

Research Article

Young Employee Security During the COVID-19 Pandemic—Polish Case Study

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Abstract: Security issues and human lives have always been inseparable. The feeling of security is the basic need of every individual. The outbreak of the pandemic has had major consequences for the operation of enterprises and their employees. The latter have faced a new, unpredictable, and rapidly changing situation, which has increased the level of fear and decreased the perception of security. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the perception of security of young Polish employees. To rate the level of security, the 5-degree Likert Scale was used. Furthermore, an attempt was made to determine whether actions undertaken by employers with respect to employee security improvement have been sufficient, or if it is necessary to expand the scope of support. In the course of analyses, it was established that the pandemic reduced the level of working conditions and economic security and had a negative impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of young employees.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic; economic security; safety; security of working condition

1. Introduction

The issue of security has accompanied humankind ever since its origins. Security holds the leading position in the field of desired values protected by individuals, social groups, and nations. To achieve and maintain optimum security levels in a given security context are the main goals of human actions [1]. Security issues and human lives have always been inseparable because they relate to human presence and ability to function in certain environments. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic posed a security threat to both states, organizations, and individuals.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been recognized as a global crisis. It has had a considerable impact on the operation of national economies and everyday lives of the citizens. They have faced a new, unpredictable, and rapidly

changing situation, which has elevated the level of fear and diminished the perception of security [2]. The pandemic has made people stay at homes, limit travels, reduce free-time activities and social life, and has led the healthcare system to the brink of efficiency abyss [3]. Its outbreak has had major consequences for the operation of enterprises and their employees, in terms of both morbidity among the employees and the considerable modifications introduced to limit the spread of the coronavirus in the workplace. During the Covid-19-related crisis, employees have faced immense pressure, excessive workload, uncertainty, and emotional strain [4–6]. Many have lost their jobs, either temporarily or permanently, many have had to work remotely, often without sufficient training. Those employed in the sectors considered to be key at the time of the pandemic (e.g. healthcare) have been overworked, overstressed, and overexposed to

viral infection [2].

In March 2020, due to the spread of COVID-19, first the state of the risk of epidemics, and then the state of epidemics was introduced. To prevent the pandemics, the Polish government implemented a number of limitations, including restrictions or prohibition, on certain types of business activities (such as catering or the hotel industry). This contributed to a significant deterioration of financial standing of enterprises and an increase of bankruptcy risk. For many employees, it meant the risk of losing their jobs. To combat the situation, the Polish government offered programmes supporting local entrepreneurs. The aids incorporated the so-called anti-crisis shields targeted at companies which recorded at least a 30% drop of income. Government support involved, among other things:

- subsidies for enterprises to cover the running costs of conducting business activities,
- contributions to employee remunerations,
- exemption from the payment of contributions to ZUS (Social Security Institution),
- subsidized interest rates on investment loans.

The key objective behind the specified shielding actions was to protect workplaces. However, despite state's support, the unemployment rate grew. In January 2021, it was 6.5% and was higher when compared to the preceding year by 1.1%. In the first quarter of 2021, 70.2 thousand jobs were lost. Job losses affected mainly the private sector [7]. This had a profound impact on the professional situation of many employees.

The majority of the research studies in the Covid-19 pandemic focus on its health consequences [8]. Research on this problem was conducted in Spain, China, Iran and the United States. Many authors believe that taking care of the mental health of the population is now essential [4,9,10]. A frequent research topic is also the impact of the epidemiological situation on the condition of the population's mental health, including the levels of anxiety, stress, and depression [3,11]. Special focus is placed on healthcare, gastronomy, or hotel industry due to considerable restrictions applied to the said branches. On the contrary, little attention is paid to the impact of the pandemic on the universally understood sense of security of employees with due regard to the physical, economic, and psychological aspects. Above all, there are few publications regarding the impact of Covid-19 on the feeling of security among young employees of the Polish enterprises, despite the fact that the pandemic has been spreading across Poland for nearly a year now. The author intends to bridge the gap, at least to some extent.

Given the growing or persisting number of the infected, the high mortality rate, and the limitations imposed by the Polish government to curb the spread of the virus, including quarantine measures and bans on conducting business operations, one may assume that the sense of security under the conditions of the pandemic might have weakened. Therefore, the purpose of the research was to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the perception of

security of young Polish employees.

