that individual to recognizing those conditions. Particular importance in the transfer of values is attributed to the social environment of an individual. Through participation in social groups, an individual learns about and undertakes various social roles from an early age, thus learning and internalizing the values assigned to these roles. A different aspect of values is their existence as a psychological category – as objects of interest on the part of individuals and an expression of their needs. The motivating power of a given value in the life of a specific person is a derivative of the position of this value among other values leading to a specific goal. The

strength of motivation depends both on the value itself and on the individual performing the task. However, because of pressures coming from various spheres of human existence, the created system of values or its part may be threatened (Ostrowska 1998, 96).

So, what does education towards values mean? According to the Author, it means proper education of young people, leading them to universal values that determine one's humanity – Truth, Goodness, Beauty. Those are the intrinsically human, unchanging and always desirable values. As indicated by W. Stróżewski (2013, 73) "it is the question of capturing value as such, its *eidos*, which, according to Edith Stein, has its autonomous essential being. This, at any rate, is the real essence of values: the essence of nobility, goodness, humility, generosity, purity, beauty, grace, etc. From the perspective of the subject experiencing a value, its essence signals its presence by «moving the heart», evoking an emotional state." Thus, as W. Stróżewski points out, values are not only "valuable things" important to their owner, but also specific features of the psyche and the soul that are revealed in various life experiences of an individual, evoking emotional states and spurring action for the sake of good.

In the process of leading a student towards adopting proper values, a special role is played by the educator, who should be a role model and a carrier of such values. As S. Ruciński (1988, 191-192) claims: "An educator who would like to introduce a student to a valuable life (…) could address the student and ask: Do you want to live a valuable life? Then come and try to walk by my side but try to walk by yourself and do not imitate me. Let the fact that I walk beside you only give you a sense of security, because I want you to feel that you are not alone, that you will not be left on your own." Thus, the educator is a person whose role is to direct the student towards a life lived according to the right values, awaken in the student the desire for these values and teach him to implement them in his own life. Ruciński also claims that "Practical activity of the educator consists in the implementation or at least a strive towards implementing certain values. The conscious character of this activity does not only consist in the fact that the educator is aware of what he is doing: what are his goals, what are the measures taken, how he understands and perceives individual elements of the process of his educational activity, etc." (Ruciński 1981, 325). The author also emphasizes that "The process of education consists of a certain sequence of activities on the part of both educators and students, it is actually a process of cooperation, aimed at correcting the lives of students (as well as of educators), and therefore it is vital that the activities of both are characterized by this internal consequence. (...) directing the development of the student requires participation of both parties of the educational process and setting the direction of educational cooperation not according to ready-made patterns to which the students should be adjusted, but according to discernment in the student's own needs and abilities as well as in the needs of the society in which he lives" (Ruciński 1981, 213).

Thus, as emphasized by K. Olbrycht, "General nature of education towards values would mean education towards a defined manner of treating «values», accepting their specific status, mode of existence, possible hierarchy, way of learning

about them and implementing them. Therefore, education in this dimension would consist in shaping a specific attitude towards values (...). Education towards values means acting that, in the psychological dimension, deliberately aims at creating the desired standards of «positivity» and «negativity.» (…) Education towards higher values is the very process, most often related to a broad group of cognitive, moral and aesthetic values, while education towards the highest values (…) means education towards goodness, truth and beauty, and at the same time towards recognizing the value of human being as a person (Olbrycht 2000, 93-94).

It seems plausible to include in this study the views of S. Chrobak, who claims that: "Development of the pupil is conditional to a dynamic, mature, fully formed person of the educator, revealing his own life philosophy and choice of values – their hierarchy and justification, and credible in responsible implementation of those values. The educator brings in to the process of education his knowledge as well as his own unique personality. Therefore, he himself must be a role model not only with respect to cognitive attitudes, formal qualifications, but also to ethical ones. «Education of a human being» can only be conducted by a responsible person who is convinced of the purposefulness of his actions. One who believes that the hierarchy of values, sensitivity, imagination and searching mind are more important than the amount of knowledge instilled" (Chrobak 2010, 129). The author claims also that "The teacher-educator's professional practice should therefore take into account manifold contexts of influencing the pupil, e.g., directness, uniqueness and specificity of each school situation, promoting such features of educational activities as: responsibility, collaboration, cooperation, open communication, understanding the sense of planned and already taking place changes in the socialization and civic education of the student. The basic sense of education is to assist in the development of another human being. "Emphasizing the role and tasks of the educator does not mean disregarding the student's role. A young person consciously or unconsciously seeks role models and authorities. Being a teacher-educator means being a master and a witness. Recognition of the role of witnesses and masters in the lives of people and societies requires consent to see the world and other people through the prism of the positive meaning of the «other» in one's own life, starting from the assumption that positive «others» have lived and still live in the real world; consent to the fact that the «other» can be and is someone positively significant, someone who brings positive goals and values, leads the way of truth and testimony" (Chrobak 2021, 30). At this point, it is also worth quoting the words of M. Gogacz: "value is a goal, a task, an idea, and therefore an intellectual construct. Such constructs do not educate. Neither do theories or ideologies. It is people who educate" (Gogacz 1997, 38).

Thus, as the above-cited Authors indicate, in the process of directing the development of proper hierarchy of values in the student, an extremely important role is played by the educator, his personality, the values he professes – values not only declared, but also practised in his own life. The educator is the one who guides his student, shows him both general and utilitarian values, leading the students

towards a valuable life lived to the fullness of his humanity. The educator should be a "master", the "Big" who shows the "Little" the world and its various aspects, indicating the modes of proper conduct in various life situations. According to M. Gogacz, "One must never betray trust. Approaching educators as persons, we learn from them to choose truth and goodness only when they are faithful to truth and goodness. It is from them thus, that we learn how to be guided by wisdom. At the same time, getting to know them as real persons, we gain our first perceptions of interpersonal relationships by experiencing these relationships" (Gogacz 1997, 20). However, while expecting respect from the "Little" due to his knowledge and experience, the educator is also obliged to show respect to the student – his personal properties, dreams, expectations, plans, ways of understanding the world and himself, searching for his own place in the world. He must adopt an attitude of deep kindness, understanding and respect towards the "Little" – not "dragging him" in the direction he has set, or "putting" in his head "the only right beliefs and attitudes, but supporting and directing his development towards the right values and ways of functioning in life." A. Maj set these expectations even higher, claiming that "The basic condition for the education of a person oriented towards the implementation of his own, but proper, objectified hierarchy of values, leading to full humanity, is to integrate around this hierarchy all subjects of education: teachers, students, parents, educational authorities, communities and social groups, the whole society, and to continue bearing witness to those values. Education towards values leading to full humanity should be of a social nature" (Maj 2016, 90). Thus, the aforementioned author does not assign the educator the role of the only person influencing the proper shaping of the hierarchy of values in students but makes all subjects of education responsible for this process – from the very students, through parents and teachers, to education authorities and society as a whole. This is the right approach, because all these elements of the educational process and their functioning are important in managing a student's life and building his system of values.

2. Do we educate towards the right values? Teacher dilemmas

We educate our children, charges and students almost exclusively to positive, pro-social values. We lead them towards Goodness, Truth and Beauty. We shape features such as respect for the Other, goodness, kindness, empathy, willingness to help others, sense of responsibility, honesty. And here comes the educational dilemma – are we not doing our students harm? Are we not making it harder for them to live their adult life in the real world, where these values and characteristics have long since been devalued?

The modern world is not open to people with the qualities that we try to build in our students. This world does not appreciate universal values but promotes hedonistic and materialistic ones. Judgment about good and evil is made not according to the true value of a given act, but according to the benefits, momentary success or pleasure

of people who undertake some actions. Liars are believed when they present their "truths" in a highly popular way, using empty words, which, however, "get recorded" in the minds of other people, especially those who are not fully aware of the reality in which they live, who do not make a critical analysis of current facts, accepting the "mental pulp" served to them as the only right view, regardless of their political orientation and social attitudes. Often, even actions taken partly in the name of serving others are accompanied by "undercover" pursuit of self-interest, dishonesty, greed, and mendacity. "Good people" are used, their ideas of right action, which they take in the name of higher values, are destroyed. People are convinced that one has to "stand up for oneself" even at the expense of the good of others, even trampling on their dignity, "claw one's way" towards one's own goal, elbow others aside, tripping them up, and even destroying the Other in the name of one's own profits and success. Even adults have difficulty finding their way in a world full of contradictions and chaos, especially in the sphere of morality. It is all the more difficult for young people entering this world ruled by hedonistic values. Due to the prevailing pluralism of opinions, views, beliefs, norms and values, young people often receive contradictory or inconsistent content, which causes confusion in socially immature individuals. This information, oozing from the widely available media, causes young people to wonder whether the values instilled in them by us – educators – are really important for their future lives, whether they will help them achieve their own life goals and lead to satisfaction. Lying, plundering millions in dishonest deals, "fixed" tenders and competitions, procrastination, awarding thousands of prizes to oneself "for nothing", highly paid positions awarded not based on competence, but on connections, nepotism or party affiliation, billions spent on malinvestments which will never be implemented, but the people "working" on them receive salaries of thousands for "doing nothing", robbing honest working people for the sake of giving away money for social pathology... one could go on and on. However, the fact is that this is today's Polish reality.

This is the world of "adults" that our students today must enter. Imbued with beliefs about the importance of humanity, goodness and empathy, brought up by us to implement higher values – both universal (Goodness, Truth, Beauty) and instrumental (benevolence, kindness, helpfulness, honesty, responsibility, etc.), they collide with reality, falling into the traps of the modern world, which usually does not care about those values, following the "rat race", uncompromisingly fighting for their own good, even at the expense of others. The world where "everything is for sale" – honesty, morality, responsibility, goodness – where the question "how much" becomes the core matter? How much am I able to "sell" myself for, sacrifice my own humanity for material benefits and my own well-being? Some will never give in to these material pressures, others will succumb at the first opportunity to gain material benefits, uncompromisingly using family or party connections or betraying their own values in the name of future profits.

So, do we educate in the right way? Should not we awaken in our students this readiness to "stand up for themselves", teach them to "elbow others aside", "trip them

up" striving for their own at all costs, even if that cost was to be the good of another person? Should we not develop in our students the skills of competing and fighting for their own good and benefits from an early age? It is obvious that such an approach has little to do with morality, true values, humanity. However, it must also be admitted that teaching our students such skills may guarantee that they will achieve success in their future life and work, and this in fact is what we, as educators, wish for.

This dilemma is extremely difficult and probably concerns each "thinking" educator who is not oblivious to the realities of the modern world. Should we sacrifice the highest values and humanity for the sake of our students' future life successes, or should we persevere in shaping this humanity, risking that our students will not be prepared for life in the modern world and may be "trampled" by other people, uncompromisingly fighting for their positions and goods? It is difficult to answer the above questions and it is difficult to choose the optimal way of education, being aware of the world in which our students will live and of what awaits them in this world.

Conclusion – pedagogical recommendations

According to I. Bieńkowska and M. Kitlińska-Król, "An important role in acquiring values is played by education towards values giving direction to our educational activities while offering a young man a spiritual and existential depth. Education without passing on what is most important and essential, tears us away from our roots, leads to the creation of other systems of reference, often to anti-values, which may not only be disastrous for a young person, but also for the general public. The inspiration to build one's own (and educationally desirable) system of values should be provided by thoughtful parents, teachers, the elderly and wiser people, those with life experience. By their attitude, they should set an example for young people to build a hierarchy of values, consistent with superior moral principles, based on universal educational values (Bieńkowska and Kitlińska-Król 2016, 47).

As emphasized above – it is not easy to choose the optimal way of educational approach in the contemporary world – at one end of this continuum there is instilling the desire to pursue positive values at the expense of one's own good and life successes, and at the other end teaching the "fight for one's own" even at the expense of the good of others and the loss of one's own humanity. However, it is possible to some extent, if we manage to find the "golden mean" between caring for the absolute good of the Other and taking care of one's own benefits without violating the process of building positive values. Therefore, it is possible to keep shaping the students' personality towards positive values, and at the same time prepare them to enter the real world through appropriate educational activities.

First of all, it would require introducing content into school and study curricula that may serve building strong assertiveness in students – the ability to take care of their own well-being, say no to unwanted demands without offending other people and

maintaining a bit of "healthy egoism." It would also be important to require teachers-educators to use any measures to build in their students their self-esteem. It would also be worth introducing content and activities into the curriculum allowing students to develop their social skills, interpersonal communication and self-understanding – defining their own needs and aspirations. Educators should also introduce a bit of competition among students, however, not too strong so as not to cause additional stress in the teaching-learning process, but very balanced, just to teach students the skills necessary in their adult life from an early age. Competition, when wrongly understood and implemented may prove detrimental, while some elements of competition when introduced into the education process may serve developing in students the readiness to overcome not only others, but also themselves in the pursuit of excellence.

Shaping the above-mentioned skills in the course of educational work can help our students to understand the realities of the contemporary world and find their own place in it, that will be conducive to their further personal and professional development. It may also help them build their self-esteem, awareness of their own competences and willingness to use them in their personal and professional development. It is not certain whether these activities of educators and the skills they shape will "give wing to" our pupils in the process of self-realization, but the introduction of these pedagogical activities will certainly help them function in the real world and fulfil themselves without causing harm to other people.

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Conflict as a Challenge for Personal Growth in the Educational Team

Konflikt jako wyzwanie dla rozwoju osobistego w grupie edukacyjnej

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Abstract: In interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, catechist and catechised, as well as in teaching and catechetical teams, communicological blockages and defence mechanisms are part of everyday life. These subjects have different expectations of each other, which in turn triggers resistance in the person. In their concrete experience, there are different observations, reflections and formation of abstract concepts. Conflicts are not always a bad thing. For Gestalt pedagogy, conflict situations present an opportunity for personal development, deepening relationships and growth of the whole group. Gestalt pedagogy uses methods to resolve conflict situations in a way that helps the individual to become aware of and reflect on his or her own feelings, memory traces, reactions and perspective on the conflict situation. Knowledge of the mechanisms of resistance and Gestalt methods for resolving communication blocks is a useful tool for team members (especially for novice teachers and mentor teachers) to build better quality relationships. Good relationships within a team can increase success at work.

Keywords: conflict, Gestalt pedagogy, drawing, verbalisation, mentoring

Abstrakt: Blokady komunikacyjne i mechanizmy obronne są naturalnym elementem relacji interpersonalnych między nauczycielami a uczniami, katechetami i katechizowanymi, a także między członkami zespołów dydaktyczno-katechetycznych. Uczestnicy tego typu interakcji mają wobec siebie różne oczekiwania, co z kolei może wywoływać opór pozostałych. Na ich konkretne doświadczenia składają się różne obserwacje, refleksje, a także tworzone pojęcia abstrakcyjne. Konflikty nie zawsze są złe. Według pedagogiki Gestalt sytuacje konfliktowe stanowią szansę na rozwój osobisty oraz na pogłębianie i podniesienie wartości relacji całej grupy. Pedagogika Gestalt wykorzystuje metody rozwiązywania sytuacji konfliktowych poprzez zrozumienie i analizę własnych emocji, śladów pamięciowych, reakcji i postrzegania sytuacji konfliktowej. Znajomość mechanizmów oporu i metod Gestalt służących pokonywaniu blokad komunikacyjnych może stać się przydatnym narzędziem dla członków danej grupy (zwłaszcza dla początkujących nauczycieli i nauczycieli- -mentorów) sprzyjającym budowaniu lepszej jakości relacji. Z kolei, lepsze relacje w zespole, przekładają się na sukces w pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: konflikt, pedagogika Gestalt, rysunek, werbalizacja, mentoring

Introduction

Dealing with conflict is a difficult and stressful situation for most people, but for young people can be the most difficult. Studies show that 90% of conflicts between students are resolved in a destructive way or are never resolved (De Cecco and Richards 1974). In this area, American scholars have concluded that avoidance, force and threats are the main strategies for dealing with conflict (Johnson et. al. 1995). When people are in conflict, they are concerned with satisfying their own needs and achieving their own goals (usually a source of conflict because the needs and goals of the individual or group are not congruent with those of the other), and with maintaining appropriate relationships with the other party to the conflict (Johnson and Johnson 1994). More recent research supports the fact that emotional intelligence has an impact on conflict management. A greater ability to identify and regulate emotions has an impact constructive solutions (Skordoulis et al. 2020).

In the international LOOP[1] project, the researchers propose, based on their findings, the necessity of structured management of novice teachers, as well as training for mentor teachers. Mentors have many roles: observer, role model, advisor, quality controller, critical friend, evaluator and leader. A mentor provides beginners with useful advice to improve teaching methods and practices. Open communication between mentor and mentee is crucial for success. Mentors should avoid one-way communication (giving instructions and criticism to the beginner) and should instead use two-way communication (where both the mentor and the mentee have a say in the relationship). This form of mentoring involves a dialogue between the beginner and the mentor. To this end, the LOOP project has developed a handbook for mentor teachers and also a handbook for new teachers.[2] Among the so-called modules in the Beginner Teachers' Handbook, Module 5 is about awareness and resolution of stress, which is also a conflict-causing factor.

Data from the Education at a Glance (OECD 2020, 439) and TALIS surveys show that the number of teachers over 50 has increased significantly. This means that there will be major replacements of teaching staff in the coming years. The above-mentioned survey reports that only 37% of teachers use ICT. This means that many beginners will be able to teach their mentors many new things about using ICT tools.

Research shows that good workplace support (emotional, informational and instrumental support) increases employees' personal satisfaction, which in turn affects work performance and reduces burnout (Cranmer et al. 2016, 3-4).

The training of mentors and the teaching of conflict resolution should therefore be present in all educational institutions and also in parishes or pastoral centres. In interpersonal relationships between teachers and pupils, catechist and catechised, and in teaching and catechetical teams, communication blockages and defence mechanisms are part of everyday life. However, in practice, we do not

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[1] LOOP project. Erasmus +. Empowering Teachers, https://empowering-teachers.eu.
[2] Spletna stran projekta LOOP: https://empowering-teachers.eu/policy-experimentation/.

find a programme for the systematic resolution of conflicts, but it is assumed that everyone knows how to do this. Most conflicts remain unresolved, are resolved in a destructive way or even break down cooperation and communication.

1. General communication barriers as a trigger for conflict

In interpersonal communication, we strive to be as successful as possible in communicating or encoding our thoughts, desires, feelings and intentions. We also expect others to receive our messages fully, to decode them correctly and to understand us, which we can only learn through feedback. Approaching this ideal is sometimes more successful, other times less so. Despite our best efforts, many times we are disappointed. Often there are conflicting expectations between the person and the environment, which leads to conflict.

Thomas Gordon lists twelve communication barriers that prevent successful communication. These include: ordering, threatening, moralising, giving preconceived solutions, using bare logic to persuade the other person to take my feelings into account, judging and criticising, unmotivational praise, humiliation, explaining things that no one asked you to explain, comforting or belittling, substituting argument, asking intrusive questions (Gordon 1991).

Some of these ways are in themselves very negative, others somewhat less so. Take 'consolation' as an example. This becomes negative when it is not properly understood. If someone is suffering, we cannot say to them, "Don't worry. It's nothing. Everything will be all right." We are denying the fact that he is really suffering. In such a case, it is necessary to listen and understand the individual's pain. Gordon suggests active listening, which requires three things: 1) Giving a sign of attention. When someone is speaking, we do not remain silent and expressionless, but express ourselves in a way that lets the other person know that we are listening (e.g. by saying "yes", "I understand", "good", etc.). 2) Asking questions. When someone is telling us something, it is good to ask a moderate number of questions, which can help our interlocutor understand that we are paying attention to what they are telling us. 3) Processing and reconstructing information. Feedback is expected in narration, not just judgement or advice (e.g. "So, if I understood correctly, that means ..."). Poor communication, poor expression and consequently poor understanding can cause tensions, which can lead to conflict.
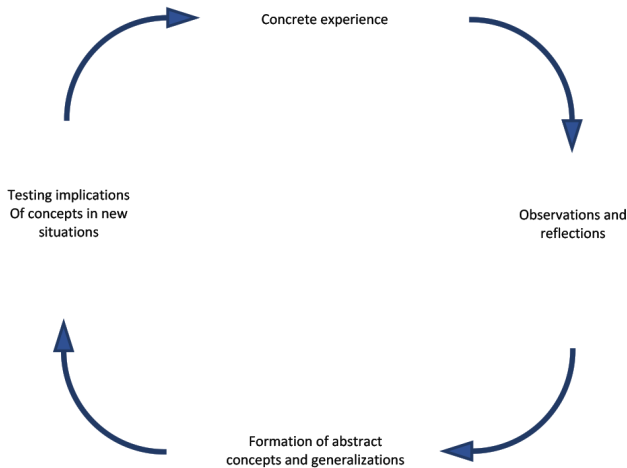
A theologian and Gestalt trainer Alfonz Žibert goes even deeper than communication itself and mentions conflicting expectations: on the one hand, there are one's own expectations, on the other hand, there are the expectations of others. This triggers resistance in the person, because it is a concrete experience in which different observations are made, thoughts are reflected upon, abstract concepts are formed (Žibert 2013, 29).

According to psychologist Tania Radionova, the opposite expectations of others trigger resistance. A person should become something he is not and does

not want to be. Such tension can lead her into an intrapsychic conflict or a spasm in which she cannot experience change. Gestalt therapy helps to get out of such a situation by changing the focus: from the conflict between the expectations of the environment and one's own willingness to engage, to the conscious experience of oneself in the here and now (Radionov 2007).

Educational theorist David Kolb is critical of classical educational practice for being too abstract and lifeless and for neglecting the concrete experience of a person. In his argument, he refers to the Lewininian experiential learning model (Figure 1), which emphasises two aspects: concrete experience and feedback. The former validates abstract concepts, as personal experience is the focal point in learning and gives support to abstract theory. Feedback, which is the basis for a continuous process of goal-directed action and performance evaluation, is essential in the process of social learning and, of course, problem solving (Kolb 2015, 89).

Figure 1: The Lewininian experiential learning model

Concrete experience

Observations and reflections

Formation of abstract concepts and generalizations

Testing implications Of concepts in new situations

Given the situation (described in the introduction), there is a great need for proper conflict resolution among beginning teachers and mentor teachers. Psychologist David Johnson believes that young people need to be trained in conflict resolution. He proposes a five-step strategy: 1) define the conflict together; 2) exchange positions and interests; 3) reverse perspectives; 4) come up with at least three mutually beneficial agreements; and 5) reach an agreement (Johnson et al. 1995).

Effort should be made to ensure that any agreement reached is not merely superficial.

2. Awareness of resistance mechanisms

Gestalt therapy and Gestalt pedagogy have developed a method that is very effective in resolving conflicts.

According to Gestalt therapists, it is through a person's contact and defence mechanisms that we can determine whether or not that person is being authentic with themselves and with others (this section is taken from Lamovec 1995, 20-33). There is a bipolar dynamic between contact and withdrawal: the more contact there is, the less chance there is for withdrawal. The two together form a whole, while at the same time alternating as character and background. If we try to force contact, withdrawal occurs and we achieve a false contact. Contact happens where the boundaries touch. A special form of contact is interpersonal contact, such as the I-You relationship. This can be ideal when both participants allow each other to fully express their experience. Gestalt therapist Lamovec is convinced that in Gestalt therapy, creating an atmosphere of acceptance is a prerequisite for the overall work. The next task is to sharpen the awareness of boundaries. Individuals differ greatly in their view of the boundaries between themselves and the world. For some they are weak and unclear, for others they are too rigid, impermeable and narrow. The first group includes persons who have not developed their individuality and therefore tend to merge, to lose themselves in the other. The fusion of boundaries is referred to as confluence, which is a defence mechanism that prevents contact (Lamovec 1995, 20).

