



WOMEN, FAMILIES, CAREERS EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON WORK/LIFE BALANCE

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Pedagogical University of Krakow

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Covid-19 Pandemic in Poland

First Covid case reported on 4 March 2020

12 March 2020 – classes and activities in schools, kindergartens suspended

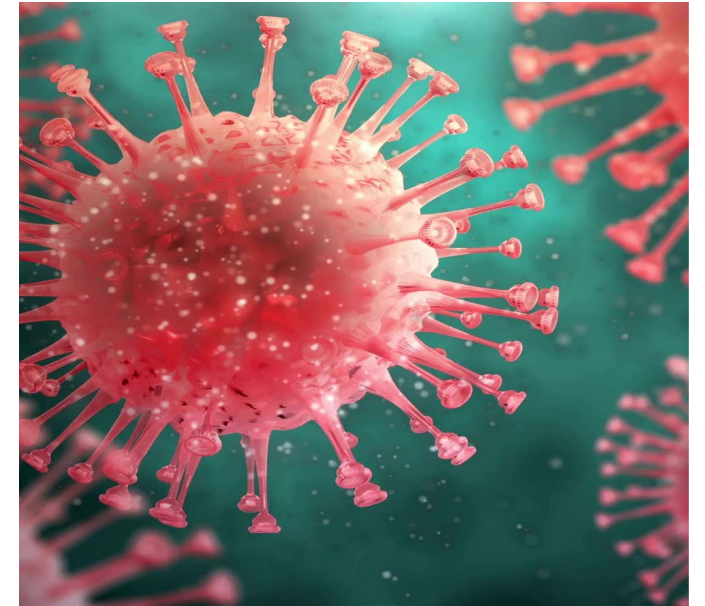
13 March 2020 – first restrictions on some businesses imposed

Next waves...

Sanitary regime introduced, division into yellow and red regions

Remote learning lasted the whole year 2020/21

Some limitations introduced since Autumn 2021 until now





Methodological assumptions

The goal: to know professional and family experience of women during the pandemic.

Method: focus group interview (FGI)

The Moderator: dr Ewa Śliwa

The study was conducted on 16 December 2021.

The group consisted of two representatives of each target group – the total of 8 women

During this presentation I will present 4 cases (one of each target group)

Analysis of results:

1) Organization of the family life

2) Daily work and cooperation with the employer

3) Transformation of the lifestyle due to the pandemic, expectations and visions for the future

Table 1. Focus group interview respondent profile (selected cases)

Group	First name*	Age	Family status	Education/profession	Place of residence
1.Mothers with children	Teresa (W3)	42	Married, 3 children (6, 8, 12)	PhD / academic teacher	City
2.Women who plan a family	Zofia (W5)	21	Single, plans family	Secondary / university student	City
3.Women over 50	Maria (W4)	51	Divorced, 3 daughters (12, 17, 21)	University degree / translator	City
4.Women living in the countryside	Monika (W6)	28	Married, no children	Secondary / beautician	Village

*Names have been changed to ensure the respondents' anonymity.



Case 1. Teresa
Mother with children

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE FAMILY





The group of mothers with children is represented by Teresa (42 years old), married, a mother of three children, a teacher

In her case, the pandemic allowed the whole family to spend time together and use it effectively

I began to appreciate it because I had more time for my family as I did not have to commute 45 minutes to work. And sometimes, I managed to do some extra work during the on-line classes: cook a meal or help my kids

In our study all the respondents emphasized the negative consequences on emotions and behaviours in their families.

Teresa mentions it too:



After about a month, I noticed that our son who needs more activity began to have depressive states. We had to motivate him to participate in classes...

Engaging in new activities also helped to survive the pandemic

I thought I might improve my qualifications so me and my husband began some trainings which gave us the feeling we were developing and learning despite many limitations. It was an escape from the reality

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE DAY-TO-DAY WORK AND COOPERATION WITH THE EMPLOYER



Teresa mentioned that she had to help her children with school at the expense of her career.