Employees below the age of 30 represent the generation Z. It is assumed that the generation Z are individuals born post 1994, i.e., in the period of rapid technological advances [12]. This technological progress characterizes their varied approach to life and work. In the case of this generation, work serves only as an interlude between holidays; a mean to attain their goals, rather than a goal on its own. Young people think highly of education, are fluent in IT technology use and feel at ease in the virtual environment. Working remotely is not an issue for them. They expect employers to be flexible in terms of working hours and forms of employment and to become involved in the construction of programmes offering a healthy work-life balance [13]. What is more, they expect their employers to adapt the workplaces to their individual needs. Analyses of young employee safety levels might be of assistance in need recognition and development of an effective model of commitment building across the specified professional group.

1.1. The Notion of Security

Security has multiple meanings used in various domains and its understanding differs depending on the area of analysis [14]. The plurality of definitions stems from the fact that representatives from different scientific domains perceive and describe security in the light of knowledge and terminology regarding their particular disciplines [15]. Despite the above, the majority of researchers agree that security is an anthropocentric category. It may pertain as well to physical and natural phenomena, but it is always seen from the perspective of a human being as a social individual [16]. As the subject of security is human being, one can discuss safety in the context of people and relations among them [17].

The etymology of the word security is from the Latin *securitas*. It comprises two elements: *sine* (without) and *cura* (care, concern, trouble), which signifies lack of concerns [17]. Security has long been identified as a state which ensures certainty of existence and survival. Nowadays, such an approach is often questioned and deemed too narrow and conservative. In the new methodology, it means not only a guarantee of inviolable survival of a given object, but also freedom of its development [18].

In general, human security may be determined as a subjective state of experiencing peace, confidence, and absence of threats [19]. From an objective perspective, it is referred to as life conditions external in relation to people, frequently rated with an application of measurable indicators. From a subjective perspective, in turn, it refers to individual experiences of human beings. Both perspectives overlap. What is vital is how humans perceive and live through the current situation against a backdrop of mental comfort and absence of threats [20].

The sense of security is the foundation of effective operations of an individual [20]. It is shaped in the process

of evaluation of a situation one finds oneself in. Subject to one's mental factors and available information, an analogous external situation may be viewed differently by various parties [17]. An individual may feel secure in a situation of high risk or feel insecure in the conditions of high stability and social peace. The indicators relevant to the evaluation of a situation may be personal (for instance, emotional stability, the level of optimism), the method of evaluation of one's social surroundings, one's attitude and beliefs concerning the surroundings, as well as variable factors, such as one's mood or life situation [20].

Freedom from threats as a state in the functioning of a human being within the reality which surrounds him does not mean lack of risks. Instead, it means their acceptable level, which does not significantly limit the ability to function of the subject of security and allows one to attain his underlying goals [11]. One's subjective sensation of threats is reflected either by potential security or by a real danger in subject's consciousness (which may not correspond to the actual situation) and results from the system of needs and values or obsessions [21]. Given the foregoing aspects, we can distinguish the following four situations [10]:

- the state of insecurity (real threat, adequately perceived),
- the state of obsession (minor threat, inadequately perceived as major),
- the state of false security (major threat, inadequately perceived as minor),
- the state of security (minor threat, adequately perceived).

1.2. Security as the Employee's Basic Need

The need is the sensation of lacking something that – due to biological, social, and cultural reasons – an individual requires to live and develop [22]. It is a causative element of human activity. The most well-known concept of needs is the theory of Maslow. It presents human needs as a hierarchic system, wherein a relative satisfaction of the lower-level needs (physiological and safety needs) conditions the activation of higher-level needs. According to the Maslow's theory, safety needs (security, safety) occupy level two, directly following physiological needs, requisite to support existence. Therefore, they are the basic needs the satisfaction of which activates higher needs [23].

Czupryński states that the entire pyramid is the foundation for constructing the system of human safety (security) [17]. Physiological needs are related to the biological survival of the subject of security. They are the basis of security because, if the needs are not satisfied, the individual dies. Safety (security) as a separate category in the system of needs means freedom from threats for the subject of safety (security). The said freedom is reflected by a low level of aggression or its acceptable level seen as the ability of an individual (subject) to deal with the negative consequences of the threats. Belongingness and love needs are also associated with the sense of security. They refer to social

acceptance which allows functioning in a friendly environment. The exclusion of any human being from social life results in an extremely low feeling of security. Likewise, appreciation and respect can be achieved in the context of a given group of people. The elements detailed in the need hierarchy create a system of values for the subject of security because they account for what is important for one to survive, become independent from threats, and stand a chance resultant from acceptance and opportunities to develop [17].