Defence mechanisms include confluence, retroflexion, introjection, projection and deflection.

Confluence or fusion expresses the tendency to erase the differences between oneself and another person, most often between people who spend a lot of time together (e.g. spouses). It is characterised by an unspoken agreement between two people, which, although it reduces the number of conflicts, leads to inconveniences: feelings of guilt, resentment, judgement of others. It is basically a fear of individuality, of separation. The person pays too little attention to himself: what are his desires, his feelings. Therefore, such a person must first learn to pay attention to his own experience. The questions are: "What do you want at this moment?", "How do you feel?", "What are you actually doing?". Confluent people carry a lot of unspoken demands that they are not aware of, and they expect others to read their desires and fulfil them, so they are disappointed again and again. This is also what they expect from the therapist.

Retroflexion is a behaviour in which the individual redirects his problem onto others, not feeling that his problem belongs to him, but feeling it as alien. It develops in people who lived in a repressive environment as children. Helpless, fearing punishment, the child shuts down because the environment is stronger than he is, uses most of his energy to contain forbidden impulses and creates a strong barrier between himself and the environment. Retroflexion helps us in many situations by

clenching the muscles of the jaw and neck, or around the eyes and chin, to stop us from crying out. The problem arises when the behaviour becomes a habit. In Gestalt therapy, attention is paid to the process of repression, the individual is encouraged to identify with the tendency that inhibits and represses. It helps him to regain the awareness that it is he who is actively exerting the pressure. In language, retroflexion is traced by the use of the plural (e.g. 'we consult', 'we persuade', 'we reproach', etc.), so that we do not know to whom the message is addressed. In Gestalt therapy, one tries to find the person to whom the client wants to say something, to reproach.

In introjection, on the other hand, we feel an alien tendency, thought or point of view as our own, even though we have not really integrated it into our personality. In retroreflection, Gestalt therapy tends to accept and integrate the dissociated part, whereas in introjection it tends to dismantle or abandon the inappropriate elements. Introjects are all those forms of behaviour, feeling and evaluation which, under environmental pressure, we have accepted even though we have not assimilated them. They lie inside us like undigested food and "make us want to vomit." Instead of getting rid of them, we repress our feelings of disgust and allow the alien to poison us. Such a person is characterised by passivity, their words do not match their behaviour. Because the environment is more powerful than he is, she does not learn to make her own demands. He chooses an environment that does not threaten him, but at the same time does not give him the possibility to satisfy his own needs. The person tries to be satisfied with what he gets, because he or she does not dare to express his or her own feelings and often represses them. Gestalt therapy, when working with introjects, first tries to reactivate disgust and resistance in order to empower the person to reject the inappropriate, and then to learn to say NO decisively.

Projection. The ability to project allows us to put ourselves in the other person's shoes, to get closer to them and to understand them better. It is about assuming the feelings of others based on our own experience. Projections can be right or wrong. Gestalt therapy aims at accuracy of projection by using the technique of paraphrasing: the interlocutor's statements are repeated in his or her own words for as long as it takes for the interlocutor to fully agree with what is being said, including all the emphases. Gestalt therapy also sharpens the accuracy of the projection by making a strict distinction in the linguistic expression between what is observed, what is felt and what is assumed. A typical example in everyday conflicts is that someone "accuses" you of being angry with them – this is their assumption and is not certain to be fact. Gestalt therapy also uses projection as an empathy technique: suggesting that the individual becomes the other person they are talking about in order to identify with the part of the experience they have alienated. Projection as a defence mechanism develops in such a way that the person does not approve of his feeling, but attributes it to the environment. In this way, he inhibits his own expression and fills himself with prejudice.

Deflexion or dilution is a behaviour that "reduces the intensity of direct contact with another person." In problem-solving, it manifests itself by trying

to circumvent it by speaking too generally, avoiding the point of contention, making eye contact, using softer expressions. Emotions are also bland in such a conversation. When making contact with us, such a person reacts by watering down our attempts: showing a bored face, making cynical remarks, turning everything into a joke. In Gestalt therapy, the person is encouraged to focus on the core of the problem, taught to express himself directly, and given feedback on how others are experiencing him.

Having discussed the defence mechanisms that fall within the scope of Gestalt therapy, we now return to the field of Gestalt pedagogy, which addresses such potential problems in a preventive way adopting the same principles, premises and objectives.

3. The basics of Gestalt pedagogy

If a person is unfree because of the past or the present moment, Gestalt pedagogy can help them to be free to be creative and playful. It is play that enables relaxation (which depends on trust), physical and spiritual creative activity, and awareness of one's own experience (Winnicott 1974, 66). Gestalt writers Chrisian von Ehrenfels and Ferdinand Weinhandl, stress that Gestalt is concerned with the totality and unity of the person, and not just with fragmentary sections of his or her phenomenality. Gestalt therapy, whose founders are Fritz and Lore Perls and Paul Goodman, emphasises that the principle of the "here and now", the observation of non-verbal modes of expression and the principle of holistic understanding are essential to Gestalt pedagogy (Hufnagel 2011, 7-8).

Olaf-Axel Burowo summarises all the principles of Gestalt pedagogy in twelve points: the principle of person-centredness; the principle of contact-centredness; the principle of the here and now; the principle of awareness; the principle of learning through experience; the principle of Self-Support; the principle of closed or good Gestalt; the principle of integration; the principle of dialogical teaching and learning; the principle of responsibility; the principle of synergy; the principle of voluntariness (Burow 1981, 86-87; Burow 1998).

Of these principles, the most important for conflict resolution are: focus on contact, learning through experience and the principle of responsibility (Nežič 2019, 194-196). In conflict situations, people avoid contact and thus prevent each other from presenting their own goals and needs, which can be restored through the Gestalt pedagogical method. It is also true that Gestalt pedagogy helps to encourage responsible action when people find themselves in irritable emotional states of conflict. Through their own experience of successful conflict resolution, they gain an experience of inestimable value (Nežič 2021, 137-141).

The aims of Gestalt pedagogy are summarised by Heinrich Grausgruber and are as follows: perceiving and recognising personal needs, interests and possibilities; promoting sensitivity and the capacity to experience; fostering the

capacity and skills for independent learning and responsible action; overcoming (external) disturbances and (internal) blocks in the contact process of learning or acting responsibly; and overcoming (internal) barriers to learning. Development of the capacity for critical-constructive communication and productive cooperation; awareness of the relationship between freedom and responsibility when it comes to making decisions about oneself in social relationships; recognition of ecological, social, cultural factors and connections, fostering a willingness to engage in these areas (Grausgruber 1994, 289). Of these goals, overcoming internal blockages and awareness between freedom and responsibility are central in a conflict situation.

The following methods can be distinguished in Gestalt pedagogy: identification or projection; imagination or imagination exercises; exercises for perceiving oneself and others; body work and movement; role-playing and simulations; creative media; exercises for group communication and raising awareness (Neuhold 1997, 17). The identification or projection method can be very helpful in conflict resolution. The concrete conflict situation can be expressed by those involved in the conflict through drawing e.g. trees, being aware that each tree represents a person (Haldot 2011, 92).

3.1. Important elements in conflict resolution in Module A

In the formal training of a Gestalt educator, counsellor, leader or supervisor, we find elements that include conflict resolution. In the following, we will limit ourselves to Catholic Gestalt pedagogy.

Among the principles, goals and methods of Gestalt pedagogy, some are particularly focused on conflict resolution. The training programmes of the Faculty of Theology, the Association for Christian Gestalt Pedagogy, the Institute for Integrative Gestalt Pedagogy and Pastoral Care (IIGS), founded in 1972 by Albert Höfer, other institutes and associations in Europe (Switzerland, Germany, Poland, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia), united under the umbrella organisation of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Vereine für Integrative Gestaltpädagogik und Seelsorge* (ARGE-IGS), enable participants to develop deep self-knowledge through exercises, feedback and reflection. This helps them to better understand others and improve their pedagogical work. The knowledge they have acquired through undergoing this process can be passed on to others in three different fields of work: therapeutic assistance (special pedagogy, defectology, crisis intervention, monitoring personal progress), teaching and didactics (school teaching) and pastoral care (catechesis, liturgy, spiritual direction, spiritual exercises) (Hufnagel 2011, 17). The Institute offers four levels of training: Module A – training for Gestalt educators, Module B – training for Gestalt counselling and pastoral care, Module C – training for Gestalt group leadership and Module D – training for Gestalt supervision (Hufnagel 2011, 16-17).

The training of participants in Module A consists of ten units, which must be spaced at least two months apart. The first unit (My self as the image of a tree) thus

emphasises listening (if I listen to others, I hear myself), discovering the richness of the interior being of each member, the power of the group in discovering one's own vocation, creating an atmosphere of trust as a condition for working with people. The second unit (Moses and the path to freedom) focuses on the importance of details and on empathising with biblical figures, and includes a "tunnel" exercise as an example of an initiation rite. In the third unit (The miracles of Jesus), work is done in groups of three and the process of changing attitudes is followed. In the fourth unit (Thou shalt be a blessing), the role of the group in reinforcing the individual's decision is emphasised, followed by looking at pictures (umbrellas), reading fairy tales to each other in groups of three (the key phrase in the fairy tale is further illustrated by the physical posture). In the fifth unit (I am God"s beloved creature), the work continues in groups of three, with the participants taking on the roles of observer, companion and leader, and following the figures (deepening – the author reads three statements and has them read to the other members; focusing on detail – the author of the character adopts a similar posture to the character and the whole group can illustrate the posture of the figure). In the sixth unit (Me in relationships), participants make a sociogram with coins and buttons (a grid of my relationships in the present, past and future), feel the dialogue in relationships with their bodies, practise the ability to disengage, empathise, tolerate conflict and present their own identity in a pedagogical-didactic square. In Unit 7 (Bibliodrama), they identify with the different roles that appeal to them most, they face the problem of "black and white painting on the example of Judas", it is stressed to them that "my self always needs YOU." In Unit 8 (My Goals), the verification of my goal in the group is emphasised and therefore the didactic exercise of signing a contract in public (in front of the group) is carried out, and the difference between group and individual goals is clearly demonstrated. In Unit 9 (Sources of my strength and spirituality), it is about experiencing previous generations as treasures and learning about different competences (Hufnagel 2011, 19-28).

From the above units, we can highlight the first, sixth and seventh units as the most important for conflict resolution: listening to the other (learning to see the other's needs as well, not only my own), setting a sociogram (finding out which relationships in my life are weighing me down), and realising that I cannot live without relationships ("my self always needs YOU").

4. Conflict resolution through visual and verbal expression

In conflict resolution, there is always the question of how to express the problem so that the conflict does not escalate. A very effective method used in Gestalt pedagogy is expression through drawing. By using the method of artistic expression, we give the individual and his product a central place. In the beginning, an appropriate environment is first established through Guided Fantasy Journey

and then the individual is invited to express his thoughts by drawing a picture, making a sculpture out of a special mass, gluing or collaging, writing a poem, etc.

This is followed by a verbalisation (or reading of the pictures – products) which takes into account the verbal-linguistic intelligence of the individual. Through verbalisation, which is accompanied by a trainer, the individual can gradually deepen his or her personal growth. It is about developing a meta-linguistic capacity that enables the individual in different ways to become aware, to experience, to see himself or herself, to deepen interpersonal relationships, to try out new (z)possibilities, to solve problems and to activate his or her resources (Siegel and Payne Bryson 2013, 80).

Karl Hadolt, a professor of Catholic religious education, describes the success of resolving conflict by incorporating drawing. Using a concrete example, he describes how a teacher of religious education implemented conflict resolution in an 8th grade class burdened by the guilt of large-scale organized theft. The class was divided into four groups: one planned the thefts, one carried them out, and one took charge of distributing the stolen items. The value of the thefts was between €700 and €1400. Instead of involving the police, he used the Gestalt pedagogical method to solve the problem. He distributed wax cards and drawing sheets to the pupils and invited them to draw the class in the shape of trees in the forest, with each tree representing one pupil. At the same time, he wrote on the board the phrase: "Every tree has a heart." A few days later, he involved the parents in the process, invited them to a parents' meeting, explained the situation and showed them the drawings, which were deliberately not signed by the authors. The parents were convinced that their child had not drawn ugly things and behaved in a protective manner. The teacher spoke to each pupil personally and asked questions: Which tree are you? Where are you standing? What is special near you? After six weeks, he repeated the drawing. At the same time, it was also Christmas time, so he included in the process the sacrament of confession and the collection of savings for the poor in the missions. His approach gave the students the opportunity to identify with the problem, repair the damage, clear the guilt, experience forgiveness and the possibility of a new beginning. If the police had intervened in this case, the children would have been burdened with an official report of theft in their careers, while at the same time destroying classroom relationships. In other drawings, which were very similar in attitudes to the first but different in characteristic details, the children felt and communicated: 'I am able to repent, I am basically a good person' (Haldot 2011, 91-94).

Haldot is convinced that the dimensions of the symbol interconnect deep-psychological, anthropological, interactional and religious dimensions. He has clear criteria when describing the drawings: 1) the general impression (how the drawing looks, what mood is conveyed by the colours, shapes, lines; what first catches the eye, how the drawing relates to the opening verse-theme, where the pupil stands as a tree and how he stands in relation to the other "trees"), 2) taking into account

the statements of the class teacher and other teachers (context, in which the pupils are), 3) the pupil's statement (where he/she is, how he/she feels, specifics), and 4) the comparison of the two drawings (how and what has changed in the drawing, what is different from the previous one, what has stayed the same) (Haldot 2011, 96).

Gestalt pedagogical approaches open up the person in a number of creative ways, while motivating him or her to analogy. For example, biblical stories, other stories, dreams, fairy tales and symbols are used. Various examples of conflicts from the Bible, such as family quarrels, deceit, divorce or even murder, can be helpful in confronting and resolving conflicts (Žibert 2013, 111). The person is encouraged to use analogy again and again and in different ways: turning a biblical text into a bibliodrama, using the symbol of a tree to express oneself, expressing emotional states through dance, etc., which allows for a more intense intracommunication. Later, she translates this expression into interpersonal communication: she verbalises or "reads" the drawing or product.

The theologian and Gestalt trainer Iva Nežič Glavica summarised Höfer's steps of verbalisation in the following six steps: "1. What do I see? (Description of the picture – the author of the drawing listens.) 2. What particularly appeals to me? (Focusing – the author of the drawing listens.) 3. How do I feel as a person, object, animal in this picture? (Identification – the author of the drawing is listening.) 4. The group members give the drawing different titles. (The author of the drawing listens.) 5. The author of the drawing chooses one title and talks about his picture in the third person singular. The group members listen and at the end, together with the teacher, they can ask questions, starting with the question 'what' or 'how come that …'. The author is not obliged to answer all the questions. 6. I want you to … The group expresses its wishes to the author, which may be summarised by the exclamation 'Please hear us' or by a prayer" (Nežič 2012, 115).

The steps of verbalisation can be applied to the client's writings, bodily postures, statues, photographs, dreams, biblical texts, the student's experiences (in everyday or religious experiences). The client must pay attention to external and internal perception and to the process at hand. The trainer must not impose his ideas on the client, but together with the group, offer him security, guide him, help him to accept his positive and negative qualities, resolve difficulties and activate his resources. It is an art that the trainer must also learn, as he is forced to step into the background and work from there like a midwife assisting at a birth (Höfer et al. 1979, 31).

Conclusion

Conflict is part of our interpersonal relationships. Knowledge of communication blockages and resistance mechanisms, as well as experience of concrete problem-solving, are essential for resolving our own conflicts.

In this study, we find that there is a lack of basic knowledge about communication blockages and defence mechanisms among employees in

educational institutions. Knowledge of the complex processes in interpersonal relationships can be a good starting point for applying simple methods of Gestalt pedagogy. Expression through drawing, play, role-playing, sociograms, etc. enable a person to more easily verbalise his or her feelings, experiences and problems. If we want to help teacher trainers and novice teachers in the future, it will not be enough to use materials such as those of the LOOP project, but it will be necessary to provide them with concrete training. As educators become more able to recognise and regulate emotions, they will be better able to recognise and regulate their own emotions and thus contribute to more constructive dispute resolution and compromise.

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SEMINARE

The Transhumanist Concept of Self-Optimization in Religious-Pedagogical Reflection

Transhumanistyczna koncepcja samooptymalizacji w refleksji religijno-pedagogicznej

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Abstract: The contemporary culture is explicitly permeated with ideas of Transhumanism. Based on principles such as technologizing and self-optimization, Transhumanism promotes the idea of constantly pushing the boundaries of immediate physical and psychological human existence. Self-optimization is about improving physical and cognitive as well as emotional and social performance. In this article, we want to explore the question of how reflection on religious education takes up the transhumanist concept of self-optimization, concretised in the theme of corporeality and artificial intelligence, and to what extent it can be addressed in Catholic religious education in Slovak schools. We will first focus on the basics of Transhumanism and then we will examine the topic of human nature and corporeality from a transhumanist perspective and try to implement it didactically in religious education.

Keywords: transhumanism, self-optimization, religious education

Abstrakt: Współczesna kultura jest wyraźnie przesiąknięta ideami transhumanizmu. Opierając się na zasadach takich jak technologizacja i samooptymalizacja, transhumanizm promuje ideę ciągłego przesuwania granic bezpośredniego fizycznego i psychologicznego istnienia człowieka. Samooptymalizacja polega na poprawieniu sprawności fizycznej i poznawczej, a także emocjonalnej i społecznej. W niniejszym artykule podjęto próbę przebadania kwestii, w jaki sposób refleksja nad edukacją religijną podejmuje transhumanistyczną koncepcję samooptymalizacji, skonkretyzowaną w temacie cielesności i sztucznej inteligencji, oraz w jakim stopniu może być ona poruszana w katolickiej edukacji religijnej w słowackich szkołach. Refleksja najpierw obejmie podstawy transhumanizmu, a następnie temat natury ludzkiej i cielesności z perspektywy transhumanistycznej oraz próbę wdrożenia go za pomocą dydaktyki w edukacji religijnej.

Keywords: transhumanizm, samooptymalizacja, edukacja religijna

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary culture, especially in the form of films and TV series, is implicitly but also explicitly permeated with ideas of Transhumanism, such as Cyberization and Mind Uploading. Based on principles of, among others, technologizing and self-optimization, Transhumanism promotes the idea of constantly pushing the boundaries of immediate physical and psychological human existence. Self-optimization is no longer just about improving one's beauty or health, but also about improving physical and cognitive as well as emotional and social performance. This so-called Human Enhancement is a comprehensive and multi-layered topic, where the original human desire for growth, progress and improvement of living conditions meets new technological possibilities, historically unprecedented developments in science and the enormous advances in biomedicine and biotechnology (Payne et al. 2015, 13).

In this context, we would like to explore the question of how reflection on religious education takes up the transhumanist concept of self-optimisation, concretised in the theme of corporeality and artificial intelligence, and to what extent it can be addressed in Catholic religious education in Slovak schools. In this article, we will first focus on defining the foundations of Transhumanism in more concrete terms. Then we will examine the topic of human nature and corporeality from a transhumanist perspective and try to implement it didactically in religious education.

1. TRANSHUMANISM AND ITS THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

Since the 1970s, Transhumanism has developed as a complex technical-scientific, philosophical, socio-economic, political and cultural movement. According to R. Sarka, it is a philosophical vision of the future that deals, among other things, with the idea of changing the human body through the use of modern technology. The goal is the integration of the artificial and the organic. The vision is of a robotic and homobotic human being. According to the supporters of Transhumanism, advanced technologies will make it possible to eliminate ageing and to expand human intelligence as well as people's physical and mental capabilities. Transhumanism is said to represent a transitional phase to the so-called posthuman age. Representatives of Posthumanism as a futuristic philosophical-scientific-technological complex currently assume that one day there will be beings on earth whose basic abilities are so radically superior to those of humans that they cannot be considered clearly human by common standards, which is why they already assign them the label of posthuman (Sarka 2009, 190).

According to a post- and transhumanist philosopher, S. L. Sorgner (2016, 71), contemporary technological Transhumanism is a trend that advocates the achievements and use of modern sciences and technologies to alter human nature

and human existence. The appropriate use of techniques expands the boundaries of human existence and results in the emergence of a posthuman being.

The transhuman is thus to be understood as a transitional form of the human being between human and the final posthuman, whose abilities, enhanced by technology, go beyond those of the previous human. In the context of modern technological Transhumanism, the transhuman still belongs to the human species and, according to S. L. Sorgner, has the potential to initiate an evolutionary step towards a new species (2016, 127). However, there is no consensus among authors as to whether the so-called posthuman should still be considered as a human. In this case, Sorgner states that a cyborg as a transhuman would be the most promising way to enable the emergence of a posthuman (2016, 72). According to N. Bostrom's argumentation, the posthuman still has a human nature in the biological sense, but he has at least developed an ability that distinguishes him from humans and transhumans: "By a posthuman ability, I mean a general central capacity greatly exceeding the maximum attainable by any current human being without recourse to new technological means" (2009, 108).

According to R. Heil, the theory of evolution is a fundamental transhumanist pillar, because transhumanists assume that everything that exists will evolve in some form (2018, 54-55). Transhumanists interpret the theory of evolution in the sense that humans in their present existence, which is an early stage of evolution and by no means an end point, would lose the ability to adapt to the material world that surrounds them, or even be displaced from it by other forms of existence. Precisely because this world is changing through technologizing and natural influences, man must adapt and optimize, intervene in an otherwise blind evolution and give it direction, otherwise he runs the risk of being displaced or extinct.

In its understanding of the human being, Transhumanism follows naturalistic and materialistic views, which are, however, paradoxically subsumed under the dualism of body and mind through cryopreservation. Contemporary Transhumanism is philosophically close to utilitarianism in its advocacy of human enhancement technologies, as it follows the hedonistic principle of avoiding pain and prolonging a happy and healthy life. The potential of the human being is far from exhausted, so that the human being in its entirety could be improved biotechnologically.

Transhumanism is thus based on the conviction that humanity is being radically transformed by scientific and technological means. The aim of transhumanist efforts is to accelerate this process. As far as the individual is concerned, Transhumanism is primarily about self-improvement by any means. The great goal of Transhumanism is the prolongation of life until death is completely overcome. For this reason, C. Coenen points out that as far as the species Homo sapiens and its future are concerned, the often-stated goal of transhumanism is the creation of an extraterrestrial civilization based on the fusion of humans and technology (2009, 268).

There are several theological issues in Transhumanism that have significant implications for other disciplines, as well as for religious education. For theological reflection, therefore, the question arises as to which transhumanist ideas are relevant for theological discourse, because according to R. Cole-Turner, there are not only differences but, at least superficially, remarkable similarities between Christianity and Transhumanism (2011, 193). For example, Transhumanism seeks to overcome the mortality and inadequacy of human existence in its own human way and by means of cybernetics and biotechnology, independently of God's activity.

There are similarities specially in the areas of soteriology and eschatology, which are closely linked to the ideas of self-perfection. The transhumanist promises of optimisation and self-transcendence are manifold; it is questionable when and if they can ever be realized. Ethically, transhumanists advocate reducing existential risks and preserving life and health, reducing suffering and increasing intelligence. However, according to Sorgner (2016), the individual's right to make the greatest possible choices is paramount: everyone is free to choose and decide which technologies they want to use to improve themselves physically, emotionally, cognitively and morally in order to live the longest, healthiest and happiest life possible. The shaping of one's own life is up to each person (2016, 153).