When me and my sons began on-line teaching and learning, it turned out the our two bedroom apartment is too small.

Eventually, the older son was learning in the smaller room, the younger was in the bigger room supervised by my husband and I was teaching my students from the kitchen...





The pandemic resulted in new forms of work (on-line) even in the areas where it had previously been impossible. It meant organizing the workplace (home office) within the private space.

The classes with the students were recorded in Teams and monitored by the IT team: the duration and who was present. One had to really control oneself.

POST-PANDEMIC LIFESTYLE TRANSFORMATION FUTURE EXPECTATIONS AND VISIONS



Undoubtedly, the successive waves of the pandemic had some impact on lifestyles. The respondent decided to introduce changes which she had previously put off.



I finally saw that this is my space. I stopped treating it like a place where we only sleep and eat. We made some changes, for example we decorated windows.

Recently, I have added some more plant because they create warm and cosy atmosphere. I began to take care of this space, we have bought a three-tiered bunk bed for the kids so they too had their own space...



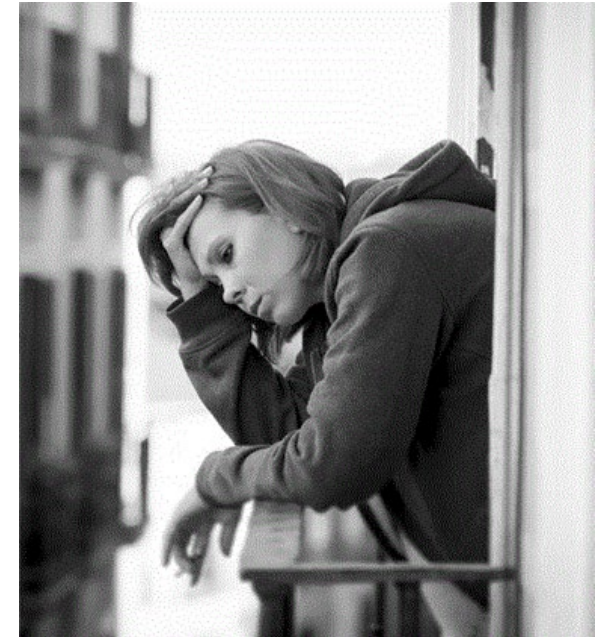
Case 2. Zofia

Woman who plan a family

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE FAMILY

In this case, the respondent emphasized the negative consequences of isolation in the first place.

The lockdown affected my mental health, I had a major breakdown. I also had to postpone the wedding date, even though me and my fiancé had long been planning to start a family. After a while, I began to notice that I had problems with breathing...



THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE DAY-TO-DAY WORK



Zofia, a student, describes her struggles with remote learning as her large family was sharing a small living space

There were 6 people in the apartment, me and my brother having on-line classes, all locked within the four walls. It seemed that soon we would jump at each other's throats. I had my classes, my brother had his and we had to share one room. I disturbed him, he disturbed me... There were 2 TV sets on at the same time because our parents watched one and grandpa, who has hearing problems, watched the other with volume high up. And I need peace and quiet to learn...

The student emphasised that she had experienced various difficulties connected with the on-line education.

Regarding these difficulties with meeting the requirements, I experienced it last year when I studied the history of art... We had to write an assignment (...) The books I needed to write the assignment were available only for on-site reading, I could not take them home, so it was a great hindrance.

POST-PANDEMIC LIFESTYLE TRANSFORMATION FUTURE EXPECTATIONS AND VISIONS



As a result of the pandemic, the student experienced a personal transformation. She acquires personal characteristics which now help her in life. Once shy and insecure, she became almost a fighter.

I have learned to live in constant uncertainty, when tomorrow is unpredictable. But the advantage if it is that, I do not leave anything for later. I have learned to study in the new conditions. I stopped being afraid of interactions with other people. My family trained me well enough. I became a person who fights for their needs to be satisfied. I have also learned to set borders. Now, I am stronger than before and I can feel I am ready to start a new chapter in my life



Case 3. Maria
Woman over 50

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE FAMILY

Another case is a woman representing the 50+ age group. Maria, divorces mother of three daughters, a translator. Forced isolation increased the already existing problems and tensions. Maria, 51 years old, shared that her husband left her during that time.