Security is a rudimentary human need and plays an immense role in the valuation of one's surroundings and taking up actions [24]. The need refers to securing one's life conditions, i.e. ensuring good income, stable job, and social stability. Siek emphasizes that the security need corresponds to self-preservation, whereas its satisfaction is associated with the feeling of anxiety and fear [25]. The level of security is a measurable indicator of the level of life [20]. It evolves along the needs, values, and expectations of the subject of security and the change of external circumstances.

The foundation of correct functioning of an individual within societies and working environments is to satisfy his safety or security need. The security need constitutes motivation for acting and developing. It is not a permanent motivation but one activated when it is not satisfied [26]. Against this backdrop, security is treated as a factor causing action only when one feels shortage of the former. Therefore, a threat to security causes an increase in motivation for undertaking actions aimed at its restoration. This must not be a real threat; it suffices that a given human being anticipates its possible lack [20]. Thus, security is not a constant, unchangeable value. That is why, one of the major aspects of actions targeted at obtaining the right level of its satisfaction is systematic identification, observation, diagnosis, and modification of conditions creating the security environment [1].

2. Methodology of Research

The purpose of the research study was to identify the attitudes of young employees regarding the satisfaction of their security needs under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. To meet the specified goal, the following research problems were formed:

- How do young employees rate their security levels?
- How did the pandemic affect the sense of security of the working conditions, the sense of economic security and the wellbeing of young employees?
- What actions did the employers undertake to strengthen the sense of security amongst the young employed?

In the course of analyses, an attempt was made to determine whether the actions undertaken by employers with respect to employee security improvement proved sufficient or if it is necessary to expand the scope of their support.

To fulfill the research questions, first of all a review of

literature (both Polish and foreign) was performed. The review served as a theoretical basis for the development of a research tool and the conduct of further empirical analyses. The empirical analyses were quantitative in nature. They were carried out with the use of a diagnostic survey method with the application of the research tool, an online questionnaire. The research was conducted in February

2021, i.e. one year following the introduction by the Polish government of first restrictions due to the outbreak of the pandemic. The study was anonymous, and the participation was voluntary. The study sampling was targeted. The analysis included young employees below the age of 30. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Study Respondent Profile (N = 170).

Criterion	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Sex:		
Female	78	45.9
Male	92	54.1
Education		
Secondary Level	124	72.9
Higher Level	46	27.1
Seniority (professional experience):		
Up to 1 year	53	31.2
1-5 years	101	59.4
6-10 years	16	9.4
Position held:		
Manager	12	7.1
Administration officer	83	48.8
Physical employee	75	44.1
Type of Agreement:		
Employment Agreement concluded for an indefinite period	66	38.8
Employment Agreement concluded for a specific period	64	37.7
Contract of Mandate/Specific Work	37	21.8
Contract	2	1.2
Own business activity	1	0.5
Size of the enterprise:		
Up to 9 employees	27	15.9
10-49 employees	40	23.5
50-249 employees	31	18.2
250 and more	72	42.4
Type of ownership:		
Private enterprise	135	79.4
State-owned enterprise	30	17.7
Cooperative	5	2.9
Industry:		
Production	41	24.1
Trade	50	29.4
Services	79	46.5

A total of 170 respondents were surveyed, 45.9% of whom were women. The highest percentage of the respondents had a secondary-level education (72.9%) and occupied administrative positions (48.8%) or were physical workers (44.1%). The analysis of job seniority of the respondents revealed that the most employees, i.e. as many as 90.6% had work experience of less than 5 years, which corresponded to the age structure of the respondents. Those employed with private enterprises dominated the respondent structure (79.4%). The largest proportion of respondents was employed in the services sector (46.5%). 42.4% of the respondents represented enterprises employing over 250 people. Typically, the employees were employed under an employment agreement concluded for an indefinite (28.8%) or specific (37.7%) period.

2.1. Research Findings

The purpose of the research study was to evaluate the level of satisfaction of the broadly understood security need under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic with reference to:

- the sense of security of the working conditions,
- the sense of economic security,
- the general physical and mental wellbeing.

To assess the level of economic security and working conditions security, the 5-degree Likert Scale was used. Therefore, the studied employees were asked to evaluate their level of security on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented a very low sense of security and 5 – a very high sense of security. The results of the evaluation are illustrated by Table 2

The highest percentage of the respondents (40.0%) assessed their sense of security of working conditions as average. 23.4% of the respondents evaluated the security of the working conditions as high. Only 18.7% of the respondents evaluated the security of the working conditions as low or very low. The percentage of the respondents who positively evaluated the sense of working conditions security was, therefore, higher than those who evaluated it negatively. As a result, the mean level of the sense of security of working conditions in the studied group was 3.4 on the five-point scale. One may presume that this result

was affected by employee commitment to observe the rules of sanitary regime at work.