The goal of immortality is mentioned again and again but does not necessarily exclude the death of the body. The body is then seen as a material shell for an implicit spirit, which, in the sense of substance dualism, could lead a completely independent life outside material corporeality through the techniques of digital mind uploading, the uploading of human consciousness. However, the immortality that is often assumed here is not immortality in the strict sense of the word, but the transhumanists are concerned with prolonging healthy life.

The theological areas opened up by Transhumanism, which are also relevant from the perspective of religious education, include the role of the body, Christian anthropological as well as ethical questions around the nature of the human being and its nature, the idea of creation according to the imago Dei, the transcendence of the self from the old to the new human being and related eschatological ideas such as the hope for the completion of life in the world to come, the belief in the incarnation and bodily resurrection of Christ, but also the preoccupation with death and resurrection and the question of life after death.

The discussion of Transhumanism in the context of Catholic religious education can therefore go beyond the obvious ethical and anthropological content and the reflection on one's own handling of the principle of self-optimisation in order to promote concrete competences of the pupils and to apply them in specific life situations.

2. The transhumanist concept of Self-optimization

Although the desire to transcend human nature is an integral part of many cultures, it is only in recent decades that the possibility of changing human nature has come within reach thanks to advances in theoretical and practical science. According to B. P. Göcke, this development is a welcome step for Transhumanism in the cultural evolution of humans, enabling them to autonomously control the course of their biological evolution and become masters of their mental and physical characteristics, far from random mutations and lengthy adaptation processes (2018, 117).

Self-optimization or self-improvement is expressed through the transhumanist concept of Enhancement, but its meaning is quite broad. It can refer to bringing about a change or a process of change in which something is improved or increased in value. It also refers to an increase in size or value by adding something else. The other way is to raise something to a higher level of development and thus refer to progress. This term is adopted as a *terminus technicus* in certain languages because a literal translation would not capture the content with equal accuracy. One could use the term Human Enhancement, but this only represents part of the phenomenon. Since this formulation is a quantitative judgement a priori, it would mean that every change, every transgression of the limits of human beings or every increase in their abilities would automatically represent an improvement and progress. After all, what is better cannot be bad and cannot entail negative consequences. An example of this misconception is the prolongation of human life. Although it has the enormous advantage for the individual of delaying death, from the point of view of society as a whole we encounter certain difficulties, such as the inadequate infrastructure, for example, in the care of the elderly and, above all, the economic problem of insufficient funds for old-age provision. We see, then, that the use of the term Human Enhancement would lead to the elimination of the moral dilemmas with which the idea of Enhancement is unreservedly associated. For similar reasons, one can still use the term augmentation, which does not mean that a particular change is beneficial, but rather refers to a quantitative increase in a particular characteristic (Payne et al. 2015, 14).

B. P. Göcke (2018) emphasizes that, from a transhumanist perspective, permanent changes in human nature are preferable to temporary changes, and in particular qualitative changes are preferable to quantitative changes in order to change the biological nature of humanity. However, since cybernetic improvements cannot be passed on to the next generation but must be reused, and since only genetic changes to the germline of an individual's genome can be passed on to the next generation, permanent biological changes to human nature are of greater value to the transhumanist agenda than temporary technological improvements (2018, 124). In this context, the nature of change offered by genetics and robotics in particular is a crucial factor in specifying the transhumanist agenda. In contrast to quantitative change in human nature, qualitative change is that which aims to

alter the basic capacities and capabilities for physical and mental activity given by the genome of our species. "For example, since it is not possible for humans to breathe underwater, changing humans to enable them to breathe underwater or give them wings would be qualitative change" (2018, 125).

However, Göcke asks at the same time why it is necessary or important for transhumanists to change human nature? The reason is not only the advantage that changing human nature makes it possible to perform certain actions, but also that the biological nature of humans is changed so that they can lead a better life than before (2018, 127). According to S. L. Sorgner, transhumanists exclusively share the basic position, which must always be adapted to the latest philosophical, scientific and technological findings, that the use of technology is generally in the interest of humans and should therefore be assumed to be so in the future, and that the appropriate use of technology also increases the likelihood of expanding the boundaries of human existence, which would be in our interest because it also promotes the likelihood of living a good life (2016, 9-10).

Leading a good life and improving people's morally relevant well-being, can thus be achieved through quantitative improvements in their mental and physical qualities, because people lead better lives if they are more intelligent, healthier and more athletic, and all in all they would prefer a state of higher intelligence, health and athleticism to a state of lower intelligence, health and athleticism (Göcke 2018, 129).

One aspect that stands out, according to A. Aguti, is the underestimation of the state of cognitive and volitional disorder that characterizes human nature and is traditionally referred to with the doctrine of the fall. As far as the latter is concerned, the position of Transhumanism is clearly techno-optimistic. Aguti points out that this underestimation, however, is another element in understanding the ambiguity of the term enhancement in ethical and religious terms (2018, 484). Indeed, it can be doubted that a being such as a human being, who clearly shows signs of cognitive and volitional impairment, both in the personal and social spheres, is capable of enhancing, even perfecting himself, to become something other than himself. On the other hand, it is obvious that there are elements in the folds of a person's self-improvement that not only hinder him but also direct him where the improvers did not foresee and where they do not want to direct him.

The destructive potential of technoscience is obvious to all. From this perspective, the transhumanist visions are both alluring and disturbing: they are presented as visions of paradise but may turn out to be visions of hell in the end (Aguti 2018, 485).

Z. Sitarčíková therefore speaks directly of the struggle against human nature. In doing so, she emphasizes that the age-old question of human nature is being raised again. Transhumanism does not deny the existence of human nature, but it raises it to another level: it is no longer human nature that determines who one is, but it is the one who says what human nature should be. Human nature thus becomes a kind of flawed biological material that needs to be worked on. The

essentialist understanding of human nature is rejected by transhumanists, and thus the metaphysical question of the meaning of human existence in the conception of man gives way to the question of functionality as pragmatic efficiency and human performance based on quantitative parameters of work, trade and consumption. Biological nature is rejected in the name of technology, which is supposed to give people more freedom. The more control man has over himself, the freer he will be. However, if man can shape man as a species according to his wishes, then the species he has created is no longer free (Sitarčíková 2012, 112). Therefore, M. Škabraha argues that the path of technological improvement does not automatically lead to more freedom; on the contrary, it can deprive us of freedom if we use it to solve a problem that we could not overcome internally. Then, it is an escape, and technology can ultimately be a domination to which we submit because we do not know how to deal with our freedom (2008, 229).

According to Z. Sitarčíková, the Human Enhancement proclaimed by the transhumanists is a reconstruction of the essence of the human being, characterized by an effort to liberate us from the core of our being, which is at the same time a destruction of what we have in common as human beings. The transhumanist *homo perfectus* is not an image of the perfection of human nature, its complete realization. Rather, it is an image of the struggle against what human beings have been given. Natural reproduction, disease, ageing, death, all these are natural to humans. Transhumanists, on the other hand, see these as limitations, impositions, deficiencies or defects of nature. Humans must free themselves from them (2012, 108).

The question of human self-improvement is also directly related to the concept of human corporeality itself. In Christianity, man and his body are irrevocable and at the same time multidimensional in their meaning: the central element is the belief in the incarnation, in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, who is both true man and true God. The community of Jesus' followers is described as the body of Christ, in which all members of the church, as parts of the body, are endowed with different gifts and are interdependent. B. Konz emphasizes that the body also has an eschatological dimension, for Christians believe in the resurrection of Christ, who conquered death and takes everyone into the reality of the resurrection (2022, 10). However, Christianity knows that earthly life is also dominated by contradictory, destructive, often falsely stabilizing forces in nature and culture, for the physical existence of human beings is marked by the tension between being accepted in the image of God and a fragmented, earthly existence that hopes for redemption.

In general, Transhumanism views the biological human body as an object that is in some way distinct from the human itself. The body, for example, is an imperfect biological machine that accumulates internal damage and therefore requires constant preventive maintenance. The body is an imperfect biological object that needs a genetically evolved solution to its vulnerability to pain. Alternatively, the body can be seen as a personal property over which everyone

should exercise the greatest possible control, including improving birth defects as they see fit. Finally, the body can be seen as an imperfect substrate from which we should escape as soon as possible (Thweatt 2018, 367).

G. Samek Lodovici underlines that Transhumanism wants to free itself from the body itself in order to achieve true autonomy, because the human body can become sick because it is vulnerable and represents a principle of limitation that has basically nothing to do with our identity. One must overcome the heaviness of the body, in which everything is opaque, limiting and inescapable, and stop accepting that one is forever a prisoner of the physical, biological and anatomical form that limits one. Similarly, the pleasures now associated with the body become separate from the body itself, from one's own body and from the bodies of others. For some transhumanist writers, the existence of others may thus become superfluous: We will create happiness exclusively in our own minds (2018, 521).

3. Self-optimisation as a topic of Religious education

Catholic religious education in Slovak schools has had an updated curriculum since 2020, which sees religious education not as teaching the content of the Catholic faith or religion, but as developing pupils' religious competences. Thus, teaching is oriented towards the competences that pupils acquire in the course of the lessons and that are substantial, acquired over a longer period of time and can be measured empirically. Competences are acquired through reflection and confrontation with specific knowledge that the student can link and apply to specific life situations. In this perspective, we also consider the religious education reflection on the transhumanist issues of corporeality and artificial intelligence as an opportunity for pupils to acquire religious competence and as learnable cognitive knowledge and skills to solve specific problems in their daily lives.

The reality of Human Enhancement raises complex questions that are important for religious education and the acquisition of religious competences. How does self-optimization affect our image of humanity? What does Enhancement mean for social interaction? How much room do we want to leave for aberrations when peak performance can be achieved at any time? Is it up to each individual to decide whether to make use of Enhancement measures, or is regulatory control necessary? To what extent does the image of man created by artificial intelligence correspond to the Christian image of man? Is the individual still autonomous in his decisions in a performance-oriented society? Will the gap between rich and poor widen or will social differences even out?

In this context of self-optimisation, B. Konz sees the topic of corporeality as a suitable basic theme in religious education. Learning to live in one's own body within the contextual framework of society is a lifelong developmental task, as human beings have to cope with a changing body until their last breath. Especially in adolescence, it is a particular challenge for young people to deal psychologically with physical conditions

and changes. Today's adolescents are offered a wide range of orientation options and staged treatments of their own bodies, especially in social media, where they seek and experience recognition (2022, 8). The desire for health and well-being is a basic need to be recognised, but more extreme forms of body optimization and self-improvement become problematic because the desired ideal state of the body requires constant effort and cannot be fully achieved, because human life continues to be characterised by the processes of ageing and mortality, so that efforts at self-improvement will inevitably fail in the end. From a theological perspective, this raises the question of what religious interpretations and orientations can be offered for the treatment of the body or the pursuit of self-optimisation (Konz 2022, 8-9).

In religious education, we can look at the transhumanist idea of perfection and optimisation, through which man overcomes all human limitations, especially his physical limitations. C. Terno proposes to first introduce the principles of transhumanism and then confront the pupils with biblical Christian ideas of man and critically question the basic idea of optimisation. It is about the advantages and disadvantages of technical possibilities and the inevitable limits of technology in terms of improving human performance. The pupils approach transhuman people with their own attitude. Then they deal with questions on the topic of a good and healthy life. This is followed by the question of the basic human need for improvement - especially through technology (Terno 2022, 22).

As already mentioned, the human body is seen in Transhumanism as flawed and in need of improvement. The goal is to optimise the organism and not only stop the deterioration of the human body, but to prevent it. Behind this, the question of the biblical anthropological image of man arises. From a theological-anthropological point of view, the problem here is whether man becomes his own creator, so to speak, by transcending human limits or even the human being.

How can the topic of improvement and optimisation be didactically implemented in religious education? C. Terno introduces this topic by first presenting the basic ideas of transhumanism. For this purpose, the film Transhumanism - Man 2.0 is shown at the beginning. The aim of the lesson is to be able to name the expectations and problems of Transhumanism (2022, 22).

After elaborating the most important ideas of Transhumanism and possible points of criticism, these can be confronted with the biblical Christian image of man. The basic concepts of biblical Christian anthropology are explained and elaborated by reading Genesis 1-4. To deepen and secure the discussion, a quotation is given which characterises Transhumanism as a religion of salvation. The next step could be the discussion of Transhumanism, which propagates salvation in the here and now. For example, while communism sees the creation of a new human being living without suffering and injustice in the creation of a new social order, Transhumanism seeks to overcome human limitations such as physical limitations and mortality through anthropotechnology. This view can be compared to the biblical Christian concept of human justification. According to the biblical

Christian view, man's attempts to perfect himself fail. This does not mean that man should not struggle against suffering and injustice, but he cannot create a perfect world. Nor can he exonerate himself. His reality is sin, his separation from God. Overcoming this separation is ultimately only possible through God. The doctrine of justification starts precisely at this point by introducing the idea of God's grace and rejecting human efforts to achieve success and perfection. The lesson shows that the biblical Christian idea of man's fallibility, which he cannot overcome by his own efforts, is a principled opposition to Transhumanism (Terno 2022, 22-24).

In addition to the theme of improvement and self-optimization, the idea of artificial intelligence can also be taken up by religious education. As digital natives, young people are familiar with digital technologies and artificial intelligence applications in many areas. They are part of their world. This can be used as a basis for anthropological and ethical learning in religious education. K. Zweig sees room in religious education for the question of the extent to which the image of man created by machines corresponds or contradicts the Christian image of man with its emphasis on the individuality of man. The thematisation of artificial intelligence in religious education reveals many moral problems that are now even more prominent and require us to be able to formulate and formalise our human values very precisely (Zweig 2020, 7).

How can the topic of artificial intelligence be didactically implemented in religious education? J. Walldorf suggests the topic of the identity of artificial intelligence as a first step. The pupils consider in which areas artificial intelligence is already present today. In a next step, the pupils are asked to think about the opportunities or dangers. Afterwards, a discussion takes place in the class in which everyone explains their point of view. The second step is to identify artificial intelligence in different cultural manifestations, for example in films. Based on the films, one can address some anthropological-ethical questions: Can intelligent machines become human? The developments in the field of artificial intelligence immediately raise questions about our sense of self-worth: Is the human being in the end just a complicated machine? In many science fiction films, we encounter the idea of software systems or robots as animate beings that can be endowed with mental characteristics like humans. Here, scenarios are created that are emotionally charged and go far beyond the current realistic possibilities. A further step is the question of eternity and salvation associated with new technologies. The pupils explore possible research on the topic of artificial intelligence and immortality, in which quasi-religious hopes also manifest themselves. The final step is to consider the ethical foundations of the age of artificial intelligence. First, the question can be clarified to what extent digital technologies and artificial intelligence can pose a threat to democracy and self-determination. On this basis, the question of the need for ethical foundations and a digital humanism can be raised, which differs from both the ideologisation of digital technologies and apocalyptic fears. Its aim is to strengthen democracy and human judgement when working with new technologies (Walldorf 2020, 23-25).

Summary

The aim of this article was to explore the extent to which religious education thinking reflects the transhumanist conceptualisation of Self-optimization. Transhumanism and its technological conceptions of human transcendence correspond to widespread views of possible human futures that fluctuate between technophilic optimism and technophobic cultural pessimism. We have focused specifically on the thematisation of Self-optimization in religious education reflection and teaching. In religious education, these topics, such as artificial intelligence and also transhumanist apocalypticism, seem to be particularly topical, interesting and attractive for pupils. Catholic religious education can contribute to the complex process of personal empowerment of students to the extent that it succeeds in making a connection to students' own lives. Catholic religious education is not only about teaching the contents of the Catholic faith or religion, but especially about developing the religious competences of the pupils to deal concretely also with transhumanist contents and concepts, which are so present in current culture, through reflection and confrontation and to apply them to specific life situations.

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SEMINARE

Preparation of Students for the Modern Labour Market in Polish Secondary Schools. The Example of Mechatronic Technical School in Warsaw

Przygotowanie ucznia w polskiej szkole średniej do współczesnego rynku pracy. (Na przykładzie Technikum Mechatronicznego w Warszawie)

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Abstract: The article presents the findings of the author's own research conducted in Polish secondary schools with the aim of identifying preparation of young people to navigate the labour market – including professional competences. The research problem was the preparation of technical school students to enter the current labour market and the role of vocational teachers in this preparation in the opinion of students. A focus research method was used, in which the research technique was a focus interview. The participants were fourth-grade students at technical schools (N=33). The research was conducted in 2023. The article presents students' opinions about teachers of vocational subjects concerning their role in preparing them to follow a profession, as well as the students' level of knowledge of the current labour market and employer expectations.

Keywords: labour market, technical school student, vocational subjects teacher, Polish secondary school, Poland

Abstrakt: W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań własnych przeprowadzonych w polskiej szkole średniej, których celem było rozpoznanie przygotowania młodzieży do poruszania się na rynku pracy – z uwzględnieniem kompetencji zawodowych. Problemem badawczym było przygotowanie ucznia technikum do zaistnienia i funkcjonowania na obecnym rynku pracy i jego związek z rolą nauczyciela przedmiotów zawodowych w opinii uczniów. Wykorzystano metodę badań fokusowych, gdzie techniką badawczą był wywiad fokusowy. Uczestnikami byli uczniowie klas czwartych technikum (N=33). Badania przeprowadzono w 2023 r. W artykule zaprezentowano opinię uczniów o nauczycielach przedmiotów zawodowych pod kątem przygotowania ich do wykonywania zawodu, a także poziom wiedzy uczniów na temat aktualnego rynku pracy i oczekiwań pracodawcy.

Słowa kluczowe: rynek pracy, uczeń technikum, nauczyciel przedmiotów zawodowych, polska szkoła średnia, Polska

Introduction

The labour market is one of many markets in the economy, which is defined as the entirety of purchase and sale transactions, as well as the conditions under which they take place (Gajdos and Lewandowska-Gwarda 2022, 11). The parties involved in these transactions are enterprises, institutions and individuals playing the roles of employers, employees, as well as intermediaries among them (Jakimiuk 2012, 2). In the labour market, we are dealing with an intangible exchange factor between the buyer of work, i.e., the employer, and the seller of work, i.e., the employee, and the price is the remuneration (Mizia and Latocha 2020). In an analysis of the labour market, two processes are considered, i.e., supply and demand (Sadowski 1997, 21). Labour supply is the sum of the number of employed and unemployed people, it is conditioned by the number of people of working age who want to undertake employment (Góra and Sztanderska 2006, 11). Demand for labour, on the other hand, is expressed by the total number of jobs offered, which consists of the realized demand – represented by the employed, and the unrealized demand - defined by vacancies (Gajdos and Lewandowska-Gwarda 2022, 11). Demand for labour can be presented quantitatively, then it refers to the number of employees needed on the labour market, and qualitatively, specifying the profile of employees sought for by employers. An increase in demand generates an increase in employment and salaries and is, therefore, considered a beneficial phenomenon (Góra and Sztanderska 2006, 13).

Children begin to identify with future professional roles at an early school age through establishing contacts with their peers, meeting the requirements of their environment, controlling their own behaviour, as well as by acquiring habits related to performing work and duties by accomplishing team and individual tasks (Stefańska-Klar 2008, 130-156). However, it is only young people studying at technical secondary schools and 1st degree sectoral vocational schools who are prepared to perform specific professions. Vocational education focuses on purposefully structured teaching and learning activities as well as a lesson and activity-based process leading to vocational preparation (Nowacki 2004, 111).

1. Research assumptions

The aim of the research was to identify the preparation of young people to navigate the labour market - taking into account professional competences. The specific objective was to assess the preparation of (selected) technical schools students to navigate the labour market. The main research problem was the preparation of technical school students to enter the current labour market and the role of vocational teachers in this preparation in the opinion of students. The following detailed research questions had been formulated to the main research problem:

1. What knowledge do technical secondary school students have about the modern labour market and how, in their opinion, are they prepared to work in their field?

2. What role does the teacher of vocational subjects play in preparing students for the modern labour market in the students' opinion?

Focus group interviews were conducted in 2023 among students at Warsaw technical schools preparing for the professions of mechatronics technicians, electrical technicians, rail transport power engineering technicians, rail transport technicians, renewable energy equipment and systems technicians. These professions are of particular significance for the development of the state (Obwieszczenie Ministra Edukacji i Nauki z dnia 20 stycznia 2023 r. w sprawie zapotrzebowania na pracowników w zawodach szkolnictwa branżowego na krajowym i wojewódzkim rynku pracy, Dz.U 2023, poz. 145, 5, 8).

The focus group interviews were conducted with fourth grade students, in view of the fact that in a year they were to graduate from technical schools and face a choice regarding their further educational and professional careers. Interviews with students of particular classes were conducted separately and continued until the students decided that they had nothing more to add on the topic. The research sample consisted of N=33 and was purposive. The average duration of the interview with each class was 1.5 hours. A focus research method was used, in which the research technique was a focus interview. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous. Participants could decide to withdraw from the research at any time without incurring any consequences.

2. Research findings – interpretation and discussion

2.1. Students' level of knowledge about the current labour market

Based on the research of the Regional Labour Market Monitoring (Regionalne Obserwatorium Rynku Pracy w Łodzi 2013, 5), it can be concluded that secondary school students have knowledge about the demand for professions sought by employers according to occupational categories. In the opinion of students, the greatest demand will be related to strict specialization, namely, specialists (79.5% of responses), craftsmen (63.9%) and medical professions (30.4%) will be the most sought after on the labour market. Young people aged 18-24 feel that they will find a job; as many as 63% of Poles express no concern in this respect, and only 28% feel anxious as regards their future job opportunities (*Rynek pracy* 2023, 14). Current forecasts for the years up to 2040 on the European continent regarding polarization of employment indicate that the demand for highly qualified employees will increase, the demand for medium-skilled employees will decrease, while the demand for low-skilled employees will remain constant. Employers, due to labour costs, will be more willing to hire medium-skilled employees whose

work will be supported by artificial intelligence and ML (*Kompetencje, jakich nie było* 2019, 40-41). The demand for representatives of the electric power industry, despite the fact that it is already in the group of shortage professions, may still increase. The main reason for the deficit is the fact that candidates do not meet employers' requirements, namely they do not have valid qualifications, e.g., SEP qualifications obtained on the basis of trainings organized by the Association of Polish Electrical Engineers (SEP), aerial work platform qualifications, as well as HDS operator qualifications (*Barometr zawodów* 2023, 43-44; conf. *Barometr zawodów* 2022, 19-23). The state labour market will lack mechatronics technicians qualified as specialists in electronics, automation and robotics, as well as railway and metro drivers (*Barometr zawodów* 2022, 27-28).

Fourth-graders, when asked about the demand on the modern labour market for employees performing the profession they learn at school, state that:

– there is a demand for employees performing the profession they are learning: "More and more people will need us", "Employees are in demand", "Each year there are fewer and fewer connections, because there are no train drivers", "After the political transformation, railway lines were closed, they saved money this way", "There's a gap, people are retiring and there are a lot of job openings now";

– the profession they learn is prestigious, unique and it offers them many opportunities to develop their own professional careers: "Some people, when they hear the word - mechatronics, wonder what kind of profession it is, and it is a combination of electronics, computer science, programming and mechanics", "In the future, I will be able to choose from many specialties on the labour market", "It is quite difficult to find employees to assemble photovoltaic cells";

– there is high competition on the labour market: "You have to know how to find a job, because there are more and more mechatronics technicians on the labour market", "Employees are in demand, but you never know";

– will receive high remuneration: "We will make lots of money", "We can assemble sockets on the construction site, as they pay a lot of money for it", "It doesn't make sense to work in one company for a fixed salary until retirement, it is better to take a risk and start your own business, then you will make a lot of money."