Our family broke apart. I mean, there had been tensions for a long time. To say it bluntly, my husband couldn't cope with all this and just moved out. It may seem strange but both me and our daughters, we felt relief, it had cleared the atmosphere

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE DAY-TO-DAY WORK AND COOPERATION WITH THE EMPLOYER



The respondent mentioned that she had to help her children with school at the expense of her career.

My job, too, depended on my younger daughter. Using computer to learn was new to her. She struggled with on-line communication with her teachers. I was lucky because my profession allowed me to modify my schedule and do my job late in the evening or very early in the morning. And the problem was that we had one PC and one notebook. Suddenly, it turned out that we need twice as much



POST-PANDEMIC LIFESTYLE TRANSFORMATION, FUTURE EXPECTATIONS AND VISIONS

The respondent decided to engage in new activities and develop passions for which she had not had time before.

I decided that I would finally get my driving licence.

I began the course and I will soon take the exam so I hope I will finally make this happen. I'm a translator but English had been always my weakness so I decided to finally take the challenge





I also adopted a dog and I think it was a great idea. I felt better, I could go out and walk, and I began to notice the beautiful world around, the changing seasons

In her case, paradoxically, the pandemic have changed her life for better, practically in all areas: family, professional, personal...



Case 4. Monika

Woman living in the countryside

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE FAMILY



The group of women living in rural areas is represented by 28-year-old Monika, married, beautician. Forced isolation, being locked in a small space and lack of conditions to work remotely also generated tensions and conflicts. Monika recalls:

There were many tensions when my husband worked from home, his papers and documents were everywhere. I am a perfectionist and I need an ordered space to think... My husband doesn't care. I was frustrated when I saw his things all over the place, dirty mugs in the sink. Another source of conflict was the postponed in vitro procedure. He did not understand that I was so afraid to get Covid that I did not want to meet with people

The respondent emphasised that long-term isolation led to some emotional and psychological disorders.

During the lockdown I began to feel anxious. I kept thinking about all the worst-case scenarios and I couldn't sleep. My husband thought I overreacted. I felt not understood and so the depression increased.

The woman developed some mechanisms to cope with the difficult situations. She released the tension through direct contact with the nature.

During the pandemic, I realised the I had always wanted to live in the countryside. Sometimes we went to the forest to relax and walk mask-free.



THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE DAY-TO-DAY WORK AND COOPERATION WITH THE EMPLOYER



My employer understood my situation, my anxiety and fear of interacting with people. They let me take an unpaid leave.

Remote work was not an option in my profession.

POST-PANDEMIC LIFESTYLE TRANSFORMATION

FUTURE EXPECTATIONS AND VISIONS

The respondent decided to introduce some changes in her closest environment. Previously ignored aesthetic side of it became the priority.



While sitting at home, I realized that all our windows look out on the walls. Tightly packed buildings, one house right by another. I decided to do something with it. I did not move the walls but I bought lots of plants and hanged green curtains.



Finally, the respondent emphasised that one should not waste time and enjoy the moment.

I have learned to enjoy small things and appreciate the power of peace and quiet. Where I live now, it is much safer and life is more predictable. I can have impact on my well-being (...) I have learned to appreciate every moment and enjoy it. I can also help other women be beautiful. It is a pretty good future prospect.

Summary

The respondents have developed mechanisms to cope with the challenging reality. The pandemic released in them an unexpected potential of strength and resources. As they faced the difficulties, they realised that they could fight for themselves, and take care of themselves and their families.

I realized that life is so unpredictable, so fragile that hardly anything depends on us... I decided that I will not waste my time on dreaming

but I will act instead, I will do that what I had been thinking of but had postponed for later. I decided to act (Maria, 51)



Thank you for your attention😊

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