As far as the economic security is concerned, more than a half of the respondents (as many as 55.8%) saw it as low, or very low (6.6%). Only 7.0% of the respondents assessed his economic security as high or very high, whereas every 3rd evaluated it as being at an average level. Consequently, the mean level of the sense of economic security in the studied group was 2.4 on the five-point scale, and it was lower than the sense of security of the working conditions by 1 point.

In Table 3, you will see the results of an evaluation of the safety level of working conditions and economic safety by the type of activities conducted by employing organizations, i.e. manufacturing, trade or services. The analysis of the said data demonstrates that the highest rate of the respondents in each group rated average both the sense of economic security and safety of working conditions. However, when one compares individual groups, it is clear that employees in the services sector felt safer in terms of working conditions and the economy than workers in the trade and manufacturing sectors. The respondents employed in the services trade were more likely to rate the safety level as very high.

Table 2. Evaluation of the level of employee security under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic (N = 170).

Specification	N = 170		Average level of security	
	answers	n		%
Sense of security of working conditions	very low	7	4.1	3.4
	low	23	13.5	
	average	68	40.0	
	high	40	23.4	
	very high	32	18.7	
Sense of economic security	very low	11	6.6	2.4
	low	95	55.8	
	average	52	30.6	
	high	7	4.1	
	very high	5	2.9	

Table 3. Evaluation of the level of employee security under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic by trade (N = 170).

Industry	Specification	N = 170			Average level of security
		answers	n	%	
Production	Sense of security of working conditions	very low	1	2.3	3.5
		low	5	11.6	
		average	16	37.2	
		high	14	32.6	
		very high	7	16.3	
	Sense of economic security	very low	4	9.3	3.1
		low	8	10.6	
		average	15	34.9	
		high	13	30.2	
		very high	3	7.0	
Trade	Sense of security of working conditions	very low	2	4.1	3.2
		low	11	22.4	
		average	18	36.7	
		high	10	20.4	
		very high	8	16.3	
	Sense of economic security	very low	9	10.4	2.7
		low	12	22.5	
		average	17	34.7	
		high	7	14.3	
		very high	4	8.2	
Service	Sense of security of working conditions	very low	3	3.8	3.4
		low	8	10.3	
		average	29	37.2	
		high	17	21.8	
		very high	21	26.9	
	Sense of economic security	very low	5	6.4	3.2
		low	12	15.4	
		average	32	41.0	
		high	17	21.8	
		very high	12	15.4	

In the course of further research, the respondents were asked to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the change of the sense of security. The results are presented in Table 4.

35.9% of respondents said that his sense of security of working conditions weakened. Most respondents (59.4%) did not see any changes in the level of security of working conditions as a consequence of the outbreak of the pandemic. A far more pronounced scope of changes was recorded with respect to the sense of economic security. More than a half of the respondents (60.6%) claimed that during the Covid-19 pandemic their sense of economic security weakened. Only 34.1% of the respondents did not notice the effect of the pandemic on economic security. Thus, we can say that uncertainty, caused both by difficulties regarding the continuation of professional activities and the general conditions of the economy, has left employee economic security vulnerable. It is a consequence of a number of negative changes the Covid-19 pandemic has introduced in the professional lives of employees (Figure 1).

Table 4. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employees' sense of security (N = 170).

Specification	N = 170		
	answers	n	%
Impact on the sense of security of working conditions	The sense of security weakened	61	35.9
	No changes	101	59.4
	The sense of security strengthened	8	4.7
Impact on the sense of economic security	The sense of security weakened	103	60.6
	No changes	58	34.1
	The sense of security strengthened	9	5.3

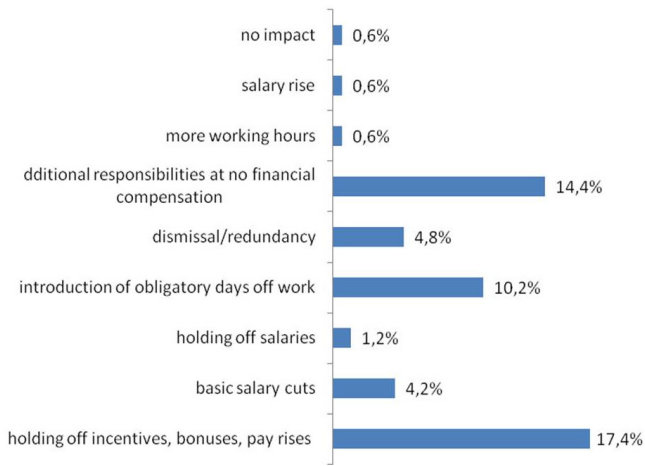


Figure 1. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the employees' professional situation*. * Respondents could select more than one answer.