The interviewed students are unanimous and claim that there is a demand for employees performing the professions they learn at school (33 respondents), and they will receive high remuneration for their work (28). Significantly fewer students admitted that they learn shortage professions and perceive high competition on the labour market (10 answers each). They were the least likely to indicate the possibility of professional development after graduating from a technical school (5).

According to the statements made by the fourth-graders (on whether they will cope on the modern labour market), it is easy to find a job, but the difficulty may lie in keeping it, in presenting one's strengths to the employer. Staying on the labour market requires further education. Students also recognize the difference between a vertical and a horizontal career. They consider moving up in the company as

a much more difficult challenge than developing only a horizontal career. Students have many ideas about where they can find employment, what to do in the future, and they emphasize the need to be skilful and quick when carrying out professional tasks. This opinion is shared by all respondents (33): "The weak will drop out and those who will continue their education will stay", "It is not difficult to find a job, but to stand out in this job can be harder", "It cannot be that I have completed a given field of study and that's it; but that I can do something related to this field of study and that they want to keep me, it can be a bit hard. Harder than just getting the job", "And another hard question, do we want to join a company and climb the career ladder or, knowing that mechatronics is slowly absorbing various other professions in its scope, are we able to earn money doing smaller jobs. Or a job posting on olx and the question is, the better you are, the faster you will do it. Then you earn 200 zloty a day here, 200 zloty a day there, and here you are. It's a matter of which path you want to take", "You can always start your own company, for example, dealing with gates or alarm systems". "We can go to giants like IPM or to lots of other corporations, as, for example, programmers; or design new vacuum cleaners for iRobot", "There are on-the-job trainings", "There are so many branches that we will surely find something for ourselves".

Approximately 75% of companies on the Polish market have reported recruitment difficulties in recent months. It was pointed out that the main issue was insufficient number of suitable candidates for jobs. Almost 33% of employers pointed to discrepancies between the skills required for a given position and candidates' skills, 25% of candidates had excessive financial expectations towards employers. On the European labour market, employment forecasts for the second quarter of 2023 remain high. 41% of employers post new job offers, 17% plan to reduce employment, 39% expect to maintain the level of employment at the current level, while 3% have not specified the planned changes (*Rynek pracy* 2023, 12). Candidates most desired by employers were those who demonstrated IT and data analysis skills (27% of companies), sales and marketing skills (24% of companies), technical skills (23%), as well as customer service (22%). Employers are most willing to hire candidates who have soft skills, i.e., those resistant to stress and easily adaptable (34% of companies), able to think critically and analytically (33%), with an insightful approach and willing to learn (27%) (*Rynek pracy* 2023, 17). According to NACE data (2022), it is estimated that over 70% of employers require young employees to possess analytical skills, along with teamwork, communication (written), initiative and work ethics skills. However, problem solving skills occupy the leading position (almost 86% of employers).

Young people, on the other hand, point to opportunities to gain professional experience, high earnings, friendly atmosphere, job satisfaction, and a job in line with their interests as the most important aspects of work. In turn, it would be difficult for them to accept lack of development opportunities, earnings not matching their expectations, high levels of stress, conflict in the team and lack

of promotion opportunities (*Młodzi Polacy na rynku pracy* 2021, 13). Research conducted among secondary school students regarding the awareness of choosing a profession proves that they believe that professional experience (66.3%), knowledge of foreign languages (59.4%), willingness to work, learn and develop professionally are most important for employers (55%) (Regionalne Obserwatorium Rynku Pracy w Łodzi 2013, 98).

In the opinion of fourth-graders, professional tasks performed by them are complicated and not every employer is able to verify the correctness of the task implementation process, but only its effect, the final result. Therefore, the employer will expect them to be able to explain how the final result has been obtained. Their cooperation will therefore have to be based on mutual trust and efficient communication. Employers expect their employees to be reliable, conscientious, resourceful, creative, and dedicated to constant learning; they should develop professionally, be able to deal with problem situations, be able to work in a team, have technical skills, work planning skills. Employers expect also availability, discipline, responsibility, resistance to stress, good health, punctuality, work ethic, knowledge of a foreign language, thinking, work experience. Students made, among others, the following statements: "The employer will expect us to tell what we have done when only the final effect is visible", "The employer will require us to be the best, to do the work carefully", "That we are trustworthy", "Resourceful and creative to tell him that it can be done better and cheaper", "Problem solving skills", "Conscientiousness", "That we should know a foreign language, in case there is a foreign contractor", "That I can plan my work, know what to do", "Practice", "That we keep order".

Students attributed the greatest importance to communication skills and technical skills (33 respondents), the other skills appeared sporadically in their statements (1 answer each). The obtained data show that the majority of respondents are aware of employers' expectations, as they coincide with employers' requirements.

2.2. The role of vocational subjects teachers in preparing students for the modern labour market

Teachers are obliged to perform tasks related to didactic, educational and care activities conscientiously, they should be guided by students' welfare, care for their health, as well as moral and civic attitude, and show respect for students' personal dignity. In addition, teachers should strive for their own personal development, including professional improvement, in accordance with the needs of the school (Prawo oświatowe z dnia 14 grudnia 2016 r. Dz.U. z 2023 r. poz. 900, art. 5; Karta Nauczyciela z dnia 26 stycznia 1982 r. Dz.U. z 2023 r. poz. 641, art. 6).

Teachers of vocational subjects face a difficult challenge because they must make every effort to prepare technical school students not only to pass exams confirming the acquisition of qualifications in a given profession, but also to equip them with competences that will help them to enter and stay on the dynamically

changing labour market, to operate in a rapidly developing civilization and the constantly transforming everyday life.

In pedagogical literature, the problem of the role of vocational subjects teachers in preparing students for their future professions was addressed by F. Szloska (1987, 106-126, 160), who noted the relationship between professional preparation of theoretical vocational subjects teachers and students' assimilation of professional content included in the curriculum. Appropriate professional preparation of teachers contributes to increasing the effectiveness of the work of a vocational school. Moreover, there is a correlation between the pedagogical preparation of teachers of theoretical vocational subjects and the preparation of students for the profession. A significant element of professional qualifications of theoretical vocational subjects teachers is practical experience gained at a workplace, in a position consistent with the professional content taught at school. Szloska postulated that such teachers should have professional and pedagogical preparation as well as appropriate ideological and moral qualifications. They should also have professional qualifications as well as general preparation necessary to understand the surrounding reality, participate in cultural life, comprehensively develop their own and the student's personality. T. Wiatrowski (1993, 243) developed a characteristics of vocational subjects teachers' qualifications. Such pedagogues should be demanding and understanding, firm, kind and fair in their contact with students. They should respect the dignity of the teaching process participants and continue their self-education and professional development. R. Gerlach (1997, 232-236), in turn, emphasized the need for teaching staff with high professional and pedagogical qualifications in extracurricular education.

In the literature, attention was also paid to other aspects affecting the future professional activity of young people, namely, research was conducted on students' opinions regarding preferred teachers, the relationship between their successes and the teacher's attitude and actions, and proposals for changes that would have a positive impact on improving education. The presented standpoints will serve as an introduction to the presentation of my own research findings.

M. Karwatowska (2012, 103-170) conducted research among students at various levels of education (primary school, lower and upper secondary school). On the basis of letters written by young people about the teacher who made a special impact on their lives, she distinguished two key areas related to the teacher, i.e., the domain of teaching and upbringing, and three secondary areas, i.e., the domain of personality, the domain of appearance and the domain of assessment. In the domain of personality, positive features prevailed over negative ones, however, the way of describing the teacher varied depending on education levels. Among teachers' most desirable qualities, primary and lower secondary school students mentioned kindness, willingness to help, gentleness and cordiality, while among the undesirable qualities, partiality, injustice, and nervousness manifested by overactive behaviour such as screaming and shouting. Young people from upper

secondary schools appreciated the following teachers' qualities: kindness, justice, tolerance, goodness and a sense of humour. They emphasized that teachers should maintain a balance between being too demanding and strict and being too lenient, as well as a balance between being diligent, thorough, systematic and workaholic, pedantic and meticulous.

In the opinion of students, their optimal functioning at school and their success depends on the attitude and actions of the teacher. Research by P. Guess and S. Bowling (2014, 201-206) proves that students achieve high academic performance when teachers care about their well-being since it affects students' life satisfaction and the socio-economic functioning, which additionally translates into the functioning of the school. According to US students, important components of professional qualifications are pedagogical skills, commitment to the teaching process, substantive knowledge, and verbal skills (Okpala and Ellis 2005, 374-383). Research conducted among Portuguese students indicates that learning effectiveness is influenced by student responses, attitudes and concepts of assessment that support self-regulation of learning (Brown 2011, 731-748). There is a belief among them that the assessment mainly focuses on pointing out the mistakes they make, as this will allow them to correct their actions. Successful, self-regulating students try to use the feedback they receive to improve their performance (Flores et al. 2020, 377-394). Flores (Flores et al. 2015, 1523-1534; Pereira, Flores and Barros 2017, 442-463) indicated that the most effective are student-centred assessment methods, which include e.g., portfolio, project-based assessments, as well as "activities such as multiple essay drafts that provide progressive feedback, oral presentations, student work assessments, and group and team projects that require interaction" (Webber 2012, 201).

Another factor that may have an impact on the effectiveness of learning is the age of the teacher. Research conducted by C.G. Pennington, M. Curtner-Smith, S. Wind (2020, 110-129) demonstrate that the above-mentioned criterion affects the learning efficiency of lower secondary school students. Students were assigned a task to watch one of two practically identical films, take an exam on its content and complete a questionnaire regarding the perception of the teacher. In the first video, the PE teacher giving a swimming lesson looked young, just according to his age. In the second film, the same teacher was made up as an older man. The results of the study proved that lower secondary school students were more willing to learn from a young teacher and had a more positive attitude to him.

Students at Warsaw technical schools that provide education in the professions of mechatronics technician, electrical technician, rail transport power engineering technician, rail transport technician, renewable energy equipment and systems technician, show the highest interest in learning the profession during lessons conducted by teachers who:

– are characterized by the right attitude and demonstrate personality traits best qualifying them to pursue the profession of teacher: "He has a passion for teaching

and is always prepared for classes", "During the lesson he encourages students to talk, and he is very demanding". "He has solid knowledge that he willingly shares", "Ambitious", "Has a good approach to people and is not burnt out", "Committed";

– have experience in the profession they teach and refer to situations occurring in the natural work environment: "He had some real-life story to tell about every piece of information he shared with us,", "He took us on a trip to his workplace to show everything in real life", "He has dealt with all the things he talks about, he shows us how to use certain tools", "He knows his job";

– have communication skills, know how to interest students in the topics discussed in the lessons and explain professional issues in an understandable way: "He speaks in an interesting way", "I actively listen to him, he talks in such an interesting way", "He has the ability to pass on his knowledge";

– adapt the teaching methods and didactic aids to students' needs, e.g., the teacher offers students problem solving tasks and conducts interesting experiments: "She tried to smuggle practice in theory. For example, she took out a resistor and showed how it works, she told what it was for, how to read the parameters", "During the lessons we are supposed to invent circuits and tell what they can be used for and make a report on it. The previous teacher was very strict and told you to copy diagrams. She gives us problems to solve", "He gave us work in groups of five, not just tests. He sat down, gave us some prompts, explained what he was going to assess";

– showing sincere concern for students' education and professional careers: "He was very demanding, but he had a lot to demand", "He wanted us to be able to do it", "In what he teaches, he goes beyond the curriculum", "If something was not in the textbook and he thought it was it important, he added it", "He gives a lot of additional materials and prepares outlines, other teachers don't care".

The interviewed students attached most importance to teachers' right attitude and personality traits (30), to teachers' experience in the taught profession (28) and to teachers' communication skills (26). Slightly fewer students pointed to selection of the teaching methods and didactic aids (17) or sincere concern for students' education, encouraging them to deepen their knowledge and broaden their skills beyond the curriculum (17).

However, as regards the teaching staff, students identify areas that require improvement and that may negatively affect their preparation for the profession. Students expect teachers to cooperate in sharing information about the covered material. This would help to avoid doing again the already covered material or gaps in the studied material that students must cover themselves – "Our teachers changed because either there were no specialists, or if there were, they taught poorly or did not teach at all, and they were replaced (new teachers were employed)", "There was rarely any cooperation among the teachers. They didn't pass on the material that had been done with us and the next teacher (who was taking over the class) didn't know what we had done, where to start; there should be a continuation, so that we could complete everything."

Any changes of vocational subject teachers - especially during the school year - are not beneficial for students, although sometimes they issue from a necessary decision of the school director (e.g., lack a professional approach to teaching). Selection of candidates for teachers of vocational subjects would improve the quality of education, however, currently there is a shortage of specialists in a given profession with appropriate pedagogical qualifications and willing to teach the profession at school. This is confirmed by research conducted by Urszula Sztanderska and Wiktor Wojciechowski (2008, 33, 38). According to the researchers, graduates of vocational schools assess their preparation for the profession as low (3.3 general knowledge and knowledge of foreign languages, 3.5 knowledge and professional skills), and there are too few vocational teachers working in a given profession who at the same time would have pedagogical qualifications and would want to work at school.

The need for a relatively permanent teaching staff was noticed by few (10) students compared to the problem of teaching practical skills by vocational teachers (33) students: "Practice is a problem, theory is better, it is not what I have expected", "I do not feel prepared to work in my profession or to take the professional exam", "There is not enough practice", "We are thrown in at the deep end, because during theoretical lessons we copied a drill in a notebook, and during practice they make us use it, and no one has ever shown us how to use this tool".

Students do not feel sufficiently prepared for the profession either by teachers of theoretical vocational subjects or teachers of practical vocational training. They further admitted that:

– selection of teaching staff is inappropriate: "There are teachers who want to teach, but do not have knowledge, and there are teachers who have knowledge, but do not want to teach",

– teachers of theoretical vocational subjects do not sufficiently teach theory: "We don't get materials, we have to learn on our own, because they say they mentioned it in class", "We are the first class to learn in this field. We have to learn on our own. We use textbooks from the 1970s.", "We had entrepreneurship, but we discussed the textbook, we don't know how to pay taxes, how to file PIT, and yet many of us would like to run a business someday." The number of answers provided was comparable, i.e., 24 for the first category and 21 for the second.

The conducted research shows that the role of vocational subjects teachers is to prepare conscientiously and professionally for teaching theoretical subjects and practical vocational training. Teachers who demonstrate deep commitment in the way they conduct lessons are able to mobilize students to improve themselves, to delve into the profession they learn at school. Teachers must constantly update their knowledge in the field of the subject they teach. Ideally, they should have practical experience in the taught profession, e.g., combine work at school with work at a workplace. Teachers should make students familiar with any innovations appearing in the taught profession and go beyond the core curriculum. They should make lessons more interesting by giving examples from their own professional

practice and prepare additional materials to expand students' knowledge with up-to-date information in the field of the taught profession not included in the textbook. The role of the teacher is to bring students as closely as possible to the real-life conditions of the workplace, for example, by organizing trips to workplaces and talking about the observed facts, phenomena, tools, etc.

Conclusion

The aim of the research, which was to identify the preparation of young people to navigate the labour market - taking into account professional competences, has been achieved. The research conducted among young people studying in technical schools providing education for the professions of mechatronics technician, electrical technician, rail transport power technician, rail transport technician, renewable energy equipment and systems technician, allows to conclude that the respondents have knowledge about the modern labour market and are ready to enter it. Based on my own research and study of literature, it can be concluded that:

– students learn shortage professions thanks to which they will not be exposed to unemployment (see *Barometr zawodów* 2022, 19-23);

– students are aware of finding employment as secondary school graduates, which coincides with the labour market predictions by 2040 that there will be a demand for medium-skilled employees (see *Rynek pracy* 2023, 14);

– they believe that they will receive fair remuneration for their work and will be able to develop professionally, just like young people from all over the country (see *Młodzi Polacy na rynku pracy* 2021, 13);

– although they notice high competition on the labour market (about 1/3 of respondents), all of them claim that they will be able to manage on the modern labour market provided that they continue their education;

– students believe that their employer will mainly expect communication and technical skills from them, which is consistent with the latest research results (see *Rynek pracy* 2023, 17; NACE 2022; *Kompetencje, jakich nie było* 2019, 51).

Teachers of vocational subjects prepare technical secondary school students to gain qualifications related to their future profession, care for them and make every effort to ensure that after graduation they manage in a real work environment, meet the expectations of potential employers and are ready to continue their self-improvement. Such an attitude is demonstrated by teachers who pursue their profession with passion. Only such teachers are able to teach students in a way that encourages them to learn the profession. Students would like their teachers to have professional experience in enterprises and workplaces, consistent with the profession they teach. Teachers having professional experience in the profession they teach, and who enjoy teaching this profession, contribute to a large extent to the good preparation of students for the profession, increase their chances of getting a job in the learned profession.

Fourth-graders attach the greatest importance to teachers' proper attitude towards students, their personality traits, experience in the profession they teach, as well as communication skills, which is confirmed by previous research (Okpala and Ellis 2005, 374-383; Karwatowska 2012, 103-170; Guess and Bowling 2014, 201-206), and slightly less to the method of conducting lessons, i.e. selection of teaching methods and didactic aids, or genuine concern for their education (cf. Webber 2012, 201). Students admitted that teachers had not prepared them fully to work in their profession. Among the areas related to the teaching staff, they notice a number of areas for improvement, i.e.: permanent employment (if possible) of the same teaching staff and conscientious teaching of theory and practice.

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SEMINARE

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The Scope of Activities of Probation Officers Carried Out as Part of Supervision Over Minors in the Light of Legal Provisions

Zakres działań kuratorów sądowych realizowanych w ramach nadzorów jako samoistnych środków wychowawczych nad nieletnimi w świetle przepisów prawnych

Abstract: Criminality and demoralization of minors raise social anxiety in many circles. The institution of the probation officer provides a legal and procedural remedy for these problems. Recently, new solutions have been introduced in Polish law to regulate juvenile proceedings. The aim of the article is to outline the scope of probation officers' activities against minors. The article presents a statistical picture of juvenile demoralization and delinquency. In order to achieve the set goal, the method of literature and legal regulations analysis (desk research), as well as the analysis of statistical data have been used.
It has been found that the scale of juvenile delinquency has a decreasing tendency. The scope of tasks of court-appointed family probation officers is complementary.

Keywords: juveniles, demoralization, delinquency, probation officer, social rehabilitation

Abstrakt: Przestępczość i demoralizacja nieletnich budzi niepokój społeczny wielu środowisk. Prawnym i czynnościowym remedium na to zjawisko jest instytucja kuratora sądowego. W ostatnim czasie w polskim prawie wprowadzono nowe regulacje postępowania wobec nieletnich. Celem artykułu jest opis zakresu działań kuratorów sądowych wobec nieletnich w świetle obowiązujących przepisów prawnych. Przedstawiono statystyczny obraz demoralizacji i przestępczości nieletnich oraz zakres działań kuratorów. Posłużono się metodą analizy literatury i przepisów prawnych (desk research), oraz analizą danych statystycznych.
Okazało się, że skala przestępczości nieletnich ma tendencję malejącą, a zadania kuratorów sądowych charakter komplementarny.

Słowa kluczowe: nieletni, demoralizacja, przestępczość, kurator, resocjalizacja

Introduction

Juvenile court probation has a long history. The first practices in this area were introduced in the 18th century in Anglo-Saxon countries and in the United States and they were based on the common law. With time, as social problems resulting from negative activities of children and youth were noted, probation solutions were also introduced in European countries. In Poland, social rehabilitation in an open environment was implemented right after the establishment of the first juvenile courts after the country regained its independence in 1918. Since then, a number of legislative and methodological changes have been introduced relating to the function of court-appointed family probation officers. Elementary tasks for probation officers are defined in the Act of 27 July 2001 on probation officers (Dz. U. 2023 poz. 27) as having educational and social rehabilitation, diagnostic, preventive and control character and indicating that these tasks are carried out only based on court rulings.

In cases related to juvenile offenders and demoralized juveniles, probation officers referred also to the Act of October 26, 1982 on proceedings in juvenile cases (Dz. U. 2018 poz. 969). Currently, this act, which had been in force for the last forty years, was replaced with the new Act of June 9, 2022 on the support and rehabilitation of minors (Dz. U. 2022 poz.1700) introducing a number of new solutions concerning proceedings in juvenile cases. In addition to changes in legal regulations, the act has also introduced the Regulation of the Minister of Justice of November 28, 2022 on the supervision of minors by probation officers, social organizations, employers and trustworthy persons (Dz. U. 2022 poz. 2544).

The legislator introduced slight modifications to the definition of the minor, defining the minor as an individual who:

– is over 10 years of age, but is not an adult and exhibits behaviours indicating demoralization,

– is over 13 and under 17 years of age and has committed a punishable act,

– against whom educational, therapeutic or corrective measures were carried out or adjudicated before the age of 21.

The applicable law specifies the lower age limit minors, i.e., 10 years of age, which has not been defined so far. Thus, it has been indicated from what age the provisions of the Act (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1700) apply and, consequently, children under 10 years of age displaying demoralizing behaviour are not subject to legal responsibility. The lower age limit is a novelty in the current legal status.

An analysis of the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency and demoralization inevitably leads to ambivalent perception of the role of minors. On the one hand, the minor is an individual perceived as an actor of destructive behaviours of an individual and social nature. On the other hand, it should be noted that a minor who comes into conflict with the law is also a victim, because criminal behaviour is the result of harm and abuse (Mwangangi 2019, 58).

The emerging problems concerning juvenile delinquent and demoralized individuals are addressed by solutions proposed in the Act on the support and social rehabilitation of minors (Dz. U. 2022 poz. 1700). It is already in the preamble that the legislator indicates family as the natural environment for human development and gives primacy to parents in passing on the values and principles of social coexistence. This provision indicates that placing juvenile delinquents in solitary confinement is the last resort implemented only when other educational measures prove to be insufficient. Supervision of the probation officer falls into the scope of those other educational measures.

As the wording of current legal provisions raise many controversies and thus require exhaustive interpretations, it is justified to make an analysis of these provisions. In addition, the quantitative picture of demoralization and juvenile delinquency is constantly fluctuating, therefore it also seems justified to present the scale of the phenomenon.

In view of the above, the aim of the article is to outline the scope of probation officers' activities carried out as part of the supervision over minors as independent educational measures in the light of applicable law. The article provides an analysis of literature regarding the subject of probation supervision in juvenile cases as well as legal acts regarding juvenile proceedings, focusing on the implementation of probation supervision as an independent educational measure. The article focuses on the following research problems: What is the quantitative picture of juvenile demoralization and delinquency, and what is the number of adjudicated probation supervisions in juvenile cases? What are the tasks of probation officers based on the applicable legal provisions and what are their characteristics?

The conducted research was based on the desk research method and embraced an analysis of relevant legal acts, literature and statistical data. For this purpose, non-reactive data in the form of statistical materials obtained from the Ministry of Justice were used.

1. Court probation as an independent educational measure adjudicated in connection with juvenile delinquency and demoralisation – explanation of terms and a quantitative picture

Supervision by the probation officer is one of the corrective measures adjudicated in juvenile cases (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1700, art. 7). A characteristic feature of this measure is individualized profiling of activities towards probationers. Supervision is characterized by a high degree of subordination and the instructions given under this measure are binding for the probationer (Garwal 2023, 594).

The table below presents the numerical and percentage data on measures adjudicated in the form of supervision over minors by probation officers, broken down by gender.

Table 1. Number of adjudicated educational measures in the form of supervision by the probation officer in 2018-2020.

Year	Boys		Girls		Total
	N	%	N	%	
2018	6189	68,5	2842	31,5	9031
2019	5864	68,3	2726	31,7	8590
2020	4304	67,9	2031	32,1	6336

Source: Statistical data of the Ministry of Justice: https://isws.ms.gov.pl/pl/baza statistical/ opracowania-wieloletni/, accessed: 21.02.2023. Own calculations.

As can be seen from the data presented in Table 1, the number of juveniles against whom courts adjudicate corrective measures is systematically decreasing. The share of boys and girls in the total number of adjudicated supervisions remained at a similar level over the analysed years.

Probationers are demoralized individuals. Simple semantics allows to assume that demoralization indicates an individual's deviation from the generally adopted moral norms. This, in turn, implies that the state of demoralization may only refer to those individuals who were previously guided by moral norms, and that those norms were internalized by them. However, in the process of development, at some point in life, such individuals ceased to observe moral norms, and started trespassing on moral, social or legal principles. Thus, socially maladjusted individuals who under the law are defendants and at the same time have the status of juveniles can hardly be considered demoralized in the light of the above definition. It is because, according to research reports (Peterman 2019, 58-70), juveniles most often come from pathological family environments in which the level of morals differs from socially accepted norms. Consequently, children brought up in such environments did not have the opportunity to achieve a high level of morals. It should therefore be noted that the very connotation of the word "demoralization" prevents the use of this term in the context of the Act on the support and social rehabilitation of minors (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1700). Nevertheless, the act in question lists circumstances signalling demoralization without specifying their precise nature. The legislator lists the following: commitment of a prohibited act, use of alcoholic beverages and drugs, including other psychotropic substances, evasion of school or learning obligation, violation of the rules of social coexistence. While consumption of alcohol and drugs, as well as evasion of school duties are evident indicators of violating norms, violation of the rules of social coexistence can raise many doubts.

The scale of the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency and demoralization is illustrated by statistical data recorded by the Ministry of Justice.

Table 2. The scale of demoralization of minors in 2018-2020.

Year	Boys		Girls		Total
	N	%	N	%	
2018	9655	66,9	4759	33,1	14414
2019	9277	67,2	4528	32,8	13805
2020	6622	65,0	3565	35,0	10187

Source: Statistical data of the Ministry of Justice, https://isws.ms.gov.pl/pl/baza-statystyczna/opracowania-wieloletni/ accessed: 21/01/2023. Own calculations.

Table 2 indicates that the scale of the phenomenon of juvenile demoralization in the period from 2018 to 2020 shows a downward trend. It turns out that boys much more often manifest demoralizing behaviours than girls. An analysis of the percentage share of individual groups broken down by gender shows that while the activity of boys has decreased, that of girls has increased.

Particular attention is due to the term "crime" used with reference to minors. The concept of crime is invariably associated with violation of the legal provisions in force. Therefore, the term "crime" refers to acts that stand in opposition to normative regulations protecting goods such as life, health and property. Regardless of the form of criminal activity, this phenomenon is viewed as negative both in social and individual aspect. Crime is an unlawful act that can only be committed by a human being, i.e., an individual with free will. Crime is either felony or misdemeanour, i.e., acts prohibited under penalty by the applicable law (Dz. U. z 2022 r. poz. 2600, art. 7 par. 1).

It should be emphasized that, according to the legal doctrine, juveniles do not commit crimes, but only punishable acts, including both delinquency, offence, and fiscal offence.

Table 3. The scale of criminal acts from 2018 to 2020.

Year	Boys		Girls		Total
	N	%	N	%	
2018	7491	76,8	2263	23,2	9754
2019	6681	74,9	2239	25,1	8920
2020	5243	74,7	1772	25,3	7015

Source: Statistical data of the Ministry of Justice, https://isws.ms.gov.pl/pl/baza-statystyczna/opracowania-wieloletni/ accessed on: 21/01/2023. Own calculations.

An analysis of the data presented in Table 3 shows that, as in the case of registered number of demoralized minors, the total number of detected punishable acts is decreasing. The percentage share broken down by gender also remains at a similar level in the analysed period. However, the fact that the share of girls

shows a slightly increasing trend is a matter of concern. Statistical data from a decade ago show that criminal activity of girls was, on average, at the level of 13% of all criminal acts, while now their share has doubled.

2. Characteristics of the scope of probation officers' activities undertaken within supervision of minors

Probation officers as an institution are an auxiliary body of the court and, therefore, they are obliged to perform orders issued by the court. Probation officers take part in examination proceedings in juvenile cases as well as in enforcement proceedings. In examination proceedings, probation officers most often are assigned the task of conducting community interviews that provide the grounds for the court decision on the case and adjudication of temporary supervision (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1700, art. 44). A much broader scope of tasks is addressed to probation officers in the course of enforcement proceedings in juvenile cases. In these proceedings, the probation officer may exert supervision over the minor as an independent educational measure, the probation officer may also control the performance of other educational measures imposed by the court on the minor or organize and control the performance of social work to which the minor was obliged by the court. In addition, the supervision by the probation officer is ordered as a probationary measure in the event of conditional release from a reformatory, conditional withdrawal from the implementation of a corrective measure (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1700, art. 235), or temporary suspension of the implementation of a corrective measure.

In juvenile cases, the overriding goal of probation work is the welfare of the minor. Consequently, the question arises about the meaning of the term "welfare of minor". There is no definition of welfare in Polish law. Bearing in mind that juveniles most often grow up in biological or foster family environments, it seems reasonable to consider the welfare of the minor as the welfare of the child on the basis of family law, where the welfare of the child is the key principle. Polish Constitution (Dz. U. 1997, nr 78, poz. 483 z poźn. zm.) regulates the general principle of the best interest of the child, which implies that children are legally protected against violence, exploitation and demoralization. Based on this provision, as well as on the preamble to the Act on the support and social rehabilitation of minors (Dz. U. 2022 poz. 1700), it should be noted that the basic task of the probation officer supervising a minor consists in providing support both to the minor and to the minor's family.

It is a truism to say that juvenile defendants are demoralized individuals, therefore the fact that the legislator imposed on probation officers the obligation to organize and conduct activities aimed at helping minors to change their reprehensible behaviours and attitudes into attitudes considered desirable in society (Dz. U. 2022 poz. 1700, art. 155), does not raise any doubts. Pursuant to the Act of 27 July 2001 on probation officers (Dz. U. 2023, poz. 17), corrective measures undertaken towards juvenile defendants may take the form of educational and social rehabili-

tation, diagnostic, preventive or control actions. Different categories of probation officers' actions towards probationers have been specified the Act of June 9, 2022 on the support and rehabilitation of minors (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1700, art. 155) and these are organizational, supervisory and control activities.

Table 4. Division of activities and tasks of probation officers

Character of family probation officers' activities	Tasks of family probation officers
organizational	diagnosing
supervisory	social education, social rehabilitation, prevention
control	controlling

Source: own study.

     As Paweł Kobes notes, the widest scope of probation officers' activities within the supervision of minors comprises tasks related to social education, social rehabilitation and prevention. However, to enhance the effectiveness of tasks aimed at social education, social rehabilitation and prevention, probation officers are obliged to undertake diagnostic and control activities (Kobes 2019, 43). The legislator clearly distinguishes between supervision and control exercised over the minor (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1700, art. 155). Conceptually, supervision means a broader set of activities and is characterized by a higher degree of subordination of the individual over whom it is exercised compared to control (Garwal 2023, 594). In addition, supervision involves taking responsibility for the probationer. On the other hand, control refers to checking the fulfilment of commissioned tasks in terms of their quantity and quality. The legislator specified a catalogue of probation officers' activities falling into the scope of supervision (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1700, art. 155). This list allows for a flexible approach in work with probationers and helps categorize this work into three areas of activity.

     The first area comprises organizational activities under which the probation officer is obliged to get acquainted with information about the minor, in particular with the case files. (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 2544, par. 7) The next step with a defined deadline is to establish and maintain contact with the minor, his/her family and the environment with which the minor is associated. The non-family environment includes, among others, the school attended by the minor or the minor's employer. The probation officer is obliged to establish the first contact with the minor within 7 days from the date of being entrusted with such supervision (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 2544, par. 4). Implementation of this task requires the probation officer to visit the minor's place of residence. During the first contact, the probation officer initiates a diagnostic process based on an interview and conversation with the minor and people from his/her environment. The probation officer's task is to recognize and diagnose the minor's personal and environmental situation. The diagnostic scope includes health and developmental aspects of the minor, as well as environmental aspects relating to the profiles of parents and siblings, material and living as well as cultural and psycho-pedagogical situation. If educational measures have been previously adjudicated against the minor, the probation officer has to determine

the degree of his/her social rehabilitation and educational effectiveness. On this basis, the probation officer develops a plan of social rehabilitation work, aiming at specific educational and social rehabilitation goals and adopting a specific model of work for each individual case. It is assumed that planned activities must be modified due to inaccurate initial diagnosis, or the dynamics of family life.

A novelty in establishing contacts with the minor and his/her family is the possibility of obtaining mobile phone numbers and e-mail addresses, which may optionally help the probation officer to establish contact with the probationer and his/her legal guardians (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 2544, par. 4).

The initial organizational activities provide a starting point for the next stage of supervisory activities, which include measures aimed at social education, social rehabilitation and prevention. This area of activities includes prevention, rehabilitation of the minor and supporting his/her social education and providing him/her with support in life matters or with psychological assistance, but also strengthening his/her relationships with the closest community (Kujan 2021, 26). By strengthening the educational and social rehabilitation impact, the probation officer maintains contact with the minor and helps him/her solve the existing and emerging problems. For this purpose, the probation officer provides assistance to minors in the form of educational and therapeutic advice. Thus, the probation officer acts as an initiator of the probationer's activity. The provisions of the law indicate that educational and social rehabilitation measures undertaken by the probation officer must be consistent with the moral values defining the parents of a minor, because it is the parents whom the legislator granted the primacy in passing on values, necessary models of behaviour and moral principles (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 1700).

To enhance the effectiveness of his/her influence, the probation officer establishes contact with institutions and organizations whose legal and statutory objectives have been dedicated to people in need of material, legal, pedagogical and psychological support. Therefore, the probation officer, for the benefit of the minor, is obliged to cooperate mainly with social workers and family assistants, as well as district police officers competent for the minor's area of residence. The research conducted by A. Gąsińska indicates that probation officers cooperating with aid institutions have noticed a significant change in the family situation of minors under their care (Gąsińska 2017, 286)

According to the law, the role of probation officers consists in control and social rehabilitation. However, taking into account all activities undertaken by this professional and social group, it must be noted that a high proportion of them are preventive activities, since probation officers affect the entire environment of the probationer's family (Zinkiewicz 2018, 58).

The last area are control activities preceded by the imposition of specific tasks on the minor. The obligations may be assigned by the court in enforcement proceedings or a probation officer exercising supervision. An example of obligations imposed on the minor by the court, but also by the probation officer, is the

fulfilment of obligations arising from compulsory education. Therefore, as part of supervision, the probation officer is obliged to periodically check the minor's fulfilment of obligations. The control also applies to the behaviour of the minor in his/her place of residence and place of education or work.

Conclusions

The statistical data regarding supervision over minors assigned to probation officers as well as the scale of registered juvenile demoralization and delinquency of may give grounds for optimism, as it has shown a downward trend over the last several years. However, this trend lacks objective justification because its key reasons are still not known. And this is where the area for further research emerges. The decrease in the number of demoralized juveniles, as well as juvenile perpetrators of punishable acts, clearly translates into the workload of probation officers, because the number of adjudicated supervisions as independent educational measures carried out by probation officers has also significantly decreased. Therefore, it can be concluded that the amount of work of probation officers is decreasing.

The tasks of family probation officers and the scope of their activities are specified in the Act on probation officers (Dz. U. 2023 poz. 27) and in the Act on the support and rehabilitation of minors (Dz. U.2022, poz. 1700) respectively. It should be noted that both of these acts are complementary as regards the analysed aspect. Precise indications of activity for probation officers are provided in the Regulation of the Minister of Justice of November 28, 2022 on the supervision of minors by probation officers, social organizations, employers and trustworthy persons (Dz. U. 2022, poz. 2544). The analysis of the indicated legal acts made it possible to determine in detail the scope of activities undertaken by probation officers and covering organizational, supervisory and control areas, and by analogy, tasks in the area of prevention, control, and social educational and social rehabilitation. Taking into account the overall meaning of probation officers' work and the resulting goal of education and social rehabilitation, educational and social rehabilitation tasks appear to provide the axis of probation officers' activity. However, the analyses show that without the initial measures such as diagnosis and the associated control and prevention, those fundamental goals could not be achieved.

This elaboration addresses only a small part of the research problem and should be treated only as a contribution to further study. The search for answers to the research problems posed in the environment of probation officers and in the group of minors under the supervision of probation officers will allow to obtain a broader, in-depth research context.

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Intensification of Depression Symptoms and the Quarter-Life Crisis in Young Adults – Preliminary Research

Nasilenie objawów depresji a kryzys ćwierci życia u młodych dorosłych

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Abstract: According to Arnett's theory, the period of emerging adulthood isa stage of development characterized by instability, changeability, and experimentation in the performed roles. In this phase of life, young people cope with many ambivalences and ambitendencies as regards their values and choices; they may also experience the quarter-life crisis. The aim of the conducted research was to determine the correlation between intensification of depression symptoms and the occurrence of the quarter-life crisis in the period of emerging adulthood. The conducted analyses were based on the Developmental Crisis Questionnaire by Nikolay Petrov et al. in the author's own elaboration as well as Beck's Hopelessness Scale and a personal questionnaire. The conducted analyses allowed to observe the varying degrees of intensified feelings of hopelessness and the symptoms of the quarter-life crisis. Heightened negative attitude towards the future, perceived as unclear, uncertain, and a sense of not fitting the reality, increased the likelihood of the crisis.

Keywords: quarter-life crisis, depression, young adults

Abstrakt: Okres wschodzącej dorosłości jest etapem rozwojowym zgodnie z założeniami teorii Arnetta charakteryzującym się niestabilnością, zmiennością, eksperymentowaniem w realizowanych rolach. Młodzi ludzie zmagają się w tej fazie życia z licznymi ambiwalencjami, ambitendencjami w zakresie wyznawanych wartości, dokonywanych wyborów oraz mogą doświadczać kryzysu ćwierci życia.
Celem prowadzonych badań było określenie zależności występujących między nasileniem objawów depresji a występowaniem kryzysu ćwierci życia u osób w okresie wschodzącej dorosłości. W prowadzonych analizach uwzględniono Kwestionariusz Kryzysu Rozwojowego Petrova i in. w opracowaniu własnym i Skalę Beznadziejności Becka oraz ankietę personalną. Wykonane analizy pozwoliły dostrzec różny stopień nasilenia poczucia beznadziejności oraz objawów kryzysu ćwierci życia. Nasilenie negatywnego nastawienia do przyszłości, spostrzeganie jej jako niejasnej, niepewnej, poczucie nieodnalezienia się w rzeczywistości, zwiększało prawdopodobieństwo wystąpienia kryzysu.

Słowa kluczowe: kryzys ćwierci życia, depresja, młodzi dorośli

Period of emerging adulthood – challenges

Social expectations towards adulthood have undergone some changes today. Attainment of adulthood is the result of individual aspirations, rather than of meeting commonly accepted social standards. Instability of employment, late adoption of marital and parental roles, as well as educational requirements have resulted in extending the period of entering adulthood. Social and cultural changes that have taken place in recent years have undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of a new, specific stage of development known as emerging adulthood. (Kohútová, Špajdel and Dědová 2021, 307).

Emerging adulthood is a phase of life lasting from 18 to 29 years of age (Arnett 2014, 156). It is considered a developmental period separate from early adulthood (Spišákova and Ráczová 2020, 1). According to Arnett, "emerging adulthood is neither adolescence nor young adulthood, but is theoretically and empirically distinct from both" (Arnett 2000, 469). In the literature, emerging adulthood is sometimes referred to as a transitional, but important period in the development of a young person due to its significance for an individual's health and well-being (Chen et al. 2019, 664). According to Schulenberg and Schoon (2012, 168-169), the main tasks faced by young people during the period of emerging adulthood are: finding employment and engaging in work-related duties, developing a relationship, gaining independence from parents. The stage of emerging adulthood is perceived as the time when young people delay taking up roles, fulfilling obligations characteristic of adulthood. It is the age of instability, high changeability, exploration of identity, experiencing the feeling of being in between, discovering new roles, opportunities (Arnett 2000, 469), focusing on oneself (Arnett 2014, 158-159), withoutclear fulfilment of normative tasks foreseen for this period. This developmental stage is approached in the literature in two ways, on the one hand, positive changes are emphasized (Masten, Obradovic and Burt 2006 173-190), on the other hand, there are references to the occurrence of risky behaviours and mental health problems. In the initial stage, young people tend to experience excitement from undertaking professional activity, entering relationships, opening of opportunities to experiment in new roles (Wood et al. 2018, 123-125). With time, however, the excitement decreases, and young people begin to show symptoms of dissatisfaction and disappointment (Yeleret al. 2021, 247). Gradually, the prolonged time of carefreeness may also contribute to increased in security (Schwartz, Tanner and Syed 2016, 2), emotional problems (Lane, Leibert and Goka-Dubose 2017, 4) and affect life satisfaction (Karaś et al. 2015, 731-733). Successful transition to adulthood is related to achievement of normative goals in emerging adulthood (Negru-Subtirica 2008, 266-267). The stage of emerging adulthood is considered to be the time of pivotal normative transitions and changes in the area of love, work and education (Arnett 2015, 227-228; Schulenberg, Bryant and O'Malley 2004, 1119-1120). Emerging adulthood is characterized by a high degree of subjective and objective instability manifested in the changeability of life plans and goals (Luyckx et al. 2010, 238-240). Ability to deal effectively with difficulties and take appropriate action is of great importance during

this period. To make a satisfactory debut in early adulthood, a young person must effectively counteract processes that disrupt the achievement of specific goals and make responsible decisions (Spišákova and Ráczová 2020, 2).

During this period, young people may face problems associated with addiction to alcohol, or drugs, as well as with mental health (Gandhi et al. 2018, 173-175; O'Connor et al. 2011, 865-867). Emerging adulthood is also perceived as a time of respite from earlier adolescent "storms and stresses" (Galambos, Barker and Krahn 2006, 351-352), persistence or emergence of symptoms of depressive patterns (Reed-Fitzke 2020, 44). Depression, anxiety and eating disorders ("social and emotional disorders") are common in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Gibb, Fergusson and Horwood 2010, 122; Kessler et al. 2012, 381-382). The process of formation and development of identity may increase susceptibility to social and emotional disorders, while the emerging disorders may hinder identity formation (Klimstra and Denissen 2017, 2055-2056). Low social skills, intensification of negative thoughts, changes in family and peer relationships, striving for autonomy and at the same time making attempts to meet the requirements of the environment may contribute to the development of depression (Burns, Andrews and Szabo 2002, 93).

When entering adulthood, young people may deal with low achievements, lack of support from relatives and they may show addictive tendencies (Rana et al. 2022, 274). The period of transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood, may be associated with the feeling of fear, which contributes to the sense of hopelessness. Persistence of negative emotions is inducive to the loss of hope, contributing to the emergence of hopelessness (Rana et al. 2022, 275-276). Hopelessness is sometimes defined as a system of negative expectations regarding oneself and one's future life (Beck et al. 1974, 861-862).

1. Depression and the period of emerging adulthood

Depression is one of the most common mental disorders affecting people in adolescence and early adulthood (World Health Organization 2016). The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders distinguishes the following diagnostic categories of depression: depressive episode, recurrent depressive disorder, persistent mood (affective) disorders such as cyclothymia or dysthymia. Classification of depressive disorders also takes into account these verity of symptoms and features and it includes: mild depression, characterised by single features of depression of medium intensity, moderate depression, with a clear deterioration of both social and professional functioning, and severe depression, associated with significant disturbances in social functioning and inability to work (Pużyński 2018, 19-36). The DSM-V classification distinguishes eight different depressive disorders, each with its own diagnostic categories: disruptive mood dysregulation disorder, major depressive disorder including depressive episodes, persistent mood disorder – dysthymia, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, substance- or medication-induced depressive disorder, depressive disorder

due to somatic medical condition, depressive disorder specified otherwise, and unspecified depressive disorder (DSM-V).

The clinical picture of depression in a person is characterised by a marked loss of interest or satisfaction in the scope of activities that previously gave pleasure, lack of emotional reactions to events and activities that usually triggered such reactions, earlier than usual morning awakening, and noticeable for others inhibition or agitation. The person is more depressed in the morning, has decreased appetite and libido, and has lost 5% or more in weight over the past month.

From a developmental point of view, depression reduces an individual's ability to achieve specific successes characteristic of a given developmental period (Cicchetti and Toth 1998, 222-223). People suffering from depression may be susceptible to social, professional and health problems. Depression also contributes to the rising social costs. In emerging adulthood, young people may experience symptoms of depression due to increased uncertainty (Haase, Heckhausen and Silbereisen 2012, 1739), pressure of social obligations (e.g., entering a relationship, raising children), barriers to achieving their own goals, e.g., lack of financial resources, limited educational opportunities. This situation may, in turn, lead to emotional problems (Mondi, Reynolds and Ou 2017, 2). Many developmental challenges, including the process of shaping identity and coping with everyday difficulties at the educational, professional, and personal levels, are conducive to the occurrence of depression in emerging adulthood (Arnett 2015, 227-228). Research study conducted by Jurkiewicz and Kołpa (2015) on the 20-35 age group showed the occurrence of depressive symptoms in 20% of the participants. Young people affected by depression are more likely to face marital and behavioural problems, addictions, and lower professional satisfaction (Kuwabara et al. 2007, 317). Conflicts in interpersonal relationships, especially with friends or partners, can lead to increased psychological distress (Chango et al. 2012, 376). Difficulties in social and partner relationships have the greatest impact on the development of depression.

2. Quarter-life crisis

Crisis is sometimes defined in the literature as a turning point, a state characterised by high emotional tension, loss of control, disorganized behaviour, and occurrence of somatic symptoms (*Psychologia* 2003, 554). Crisis is also referred to as a loss of balance (Sillamy 1994, 131). As regards development, crisis is a breakthrough on the way to a new stage (*Psychologia* 2003, 554), associated with changes in the emotional sphere. Crisis is not a uniform research issue. The literature describes various types of crises and various ways of dealing with them (Płużek 2003, 152).

A person in crisis, fearing the reaction of the environment, may suppresses emotions at the same time depriving themselves of the possibility of being authentic. Such behaviour frequently prevents self-fulfilment, and thus the possibility of development (Bronowski, Kaszyński and Maciejewska 2019, 90). Crises in early adulthood appear towards the end of emerging adulthood (Robinson 2016, 17-30).