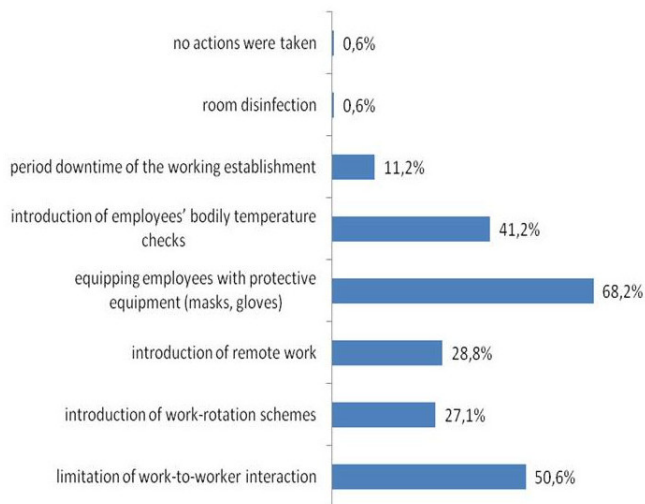


Figure 2. Activities strengthening work security implemented in the enterprises in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic*. * Respondents could select more than one answer.

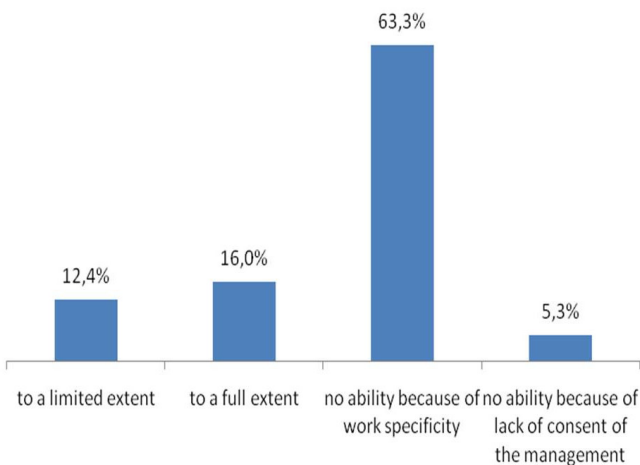


Figure 3. Ability to work remotely during the pandemic.

The economic effects of the pandemic most frequently signaled by the respondents comprised non-payment of incentives, bonuses, pay rises, as reported by 17.4% of the respondents. 10.2% of the respondents, in turn, was obliged to take a few days off work, whereas 14.4% of employees had extra workload without compensation. The scale of dismissals or redundancies in the studied group was relatively low, for it affected only 4.8% of the respondents. Without a doubt, this must be credited to the "anti-crisis" shields introduced by the Polish government to protect work posts. About four percent (4.2%) of the studied employees received remuneration that was lower than that before the pandemic. Therefore, it can be stated that the professional situation of the staff, including their material situation, significantly deteriorated. The negative impact of the pandemic on the professional situation was experienced by a marginal rate of the respondents (only 0.6%).

To improve work security, employers introduced a number of actions to contain the spread of coronavirus in the workplace. The most common practice was to equip the staff with personal protective equipment (masks and gloves). Such support was offered to as many as 68.2% of the respondents (Figure 2). In the case of a half of the studied population, employers implemented worker-to-worker interaction constraints. Circa forty percent (41.2%) of the respondents reported introduction of a body temperature check. 28.8% of employees had an opportunity to work from home, whereas 27.1% of the respondents used work-rotation schemes (working from the office and teleworking). A periodic downtime of the employing establishment affected by 11.2% of the respondents. Nearly thirty-nine percent (38.5%) of the respondents said that the actions undertaken by the employers contributed to improvement of their work security to a large or a very large extent. Whereas 19.2% reported that security improvements due to undertaken actions were either low or very low.

One of the ways to improve work security amidst the pandemic was to shift to remote work, i.e. work conducted from outside the seat of the employer (e.g. from home). Around forty percent (40.4%) of the respondents found that it strengthened their sense of security to a large or a very large extent. Nonetheless, not all employees could avail of this type of work (Figure 3). As many as 63.3% of the respondents did work the specificity of which did not allow remote working. Only 28.4% of the respondents had an ability to work remotely either full- or part-time.