According to Robinson (2015, 10), a quarter-life crisis usually occurs between the ages of 25 and 29. Agarwal et al. (2020, 1) define it as an episode of developmental crisis occurring in early adulthood. Some researchers define the quarter-life crisis as "a feeling of overwhelming instability, constant change, too many choices, and a panicked sense of helplessness" (Robbins and Wilner 2001, 3) or "a form of emotional crisis that occurs in individuals in their 20s, which includes feeling of separation, isolation, inadequacy and self-doubt, combined with fear of failure" (Atwood and Scholtz 2008, 241). The literature distinguishes two types of the quarter-life crisis, i.e., locked-out and locked-in (Robinson 2019, 167-169). The locked-out crisis is associated with difficulties in reaching adulthood at the age of 21-25. Young people in this period may face problems with gaining financial independence and with establishing a romantic relationship. The second type, i.e., the locked-in crisis occurs at the age of 25-35. It is associated with lack of acceptance for the performance of specific roles related to work and family (Yeler et al. 2021, 247).

The quarter-life crisis may be associated with instability, emotional changes caused by the undertaking of active efforts, being overwhelmed, or difficulty coping with problems (Agarwal et al. 2020, 2). In addition, it may involve a sense of hindered developmental commitments (problems with finding a job, getting married), feelings of detachment form one's life role, difficulties with realizing one's identity (Robinson 2019, 168). It can also take the form of an emotional crisis associated with a sense of helplessness, isolation, doubt in one's own abilities (Anggraini, Wahyunengsih and Aqila 2002, 38). Over time, young people realize that this condition leads to the feeling of limited development opportunities. This crisis may have development potential because it contributes to the termination of ongoing commitments, ties and provides the opportunity to start new activities (Robinson 2013, 6-7). A quarter-life crisis may, on the one hand, cause positive changes, for example in lifestyle, or, on the other, contribute to the development of depression and lower self-esteem (Robinson and Wright 2013, 407-408). Emerging adulthood is a period when young people face many changes and have to make many decisions. Experience of instability and uncertainty is common because the young person has a sense of pursuing an "invisible goal" (*Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood* 2017, 568). Ability to function in a situation of uncertainty and instability becomes crucial for coping with developmental challenges and overcoming the quarter-life crisis.

Research conducted by Herawati and Hidayat (2020) showed that in people aged 20-30, an individual quarter-life crisis was experienced by 43.22% (to a moderate degree), 27.97% (to a high degree), 14.83% (to a low degree) and 3.82% (to a very low degree). Analysis of the conducted research findings demonstrates that the quarter-life crisis occurred in the majority of subjects (Herawati and Hidayat 2020, 131). Research conducted by Yeler and colleagues (2021) on people in early adulthood showed that 82% of young people experienced a crisis at various levels. The main areas of crises were career, age, experienced level of happiness, experienced level of difficulty, and intolerance (Yeler et al. 2021, 253-255).

3. Kazimierz Dąbrowski's positive disintegration theory

According to the theory of positive disintegration, formulation of personality and identity requires overcoming certain genetic, biological determinants of the development cycle as well as specific socio-cultural schemes (Tylkowska 2000, 231). Development in Dąbrowski's theory is a multi-faceted and multi-level process conducive to the pursuit of an ideal personality (Dąbrowski 1975). It also involves overcoming certain obstacles, as well as commitment, hardship, and determination. In order to be able to develop effectively, a person should discover their goals and learn values. An important role in human development is played by a person's development potential, which is determined by three factors. The first is related to the innate characteristics of a person's psychobiological construction. The second is determined by the impact of the environment and social situation. The third factor is authentic and autonomous (Dąbrowski 1975; Tylkowska 2000, 235).

According to Dąbrowski (1979), development is related to reaching successive levels, starting from primary integration, unilevel disintegration, spontaneous multilevel disintegration, organized and systematized multilevel disintegration, and secondary integration. The first level is characterized by internal conflicts and lack of development mechanisms (Limont 2014, 10). Characteristic features of this level are impulsiveness and automatism as well as strong subordination to primitive drives (Dąbrowski 1975, 51-54; 1979). Mental functions here are integrated, organized, but unconscious. The aim of this level is to satisfy the needs and derive satisfaction from life (Tylkowska 2000, 241). At the level of primary integration, individuals are devoid of reflection and react mechanically to environmental stimuli. Unilevel disintegration is characterised by ambivalences and ambitendencies (Dąbrowski 2015, 276) with clearly dominating relativism of values. The mental tension arising at this level can have a negative or positive outcome (Dąbrowski 2015, 70-71). This type of disintegration can occur during a developmental crisis when a person is struggling with difficult external conditions. Individuals at this level lack the sense of autonomy (Tylkowska 2000, 243), they cope with conflicting feelings. On the one hand, they have an urge to act, and on the other, they feel fear blocking any attempts at spontaneous activities.

At the third level, the impact of developmental dynamisms can be discerned. The third factor begins to work here, manifested in the creative instinct, hierarchy of values, or positive maladjustment. It enables an individual to search for development opportunities and eliminate factors inhibiting such a development (Dąbrowski 1975).

An individual at this level experiences manifold, strong conflicts. The level also involves certain dynamisms, e.g., feelings of inferiority in relation to the environment, dissatisfaction with oneself, maladjustment (Tylkowska 2000, 245). An individual begins to conceive their ideal personality and strive to achieve certain goals.

In an organized, systematized multi-level disintegration, a person shapes their own personality, strives for synthesis, internal integration, balance through the implementation of a social and individual ideal. There is a greater level of

systematization here compared to the previous levels. People are capable of self-reflection. The third factor and certain dynamisms: the subject-object in oneself, self-awareness and education-of-oneself are intensively active here (Tylkowska 2000, 246). Disintegration processes take place at this level, but their course is calmer and more controlled (Dąbrowski 1989, 60).

In secondary integration, the balance of personality unity, i.e., internal synthesis, is achieved. There are no internal conflicts. The ideal of personality is realized (Limont 2014, 11). At this level, self-awareness, empathy and responsibility clearly dominate (Tylkowska 2000, 247). The working mechanisms of the internal environment begin to bring an individual closer to the ideal personality (Dąbrowski 1979, 34-36).

4. Aim of research and methodology

The aim of the conducted research was to determine the relationship between intensification of depressive symptoms and the occurrence of the quarter-life crisis in young people in the period of emerging adulthood.

4.1. Research subjects

The research results were calculated based on the answers of 122 participants, including 107 (87.7%) women and 15 men (12.3%) aged between 23 and 30. Participants aged 23-24 dominated. The mean age of the respondents was 24.66 with a standard deviation of 2.080. Among the respondents, 77.9% do not suffer from any disease, and the remaining 22.1% suffer mainly from thyroid diseases, diabetes and insulin resistance, anxiety disorders, hypertension and asthma. Therefore, the majority do not take medications (82%), while 18% use pharmacotherapy, mainly in connection with the diseases they suffer from. The majority of participants have not experienced depression episodes (73%), do not use any stimulants such as cigarettes, alcohol or other psychoactive substances (59,8%), while others (40.2%) use alcohol and cigarettes; isolated cases of iqos and marijuana use have been reported. Most participants (65.6%) have recently experienced no unpleasant life events that could have a significant impact on their mood. Most of the respondents in a difficult situation can count on support from their parents (82.8%) and friends (68.9%), slightly less on support from their partners (61.5%) and friends. The respondents receive the least support from their friends (16.4%).

4.2. Tools

Two tests were used: the Developmental Crisis Questionnaire and the Hopelessness Scale. Participants also completed a personal questionnaire.

The Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12) by Petrov, Robinson and Arnett (2021) was translated into Polish with the consent of its creators in accordance with the test development procedure. Currently, the authors of the article continue

works on adapting the tool. The questionnaire consists of 12 statements to which the participants respond on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree". The statements refer to experiences that describe the respondent's life in the past six months. In addition to the overall crisis score, the authors identified three components: Disconnection and Distress, Lack of Clarity and Control, and Turning Point and Transition. According to the authors, if a person scores 42 points or more, it indicates the presence of crisis, while 41 points or less means absence of crisis. These are indicative data due to the fact that the tool has not yet been fully adapted. In the presented studies, the result of Cronbach's α reliability coefficient for the entire questionnaire and individual scales is respectively: 0.808; 0.849; 0.737; 0.814 and for the statements it ranges from 0.775-0.811.

Beck's Hopelessness Scale (HS) was elaborated by Oleś and Juros (1985-1986). The questionnaire consists of 20 statements. If a given statement describes the attitude of the respondent in the last week, they should mark the True answer, and if the sentence is false as regards the respondent, they should mark the False answer. In addition to the overall score, the authors distinguished three components: affective, motivational and cognitive. The higher the score obtained on the scales, the greater the intensity of the sense of hopelessness among the respondents. Cronbach's α reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.757.

The personal questionnaire was created for the purpose of the research, it consisted of 15 questions regarding demographic data such as gender, age, place of residence, education, marital status and professional situation. The questionnaire also included questions about diseases such as depression or other, depression episode, taking medications, using stimulants. The questionnaire also included a question about the recent occurrence of unpleasant events in the respondent's life, which could significantly affect their mood.

4.3. Research procedure

Group selection was purposive; the snowball method was used. The research began with uploading questionnaires to an online survey via the *Lime Survey* service. Next, a survey was created using the ankiety.kul.pl webpage. It began with a greeting and an invitation to participate in the survey. Information was also provided that participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous, and that the obtained results would be used only for scientific purposes. Thanks for participation were also included. The following questionnaires were uploaded: Personal questionnaire, Developmental Crisis Questionnaire, HS Questionnaire. All questions were mandatory, i.e., in order to go to the next stage of the survey, respondents had to answer each question. Completing the survey took about 25 minutes.

Information about the research was published on the Facebook social network created by Mark Zuckerberg. The portal allows registered users to create groups and share news. Mentions with information on the conducted research were posted, among others, on student groups with information on the age required to

participate and with a link to the survey. Potential participants were also assured of voluntary and anonymous character the survey. In the published information on the research, the authors asked for its further dissemination. The study has the approval of the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Psychology of the Catholic University of Lublin.

314 Polish-speaking respondents took part in the research, 181 of them being excluded due to incomplete completion of the questionnaires and failure to meet the research criteria, which was the age between 23 and 30 years. Respondents who declared suffering currently from depression (11 people) were also excluded.

4.4. Statistics used

The statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0 was used to verify the hypotheses. Before proceeding to the verification of the hypotheses, basic statistical calculations were performed, taking into account the mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, and the median. Subsequently, it was checked whether the variables of the Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ) and the HS Questionnaire had a normal distribution. Due to the fact that a normal distribution was not obtained for most of the variables, the analyses were performed using the T-test, U Mann-Whitney test and H Kruskal-Wallis test. The relationship between the Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ) and the HS Questionnaire was conducted using Pearson's r correlation. To estimate the probability of a crisis based on the analysed psychological data and nominally identified developmental tasks, logistic regression analysis was applied using the input method.

5. Research results

Below are presented the data supporting the results (Table 1) and the statistical analyses results concerning the relationship between the studied variables (Table 2, 3).

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the results

Statistics	HS hopelessness	HS affective	HS_motivational	HS_cognitive	DCQ Quarter-life crisis
M (SD)	5.35 (3.91)	0.90 (1.20)	1.80 (1.30)	1.92 (1.61)	34.89 (7.89)
Me	4	0.5	1	1	34.5
Min-Max	1-17	0-5	0-7	0-5	16-53
Skewness	1.110	1.463	1.508	0.519	0.009
Kurtosis	0.588	1.645	2.242	-0.889	-0.333
Shapiro-Wilk	0.879	0.752	0.767	0.887	0.990
P	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.524

The average intensity of the sense of hopelessness in the group of respondents indicates a mild sense of hopelessness, which is also confirmed by the median. However, the spread of results is large and suggests the occurrence of cases with sharp intensification of the sense of hopelessness. The average result of the severity of the quarter-life crisis symptoms is comparable to the research on the construction of the scale (Petrov, Robinson and Arnett 2021).

In the presented research, 20.5% of young adults experience the quarter-life crisis. In the remaining 79.5% of respondents, development of the crisis symptoms was insufficient to allow for its identification.

The following potential predictors were introduced into the logistic regression model: feeling of hopelessness (affective, motivational and cognitive component), close relationships (single, in a relationship), basic activity (studying, studying and working, working, not studying and not working), gender (man, woman), quarter-life crisis (Table 2). The collinearity test for the elements of the VIF model ranges from 1.717 to 1.862 and the tolerance index ranges from 0.537 to 0.582.

Table 2. Predictors of the quarter-life crisis in the light of logistic regression

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	P	Exp(B)
Affective hopelessness	0.861	0.290	8.819	0.003	2.366
Motivational hopelessness	-0.184	0.262	0.493	n.i.	0.832
Cognitive hopelessness	0.475	0.241	3.895	0.048	1.608
Single	0.513	0.560	0.839	n.i.	1.670
Activity (studying)	-0.477	2.352	0.041	n.i.	0.620
Activity (studying and working)	-0.076	2.340	0.001	n.i.	0.927
Activity (working)	0.561	2.385	0.055	n.i.	1.752
Activity (not working)			1.431	n.i.	
Gender (M)	0.044	0.875	0.003	n.i.	1.045
constant	-3.314	2.415	1.883	n.i.	0.036
Hosmer and Lemeshow: χ2=7.55 df=8. p=0.479; R²Cox and Snell=0.251; R² Nagelkerke=0.394					

The analyses show that the collective test of the model coefficients is statistically significant (χ2=35.298.df=8. p=0.000). The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness of fit test of the model indicates that the data are fit (χ2=7.55.df=8. p=0.479). The model allows to explain 25.1% (R²Cox and Snell) – 39.4% (R²Nagelkerke) of the variability of the explained variable results. Only two factors significantly justify the experience of the quarter-life crisis, namely, affective hopelessness and cognitive hopelessness. The obtained results make it possible to estimate probability of the quarter-life crisis: if the intensity of affective hopelessness increases by one unit. probability of crisis increases 2.37 times; if the intensity of cognitive hopelessness increases by one unit, probability of crisis increases by 1.61 times. On the basis of observational data on the absence of crisis, 96.9% of correct classifications of predicted data can be made and on the basis of data on the occurrence of crisis, the indicator is 44% of correct classifications (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of classification correctness based on observational data

Observational		predicted crisis		% of correct classifications
data		No	Yes	
crisis	No	94	3	96.9
	Yes	14	11	44.0
	% total			86.1

Discussion

Young people entering adulthood experience difficulties in social and emotional functioning (Gibb, Fergusson and Horwood 2010, 122; Klimstra and Denissen 2017, 2055-2056; Kessler et al. 2012, 381-382; Reed-Fitzke 2020, 44). The conducted analyses showed that the subjects experienced increased hopelessness and symptoms of the quarter-life crisis in varying degrees. The average of crisis symptoms is comparable to other studies, as is the average of hopelessness.

Starting adult life, young people try to gain independence, find and start a well-paid job, expand the area of established relationships at the family and extra-family level and take responsibility for themselves and their choices (Schulenberg and Schoon 2012, 168-169; Wood et al. 2018, 123-125). However, the feeling of constant instability caused by the changeability of plans, goals, and difficulties in defining one's own identity are not conducive to the implementation of normative developmental tasks (Arnett 2000, 469; Luyckx et al. 2010). Lack of self-knowledge makes it difficult to shape one's own individuality and identity (Płużek 2003, 146). People struggling with unstable external conditions may experience ambivalences and ambitendencies which intensify the effects of the experienced crisis (Dąbrowski 2015; Tylkowska, 2000). The pressure of social obligations, financial difficulties, limitations in terms of self-development can additionally increase the feelings of uncertainty and self-disillusionment (Haase, Heckhausen and Silbereisen 2012, 1739; Mondi, Reynolds and Ou 2017, 2). In a stressful situation, the resulting fear and tension contribute to disorganized behaviour and mental chaos. As a result, an individual begins to notice the mismatch between their needs and the expectations of their environment (Kubacka-Jasiecka 2005, 64).

In the conducted analyses, it was noticed that the greater the intensity of a negative attitude towards the future, feelings of not fitting the reality, the greater the likelihood of crisis. Young people entering adulthood experience numerous relational and personal changes, while striving to meet the requirements of the environment (Arnett 2015, 227-228; Masten, Obradovic and Burt 2006). Sometimes, however, low social skills, intensified tendency to negative thinking, helplessness caused by inability to meet the requirements of the environment may contribute to self-doubt, feelings of being overwhelmed, or doubts regarding one's abilities (Burns, Andrews and Szabo 2002, 93; Rana et al. 2022, 275-276). The quarter-life crisis is associated with the experience of helplessness, problems with fulfilling developmental tasks, doubts about one's future and one's potential (Anggraini, Wahyuengsih and Aqila 2002, 38). The feeling of loss of

control, powerlessness and helplessness contribute to the intensification of the effects of the experienced crisis (Kubacka-Jasiecka 2005, 64).

In the case of the respondents, the more the future was perceived as unclear and uncertain, the greater the likelihood of crisis. In the period of emerging adulthood, a young person may have a sense of following an "invisible goal" (*Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood* 2017, 568), which, combined with the experienced unpredictability of the future, instability of undertaken activities and roles, may intensify the symptoms of the crisis. An uncertain vision of the future is not conducive to shaping a person's autonomy (Tylkowska 2000, 243). Young people may experience contradictory tendencies in taking certain actions: on the one hand, the fear of action, on the other hand, the need to act.

The respondents show a tendency to postpone implementation of developmental tasks for an unspecified future, which is a typical characteristic of many young people in emerging adulthood (Arnett 2014). During this developmental period, young people begin to focus on themselves, their own capabilities, changes in plans, life goals (Luyckx et al. 2010). Experimenting in new roles, with new possibilities is not conducive to the fulfilment of normative tasks related to the stage of entering adulthood. Difficulties in determining the level of maturity, self-integrity, identity, and difficulties in adapting to developmental requirements are similarly not conducive to the implementation of developmental tasks and overcoming crises (Kubacka-Jasiecka 2005, 77).

Young people in emerging adulthood experience symptoms of depression, according to the analyses and research conducted by Jurkiewicz and Kołpa (2015). Strineet al. (2008) found that 16% of young people aged 18-24 were diagnosed with depression at some point in their lives.

Research limitations

– large disproportion in numbers (107 women / 15 men),

– worse mental condition of the society (research conducted after a 2-year pandemic of restrictions such as isolation, limiting interpersonal contacts, quarantine, travel restrictions),

– electronic form of research – the survey was relatively long, resistance to completing online questionnaires and weariness during the completion of the survey resulted in the fact that as many as 181 people withdrew from the research during its course,

– a factor that may be important and worth attention – the current situation of the war in Ukraine, which is not indifferent to the inhabitants of Poland and the world.

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An Example of Applying Fritz Schütze's Concept of Trajectory Processes in Biographical Research into Young Adults

Przykład wykorzystania koncepcji przebiegu procesów trajektoryjnych Fritza Schützego w badaniach biograficznych młodych dorosłych

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Abstract: This paper presents the possibility of applying Fritz Schütze's concept of the trajectory of suffering in empirical research. The first part of the article presents the methodological assumptions of the research focusing on the biographical research method and the narrative interview technique. The following section analyses a biographical transcript obtained from a narrative interview. The interview participant was a 23-year-old man who told his narrative according to the scheme of trajectory of suffering, defined as *an experience of losing control over one's* external circumstances.

Keywords: young adults, biographical research, narrative, trajectory of suffering

Abstract: W artykule zaprezentowano możliwości wykorzystania w badaniach empirycznych koncepcji przebiegu trajektorii cierpienia opracowanej przez Fritza Schützego. W pierwszej części tekstu opisano założenia metodologiczne badań, omawiając metodę badań biograficznych i technikę wywiadu narracyjnego. W dalszej kolejności analizie poddano zapis biografii uzyskanej w wyniku przeprowadzonego wywiadu narracyjnego. Uczestnikiem wywiadu był dwudziestotrzyletni mężczyzna, który swoją narrację skonstruował w planie trajektorii cierpienia, tj. *doświadczenia wymykającego się próbom kontrolowania* zewnętrznych okoliczności.

Keywords: młodzi dorośli, badania biograficzne, narracja, trajektoria cierpienia

Introduction

In existentialist and personalist theories the human being is viewed as a transcendent entity, destined to go beyond the existing limitations, to rise above difficulties and to overcome limitations, fears and existential crises. Difficult unforeseen events happening in one's life trigger a process of trajectory struggles against the new existential situation, which in turn entails being forced to respond to adverse life experiences. What seems particularly inspiring and valuable from a research perspective is the insight into the trajectory process, the biographical resources individuals make use of and the ways such individuals develop to understand themselves, the world and other people. This approach is mainly concerned with learning about the subjects' life strategies, understanding their behaviour, aspirations, fears and aspirations.

1. Methodological assumptions of the study

The planned research project aims at finding out and describing the meanings that young adults give to the existential conflicts they experience as a result of their confrontation with objective existential facts: freedom, finitude, fate and their own loneliness. Developing an in-depth and multilayered understanding of human experiences required a qualitative methodological approach geared towards analysing the senses and meanings symbolised in language, narrative and in real rather than merely proclaimed or postulated beliefs and choices (Straś-Romanowska 2010, 103).

The research used the biographical research method. Therefore, the interest of this research focuses on autobiography, a story of one's life, wherein apart from its factual dimension a particular importance is given to its interpretative aspect (cf. Ostaszewska 2018, 81). The latter dimension can be represented thanks to one's reflecting on their lives and reflectively relating to one's past through the lens of the present and future. The key here is to interpret past events from today's point of view, to seek explanations and to combine past and present perspectives (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2006, 18-19). In this sense, biography is not a reflection of the past but rather a past-related reflection, an expression of retrospective meaning-making and the shaping of one's experiences (Lalak 2010, 252-254; Karkowska 2018, 111).

It has been assumed that the process of interpreting reality, understanding oneself and also telling about one's life experiences is not chaotic and unpredictable but narrative, i.e. it has a narrative structure, taking the form of a story. Moreover, the order of one's life account corresponds considerably with the structure of events one goes through and experiences (Kaźmierska and Waniek 2020, 15; Rokuszewska-Pawełek 2006). In other words, the stages of a biography are reproduced by a narrative in a similar order to the one according to which the biographical experience unfolds. The fundamental organizing principles of life history include biographical process structures that form the basis of the

biographical process (Schütze 2016; Kaźmierska and Waniek 2020, 105). Analysing them leads to revealing the attitude that the narrator takes towards the events he narrates. Process structures, in this view, represent basic forms of biographical experience and attitudes towards one's own life, illustrating the importance of internal motives for action, the influence of external circumstances and social expectations, and stages of life characterised by intentional order or chaos.

1.1. Narrative interview

The narrative interview has been chosen from amongst the research techniques used in biographical research. Typically, a researcher interferes in the course of the interview to a very little degree which, consequently, lets the subject dominate the topic started by the researcher. The subject's feedback takes the form of a story about his or her personal experiences. I have defined a narrative interview broadly as a conversation during which an interviewee tells the story of his or her life adopting a perspective of a question the researcher is interested in (cf. Rubacha 2008, 136). This technique involves a specific procedure for collecting material which results in obtaining a spontaneous narrative about life, which is then analysed according to the theoretical and methodological assumptions adopted. At the same time, the resulting narrative is not an aggregated sum of the elicited answers, but one's own, spontaneous life story without being interrupted by the researcher (Kaźmierska 2004, 74).

What distinguishes the narrative interview from other types of interviews conducted in the qualitative research paradigm is primarily its facility to capture the processual nature of events, to establish the pattern of individual biographical experiences, to reconstruct process structures, temporal order and the sequence of events characteristic of particular stages in a person's biography.