In the course of the analysis, the respondents were also inquired about their general feelings affecting their wellbeing since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The studies show that the current epidemiological situation raises concerns amongst employees (Figure 4). The largest proportion of the respondents (56.8%) felt alienated because of limited social interactions, and a half of them (49.1%) expressed concerns about their own future. The studies demonstrate that the pandemic is a source of additional stress for 33.7% of the analysed, whereas every fourth respondent fears losing a job, experiencing a salary or wage cut, and getting infected. For 14.2% of the respondents, work under the conditions of the pandemic is less satisfactory, and 12.4% are less motivated to perform it.

Uncertainty and changes occurring due to the pandemic

also translated into the health condition of employees (Figure 5). The most frequently reported medical conditions were mood disorders (27.1%), anxiety (17.1%), sleep disorders (15.9%) and headaches (12.4%). In the case of every tenth respondent, the pandemic contributed to depression. Quite importantly, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly limited the already insufficient access to healthcare for the majority of people, including psychiatric and psychological support. Remote medical diagnosis may not be accurate, and it could be challenging to establish a therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, the obligation of the understaffed medical personnel to quarantine is also crucial. Although as many as 52.9% of the respondents have not suffered from aggravated symptoms since the outbreak of the pandemic, one must note that the studied group was dominated by young people below the age of thirty. Generally, this type of population features good overall health condition.

The consequences of physical and mental health deterioration, due to both the Covid-19 pandemic and its after-effects (e.g. social isolation), may be alleviated by various forms of support provided by employers. In the course of analyses, however, it was determined that support was marginal because as many as 42.9% of the respondents did not receive any support from their employers (Figure 6).

The most popular action appeared to be the provision of information on how to proceed to minimize the risk of infection. Such practices were reported by 47.1% of the studied population. Additional occupational health and safety training in the conditions of the pandemic was offered to 18.2% of the respondents, whereas 12.9% received equipment to work remotely. Only 4.1% of the respondents were offered psychological care on the initiative of the employer.

3. Discussion

In the course of analyses, it was established that the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact not only on the sense of physical and economic security of the employees in Polish enterprises, but also on their health condition. The study findings correspond to the results of studies conducted by other authors in various countries affected by the pandemic.

The underlying effect of the pandemic is job insecurity defined as a threat to the continuity and stability of employment in the present form [27]. A study conducted by the Randstad Research Institute in March 2020 on a population of 1016 Polish employees shows that their concerns about keeping their jobs have grown since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. As many as 26% of the studied employees expressed fear of losing a job. This represents a 17% increase compared to a measurement from before the pandemic. Concerns related to potential dismissals were most frequently voiced by employees in the financial, telecommunication, and IT sectors, and in the industry. What is more, nearly a half of the employees (41%) feared salary cuts because of the coronavirus risk and the declared state of pandemic. This affected, above all, sellers and drivers. Company liquidation was most apprehended by those employed in the hotel, catering, and building industries. Only one-third of employees expressed no concerns about their professional situation [28].

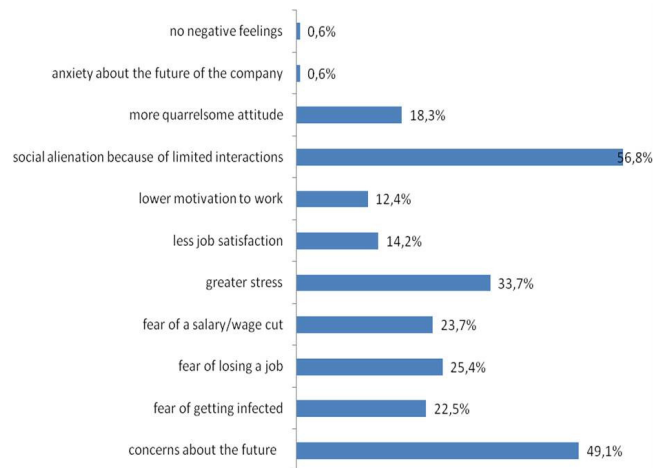


Figure 4. Feelings experienced by employees during the Covid-19 pandemic*. * Respondents could select more than one answer.

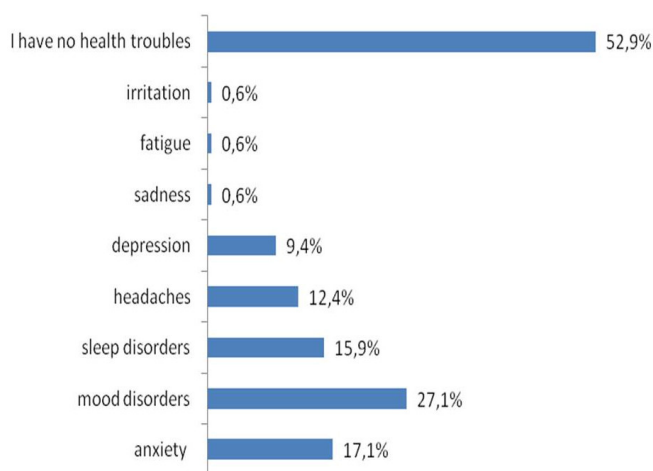


Figure 5. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees' health condition*. * Respondents could select more than one answer.

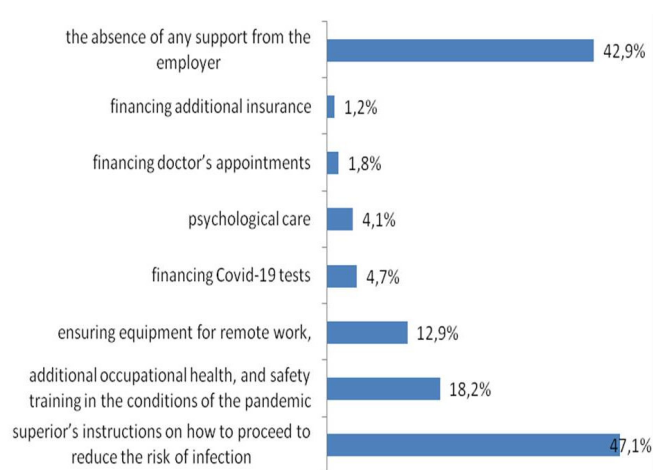


Figure 6. Support granted by employers to employees amidst the Covid-19 pandemic*. * Respondents could select more than one answer.

Employment insecurity yields a number of negative consequences to both employees and employers. Sarwar et al. conducted a research study about the sense of employment security on a group of 253 employees of hotel restaurants. During the research, it was determined that employment insecurity caused by Covid-19 lowered employees' wellbeing due to financial stress [29]. Next, Chen and Eyoun conducted studies among American restaurants' staff. The study findings suggest that employees' fear instilled by the Covid-19 pandemic was positively correlated with both job insecurity and emotional extortion [11]. What is more, studies conducted by Abuelnasr on a group of hotel staff members showed an increase in the sense of job insecurity among the employees unaffected by job redundancy schemes [30].

Several researchers proved that job uncertainty brings about negative mental consequences [5,31,32]. This is associated with reduced job satisfaction and deteriorated mental health condition. In particular, it was emphasized that the absence of job security is an experience which generates an additional stress load [33]. The research studies conducted by Wilson et al. showed a significant increase in fear and depression symptoms related to job uncertainty experienced due to the pandemic [6]. Studies carried out among 1517 Polish employees demonstrated that every third staff member sensed anxiety and fear, and 31% of workers reported mood disorders [34].

Furthermore, a study conducted among Chinese employees revealed that 52.1% the study participants sensed fear due to the pandemic [35]. Similar research findings are reported in Algeria. A study conducted there showed that 50.3% of the studied group sensed fear, 48.2% were stressed, 46.6% reported low spirits, whereas 47.4% continually pondered about the pandemic and the methods of protection against infection [36]. It was determined that the lower the level of education, the stronger the psychological symptoms [37]. Stressors included isolation, insufficient information, and financial issues [4]. Dolot, in turn, found that long-term remote work may lead to fatigue, physical and mental exhaustion, professional burnout, and psychosomatic and mental diseases [38]. It was demonstrated that job insecurity is a stressor leading not only to a decreased mental comfort but also to professional burnout [39,40]. Consequently, the lack of job security contributes to lower employee efficiency and effectiveness of organizations [41].

The sense of job insecurity is also correlated with the sense of economic security. In the conditions of the pandemic, employees fear that their financial situation would worsen due to a job loss or a salary cut [42]. Employment uncertainty is also a crucial factor that affects employee decisions about whether or not to remain in a given organization [43], and it may even result in deteriorated relations with other colleagues [44]. The final effect of employment insecurity may also be a loss of valuable and unique human capital.