The recorded narrative interviews have been analysed with reference to the basic methodological directives proposed by Schütze (1983, 2016, 2012) and characterised by Kaźmierska and Waniek (2020). In one aspect, the analysis reconstructed the narrator's life story and, in the other, it retrieved the meanings he ascribes to his biographical experiences. The multi-level and multi-stage analysis has covered the following levels:

1) A formal analysis of the content, which involved dividing the story into sequences, establishing narrative, descriptive and argumentative communication patterns, and distinguishing so-called narrative constraints (laws) aimed at providing a biography with a certain form (to condense, to providing details and to close the textual form).

2) A structural description aimed at searching for single situations and turning points in the biography of the subjects and establishing the role of biographical advisors with a significant impact on subjects' lives. The scope of the structural analysis of the content also included 'process structures', preambles, codes (summaries that referred to the entire experiences), broken codes (which indicated

an inability to conclude one's story, summarise one's experiences and evaluate one's life) and obscurations (which means leaving out certain biographical experiences during narration resulting in gaps in the presentation of the life account).

3) An analytical abstraction aiming at a holistic view of the history taking into account the process structures identified in it. The purpose of the analysis at this level has primarily been to answer questions about: (1) what stands out in the biography; (2) what is the relationship between the narrator's presented beliefs and the sequence of actual structural processes; and (4) what are the relationships between the individual processes and the social phenomena relevant to this case? (Schütze 2012, 258-259). The overall reconstruction of the general biography organisation has been to reflect the form of a biographical profile (portrait).

The narrative interview was conducted in October 2022. The location and time of the interview were agreed with the subject over a telephone call. The interview lasted two hours. It commenced with presenting the following instruction: "I would like to ask you to tell me about your life with particular emphasis on the conflicts you have experienced with yourself and with other people. Please, start telling your life story from the very beginning, that is, a period you remember from your childhood. What and how you tell your story is solely up to you. I am not going to interrupt you and ask you any questions during your account. Only when you decide you want to finish telling the story of your life will I ask you questions to make sure I've understood everything, or perhaps to elaborate on some of problems and questions you will might have raised."

After the subject had finished telling his life story, he was asked to answer questions, which aimed at clarifying and complementing some of the themes and finding out about the man's values, hidden desires, needs and fears.

1.2. Process structures

The most important stage of the research process carried out was to isolate and characterise process structures, illustrating the different ways in which the subject had captured and interpreted his past. Following Schütze's principles (2012, 2016), the following process structures were taken into account during the analysis: biographical patterns of action, institutional patterns, transformations and trajectories. In the first case, the narrator depicts his life taking the perspective of intentional actions he undertook, the fulfilment of his plans and the efforts he put into shaping his destiny and constructing his identity (Schütze 2016, 455). In the case of institutional patterns of expectations, the narrator describes his life story primarily laying stress on the fact of following the activity scenarios prepared for him. (Schütze 2012, 180). Regarding the biographical transformation, the author describes his life mainly through a creative transformation of biographical identity, exposing an unexpected, positive change in his life, entailing the discovery of new possibilities for development and a change in his previous view of the world (Schütze 2016, 455).

The fourth perspective involves presenting one's life in terms of a trajectory, i.e. a pattern of different contingencies and constellations one is being caught up in, resulting in a sense of loss of control over life and trust in the world. The phenomenon of trajectory refers to processes of prolonged suffering that leads to a deepening sense of growing disarray, alienation from oneself and others, being overwhelmed and controlled by outer forces. As Schütze argues, a so-called 'trajectory potential' has a great role here, as it "generally has a component of biographical dispositions to be wounded and a component of a set of key contradictions within a current life situation" (Schütze 2012a, 428). The course of the suffering trajectory process usually follows the structure below:

1) Gradual accumulation of principal trajectory conditions;
2) Sudden crossing of the trajectory potential limit;
3) Making efforts to develop a shaky balance when one copes with everyday life;
4) Destabilising the unstable balance of coping with life;
5) Breakdown in the organisation of daily life and self-orientation;
6) Making efforts to theoretically rework the breakdown of the orientation system and trajectory;
7) Making practical attempts to work on the trajectory and gain control over it.

2. The course of trajectory processes

The biography analysed here is an example of the story of a person affected by the trajectory of suffering associated with experiencing overwhelming random events. The machinery of his trajectory of suffering is triggered by a specific set of adverse external factors, which is the experience of peer violence. What is distinctive about the narrative in question is the characteristic structure of experience which takes the form of a descending lifeline curve.

In the preamble, which is Adam's first, spontaneous attempt to capture his life story in its entirety, he signals the most important phases of its progression, as he also formulates the basic features of his biography. He begins his story by describing a complicated childhood, filled with pain and suffering, marked by illness, numerous hospital stays, operations and lengthy rehabilitation. Importantly, narrator does not make his illness the main thread of the story, but presents it solely as a factor causing further difficulties and perturbations in his life. The starting point for constructing his biography, violence and various related forms of peer harassment and bullying are the underlying problem. Painful childhood experiences have left deep and difficult to heal wounds in the narrator, becoming an important aspect of his self-image.

"I'd gained weight; this later turned out to be the cause of my later being scapegoated, ridiculed and a sort of physically and emotionally harassed. To be honest, I didn't have a lean build. Mine was more of a barrel rather than a stick. Mess started at my primary school. They would trip me, they would turn my backpack inside out, I was called names, showered abuse on, ridiculed, and occasionally

provoked to get into a fight. Well, I have always been used as a punchbag, you could say, because I would never fight back, I would rather use the pen more than the sword. Well, that did affect me greatly, as they would take advantage of it, so it was already a part of my very deep subconscious. It has left a scar in me that is in there to this day and that has contributed to my low self-esteem."

The quoted passage ends with a coda, namely, a brief assessment of the past life course and its impact on the current existential situation and self-understanding ("It has left a scar in me that is in there to this day and that has contributed to my low self-esteem.") At the same time, the narrator's attempt to explain and justify his current position seems significant, revealing the general nature of the narrator's personality, his reticence, sensitivity and gentleness ("I would rather use the pen more than the sword.")

Some signs of a threatening trajectory of suffering can easily be noticed in the presented narrative. Trajectory potential starts to be accumulated as early as his childhood. Experiencing violence from peers, as he lacks support and understanding from teachers and parents, throws the narrator into a state of deep tension, gradually inducing low self-esteem, the feeling of being inferior, useless and worthless ("Well, like I have already mentioned, low self-esteem, low self-assessment, no self-confidence, I was underestimating my own worth. That used to last until high school. Only, it was growing gradually, step by step.")

Accumulation of negative experiences and a growing state of apathy and sense of meaninglessness result in crossing the boundary between intentional action and passive response. Adam is finding it increasingly difficult to rise above his mounting problems, meet the high expectations of his family and take control of his own life. Despite his deepening sense of disintegration, he still tries to maintain a shaky balance of coping with his life, seeking new solutions and strategies for action. Consequently, he tries to become indifferent to human injustice and alleviate the hardship of existence by suppressing grief, holding back anger and closing himself within the boundaries of his own 'self'. He adopts an attitude of passivity and limits contact with the social world in an attempt to maintain a state of homoeostasis, minimise suffering and reduce the risk of making a mistake ("I wouldn't go out to play with my friends, I wouldn't play football, I wasn't able to do these things"). Using a well-developed mechanism to modulate his emotions, he tries to function fairly properly in the group, as he confines his true 'self': "If I hadn't held back my emotions, it could have ended up differently, I could have experienced a sort of swing of emotions and it could have ended badly, maybe not for me, but, well, for other people. They might have found me strange because now I'm happy and then I'm sad, a strange person. So, I definitely used to block that expression of emotion among people."

In his interactions with people, he hides behind a mask of normative behaviour, hiding his 'true face'. Because he is constantly afraid of failure and the associated heightened state of internal tension, he does everything he can to avoid having to take risks and exercise his freedom: "That's how I've always been. When I take a risk, it takes so much stress that it will be enough for me for a very

long time. That's why I choose a conservative lifestyle, because I like keeping my stoic attitude, that calmness, that security, that safety valve." Interestingly enough, although the man is aware that human contact is a source of strong psychological discomfort for him, the prospect of long-term loneliness is not desirable either ("I will be left all alone and that is what I fear most").

Destabilising the unstable balance of coping with everyday life comes when the narrator realises that his adopted way of being does not solve the problem, but on the contrary, it makes it even worse. Adam observes that attempts to safeguard himself from suffering and protect himself from the volatility of fate lead his existence astray, and they become an expression of a profound crisis of his existence. The narrator tries to relieve the built-up tension in solitude, crying and through the experience of emotional catharsis: "Most often it manifests itself to me by yelling and crying into my pillow, for example."

When the man forms a close, intimate relationship with a woman, it becomes a turning point in his biography. Certain markers of biographical transformation can be found in the description of this passage of his life like surprise and the discovery of new possibilities: "We had a lot things deeply in common and we got along really very well, without words and you could tell she was cast in the same mould, literally a mirror image of me. We were the perfect match, like a hand and a glove. You could say I was happiest at that time in my life. My life was getting better. My self-esteem was on a rise. I believed in myself more which means that all was going to pan out well."

When he breaks up with his life partner, his organisation of daily life and self-orientation breaks down. The experience of failure in interpersonal relationships is accompanied by a massive accumulation of other problems, resulting in a complete loss of the ability to do anything, a loss of hope to improve his well-being and find meaning in his existence. Adam begins to experience a state of pervasive doubt, suspicion and distrust of the world and his close ones. The culmination of upsetting events results in a sense of existential 'homelessness', the drama of losing his identity and even the desperate thought of taking his life:

"First of all, I had this thought, 'the world would be a better place without me', yes that was what I most often thought that everyone would be better off without me there. The other thing I thought about was that I would have freed myself from everyone else and I would have finally had a break from it all. I just came to the realisation that since nobody liked me anyway, as they bullied me, as I was a laughingstock and so on, they'd have been better off if I wasn't there." The thought of committing suicide goes hand in hand with the need to free himself from the hardships of everyday life, to rid himself of the burden of life and to get out of the existential trap of living.

In attempting to theoretically work through the breakdown of his orientation system and trajectory, Adam searches for possible reasons for his suffering, attempting to redefine himself. Because he feels completely incapacitated by fate, betrayed, rejected and vulnerable, he willingly positions himself in the role of

victim, adopting a role of a voluntarily suffering person: "I can't explain it, can't comprehend it, but I help others, I give them great advice, I can support them, but nobody has given me any idea. I don't know, I take it as a sort of purpose in life God gave me that 'you will be a martyr for yourself, and help others'. This is how I explain it to myself. I don't know why I can't help myself but I can help others."

2.1. Role of a voluntarily suffering person

As he fosters the role of a martyr within himself, the man is bitter about his unrequited feelings, laments his fate, complains about the law of necessity, the injustice and hostility of the world, surrendering passively to his destiny ("I as a victim"). In doing so, he strongly focuses on the wrongs he has suffered, his unfulfilled needs and desires, he keeps taking a tragic view and he constantly ponders on his past. This attitude of voluntary suffering is accompanied by his having a sense of entitlement and demanding more from life: "I wish a person would arrive who would help me get up from my knees after all that has happened. I am afraid that the longer I carry on, the worse it will get, but maybe at some point, in this dense forest, there will be a clearing where there will be a forest nymph who will break the spell for me." The man waits for his grievances to be heard and his expectations to be met, relieving himself of the responsibility of working on his own biography. He lives in an atmosphere of resentment towards the world, moral stagnation, expecting initiative on the part of fate and those around him.

The role of the victim he enacts is well reflected by the linguistic forms used in the text. It is dominated by passive voice expressions, impersonal predicates, negative forms, reflexive verbs indicating a lack of possibility, and third-person expressions illustrating actions taken towards the subject: "I was ridiculed", "he targeted me", "I was judged", "it was hard for me", "I didn't have a lean build", "he took advantage of that", "I didn't go out", "I didn't play", "I couldn't", "she told me", "it hurt me a lot", "I was disliked there", "I was left in the lurch", "I don't think of myself in a positive way, "I was tripped", "my backpack was turned inside out", "I was called names, showered abuse on, ridiculed", "they tried to provoke me", "I was always a punchbag", "they took advantage", "I had no strength", "it didn't work", "I cannot comprehend", "I can't understand", "he threw me about", "I fell", "I couldn't", "she told me to call", "I didn't see the point", "I had no sporting skills", "I had no evidence", "I couldn't", "I'm a pessimist", "I was a perfect victim". The role of a victim, as can be seen from the expressions quoted, is apparent first of all in the depreciation and belittling his own worth, low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence.

2.2. Subject's attempts to justify his helplessness

Adam justifies his own helplessness quoting his problematic character, bad environmental role models, his upbringing and the experience of harm from his peers. He places the responsibility for the tragedy of his own existence on the

social environment, seeing it as the main factor restraining his movements and paralysing his creative activity. In an attempt to shake off the burden of freedom, he seeks various excuses, calling himself: a romantic, sensitive person, scapegoat, martyr and introvert ("I suspect that not only do I suffer from depression, but I'm also an HSP, a highly sensitive person"). He uses his character traits and innate qualities as a straightforward basis for his reasons for not taking action. Filled with resentment, regret and distrust of people, he feels insecure, weak and threatened, fearful of being hurt by those around him. He fears that he will be hurt again, unfairly judged and unfoundedly accused: "A bad reputation sticks a person. For example, someone spreads a rumour and people start to turn away from me. This is quite likely, because people are different, they are two-faced, they are insincere, they want to cause trouble to someone."

The man makes no attempt to practically work on the trajectory and gain control over it. He is unable to free himself from its destructive bonds, shed his pathological anxiety and regain his sense of agency. Conversely, he develops various strategies that fail to work dealing with the problem, which clearly block the process of transformation in the identity area. The trajectory mechanism thus begins to resemble a negative feedback loop, taking the form of a trap. The lack of hope to free himself from the trap of the trajectory and insufficient awareness of his own freedom result in the transformation of the initial suffering into other problem areas. According to the theory of Fritz Schütze (2012a, 450-451), three types of transformation can be distinguished here: 1) Quasi-metaphysical: The repeated experience of failure and the constant breakdown of expectation patterns result in a disintegration of trust in the world order and a breakdown of trust in its fairness; 2) Interactional level of trajectory distortion: The repeated experience of suffering in interpersonal relationships leads to feelings of insecurity in dealing with others and paralysis of interpersonal skills; 3) Identity transformations: The man loses his sense of 'self' and previously accumulated biographical resources prove ineffective and inadequate for his current existential situation.

2.3. Subject's problems with defining his own identity

In this case, a prolonged experience of contempt, violence and lack of recognition becomes the main factor blocking the attainment of an authentic and coherent identity. The problem also stems from a deep sense of discrepancy between the need to follow his conscience and fulfil his vocation and the desire to fulfil a commonly accepted social role. In consequence, the subject adopts a negative identity, which characteristically accepts negative messages regarding the images of himself and the world. The identity is marked by low levels of cohesion, instability and vulnerability to external influences. Adam has a sense of not being good, capable and competent enough to be able to spin and implement his own biographical action plans. Adopting a negative identity propels a vicious cycle of failure, blocking the choice of new action strategies and limiting the possibility of

transforming the state of anxiety into constructive action and thus neutralising the potential for trajectory. The man does not accept himself, his character traits and his appearance, wanting to become someone else ("looking in the mirror, I would change everything"). Clinging to some idealised vision of himself, unable to rid himself of himself, he chooses, in Søren Kierkegaard's terms (1982), 'sickness unto death', plunging into despair. A lack of self-acceptance is accompanied by a lack of self-confidence, a refusal to recognise his own freedom and to take control of his own life: "I look in the mirror and declare 'I don't want to look in the mirror because it makes me sick'. I'm looking at a stranger. I don't believe in my worth and my abilities." The fear of freedom and, at the same time, the resistance to his own necessity become the cause of experiencing an extremely strong inner conflict. The more Adam pushes away the realisation of his own freedom and, at the same time, the more strenuously he struggles against his external and psycho-physical necessity, the greater his suffering grows.

Because the narrator gives up working on his own biography and working on his destructive trajectory potential, hence he condemns himself to function in a state of limbo and existential homelessness: "I do everything on one breath and my brain has kind of switched off by now. And so it has been until now." By choosing an inauthentic mode of existence, he perpetuates the tendency to constantly 'police himself', control emotions and 'brace' his own behaviour. Lack of determination and refraining from creative activity go hand in hand with the fear of uncertainty and the loss of a sense of relative security.

The man's self-portrait is marked by his attitude to his own past. Recollecting only his negative images and memories and recording his past in a rigid memory framework effectively block access to alternative ways of perceiving reality, resulting in the adoption of a fatalistic approach to life, which clearly reduces its dynamics. The man's behaviour resembles a vicious circle. Closing himself in a circle of negative experiences increases feelings of alienation and exacerbates the state of low self-esteem. When he constantly recreates painful past events in his mind, he perpetuates a schematic way of thinking. Adam interprets his life solely as a failure. He explains each of his setbacks, such as for example his break-up with his life partner, to validate his low self-esteem. By focusing exclusively on his negative states of mind, he constructs a narrative in which he becomes a tragic character.

Although the life story presented above illustrates a trajectory of suffering, some fragments also show features inherent in institutional patterns of expectation. The latter ones include Adam's attempts to meet social demands, including the expectations of peer groups, even though they are incomprehensible and problematic for him. This condition results in role diffusion. At its root lies the conflict between social expectations and the impossibility of adhering to them. Being himself is in contrast with playing a role according to social expectations, norms and rules. Adam finds it very difficult to adapt to his role of a man and to accept the characteristics of that role. His preferred qualities of affection, subtlety and obedience are at odds with the patterns of manly behaviour. In order to adapt

to society, the narrator hides his tenderness, tears and emotions, as he does not allow himself to be moved and show weakness. He therefore plays the role of being manly, strong and decisive, even though this behaviour seems alien to him and incompatible with his personality structure:

"I can't cry, as this would be rather unacceptable according to the stereotypes of today's society. A guy is supposed to be manly, he is supposed to be tough, he is supposed to be made of steel, have a lumberjack beard, a lumberjack haircut, have a lumberjack shirt and hunt for food and dinner on his own. Well, that's not me. I am the total opposite of that. I am a female version of a man. I write poetry, I can distinguish colours well, I don't have a voice as deep as a well, so it seems to me that the worst thing is that I can be delicate and emotional enough for some to consider it a flaw in a man. I am afraid that I will be perceived by society as, quote, a faggot rather than a man."

The problems of defining his own identity is expressed in the many contradictions in his perception of himself and the world. On the one hand, the man declares indifference and resilience to the harm he has suffered, while on the other, he strongly experiences his own isolation and loneliness. Moreover, he considers himself to be an extremely emotional, compassionate and sensitive person (he writes poems, reads poetry) and at the same time declares a rational approach to the world, pointing to the relevance of rational arguments, scientific findings and cause-and effect relationships ("I would rather stick to this material world. I understand my love not in terms of spirituality, but I take it more in terms of biology and hormones that stimulate the mind"). Other contradictions revealed in the narrative include happiness contrasted with the unfavourable nature of fate, the desire for solitude contrasted with sharing life with another person and the real world contrasted with the utopian one.

Adam lives in two worlds: an idealised world, imbued with a longing for harmony, unity and happiness, and a world of real everyday life, marked by numerous contradictions. He dreams of a world without violence, problems, brutality, filled with mutual respect, help and love. Failure to acknowledge basic existential facts, including accepting the duality of his own existence, makes the man feel unhappy in the real world. He reacts to each of his failures and inability to realise his plan with a strong sense of hurt and disappointment, losing motivation to overcome subsequent difficulties in life. Moreover, his longing for an idealised future becomes synonymous with a yearning to be cared for, loved, interested in the environment and given the ability to think positively:

"I'd like to be happy, which means waking up and immediately smiling instead of saying 'Jesus, fucking hell' like in 'Day of the Wacko'. I wish I didn't wake up just like that, and that would already make me happy. I just need a sense of love, I need such – to put it nicely – protection, in inverted commas, security. I would like another person to hug me so tenderly and I would feel safe simply."

The adoption of a (pseudo) identity and the objectification of his self are clearly accompanied by his deficit of appropriate educational influences. Adam is

on his life path where he does not meet people who are personal role models for him to follow. He accuses his school teachers of indifference, a dismissive attitude towards their students, lack of commitment and sensitivity to the problems and concerns of young people. He points out their inappropriate behaviour, lack of support and recognition: "They were mute, as if no-one lifted a finger, none of them took any interest, there was no initiative at all (…) Some teachers said, for example, I was good for nothing or said, 'Good god, how are you going to pass this' or something like that, and so, it all accumulated in me, bit by bit. This kind of things has built up my pessimism". He memorises and stores unpleasant words said to him, depriving him of his dignity, discriminating, objectifying and relegating him to insignificance. What is more, he believes that his time at school contributed to his attitude of resignation and moral indifference, becoming a source of spiritual 'numbness' ("I have learnt to actually switch off a bit, to become sort of numb").

The analysis of the narrative presented makes it possible to reconstruct the profile of a person that is completely helpless when facing the world, lost, unable to give his life a deeper meaning. The experiences prior to the suffering trajectory being triggered and the subject adopting the role of victim include rejection by the environment, facing peer violence and failures to establish a relationship with the world. They all result in his difficulties in defining his own identity and – which is related – in reflectively and responsibly confronting the conflicts he experiences.

Conclusion

The use of Fritz Schütze's concept of the trajectory of suffering in the study of young adults' life experiences enables to capture the wide range of senses and meanings they give to their problems, crises and difficulties in life. At the same time, the interpretation of biographies based on the presented concept provides an opportunity to reconstruct the process of forming attitudes towards unfavourable life circumstances. The narrative analysed above shows how life's difficulties and negative social arrangements contribute to the adoption of an attitude of escape into suffering. Since the man telling the biography is unable to relate to his life experiences in terms of values and the meaning of existence, he chooses not to act and closes himself off, adopting the role of victim and a voluntarily suffering person. He does not see his fate as a challenge, but only as a destiny, refraining from getting involved in actual projects. By succumbing to the logic of misfortune, he unconsciously plunges into a spiral of failure and suffering, treating random circumstances as a source of despair, a reason for total loneliness and anguish. The man uses up all his vitality to constantly analyse his misfortunes and fight against his inevitable fate, falling into the state of existential 'homelessness'.

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The Sociological View of a Residence for Ukrainian Women Run by Pallottine Priests in Ołtarzew near Warsaw. The PPPiW Research Report Based on Application of the Youth Studies Approach

Socjologiczny obraz domu dla ukraińskich kobiet prowadzonego przez księży pallotynów w Ołtarzewie k. Warszawy. Sprawozdanie z badań PPPiW w perspektywie aplikacji analiz juwentologicznych

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Abstract: This text presents sociological research conducted by sociologists from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in 2023 in the Pallottine Centre "Future for Ukraine". Taking into consideration social characteristics of the research sample consisting of the Ukrainian women – war refugees – the researchers adopted qualitative methodology based on the semi-structured interview technique. The paper-based interview scenario was a research instrument, and the respondents replied via written essay directly on the sheets handed out to women. All the questions were translated into Ukrainian. The Ukrainian women who stayed in Ołtarzew described experience and attitudes towards eight spheres: specificity of the place, adaptation, safety, religiosity, emotions, problems, losses, plans, and dreams. Ultimately 28 women who had lived in the Centre participated in the research. They were characterised by social-demographic heterogeneity that allowed to show complexity of their life in the current situation.