The pandemic situation has also had an impact on the psychological capital of employees defined as a positive

mental state of an individual expressed through optimism, hope, the sense of one's own effectiveness and mental immunity [45]. This type of capital is interrelated with health and wellbeing of employees and it contributed to stress reduction [46]. Finally, it has an effect on employees' attachment to organizations, their job satisfaction and innovativeness [47].

4. Conclusions

Covid-19 is considered one of the most devastating and mortal illnesses of the century. The spread of the pandemic and associated curbing of economic activities have hit many business units across industries. As a consequence, to lower the cost of work, numerous entrepreneurs have had to implement strategies of employment reduction. Those unaffected by redundancies fear the future and are uncertain about their employment, which has a negative influence on their sense of security.

In the course of analyses, it was determined that the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the feeling of security among the employees of Polish companies. Uncertainty, caused both by the challenges posed by the pursuance of professional activities and the general condition of economies, has left employees' sense of economic security vulnerable. The average rating of the level of economic security was lower than the rating of the security of working conditions. The main reasons behind the decreased sense of security among the studied employees comprised deterioration in one's professional situation, above all, the financial status, due to a non-payment of incentives, pay rises, bonuses, and salary cuts.

Given the low security comfort, one should not expect full employee engagement or commitment and high performance. Therefore, managers face serious challenges related to the reinforcement of the feeling of security of the staff through relevant human resource policies. In order to strengthen the sense of security of the employed, no single adjustment of a working establishment to the binding sanitary regime will suffice. One of the key responsibilities of the managers at the time of the pandemic is to build trust within organizations [30]. Trust between the subordinates and the superiors is a strategic relation which has an impact on the performance of the former, their organizational engagement, job satisfaction, and the prevailing atmosphere in organizations [48,49]. The fundamental element of trust is managers' reliability based on their honesty and the ability to keep promises.

A crucial aspect of trust development is support and vital information offered to employees. Workers who view their workplaces as supportive are more favorably disposed towards organizations and more likely to demonstrate stronger commitment to work. Employee support is, therefore, not only humanitarian, but also profitable in the long term. It may limit any undesirable rotation, help stabilize employment, increase employee engagement, and improve work performance [30].

Another factor having a positive impact in the process of employee security reinforcement amidst the Covid-19 pandemic is empowerment, which consists in a delegation of the rights to control actions and take decisions to employees. This strengthens the feeling of power, independence, and autonomy.

4.1. Practical Implications and Future Directions of Research

The research findings may be of significance to human resource departments and managers, for they emphasize the role of the employees' sense of security. High security levels of the staff have a powerful impact on their operations in the working environment and are the determinants of a full use of employee potential for the development of organizations. Thus, the broadening of knowledge about the employees' sense of security and commitment to strengthen it are the conditions which determine the ability to attain the goals of the HR function.

Given the subsequent mutations of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the consecutive waves of the pandemics, one may assume that the issue of developing safety among employees amidst epidemics may become an essential question and an obligatory element of the HR policy of every organization. Given this context, safety research may become an inspiration for the development of guidance regarding the shaping of safe conditions of work, oriented at the strengthening of the sense of safety and security of employees during pandemics.

This study demonstrates that the pandemic has had a negative impact on the sense of security among workers. Nonetheless, due to a limited number of study respondents, a short research period, it may not be generalized as having reference to the entire population.

The low number of respondents in the study precluded

the conduct of an analysis of worker safety by sectors. It is common knowledge that constraints in some sectors were tighter than in others, e.g. in the hotel industry or catering. Other sectors, in turn, recorded a growth of income because of the pandemics, for example the production of protective wear or medical equipment. Without a doubt, this had an impact on the sense of security of employees employed in the above sectors.

The Covid-19 pandemic is ongoing. Therefore, it is justified to repeat the research study on a larger cohort in order to regularly monitor the level of security of employees and to assess involvement and effectiveness of actions undertaken by managers with the purpose of security reinforcement.

The author is aware of the limitations of the research studies presented in this article for they relate to a narrow group of respondents and the study findings are not universal. Nonetheless, they are a starting point for further, more extensive research in the field on a representative study sample.

The results of the studies relate to young employees below the age of 30 who are in the initial stage of their professional careers. Typically, young people are less afraid of pandemics and their health and economic consequences. Therefore, the future analyses should include a comparative analysis to juxtapose the sense of security in the group of young employees versus more experienced professionals. Such a study could help implement the concept of diversity management through a diversified approach to the development of working conditions across different generations of employees to enhance the use of their intellectual potential.

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