Keywords: Ukrainian women, Ołtarzew, war, adaptation, safety, emotions

Abstrakt: Niniejszy tekst stanowi informację o badaniach socjologicznych przeprowadzonych przez socjologów z Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w 2023 r. w pallotyńskim Centrum „Przyszłość dla Ukrainy". Z uwagi na charakterystykę społeczną badanej próby, która składała się z ukraińskich kobiet – uchodźczyń wojennych – zdecydowano się na aplikację jakościowej metodologii opartej na technice wywiadu częściowo ustrukturyzowanego. Narzędziem badawczym stał się papierowy scenariusz wywiadu, a formą udzielania odpowiedzi esej pisemny udzielany bezpośrednio na rozdanych kobietom kartach – warto dodać, że wszystkie pytania przetłumaczono na język ukraiński. Przebywające w Ołtarzewie Ukrainki opisywały swoje doświadczenia i postawy odnośnie ośmiu obszarów: specyfiki miejsca, adaptacji, bezpieczeństwa, religijności, emocji, problemów, strat oraz planów i marzeń. Ostatecznie w badaniach wzięło udział 28 kobiet – mieszkanek Centrum – o heterogenicznych charakterystykach społeczno-demograficznych, co pozwoliło na oddanie wielowątkowego obrazu ich funkcjonowania w obecnych uwarunkowaniach.

Słowa kluczowe: ukraińskie kobiety, Ołtarzew, wojna, adaptacja, bezpieczeństwo, emocje

Introduction

Russian Federation's military aggression that intensified on February 24, 2022 triggered human movements of migratory and refugee character. Significant numbers of the defenceless victims of the war conflict, especially women and children, found refuge in Poland. One of the asylums for the Ukrainian women was the "Future for Ukraine" Centre run by Pallottine priests in Ołtarzew near Warsaw. Previously, in that place there was a well-known sacral site (theological seminary and parish) with a long and interesting history. The meeting in Ołtarzew of the two radically different groups as regards their social, gender, national, status, structural, confessional, and other characteristics opened a fascinating field for research undertaken by the members of the Research Laboratory of the Polish Values and Attitudes Measurement (Polish: Pracownia Badawcza Polskiego Pomiaru Postaw i Wartości – PPPiW)[1], affiliated to the Institute of Sociological Sciences of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw.

1. Inspiration for the research

The constantly incoming news about the development of military actions and the brutality of Russian forces caused a great stir in the Polish public debate. The Polish society almost immediately adopted a supportive attitude towards the refugees arriving from beyond the eastern border. Among them there were predominantly women, children, the elderly, and those whose physical abilities did not allow them to engage in armed combat with the Russian occupier. A pro-social orientation focusing on granting asylum was also adopted in the Society of Catholic Apostolate, i.e., the congregation of Pallottine priests in Ołtarzew, decided to adapt facilities previously used by clerics for the needs of those currently most in need. These actions were part of the historical traditions of hospitality in Polish homes, especially in difficult, extraordinary situations, such as the armed conflict in the east.

The team of sociology researchers from PPPiW decided to take a closer look at this situation – the entire spectrum of life of Ukrainian women in conditions that were completely new to them. When describing the sociological conditions of the meeting of Ukrainian women with the Polish Pallottines, which took place on the Polish soil, the circumstances of this specific contact are worthy noting in relation to the characteristics of both collectivities. In the realities of a sacral site (seminary), this meeting took place under significantly differentiated conditions. Both parties basically in every socio-demographic characteristic (demographics) represented completely different statuses, and therefore the resulting social roles. The extreme heterogeneity of the two collectivities (Pallottine staff and Ukrainian residents) can therefore be considered typologically, as a difference in nationalities, but also in ethnic and linguistic terms (Polish-Ukrainian), group (us-them), gender

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[1] Rich archive of the research, conference and publishing activities is available on the internet page: https://is.pppiw.uksw.edu.pl/.

(men-women), religions (Catholics/Orthodox or Greek Catholics), and status/ class (clergy-priests / secular women with children). It has inspired an interesting cognitive contrast and the need to establish and further typify mutual contacts.

The PPPiW team was also aware of the uniqueness of the situation – the women staying in Ołtarzew were characterized by high rotation and variability in their numbers during specific periods, e.g. during religious holidays. Therefore, the research activities went extremely smoothly – the conceptualization of the project was implemented during the early spring of 2023.

2. Methodology and organization of research and description of the research sample

The first, introductory meeting of the team members with potential participants of the study – the Ukrainian residents of Ołtarzew – took place on April 5, 2023. During this meeting, all general issues were discussed, the idea of the research was explained, and participants were encouraged to participate. The next meeting, held on May 25, had clearer topic, all technical issues were explained, including how to fill in the part with socio-demographic data (demographics). Efforts were also made to encourage Ukrainian women to participate in this project, explaining to them the significance of their statements and the scientific importance of the sociological image of their daily reality. On May 31 – during another visit – a paper research instrument was distributed, i.e. an interview scenario with questions. Answers were finally collected during the last visit – on July 5. During all these field meetings in Ołtarzew, basically all members of the research team spoke up. They explained in detail the purpose of the research, its principles and ensured about anonymity and exclusively research use of the obtained information. Moreover, during these meetings, the Ukrainian women asked questions and seemed interested in that initiative. It should also be mentioned that the PPPiW team consulted with the Pallottine administrators of Ołtarzew, agreeing on the next stages of research activities and received a great support and understanding. Together, it was possible to carry out the entire research procedure, i.e. field research of a qualitative character.

The PPPiW team initially assumed that the research group would mainly consist of young women – mothers of small children or those without offspring – as people who were most at risk due to the cruelty of war. Finally, 28 women with diverse social characteristics participated in the study. Their age ranged from 18 to 70 years – the four youngest participants declared an age from 18 to 22 years, nine identified themselves as thirty-year-olds (range 30-37), six women declared the age of forty (range 40-48), two indicated 51 years, while the five oldest participants in the study declared an age range from 61 to 70 years. In addition, two women did not share their age at all. Thus, almost half of the women participating in the study can be described as young. Education also turned out to be different (three women declared it as basic, nine vocational, six secondary, and the remaining ten as higher).

The Ukrainian women come from the following regions: Kharkiv (five), Zaporizhia (five), Dnipropetrovsk (four), Khmelnytskyi (three), Sumy (three), Kyiv (two), and one each from Volyn, Poltava, Ternopil, Mykolaiv and Lviv. In addition, one of the women did not provide information about her origin. Marital status can be described as follows: seven single women, 11 married women, two women in partnerships, three divorced and five widows. Most women declared having children, except for five. Seven women declared having one child, nine women – two children, and six women having three. One of the women stated that she had six children. Having a job was declared by slightly more than half of the women participating in the study – 15 out of 28. The majority – 24 women – professed faith, two expressed the opposite position, and another two did not provide information about their religious attitudes. Thus, the sample has been diverse that would allow obtaining cross-sectional data from women coming from different environments, additionally representing different lifestyles and structural characteristics.

Ultimately, eight thematic areas appeared in the research instrument. They represented the basis for the essay-type answers provided by female respondents. The qualitative sociological methodology was applied. The technique was an indirect interview, and the research instrument was an interview scenario that was to be completed by the respondents on their own. At the end of the research instrument, the already mentioned fragment with socio-demographic data was included, so that the basic characteristics of the analysed community could be reconstructed. The document was translated into the native language of the women, i.e. Ukrainian. The PPPiW research team decided to implement this specific type of research instrument due to the need to ensure anonymity, but also the accuracy and reliability of the answers given. The real-time interviews with the Ukrainian women had been considered as well, but the participation of a third party – a Ukrainian language translator – proved problematic, as the statements obtained might not fully reflect the actual attitudes of women. Therefore, a collection of anonymous essays and the translation of handwritten statements was in this particular case an authenticated action – thanks to this, it was possible to preserve all dimensions of anonymization of the research material.

The future essays consisted of eight issues: specificity of the place, adaptation, safety, religiosity, emotions, problems, loss, and plans and dreams. These issues were described with the help of guiding questions. The area in perspective was quite extensive, and the intention of the research team was to show the fullness of the "new life" of the Ukrainian women, whose life was marked by armed conflict. Military aggression resulted in emigration, which is turning into a story of increasingly longer life abroad, with a full spectrum of adaptation or its lack in many areas. Individual threads were not detailed in the dispositions (questions) directed to the Ukrainian women, as the subjects themselves decided on the scope of the content in their essays, they independently determined their meaning and the number of presented narrative threads. The study represented a non-directive request to share the thoughts on residential situation of the Ukrainian women in the centre run by the Pallottine priests.

3. Selected themes from the statements of the surveyed women

Below, there are only some of the statements obtained from the collected content-rich essays. The first distinguished area of reference was the specificity of the place. This particular topic is characterized in sociology by a large number of references (Siciński 1992, 9). The Ukrainian women staying in Ołtarzew described significant elements influencing their residence in this specific location. They referred to their life situation, commented on amenities, but also difficulties in caring for their children or commented on the organization of everyday life. Below there is one of such statements.

"Currently, I live in the Pallottine Centre in Ołtarzew. It is a very nice place, beautiful trees, flowers, near the church where you can pray, close to the Centre there is a wonderful park where you can rest and walk. Near the Centre there are benches where you can sit and gather your thoughts. Think about how to live on. I like to write poems and music. I really like it in the Centre. My daughter and I have a separate room with all amenities. We prepare concerts and feel needed. We perform at them and give people positive emotions, that despite the war in our country we are not alone. Many people support us and do good for our children and for us. It is a blessed place where we were accepted as a family and surrounded with care to make our life easier during the war. I am very grateful to them for that. I want to end with my poem.
Now we are all waiting for a miracle from life,
When the war will end and silence will reign again.
Our children will not hear explosions or alarms,
Peace will reign all over the world, a hundred roads will be open".

These are a few sentences from my poem. Sponsors from different countries and the Polish government come to us. I am very grateful to everyone for the gifts for our children. It's nice to see the smile of our children" (K5, 65)[2].

The account of a 65-year-old widow that had a vocational education level and declared having three children shows the emphasis on characteristic features of nature (trees and flowers in the park). The very place therefore encourages praying and contemplation. She emphasizes good living conditions and appreciates her new place of residence. She even describes it as "blessed". She also expresses gratitude for the support received – stating that they were accepted as if they were a family and provided with care. The woman also mentions that she has artistic abilities, so she organizes concerts with her daughter also staying in Ołtarzew. Her reflectiveness can also be seen in the poem with which she illustrated her statement. In the end, she emphasizes the smile that appears on the faces of Ukrainian children, which is a living proof of their well-being in the Polish asylum.

[2] Although in the qualitative sociological research researchers move away from typical designations of specific respondents (used in the description of respondents in the quantitative research). However, as to the subject statements, it was decided to introduce rather brief signs – the designation K5 means the fifth woman (out of 28), who decided to share her opinions, while second number indicates age.

Another area of research exploration was the issue of adaptation. It was interesting to examine whether the descriptions of the house in Ołtarzew coincide with the process of general adaptation to the conditions that Ukrainian women encounter.

> "During this period, since I live here, I have already got used to it enough. In winter we had various performances – scenes, concerts, over which we worked with other mothers which brought us closer to one another. Every resident of our building – its integral part, and now, when for one reason or another several people have left the centre, there is such a feeling as if I let go of some dear, close person, without whom life is not so colourful. The Pallottine priests always greet us with a smile and warmth, every time they say warm, kind words, they care, ask if everything is okay. It's very pleasant. Father Krzysztof is particularly friendly and kind-hearted, Rector Father Mirosław and Father Piotr want to help, advise, support as best and as much as they can. And these collective trips, they renew a lot. Of course, I miss home, my loved ones very much. Since the beginning of the war, I haven't been home at all. But in Poland, I came back to life. Even in Ukraine, I didn't feel the way I do here. This oppression, Sovietism, which prevailed in us, in my behaviour gradually left and here I started to acquire other values" (K6, 32).

The above statement of a 32-year-old married woman with higher education and declaring having six children indicates a positive course of adaptation, i.e. getting used to the conditions of the Pallottine house. She also emphasizes the disturbed integrity of the entire centre, when people who have lived here so far left, which was the sad experience for her. She emphasizes the great role of the Pallottine priests in the positive course of adaptation, pointing to their diverse support (smile, warmth, help, kind words, involvement in the well-being of women staying in the centre). In addition, she expressed longing for home, however, noting that only in Poland did the woman herself "come alive", as she experienced other values than – as she admits – rooted in Ukraine "Sovietism". Certainly, the values acquired in the Pallottine centre will allow her to look at her life and the current situation from a slightly different perspective than before.

Another issue, no less important from the point of view of staying in a specific place and in a specific situation, is the feeling of safety. Probably for everyone it seems obvious that in a situation of existential threat, a condition that provides comfort of life without any threats seems desirable. The sense of security, as the American psychologist A.H. Maslow wrote, is one of the main needs of a human being. This category in his hierarchy of needs is located just after physiological ones (Maslow 1990, 76). In turn, according to L. Korzeniowski, it is an objective condition of lack of threat, which is subjectively perceived by individuals or groups (Korzeniowski 2000, 432). In the presented study, this area contained the following questions: Do you feel safe?; In what respect?; What does it result from? Below, two statements were quoted, which are similar in terms of content to the confessions of other women.

"Yes, of course I feel safe here, because it's a different country and the war is far from here. There are no sirens here, the lanterns shine at night, you can walk in the park, now you can sunbathe by the river, go with the children to the playground, in short, live normally and not be afraid that you may not wake up in the morning, because a rocket flew in, or a window was blown out and it can hit your head, or again a rocket to the house where the children are sleeping, and then fragments of their bodies are collected on nearby roofs and there is nothing to bury" (K3, 35).

"Yes, here I feel safe, because here there is, first of all, my mother, and second, the atmosphere of this place creates a sense of security, a gate, the Centre is fenced, there are cameras. The feeling that people here are surrounded by care. Besides, the room can be locked, that's also important. The laughter of children gives a sense of being able to breathe calmly, relax, enter your room and do what you want without instructions and time constraints, so it can be called freedom" (K2, 30).

Just these two statements of two thirty-year-olds with respectively basic vocational and secondary education are a testimony to the condition of lack of negative emotions. It confirms that the Pallottine house provides appropriate conditions for experiencing well-being, which consists of a sense of economic stabilization and a guarantee of protection for oneself and children.

Despite the need to defend oneself, the loved ones, the property and above all the homeland come to the fore, asking questions about religion, about faith in God, about His presence in the face of daily threats also seem to be justified in a situation of existential threat due to war actions. This is a situation that the American sociologist P.L. Berger described as a borderline situation, as it threatens human existence. Therefore, in the research instrument, a segment on religion and religiosity was included. In addition to the demographic questions, that concerned confession and declaration of faith as well as involvement in religious worship, this problem area was determined by the following three questions: How does your religiosity express itself?; Has the war changed your religiosity, and if so, to what extent?; Does religion give meaning to your life? Below, some of the statements were quoted, especially those indicating the impact of war on religiosity.

"The war did not change my religiosity. I know there is God in this world. He is with us, the truth is with us! And all these monsters will be punished for their atrocities. Thanks to our strength, our faith in God, in justice, we have become an incredibly strong nation. We are so united and mobilized! We have become true brothers and sisters, who will surely survive this war, return all their lands, survive all this sorrow and build a new, independent state. I believe in Us, I believe in our future! God is with us! God is in the heart of each of us!!! God will give us the strength to survive all this!!!" (K10, 41)

"The war has changed not only my religiosity, but my whole life. Faith in Almighty God is everything that can always be in the heart, regardless of circumstances. It has only increased and strengthened my faith. Everything happens by the will of God. I am a Christian and I have no intention of changing my faith. I never stop thanking God for everything, because with faith we went in an unknown direction and did not know what awaited us. Nowadays, I can rely only on Almighty God" (K2, 37).

These two statements alone show that war can both strengthen individual religiosity and weaken or even destroy it. The latter attitudes, however, are less numerous. From other, quite extensive statements, it turns out that the religiosity of the people studied was mainly shaped in the family circle or in a place of worship (Catholic or non-Catholic churches). Hence there is an attachment to religious practices. This is a religiosity characterized by individual prayers, adherence to tradition and customs, observance of holidays and sometimes contacts with the clergy.

The sense-making dimension of religious faith, which was also referred in the study, deserves individual attention. In the borderline situations, a person seeks a reference point, an authority, which in his belief can allow him to survive and overcome sometimes traumatic moments. Believers often turn to religion, seeking support in it. Analysed evidence shows that religion allows to survive and conveys hope. In this case, only religious faith, the deep one, becomes a conveyor of support, hope and finally a sense of security (Zaręba 2008, 230). The following three statements seem to confirm this view.

> "I believe in God, it hasn't changed. Yes, it creates a meaning" (K24, 18).
> "Me and my family do not see the meaning of life without close ties with the Church, without its teaching, position and creating an appropriate image in our minds" (K25, 40).
> "Faith is always with me. Without faith there is no meaning in life" (K19, 51).

It can be assumed that the religious identity of the women surveyed has its anchoring in the centuries-old tradition, which is present in the daily life of the Ukrainian society. Religion is located rather high in the axiological hierarchy. Its value is appreciated. The study shows that the professed religion – whether Orthodox or Catholic – conveys the sense of meaning in life, fills with hope and expands the scope of Transcendence in the life of quite a few people, especially in a situation of existential threat.

And finally, the issue of emotions, either positive or negative, that always accompany people, regardless of the situation in which they are currently found. As L. Golińska notes, "negative emotions (fear, regret, a sense of injury) last until the situation undergoes a clearly favourable change. Sadness lasts and does not disappear, time alone is not enough to stop feeling it; for fear, regret, a sense of injury to give way, an objective or subjective change in the situation is needed" (Golińska 2002, 29). Hence, among the questions in the structure of essays, the following issues were found: What emotions did you experience when the war broke out?; What do you feel now? And again, there are a few examples of statements.

> "No words in life can express the emotions that were born in us when the war began" (K10, 41).
> "These emotions cannot be expressed. Since the beginning of the war, we lived in the basement of a kindergarten. It was very scary and very dangerous. It's a pain, a fear for people. Children and adults were very scared" (K12, 45).
> "Emotions… It was very terrifying, because you don't know what to expect,

what to do, where and how to sleep, and it's better not to fall asleep, to react immediately if something happens. What things and documents to pack into this evacuation backpack, where to put it, so as not to forget about it on the run. To go to work or not to go, because the children will be left alone at home, and if something happens, they can get scared and they can be in fear and not be able to do anything… But you still go to work hoping that everything will pass quickly, because you need money, you have to feed the children somehow. There at work, when the sirens start, you run to the phone and call your older son to hurry with his brother to the corridor in the house, because there are no windows there, at least the glass will not fall, because there is no basement, the corridor is the only safe place. And in such a way five, ten times a day. You are always in fear because of that damned Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, because it is seven kilometres from our city and you think, what if it suddenly explodes and then it's the end for everyone. Then you still can't stand it and you go to another country in search of safety. At home, the old grandmother stays because she doesn't want to go anywhere, then you worry about her. And now I have the impression that my life is in suspense, and you are waiting for everything to end, to just start living!!!" (K3, 35)

For example, the account of a 35-year-old mother of two children, with secondary education, refers to the study of emotions, extreme feelings evoked by the threat of war. In this particular case, emotions are "amped up" additionally by the close location of the nuclear power plant, and the threats resulting from this type of energy acquisition are particularly well remembered in Ukraine due to the already historical catastrophe in Chernobyl. The woman emphasizes the permanence of tension, pointing to the "evacuation backpack" denoting a certain package of the most necessary things, further she gives a testimony about the difficult combination of fear for loved ones with the mundane – but how true even during the war – need to work and provide oneself and one's children. Work is anyway intermittent, because there is always a fear of how, for example, in the case of bombing, the children will behave and whether they will definitely go to some kind of asylum, that is, the corridor, which the woman defines as the safest, due to the lack of windows and averting the possible injuring oneself with shattered pieces of glass. Emotions and fear for loved ones do not cease even when leaving Ukraine – the woman's grandmother stayed there. Therefore, the woman's current existence is "life in suspense", waiting for real life, without any traumas and threats. In this particular case, the tempo of the statement itself is certainly noteworthy, the threat and the resulting emotions are directly given by the dynamic narrative intensifying the unstable mental state of this particular woman, who collided with borderline experiences. The threat to her own life and her children can be definitely considered as such.

At the end a certain sociological feature of observation is worth noting. Namely, apart from the collected empirical material – which became the basis for the analyses – the organisational meetings themselves provided additional and very interesting observations. The observation of the surveyed women revealed,

among others, that only some of them spoke during organizational meetings, sharing their experiences so far from staying in Ołtarzew. These were usually rather younger of the Ukrainian women. At the same time, one could not help feeling that one is dealing with lost, withdrawn people with the characteristics typical for migrants. They were even a bit distrustful of the researchers. Despite assurances of full research anonymity, the lack of some data in the demographics, and sometimes giving very "poor", laconic and truncated answers to key questions in thematic areas seem just to confirm these observations. It probably resulted from the far-reaching caution or distrust, or even fears about their life and the lives of their loved ones, especially husbands or partners fighting on the front. Nevertheless, the women were grateful for the hospitality and social assistance shown, most were convinced to participate in an anonymous study and share their experiences so far, emotional condition and plans for the future (Zaręba, Mejzner and Kawińska 2023).

Summary

The comments of the Ukrainian women are diverse, they emphasize their personal perspective of references to war, wandering, Poland, the Polish people and specifically Ołtarzew, generally the situation in which they are currently found in Poland. Even the essays collected from one person contained significant differences in the approaches to specific areas, e.g. on the one hand, it may be the appreciation of the place of residence itself – the Pallottine "Centre for Ukraine" – and on the other hand, general difficulties in adapting to the conditions that arose after February 2022, in which they had to live outside of their *habitat*. An equally wide range of references can be seen in the area of emotions, where there is a gratitude, on the one hand, but also a frustration, on the other, due to the ongoing war and the inability to return to their native land.

Since this is not a quantitative study, it is not possible to directly state a statistical relationship between variables – e.g. age and religiosity, gender and appreciation of the residence in Ołtarzew, etc. However, it can be seen that the two youngest (eighteen-year-old) participants in the study showed their desire to stay in Poland and develop, e.g. one of them wants to open and run a "circus studio for children", thus demonstrating her optimism and striving to realize her youthful dreams. On the other hand, it is precisely the youngest categories that have been affected extremely painfully by the war. The same woman has experienced the loss of three close people.

The analyses have therefore revealed a large cognitive potential of this particular community and some optional research plans for the future. Among them, there is a need to pay attention to children and young people, i.e. two generational categories of Ukrainians, for whom the war and the associated stay in Poland are significant experiences from the perspective of their biography – both in the near and distant perspective. The role of adaptation of youth to new conditions

will certainly be crucial here, which may – but does not have to – turn into assimilation into Polish culture and life practices. Therefore, serious consideration of conducting a similar type of research exclusively with young people is necessary to see if their statements are characterized by a specific – youthful optics.

Furthermore, the collected statements of Ukrainian women – along with a comprehensive sociological commentary – will be published at the turn of 2023 and 2024 in a research publication edited by Sławomir H. Zaręba, Mirosław Mejzner and Martyna Kawińska. The work will be published by the UKSW Academic Publishing House. The elements raised earlier, such as the heterogeneity of the research sample, but also the individual statements of the research participants, represent attention-grabbing empirical material, which can be an inspiration for other sociologists to research communities migrating to Poland and their attitudes towards the host country. This topic is therefore extremely relevant and in years to come will be a document of social life of the specific time – shelter given to the Ukrainian nation by Poles during the Russian war invasion.

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44(2023)1